

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The praise accorded to Noah is unparalleled in Tanach. He was, says the Torah, "a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noah walked with God." No such praise is given to Abraham or Moses or any of the Prophets. The only person in the Bible who comes close is Job, described as "blameless and upright (tam ve-yashar); he feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:1). Noah is in fact the only individual that the Tanach describes as righteous (tzaddik).

Yet the Noah we see at the end of his life is not the person we saw at the beginning. After the Flood: "Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's naked body. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father naked." (Gen. 9:20-23)

The man of God has become a man of the soil. The upright man has become a drunkard. The man clothed in virtue now lies naked. The man who saved his family from the Flood is now so undignified that two of his sons are ashamed to look at him. This is a tale of decline. Why?

Noah is the classic case of someone who is righteous, but who is not a leader. In a disastrous age, when all has been corrupted, when the world is filled with violence, when even God Himself -- in the most poignant line in the whole Torah -- "regretted that He had made man on earth, and was pained to His very core," Noah alone justifies God's faith in humanity, the faith that led Him to create humankind in the first place. That is an immense achievement, and nothing should detract from it. Noah is, after all, the man through whom God makes a covenant with all humanity. Noah is to humanity what Abraham is to the Jewish people.

Noah was a good man in a bad age. But his influence on the life of his contemporaries was, apparently, non-existent. That is implicit in God's statement, "You alone have I found righteous in this whole generation" (Gen. 7:1). It is implicit also in the fact that only Noah and his family, together with the animals, were saved. It is reasonable to assume that

these two facts -- Noah's righteousness and his lack of influence on his contemporaries -- are intimately related. Noah preserved his virtue by separating himself from his environment. That is how, in a world gone mad, he stayed sane.

The famous debate among the Sages as to whether the phrase "perfect in his generations" (Gen. 6:9) is praise or criticism may well be related to this. Some said that "perfect in his generations" means that he was perfect only relative to the low standard then prevailing. Had he lived in the generation of Abraham, they said, he would have been insignificant. Others said the opposite: if in a wicked generation Noah was righteous, how much greater he would have been in a generation with role models like Abraham.

The argument, it seems to me, turns on whether Noah's isolation was part of his character, or whether it was merely the necessary tactic in that time and place. If he were naturally a loner, he would not have gained by the presence of heroes like Abraham. He would have been impervious to influence, whether for good or bad. If he was not a loner by nature but merely by circumstance, then in another age he would have sought out kindred spirits and become greater still.

Yet what exactly was Noah supposed to do? How could he have been an influence for good in a society bent on evil? Was he really meant to speak in an age when no one would listen? Sometimes people do not listen even to the voice of God Himself. We had an example of this just two chapters earlier, when God warned Cain of the danger of his violent feelings toward Abel -- "Why are you so furious? Why are you depressed?... sin is crouching at the door. It lusts after you, but you can dominate it" (Gen. 4:6-7). Yet Cain did not listen, and instead went on to murder his brother. If God speaks and people do not listen, how can we criticize Noah for not speaking when all the evidence suggests that they would not have listened to him anyway?

The Talmud raises this very question in a different context, in another lawless age: the years leading to the Babylonian conquest and the destruction of the First Temple, another lawless age: "Aha b. R. Hanina said: Never did a favourable word go forth from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, of which He retracted for evil, except the following, where it is written, 'And the Lord said unto him: Go through the

midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations that are being done in the midst thereof' (Ezek. 9:4).

"The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Gabriel, 'Go and set a mark of ink on the foreheads of the righteous, that the destroying angels may have no power over them; and a mark of blood upon the foreheads of the wicked, that the destroying angels may have power over them.' Said the Attribute of Justice before the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Sovereign of the Universe! How are these different from those?'

"Those are completely righteous men, while these are completely wicked,' He replied. 'Sovereign of the Universe!' said Justice, 'They had the power to protest but did not.'

"Said God, 'Had they protested, they would not have heeded them.'

