

### Non-violent Communication in Parshat Noach

This coming Tuesday we will exercise our democratic civil rights and choose our nation's next leader. It is a landmark occasion.

And it's taken a long time to get here. During the long pre-election period I watched one of the debates between presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump.

I must admit that one debate was more than enough for me. The debate was - and I am going to use a strong word, but I mean it - was violent, even if no violent actions or even words were said. It was very difficult for me to see a theme whereby to make one's point the other needs to be diminished as if this is the only way to conduct a debate. You see, my experience could have been much cleaner if each one of them would have focused on their own agenda, and have taken responsibility for their own actions good and bad.

However it is not the candidates who should be blamed for violence but rather, the medium. And as Prof. Marshall McLuhan said: "The medium is the message". To a degree, the candidates were drawn into violence during the course of the campaign in order to draw more audience, in order to increase rating.

But is violence necessary?

Our *parsha* teaches us that the world was filled with corruption, "וַתִּשְׁחַת הָאָרֶץ לְפָנַי הָאֱלֹקִים" "...and the earth was corrupt before God", and God, in causal punishment of מידה כנגד מידה – destroys the world.

What was this corruption exactly?

The Gemara in מסכת סנהדרין<sup>1</sup> tells us that the world was filled with envy, with greed and theft, lies, intolerance, cheating and fraud. Rashi and Eben-Ezra also add sexual misconduct to the list of people's sins. In essence, the Gemara teaches us that the world

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<sup>1</sup> נז, ע"א

was filled with different kinds of violence including verbal violence, and non-verbal violence. This is the reason for the extinction of the world - **violence**.

God entrusts נח with the task of saving the world, at least this is how Rashi explains the 120 year duration of building the Ark. Constructing the Ark on top of the mountain was supposed to arouse questions among the people and it was Noah's mission to call on the people to do *teshuva* and repent of their ways, to cause a change. Noah was entrusted with leadership.

But what did he do?

The Rebbe of Kotzk says that there are two ways to combat cold. One is to wear a warm fur coat and the other is to light a fire.

Someone choosing the first option only takes care of heating his own body. The second option enables others to warm themselves.

Noah took the first course of action. He took care of himself and his family. The Ark he built contained no one except his own family. It is true that God commands Noah to take his family, but God does not restrict him only to his family. Had he so chosen, Noah could have also saved other people. He chose however, to adhere to the narrow interpretation of: "וכל ביתך" – "and all your house".

In a world of violence חמס ושחיתות, evil-doing, corruption and immorality this is the face of a צדיק of that generation - Noah covered himself with a fur coat, he didn't light a fire, he didn't fight for others to join him into the Ark, he did not fight for their lives.

Through my parenting journey I encounter the non-violent communication of Dr. Marshall Rosenberg, the father of the theory of non-violent communication, and I felt so grateful. I am also coming from a country that establish a strong army, and as a young country, we in Israel adopted tough language. Marshall Rosenberg worked with Israel a lot in the 80s and established this theory in many schools.

Rosenberg explains that:

Violence arises from the habitual ways we've been taught to think and speak. Communication styles that seem commonplace often cause anger, pain and can lead to violence. Our words are sometimes loaded with judgment and demands that seem only to bring resentment and conflict. That the ways we have learnt to think and speak actually block communication, cause pain and further misunderstanding and lead to violence.

Dr. Rosenberg adds that the way to communicate in a non-violent way consists of two stages: The first is concern for other people, like Avraham did in סדום, fighting for every soul, and the opposite from what נח did, concerning for himself and his own family. and the second is connecting with other people.

Marshall Rosenberg speaks of communication from the heart, communication that includes talking about our **feelings** and **needs**.

It is interesting that the Torah describes the violence and corruption of the people on the surface of the story. And the beauty in our *parsha* is the slender threads of hidden internal messages - messages contrary to the violence visible on its surface. For example:

When portraying the entry to the Ark that will save all those coming inside, the Torah uses the description: "מִן־הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה וּמִן־הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר אֵינָנָה טְהוֹרָה", "Of clean beasts, and of beasts that are not clean...". Why use so many words when the Torah could simply have said: Of clean beasts and of unclean (טמאה) beasts? Why was it important to use such a long-winded cumbersome wording like "beasts that are not clean"? R. Yehoshua ben Levi understood the answer and explains it in מסכת פסחים:

לעולם אל יוציא אדם דבר מגונה מפיו, שהרי עקם הכתוב שמונה אותיות ולא הוציא דבר מגונה מפיו, שנאמר: מן הבהמה הטהורה ומן הבהמה אשר איננה טהורה.

R. Yehoshua ben Levi said: A person should never say anything indecent, just as the Torah adds eight letters in order not to say anything indecent, as it is written:

מִן הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה וּמִן הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר אֵינָנָה טְהוֹרָה.

According to R. Yehoshua ben Levi, the תורה went out of its way to avoid using violent or indecent words, a model that we should emulate.

In the same way, Marshall Rosenberg teaches that we must be careful of violence towards ourselves with the words we use towards ourselves in our internal conversations. Think for a minute – when we encounter the less perfect side of ourselves – what internal dialogue do we adopt? Most of us are mercilessly violent towards ourselves, saying harsh things to ourselves. Marshall Rosenberg proposes that we bring more compassion to our internal dialogue, thereby enabling ourselves to be more compassionate with others when we encounter them in their less than perfect state.

Let us light a fire, even if we have a warm coat of our own. We have the same time that was given to נח to build his Ark – 120 years – for each of us to act and influence the world to be less violent, to lead the world to be a place of peace.

And in order to make entering the Ark of peace - one more thing: תיבה in hebrew is ark but also a **word**.

So make it a little more practical - I would like to quote the four agreements between ourselves that Don Miguel Ruiz refers to in his book 'The Four Agreements':

1. Be Impeccable with your Word: Speak with integrity. Say only what you mean. Avoid using the Word to speak against yourself or to gossip about others. Use the power of your word in the direction of truth and love.
2. Don't Take Anything Personally: Nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality, their own dream. When you are immune to the opinions and actions of others, you won't be the victim of needless suffering.
3. Don't Make Assumptions: Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness and drama. With just this one agreement, you can completely transform your life.

4. Always Do Your Best: Your best is going to change from moment to moment; it will be different when you are healthy as opposed to sick. Under any circumstance, simply do your best and you will avoid self-judgment, self-abuse, and regret.

In so doing, our world will be a better place, we have work to do. Let us do our work to make this world a better world! Let us use the time we have been given to build תיבת שלום Ark of peace by using words of peace.

Shabbat Shalom!