

MACHON PUAH

No'ach & His Wife

B'reishit 6:18 states “I will uphold My covenant with you and you will enter into the Ark; you and your sons, and your wife and your daughters-in-law with you.” The men were separate from the women. This same idea appears later in the execution of this instruction: “No'ach came and his sons and his wife and daughters-in-law into the Ark” (7:7). Only when they all leave the Ark do we read “Leave the Ark; you and your wife and your sons and your sons’ wives together with you” (8:16).

In all three places Rashi makes a similar comment and explains that during the entire time of the flood No'ach and his wife were not permitted to live together. His sons separated from their wives until they all exited from the Ark that had protected them from the devastating flood that had wiped out of humanity, flora and fauna.

We could explain that the reason for the prohibition on usual marital relations was due to the cramped and communal living quarters that No'ach and his family inhabited during their stay in the Ark. It would not have been appropriate for them to live as man and wife in such a setting. But a close reading of Rashi reveals another reason; it was due to the flood and not the Ark that marital relations were prohibited throughout the downpour and torrential storm.

The explanation is that it would have been unfitting for No'ach and his wife, his sons and their spouses, to continue to live normally and have children while outside their boat a storm raged that destroyed all known life. They could not live a tranquil and ordinary life while others suffered a terrible fate so close to

them.

While they were saved from the ravages of the tempest they could not detach themselves and had to feel empathy for those in pain and distress. From here we learn an important principle; while one is obligated to have children and this is an apparently private affair between husband and wife, the simple act of having children is connected to a wider picture of the state of society and even the entire world.

There is a halacha that one should not continue having marital relations during war or a famine (Orach Chayim 240:12). During these trying times even though the individual and his wife are perfectly safe and healthy they cannot ignore the plight of those around them.

What are the limitations and parameters of this halacha? If there is a war somewhere in the world must we all refrain from having children?

More on this next week.

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