"Sovereign of the Universe!' said Justice, 'This was revealed to You, but was it revealed to them?'" (Shabbat 55a)

According to this passage, even the righteous in Jerusalem were punished at the time of the destruction of the Temple because they did not protest the actions of their contemporaries. God objects to the claim of Justice: Why punish them for their failure to protest when it was clear that had they done so, no one would have listened? Justice replies: This may be clear to you or to the angels -- meaning, this may be clear in hindsight -- but at the time, no human could have been sure that their words would have no impact. Justice asks: How can you be sure you will fail if you never try?

The Talmud notes that God reluctantly agreed with Justice. Hence the strong principle: when bad things are happening in society, when corruption, violence and injustice prevail, it is our duty to register a protest, even if it seems likely that it will have no effect. Why? Because that is what moral integrity demands. Silence may be taken as acceptance. And besides, we can never be sure that no one will listen. Morality demands that we ignore probability and focus on possibility. Perhaps someone will take notice and change their ways -- and that "perhaps" is enough.

This idea did not suddenly appear for the first time in the Talmud. It is stated explicitly in the book of Ezekiel. This is what God says to the Prophet: "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their ancestors have been in revolt against Me to this very day. The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says.' And whether they listen or fail to listen -- for they are a rebellious people -- they will know that a Prophet has been among them." (Ezek. 2:3-5)

God is telling the Prophet to speak, regardless of whether people will listen.

So, one way of reading the story of Noah is as

an example of lack of leadership. Noah was righteous but not a leader. He was a good man who had no influence on his environment. There are, to be sure, other ways of reading the story, but this seems to me the most straightforward. If so, then Noah is the third case in a series of failures of responsibility. As we saw last week, Adam and Eve failed to take personal responsibility for their actions ("It wasn't me"). Cain refused to take moral responsibility ("Am I my brother's keeper?"). Noah failed the test of collective responsibility.

This way of interpreting the story, if correct, entails a strong conclusion. We know that Judaism involves collective responsibility, for it teaches Kol Yisrael arevim ze bazeh ("All Israel are responsible for one another" Shavuot 39a). But it may be that simply being human also involves collective responsibility. Not only are Jews responsible for one another. So are we all, regardless of our faith or religious affiliations. So, at any rate, Maimonides argued, though Nahmanides disagreed. (See Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melachim 9:14. Also see Ramban, Commentary to Bereishit 34:13, s.v. Ve-rabbim.)

The Hassidim had a simple way of making this point. They called Noah a tzaddik im peltz, "a righteous man in a fur coat." There are essentially two ways of keeping warm on a cold night. You can wear a thick coat, or you can light a fire. Wear a coat and you warm only yourself. Light a fire and you can warm others too. We are supposed to light a fire.

Noah was a good man who was not a leader. Was he, after the Flood, haunted by guilt? Did he think of the lives he might have saved if only he had spoken out, whether to his contemporaries or to God? We cannot be sure. The text is suggestive but not conclusive.

It seems, though, that the Torah sets a high standard for the moral life. It is not enough to be righteous if that means turning our backs on a society that is guilty of wrongdoing. We must take a stand. We must protest. We must register dissent even if the probability of changing minds is small. That is because the moral life is a life we share with others. We are, in some sense, responsible for the society of which we are a part. It is not enough to be good. We must encourage others to be good. There are times when each of us must lead. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l © 2020 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd Haran died before his father, in the land of his birth, in Ur Kasdim." (Gen. 11:28) When it comes to questions of belief, the agnostic is the loneliest of all. On one side of the fence stands the

atheist, confident in his rejection of God and often dedicated to the debunking of religion, which he considers to be ‘the opiate of the masses’ (per Karl Marx). On the other side stands the believer, who glories in his faith that the universe is the handiwork of God. The agnostic stands in the middle, not knowing (a-gnost) whether or not God exists, usually despairing of the possibility of acquiring certitude about anything transcending observable material phenomena.

Our Biblical portion makes reference to two very different agnostics, Haran and Noah. The contrast between them contains an important lesson for agnostics, believers and atheists, alike.

The Bible states that Noah, along with his sons, his wife, and sons’ wives, went into the ark “because of the waters of the Flood” (Gen. 7:7). From this verse, Rashi derives that “Noah had little faith; he believed and he didn’t believe that the Flood would arrive.”

