

YOU DO YOUR PART

One more plank. One more tefillah.

Written and presented by R' Michael Kaplan

In honor of Jack and Jacklyn Hanan

There is something remarkable about the story of Noach that often goes unnoticed.

Borei Olam tells Noach that a great flood is coming. The world as he knows it is going to disappear, and upon his shoulders rests an almost unimaginable responsibility.

He must build a teivah—not only to save his family, but to preserve every living creature on planet Earth.

And the Torah gives him the exact measurements: **300 amos long, 50 amos wide, and 30 amos high**. That's longer than a football field and taller than a five-story building.

Every animal, every bird, every species that must survive the Mabul. *How could they possibly fit?*

Rabbeinu Bachya makes an astonishing observation. Even fifty teivos of those dimensions could not naturally have held all of them. The survival of the animal kingdom was nothing short of a miracle.

Which raises a question: If Borei Olam was going to perform a miracle anyway, why did Noach have to build the teivah at all? Why spend years cutting wood and measuring beams, knowing that by the laws of nature it could never accomplish what was being asked of it?

Rabbeinu Bachya reveals a profound principle.

Borei Olam expects a person to do everything within his natural ability. And where human effort ends, what remains is in the hands of Borei Olam.

Noach wasn't asked to perform a miracle. He was asked to build the teivah. Whether it could hold the entire animal kingdom wasn't his responsibility.

His responsibility was to pick up the next piece of wood, and then the next, even when he couldn't possibly understand how it would all work out.

And perhaps nowhere is this lesson more meaningful than in those moments when we desperately want to accomplish something, but discover that our hands are simply too small.

A WEDDING IN ERETZ YISRAEL

Allow me to take you to a wedding in Eretz Yisrael, to a young man who discovered, on the happiest night of his life, just how small his hands really were.

Avraham grew up in Eretz Yisrael. When he was about three years old, his father passed away. At seven, circumstances placed him in the home of a childless couple who welcomed him as their own.

For thirteen years, they gave him everything they had: a home, an education, and the security of knowing that someone was waiting for him at the end of every day.

They had never been blessed with children of their own. So they poured every ounce of their love into this boy. To Avraham, they were his parents in every meaningful sense.

And then came the day they had all been waiting for. Avraham was getting married. He was a chassan.

But shortly before the wedding, his biological mother, long out of contact, came to see him with her husband. She longed to stand beside her son as his mother and requested all the honors traditionally given to the parents of the chassan.

Avraham understood. He asked only one thing: that the couple who had raised him be honored as well. But his mother and her husband would not agree.

And Avraham, caught between the people who brought him into the world and the people who raised him, couldn't change their minds.

The wedding day arrived. The music played. The guests danced. And as Avraham sat at the head table, his eyes wandered across the room.

There, among the guests, sat the man who had raised him. Quietly. Alone. No seat of honor. No acknowledgment. Just another guest at a wedding.

Thirteen years flashed before Avraham's eyes. The frightened little boy at his doorstep. The meals. The school mornings. The countless sacrifices no one in that hall would ever know about.

Avraham could no longer contain himself. He began to weep. His uncle noticed him and gently led him outside. Behind them, the music continued, and Avraham could barely speak.

"Thirteen years, they gave me everything. They never had a child of their own. They took me in. They raised me, and they loved me. And tonight, of all nights, I couldn't even give them the honor they deserve. *What kind of son am I?*"

His uncle placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Avraham, let me tell you about your grandfather. He waited forty-one years to become a father.

"Once, at his best friend's bris milah, surrounded by joy, he stood quietly in the corner with a broken heart, overlooked and stunned not to be offered a single kibbud.

"And from that sad place, childless, he poured out a tefillah deeper than he had ever said. Eventually, Borei Olam blessed him with twin boys.

"Avraham, one of those boys was your father. **The other is standing right here beside you.**"

For a moment, neither man spoke.

"Avraham, you're standing here tonight because a man who couldn't give himself a child discovered that he could still turn to Borei Olam.

"You can't change what happened here tonight. You can't give them back the years they waited, and you can't place a baby in their arms.

"But you can ask Borei Olam to do what you cannot. Every day, take a few minutes and sincerely pray for them. Start now, with those tears. Because after everything they gave you, this is something you can still give them."

And Avraham did. Every single day. Quietly. Faithfully.

And a year later, the couple who had opened their home to a little orphan boy were blessed with a beautiful daughter of their own.

Ladies and gentlemen, a young man couldn't give his parents the honor they deserved. He couldn't erase their years of waiting. And he certainly couldn't give them a child.

But he could pray. And pray he did, not knowing whether the answer would ever come.

Because his responsibility was not the outcome.

ONE MORE PLANK

And now we understand Noach. Borei Olam never asked him to figure out how every animal could fit, or would fit. He simply asked him to build. One beam. One plank. One day at a time.

Somewhere in our lives, each of us has a bayis we're trying to build. A child we're struggling to reach. Perhaps a relationship we're trying to repair. A parnassah that doesn't seem to add up. A loved one we're praying for, but there seems to be no answer in sight.

And we wonder: *What difference can my little effort possibly make?*

Noach could have asked the very same question. What difference will one more plank make when even fifty teivos couldn't hold all these animals?

And yet, he picked up the plank. **Because the size of the challenge never changed the size of his responsibility.**

We are not asked to know how the story ends, nor to guarantee the results. Of course not. We are asked to do what we can and leave the rest in His hands.

So remember Noach. Remember Avraham on his wedding day. And remember this:

Never confuse what is beyond your ability with what is beyond your responsibility.

One more tefillah. One more act of chesed. One more attempt to make things right. One more plank.

The miracle is never ours to perform. Our job is simply to build the teivah. And when we've built all that human hands can build, the rest belongs to Borei Olam.

Shabbat Shalom u'mevorach.

A lightly edited transcript of "Parashat Noach: You Do Your Part" from Mi Ka'amcha Yisroel. The account is reproduced as told in the presentation; it has not been independently authenticated. [Watch the original talk.](#)

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