

What the Ark Taught Noah

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By Rabbi Cohen

When the rains first fall at the beginning of the flood story, Noah is described as “a man of little faith,” waiting for the waters to reach his knees or so before finally entering the ark.

Being that Noah had, at G-d’s behest, dropped everything and spent the last 120 years building an enormous ark, to call him a man of little faith seems a bit extreme.

Similarly, the flood is referred to as “the waters of Noah,” as though he – the only one worthy of being saved – were actually to blame for it. This is odd.

But the truth is that Noah is criticized in the flood story. He was surrounded by wicked people who needed a righteous leader to teach them and inspire them to goodness. Noah was righteous, but he wasn’t a leader. He didn’t give enough of himself to the generation.

So Noah entered the ark, a 450-foot floating sealed zoo. The lion roared, the bear growled, the dog barked and the duck quacked. The animals – everything from insects to elephants – were hungry, each with its own diet, feeding time and messy quarters to clean. The ark was also claustrophobic and damp. “Deliver me from prison,” Noah prayed, “for my soul is tired of the smell of lions, bears and panthers.”

But this time Noah had no choice – the world was in his ark and he, as captain, had to take care of it. He fed the animals, he cared for them and he cleaned their stalls. Our Sages say that he gave of himself until he was coughing blood. He gave of himself until there was nothing left to give.

Sometimes all faith means is the realization that G-d wants us to give of ourselves to others, for the world is built on kindness. Thanks to Noah's kindness, there was a spirit of goodness in the ark, where, after a long day, the lion did, in fact, lie down next to the lamb.

The ark taught Noah faith – the faith that we're all in this, the same boat, together.