Noah didn’t enter the ark until the water literally pushed him in. Rashi’s phrase that “he believed and he didn’t believe” is really another way of describing an agnostic who remains in the state of his uncertainty; he believes and doesn’t believe. Noah is therefore described by Rashi as the first agnostic.

The second Biblical agnostic appears in the guise of Haran. “These are the generations of Terah. Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran” (Gen. 11:27).

Why does the text specify “and Haran died before his father in the land of his birth, in Ur Kasdim” (Ibid. v. 28)? What is the significance of citing the exact place of Haran’s death?

Rashi explains by citing a fascinating midrashic tradition, and at the same time extracts Haran from relative anonymity, setting him up as a counterfoil agnostic to Noah. This midrash details how Terah, the father of the clan and a famous idol manufacturer, brings charges in the court of King Nimrod against his own son. He accuses Abram of being an iconoclast who destroyed his father’s idols while preaching heretical monotheism. As punishment, Abram is to be cast into the fiery furnace.

Haran is present at the trial and takes the position of having no position. He remains on the sidelines thinking that if Nimrod’s furnace will prove hotter than Abram’s flesh, he will side with the king; but if Abram survives the fire, then it would be clear that Abram’s God is more powerful than Nimrod’s gods, and he will throw in his lot with his brother.

Only after Abram emerges unscathed, is Haran ready to rally behind his brother. He confidently enters the fiery furnace (literally: Ur Kasdim), but no miracles await him. Haran burns to death.

Is it not strange that the fate of the two agnostics should be so different? We read how Noah was a man of little faith, and yet not only does he survive the Flood, he turns into one of the central figures of human history. He is even termed “righteous”

in the Bible.

In contrast, Haran, father of Lot, brother to Abraham, hovers on the edge of obscurity, and is even punished with death for his lack of faith. Why is Haran’s agnosticism considered so much worse than Noah’s?

Rabbi Moshe Besdin, z”l, explained that while Noah and Haran shared uncertainty about God, there was a vast difference between them. Noah, despite his doubts, nevertheless builds the ark, pounding away for 120 years, even suffering abuse from a world ridiculing his eccentric persistence. Noah may not have entered the ark until the rains began—but he did not wait for the Flood before obeying the divine command to build an ark!

Noah may think like an agnostic, but he acts like a believer. Haran, on the other hand, dies because he waits for someone else to test the fires. In refusing to act for God during Abram’s trial, he acted against God. In effect, his indecision is very much a decision. He is an agnostic who acts like an atheist.

Indecision is also a decision. A person who is indecisive about protesting an evil action or a malicious statement is aiding and abetting that malevolence by his very indecisive silence. After all, our sages teach that “silence is akin to assent.”

Noah reached his spiritual level because he acted, not so much out of faith, but despite his lack of it. Our Sages understood very well the difficulty of faith and the phenomenon of agnosticism. What they attempt to teach the agnostic is: If you are unsure, why do you act as if you are an atheist? Would it not be wiser to act as if you were a believer?

We learn from Noah’s life and Haran’s death that perfect faith is not necessary in order to conduct one’s life. Belief is never as important as action. In the World to Come, there is room for all kinds of agnostics. It depends primarily on how they acted on earth. ©2020 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The concluding portion of this week’s Torah reading deals with the society that built the great Tower of Babel, and the beginning of the lifetime, and accomplishments of our father Abraham. To me there is a relevancy and immediacy to this theme as it appears in this week’s Torah reading.

What is described in the Torah is the creation of a totalitarian society, ruled by dictatorship, fear, and imposed thought and speech control. The Torah text itself sums up the entire situation in its prophetically profound, concise description -- “and the society itself spoke only one language and the few same words.” Here you have a description of the destruction of minority opinion, freedom of speech and the right to be different and individualistic. In short, you have the description of North Korea, communist China, Cuba,

Venezuela, Nazi Germany, and the former Soviet Union. You have George Orwell's book "1984," paraded before us as biblical literature. In such a society, truth, faith and optimism can never flourish. Faith itself is based upon freedom of choice and the worth of the individual. When the state or the government controls the speech, language, and culture of the society that it governs, then there is very little room for the advancement of faith and for societal growth generally.

