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by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

QUICKLY, BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!

PARSHAS NOACH

Rabbi David Ashear quotes a powerful *mashal* from the sefer **Emunah Shlaima**.

There was a wealthy businessman who lived in Israel. He was so stingy that he never spent money on airfare to conduct his business. His business dealings were all done by phone. One time he was presented with the opportunity to make a fortune. The only problem was that the business deal had to be made in person. Having no choice, the wealthy man called a travel agent and asked for the cheapest ticket. The travel agent told him that the cheapest ticket that he could get was \$750. The wealthy man was not happy to spend that money, but he felt that he had no choice. He bought the ticket. When he boarded the plane, the flight attendant showed him his seat. It was a middle seat, located in the very back of the plane. The plane took off. The wealthy man was crammed between two passengers. They kept disturbing him as they were having a constant conversation over his head. Suddenly the two men started arguing loudly. This was too much for the wealthy businessman. He rose from his seat and went to stretch his legs. He walked towards the front of the plane and came to the first-class section. There, everyone was sitting comfortably, with plenty of leg room. Some were even lying flat on a bed. The aroma of delicious food lofted through the air. The wealthy man saw an empty seat and sat down. He thought to himself that this section was where he belonged. As he was about to fall asleep, a flight attendant asked him, "What are you doing here? This section is reserved for first-class passengers." The wealthy man replied, "I refuse to go back to my other seat. I am a millionaire. This is where I belong!" The flight attendant explained that the people in that section paid a lot of money for their seats. The wealthy man asked, "How much did they pay?" The flight attendant replied, "Close to \$4,000." "What, so much!" Despite the hefty cost, the businessman took out his credit card to purchase a first-class seat. The flight attendant said, "I'm sorry sir but it is too late! You can't buy a seat now. That had to be done at the airport before you boarded the plane. The wealthy man responded, "It's beneath my dignity to go back to that terrible seat in the back of the plane! I will pay you \$10,000 for an upgrade." "Sorry," the flight attendant said. "No matter how much you offer, it's too late!" With those parting words, the flight attendant sent the wealthy man back to his seat. (Living Emunah 6 by Rabbi David Ashear)

The entire world was sinning terribly, except for Noach (and Mesushelach who died immediately before the flood). Hashem told Noach that the world was going to be destroyed by a flood. Noach should build an ark to save himself, his family, and many living creatures. Hashem told Noach to build the ark over a period of 120 years. Why so long? **Rashi** (Bereishis 6:14) says that Hashem wanted to give the world an opportunity to repent from their evil ways. When the people would see Noach building a huge boat, they would question why he was doing it. When Noach would reply that the world would be destroyed

"Make for yourself an
ark of cedar wood...."
(Bereishis 6:14)

if the people kept sinning, perhaps that would inspire the people to improve. Hashem gave them a chance to repent. Instead, they responded with arrogance. They cursed Noah (**Midrash Rabbah** 30:7) and said that they would destroy the ark if they saw Noach trying to enter it (**Rashi** 13:7). They were not afraid of the threat of a flood. They were giants and didn't think that the flood waters would rise above their necks (**Pirkei drav Eliezer** 22). They knew witchcraft and felt that they could use that to protect themselves (**Zohar** 1:383).

After the 120 years had passed, Hashem gave the people an additional 7 days to repent. After that time, when it started raining, Hashem still allowed the people to repent (**Bereishis Rabbah** 32:9). But they did not repent.

The people could not anticipate what was about to come. Radak and Ibn Ezra say that the floodwaters were very violent and surged forth very powerfully. The **Talmud** (Sanhedrin 108B) says that the water was boiling hot. In fact, the people eventually melted from

the heat. Even their bones melted! **Chumash Ha'emek Davar** quotes the Midrash that Mt. Ararat was the highest mountain at that time. The waters surged 15 cubits above it! The **Rosh** says that even those who climbed to the highest peak to escape the raging waters found nowhere to flee and drowned. Imagine what these people were thinking when they climbed the highest mountain, and the flood waters were about to cover them. I would imagine that they said that they should have listened to Noach and repented. But unfortunately, at that point, it was too late.

In the World to Come, everyone will want “first-class seats”. Once a person dies, it is too late for him to “upgrade”! While we are alive, we still can acquire those first-class seats through our learning Torah and doing mitzvos. Let’s grab those opportunities while we are still able!

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Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.

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