



Words of Wisdom

By

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Noach: The Way We Preach

Around 100 years ago in Lithuania, the yeshiva of R' Yisroel Meir Kagan, the saintly *Chofetz Chaim*, was in severe financial distress and at the brink of shutting down. Someone arranged a meeting of the *Chofetz Chaim* with a wealthy factory owner from Moscow, a simple Jew who was not observant. His factory, which employed over a thousand workers, remained open on Shabbos. Upon making the trip to Radin and meeting the *Chofetz Chaim*, the wealthy man was impressed. He immediately placed a sizable donation of 10,000 rubles on the table.

When he saw this large amount of money in front of him, the *Chofetz Chaim* burst into bitter tears. The man from Moscow apologized; he assumed that his gift must not have been a large enough donation. He assured the *Chofetz Chaim* that he would donate more; he would give the holy man whatever the yeshiva needed. The *Chofetz Chaim* immediately dismissed that notion. He was indeed very grateful for the gift. It was more than enough; moreover, he would turn down any additional funds. He looked at the man and told him, "Heaven forbid, I should cry for something as trivial as money," he explained. He was crying for that precious Jew in front of him, a Jew with a benevolent heart who had demonstrated a strong desire to do *mitzvos*. On short notice this Jew was prepared and willing to expend a small fortune to fortify *Torah* learning. He explained he was crying because this distinguished *neshama* would one day be held accountable for violating the *Shabbos*! He was crying because he sincerely felt pain for the state of this man's soul. The man took the message of the *Chofetz Chaim* to heart and eventually did *teshuvah* and slowly, over time began to observe the *Torah*.

R' Yekusiel Yehudah Halberstam (1905 - 1994) the Klausenberger Rebbe explained that the man from Moscow was receptive to the *Chofetz Chaim* because the *Chofetz Chaim* did not speak condescendingly toward him. It was obvious that the *Chofetz Chaim* respected the man and loved him. He spoke to him from the heart which is why his message was able to have a profound effect.

Although *Noach* had 120 years advance notice before the great flood, he was unable to influence the people of his time to do *teshuvah*. Aside from *Noach* and his family no other human was spared. To explain this failure, the Klausenberger Rebbe cites a *Medrash* which describes the way the onlookers reacted to *Noach*. They saw *Noach* building the ark and asked him what it was about. He replied, "So said G-d, He will bring a great flood to the world." The people responded, "The flood will be on the house of *this man* [*Noach's house*]," The Rebbe explained that they responded this way because they felt *Noach* was threatening them, lording over them. His rebuke directly attacked them, therefore in a typical fashion they reacted in kind, telling *Noach*, "You deserve it, not us." *Noach's* message was not wrong, *Hashem* did tell *Noach* the world would be destroyed. The people were clearly in the wrong and paid the price; they should have considered their lot and changed their ways. Nonetheless, *Noach's* rebuke was ineffective. Unlike his descendent, Avraham, *Noach* was unable to reach the masses.

Even the most consequential message of truth can be entirely ineffective if we fail to package it correctly. On the other hand, the *Chofetz Chaim* was able to communicate the direst message in a pleasant way which ultimately left a profound impact on his mark!