One need only look at the wreckage wrought by the forces of thought and speech control that promised the utopian future of the 20th century, This only brought misery to well over 100 million people, without achieving any hint of that utopia being actualized.

The words that the Torah uses to describe the society of the Tower of Babel are striking in their simplicity and accuracy -- "one language and the same few words." It reflects the inability to tolerate other opinions and different words. It is the reason that Abraham is thrown into the 'furnace of fire' simply because he dares to be different and to expound the idea of monotheism in a society of enforced paganism.

The forces that ruled at that time could not tolerate even one voice of dissent and difference. The main problem that the Jewish people have faced over their long history is that they are basically different -- in speech, dress, outlook, belief, and worldview. Even within the Jewish people there are forces that wish to stifle the faithful minority and to eliminate them from political and social influence and power.

It is interesting to me to note that those who shout the most loudly about individual rights and freedoms rarely are willing to extend them to others who may differ from them in ideology, and social customs.

It is not for nothing that we pride ourselves in being the children of Abraham and willing to stand up alone even against the so-called majority of the current Jewish world. This world has unfortunately lost its way in the name of false gods and bankrupt ideals. It has become totalitarian in its attitudes and behavior towards religion and the Orthodox Jewish world.

But just as our father Abraham persevered and overcame the society of the Tower of Babel, I am confident that this will be the future result in our Jewish world regarding our current situation -- of political correctness, cancel culture and coercive behavior. ©2020 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

The earth became corrupt before G-d and the earth filled with violence." (Beraishis 6:11) Enough was enough. After people were

allowed to live as they wished, a scant ten generations after Man was created from the earth, Mankind had lost its privilege of living upon it. What was so bad about Man's behavior? This posuk tells us.

The earth became corrupt and perverse. Rashi tells us that corruption (Hebrew hashchasa) refers to idolatry and acts of lewdness. Chamas, the subsequent violence, referred to theft and strong-arming of people's money.

These three sins led to the downfall of Man, so it behooves us to understand a bit more about their relationship. Normally, the three cardinal sins are idolatry, lewdness and murder. In this case, theft takes its place because one who steals from another does so for the same reason that he feels he can kill him -- the other man has lost stature in the first's eyes. He is not as important or worthwhile as I, and thus I can take advantage of him. It was this final step that sealed the fate of the people of the Flood.

While Hashem is willing to forgo vengeance for His own honor or holiness, and did not decide to destroy the world for the first two sins, we learn that He is not willing to let us harm each other. This is a striking lesson not only about Hashem's patience and tolerance, but about the great respect He has for human life and dignity!

Were we to give it a human perspective, it's like a parent who will let his children misbehave as long as they are getting along. Once they begin fighting amongst themselves, however, the parent must step in and put a stop to it. This lesson is especially meaningful in the context of a person who, like Noach, is trying to correct the misdeeds of others. The only way to do that is by showing love and respect for the other, not by taking away their human dignity.

Finally, we learn that being able to care about people cannot happen if one does not care about G-d. Those who claim that G-d doesn't exist or is irrelevant, and the only thing that matters is how you treat people, are partially right as we've said, but they don't realize that once you remove Hashem from the picture, you will stop respecting and caring for others. The reason we respect others is because they have a G-d-given right to exist even if we find them troublesome. That is part of the tzelem Elokim which each person has.

The Torah teaches us here that we must respect G-d and then we will be able to respect Man, and hopefully, become worthy of respect ourselves.

Once, a group of 50 people was attending a seminar. Suddenly, the speaker stopped and decided to do a group activity. He gave each person a balloon and asked them to write their name on it using a marker pen. Then, all the balloons were collected and put in another room.

Next, they were let in that room and asked to find the balloon that had their name on it. Everyone was frantically searching for his or her own name, colliding

into each other, pushing around others, and there was utter chaos. At the end of five minutes, not a single person could find his own balloon.

Then, everyone was asked to randomly collect a balloon and give it to the person whose name was written on it. Within minutes, everyone had their own balloons in hand.

