



FROM THE DESK OF RABBI MOSHE HAUER

OU EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

**ORTHODOX
UNION**
Enhancing Jewish Life

Changing the World

During this particularly difficult time for Klal Yisrael resulting from the barbaric horrors inflicted by Hamas, it is discouraging to see so much of the world living with an alternative reality. As children of Avraham, this discouragement should neither paralyze us nor allow us to lose hope.

Our sages explained why the first ten generations of the world ended in death and destruction in the time of Noah while the next ten similarly failed generations leading to Avraham were not destroyed. Noah built an ark to save himself whereas Avraham spoke up and spoke out, teaching right from wrong. He did not give up on the world, and as a result he saved the world (Avos 5:2-3; see Rashi there). What made him – rather than Noah - hopeful enough to effectively speak up?

Avraham, the original and defining Jew, saw beyond current limitations. To him, every one of the wicked people of his time represented a potential *tzaddik*. He knew that the transformation that he had personally experienced – coming to G-d from a family background of idol worship – was open to anyone anywhere. As a result, his care, guidance, and teaching brought Teshuva to the world and helped them avert catastrophe. His household included multitudes of people whose lives

he and his wife Sarah had transformed and shaped, *hanefesh asher asu b'Charan* (Bereishit 12:5).

Noah was given 120 years to build the ark, providing him with the context and the perfect prop to warn, to teach, and to cajole his immoral contemporaries towards a better path (Rashi to Bereishit 6:14). Yet, when the flood came, it was only he and his family who entered that ark. There were no *nefesh asher asu*, no “souls that he had transformed” to join his family and be similarly saved. Noah’s world remained corrupt and needed to be completely destroyed.

What made Noah fail when Avraham was so successful? Noah was an FFB (Frum From Birth). He was the only one who had **remained** faithful while the world experienced moral decline. Noah held on to his faith with his fingernails as he watched others around him drop like flies. He had no paradigm and no picture of what it could look like for someone to find their way back. Avraham, on the other hand, was a *baal teshuva*, a person who knew from his own experience that the past is not a prison. He brought that optimism to bear on his view of others, truly believing in those who he was trying to help.

That optimism is not limited to those – like Avraham – who had traveled that journey

themselves. Every one of us has had the chance to see transformational growth in others who have overcome challenges of faith and observance or of trauma and addiction. We must recognize that those stories are not limited to the heroic individual but represent the human condition, the power in every soul to release themselves from past limitations. And while antisemitism – the longest hatred – appears to be a hard limitation for the world to escape, we should nevertheless speak up and speak out, not just in self-defense but infused with a bit of Avraham's optimism that those we encounter have real potential for good. ■