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"LAW AND LOVE"

VI. The Waters

The prophet Isaiah proclaims, *ki mei noah zot li*, "for this is as the waters of Noah to me." Just as I have sworn, says God, not to bring another flood to the world, so will I not punish my people again. But, the Zohar (*Lev.*, 14b) remarks, is this not a strange expression? Should the waters of the flood not be referred to as such, *mei mabbul*, rather than as *mei Noah*, the waters of Noah?

The answer of the Zohar provides us with a marvelous moral insight. It tells us that when the Almighty wishes to bring destruction upon a world deserving of such cataclysm, He first informs the pious of that generation, hoping that they will intercede for their fellow men before God, and that they will try to arouse their contemporaries to righteousness so that, having changed their ways, God may feel free to change His decree. Thus did Moses plead before God and preach to his fellow men, and thus did the prophets do after him. Noah however, did nothing of the sort. He was concerned only for himself. He did not care about his contemporaries. When God told him that a flood would destroy every existing thing, he built an ark for himself and his family, concerned only for Noah and no one else. Because of this spiritual self-centeredness, because of his religious indifference towards the well-being of his fellow men, he was damned with the eternal stigma of having this flood known as *mei Noah*, "the waters of Noah." The devastation, the destruction, the calamity bear his name for eternity.

Let us not, in our days, be guilty of the same kind of spiritual egotism in the false guise of not wanting to interfere in the lives of others. We are not interfering when we bring to our fellow-Jews, who have abandoned Jewish marriage law, the message of Torah. We are discharging our responsibility to them and to their children, and to their children's children, and to generations yet unborn, informing them and cautioning them about the Torah's law of marriage and legitimacy.

Let us discharge our historic responsibility of teaching Torah to all Israel. Having done that, we shall discover that just as the punishment for irresponsibility comes in the form of water, the *mei Noah*, so the reward for proper responsibility is also water, but of a different kind, and also mentioned by the prophet Isaiah: "And the entire world will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, even as the waters fill the sea."

NORMAN LAMM