The speaker reflected on what this exercise meant. This, she said, is exactly what's happening in all of our lives. Everyone is frantically looking around for happiness, but no one knows where to find it. Our happiness lies in the happiness of other people. Give them their happiness, and in return, you will get your own happiness. ©2020 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

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Chamei Teverya

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

All the fountains of the deep opened" (*Bereishit* 7:1). This is how the Torah describes the beginning of the flood. However, at the conclusion of the flood the Torah states: "And the fountains of the deep closed" (8:2), omitting the word "all." Our Sages derive from this that not all the fountains of the deep were closed. Those which benefit humanity, such as the hot springs of Tiberias (*Chamei Teverya*), were left open (Rashi).

When Jewish law speaks of cooking, it is limited to cooking over a fire or any derivative thereof. This is true whether the subject is cooking on Shabbat, roasting the Paschal lamb, or cooking milk with meat.

Since the Torah prohibition of cooking on Shabbat is limited to cooking with fire, one is not liable for cooking with the hot springs of Teverya or the sun (Rashi on *Shabbat* 39a). If we could harness the sun's heat to cook on Shabbat, normative *halacha* might permit it (*Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchetah*, chapter 1, note 127).

Some say that if a non-Jew uses *Chamei Teverya* to cook food, it may still be eaten by a Jew. Since the heat source is not fire, the food is not considered to have been cooked by the non-Jew (and thus it is not forbidden on the grounds of *bishul akum*). Nevertheless, all agree that if non-kosher food is cooked in a pot using *Chamei Teverya* as the heat source, both the pot and the food become forbidden. Does this mean that the people of Teverya can save on their electric bills by using *Chamei Teverya* to *kasher* their kitchen items before Pesach? Not necessarily. Some maintain that if a pot absorbed the taste of prohibited food while on the fire, it can be rid of it only by fire, following the principle of "*Kebol'o kach polto*" ("An item 'spits out' absorbed food in the same way that it absorbed it"). If so, *Chamei Teverya* would not count for *kashering* purposes.

Another interesting tidbit: women may use *Chamei Teverya* for purification purposes, but it may

not be used for *netilat yadayim* (hand-washing before a meal). This is because hot water may be used for *netilat yadayim* only if the water started out cold and was later heated up. In contrast, water which was always hot (as is the case with *Chamei Teverya*) cannot be used for *netilat yadayim*. Some say that *Chamei Teverya* cannot be used for *netilat yadayim* because of its sulfur content, which makes it unfit to drink. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This week's portion describes the story in Genesis of the great deluge that destroyed the earth. Why must the narrative tell us about the flood in such great detail? The Torah, very simply, could have told us that the world had turned evil and that God had no other choice but to destroy all living things. Several answers come to mind:

When thinking about the deluge most of us conjure up an image of a God who is vengeful seeking to punish with great brutality the entire world. But the extensiveness of the narrative indicates a very different message. Far from God being a God of retribution, the length of the descriptions teaches that God is a God of compassion who actually hesitated to destroy the world.

Thus, my rebbe in Chumash, Nechama Leibowitz divides the section prior to the flood into six paragraphs. The long discussion of what God goes through before allowing the waters to come down reveals a God who waits until the last instant to eradicate the world - hoping against hope that humankind would repent. Indeed, on the morning of the flood, the Torah says, "and rain (not a flood) was upon the earth." (Genesis 7:12) Rashi there tells us that the great flood began as only rain because, even at the last moment, if humanity would have repented, God would have turned the waters into a rain of blessing.

The narrative is similarly lengthy when describing Noah's exit from the ark. The detailed and deliberate style may indicate an uncertainty on the part of Noah. Having experienced "the deluge," Noah hesitated to start over, wondering and worrying why he should exit and start the world anew. After all, more destruction could be around the corner.

Note that God commands Noah to leave the ark with his wife so that he could cohabit and continue to live as a family. Noah, however, exits with his sons, while his wife leaves with their daughters-in-law as they could not fathom living together as husband and wife and continuing the human race. (Genesis 8:16,18) Perhaps for this reason, God has to, in explicit terms, tell the exiting Noah to be fruitful and multiply - continuing to bring life into the world. (Genesis (9: 1,7)

Also, the Seven Noahide commandments mentioned in part esoterically in the Garden of Eden

narrative, are elaborately spelled out after Noah emerges from the Ark. (Genesis 9:1-7; Sanhedrin 56b) This is followed by God's promise never to destroy the world. (Genesis 9:8-17) This promise seems to be predicated on humankind's commitment to the seven fundamental laws of morality. God on His own would never destroy the world; humans, however, if they fail to live ethically, have the capacity to destroy themselves. ©2020 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

A Perfect Tzaddik or a Tzaddik Who is Perfect

Noach is first introduced in last week's parasha, and the Midrash speaks of him as ending the curse of Adam by inventing the plow, enabling Man to seed his land in an efficient method. He is considered blessed by Hashem, and the Torah presents him in a positive way. Still, something is troubling in his behavior and the Rabbis pick up on this discrepancy. Our parasha begins with the words, "This is the history of Noach, Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations, Noach walked with Hashem." In a simple reading, Noach appears to be exemplary; he is righteous, a Man (explanation follows), perfect, and one who walks with Hashem. But the Torah can be learned on many different levels. Many of the commentators stress different nuances in the sentence to give a varied understanding of Noach.

A key word in the pasuk is tamim, perfect or whole-hearted. One concern of the Rabbis is whether this word is connected to the word tzaddik, a righteous person, or is considered to be independent within the sentence. If the word is connected, the implication is that Noach is a perfect tzaddik. This follows the opinion of the Ramban, "the pasuk reminds us that Noach was worthy and complete in his righteousness, he was worthy to be saved from the flood without punishment because he was perfect in his righteousness." If the words tzaddik and tamim are separated, as we find in ibn Ezra and Sforno, the question arises in which way Noach was perfect and whether that perfection extended to his righteousness. Both the ibn Ezra and Sforno agree that Noach was a tzaddik in his actions, but ibn Ezra says that he was perfect in his heart, whereas Sforno says that he was perfect in his thoughts.

HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch defines the terms that are used. "The tzaddik looks at everything objectively, at nothing from the stand point of his own interests... Tamim is... connected with derech (path), ...primarily the development through which a person goes to the consummation of his own personality, ...in

deeds (tzaddik), consideration of his own personality is relegated to the background, in derech, the satisfaction and perfection of his own personality is the aim...and does not allow oneself to be torn away in the slightest by external allurements..." The tzaddik is externally focused, the tamim is internally focused.

The separation of the two words enables us to see a possible flaw in Noach. Internally (ibn Ezra) and in his reasoning (Sforno), Noach was perfect, but this did not necessarily spur Noach to save others. Rashi and Rav Hirsch see a discrepancy between Noach and Avraham. Noach "allowed himself to be led and directed by Hashem" but Avraham "went before Hashem" without His assistance, independently acting to change the world. Noach separated himself from the evil world to maintain his purity and morality, avoiding marriage and children significantly longer than previous generations. Avraham chose to immerse himself in the world so that he could demonstrate to others the proper path to Hashem. Still, Hirsch reminds us that Noach is called Ish, a Man, "a proven character," a term seldom used to describe an individual.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains the Sifri's contention that there are two different ways in which a person can become tamim, a perfect, whole-hearted individual. The first way is to become a recluse, separating oneself from the rest of society for fear that the corruption within that society will affect his own thoughts and actions. He separates himself into a world of prayer and the study of Torah. He makes no effort to interact with the rest of the world, even to try to have an influence on it. The second path that a perfect individual may take is a constant battle with the ideas and negative influences of the world in order to conquer them. The righteous ones who choose this path go out among the people, warning those who sin and teaching and advising those who seek to conquer their own evil inclinations. These righteous men are called "those who conquer their evil inclinations." It is these men who combine the two words of tzaddik and tamim; they are truly those who are whole-heartedly and perfectly righteous.

Our question still remains. What kind of righteous man was Noach? Was he one who combined the two terms of our sentence or were they separate descriptions of his character? These questions also enable us to comprehend the general argument among the commentators that pervades this entire parasha. Rashi explains both sides of the argument with the seemingly unnecessary word in this sentence, "b'dorotav, in his generations." "There are those among the Rabbis who expound this word as praise. All the more so had he been in a generation of righteous people, he would have been even more righteous. And there are those who expound it as deprecation. According to HIS generation he was righteous but had he been in the generation of

Avraham, he would not have been considered anything of significance.” Avraham was definitely a tzaddik tamim, a combination of both these words as one. Noach was either a man who separated himself from the world to remain pure, or he was involved in trying to save the world, much like Avraham did for the people of the five cities of Sodom. There are definitely indications within the parasha which can be interpreted in both ways.

HaRav Sorotzkin gives a possible solution to this argument. He suggests that Noach’s approach to the world changed after Hashem commanded him to build the Ark. Noach was the recluse, separating himself from the world. He married late and only started a family when he was five hundred years old. He was fearful of succumbing to the temptations of a relationship before that time. Once Hashem had commanded him, Noach devoted his life to saving others. He rebuked them and warned them of their upcoming doom if they did not change. He delayed completing the Ark in the hope that he might have an influence on the people and affect Hashem’s decree. This is what is meant by “Noach walked with Hashem;” he allowed Hashem to prod him into action. He became the tzaddik tamim, the righteous, perfect, whole-hearted Man. The ibn Ezra tells us that Noach remained righteous even to the generation of Avraham.

It is clear from Noach’s story in the Torah that Judaism prefers one who is involved with society and not secluded from it. Of course, involvement comes with its set of dangers. But as Rav Hirsch explained, a tzaddik must focus on what is good for society, not him alone. Our success in life can never be accomplished in an unchallenged, cloistered environment. We are meant to live in society, benefitting that society by our actions and our Torah and our example. May our current “isolation” end soon, and may we again serve our community and our People. © 2020 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI D. TZVI TRENK

A Tikkun for Noach

At the very end of Parshas Breishis, we are introduced to Noach when his father Lemech proudly named his son Noach, “For this one will comfort us (‘Y’nachmenu’)...from the earth which Hashem cursed”. The letters Nun-Chaf which spell Noach’s name, are rooted in the word “Y’Nachmenu.”

Lemech saw in his newborn son something uniquely special, a promise of hope and redemption for a world suffering from the curse of Adam Ha’Rishon. What though led Lemech to believe there was a grand destiny awaiting his newborn baby? What gave him reason to have such high hopes for a blank slate of an infant child?

Chazal teach, there’s a guarantee Torah will never cease from the descendants of three consecutive generations- father, son, and grandchild- of Talmidei

Chachamim. This is based on a pasuk in Koheles: “H’Chut Ha’Meshulash Lo B’Mheira Y’natek – A three-stranded cord will not quickly be broken” (Koheles 4:12, see Yoma 85A and Kesuvos 62).

Based on this, we may suggest that since Noach was the child of three consecutive generations of righteous men- Chanoch, Mesushelach, and Lemech- Noach’s birth came with such a guarantee of greatness. He stood on the shoulders of giants; his Zechus Avos gave him the capacity to change the world for the better.

Similarly, the three generations of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, the “Chut Ha’Meshulash” of the Avos, culminated in Yosef, destined for greatness even when he was a “Na’ar.” His youthful dreams reflected a vision of an extraordinary future for him, and for him alone. Just as Lemech saw Noach’s uniqueness, so with Yaakov towards Yosef: “Eleh Toldos Yaakov, Yosef.”

We find additional parallels between Noach and Yosef.

The Midrash Tanchuma comments that we find two people who earned the title “Tzaddik”: Noach and Yosef. Why did they merit such a rare appellation? A “tzadik” is a paradigm of a giver of “tzedaka,” one who dedicates himself to saving others from distress. Noach and Yosef’s common trait was they were both givers of tzedaka to the world-at-large. Noach saved the ecological world from destruction and then worked to build a new world following the Mabul. Similarly, Yosef sustained the most powerful ancient empire during a devastating famine. He also established a new world for Yaakov’s family in its fateful transition from Canaan to Goshen. He paved the way for ultimate Geulah leading to a new b’riah known as Am Yisroel.

There is a deeper level, one that truly cements the Noach-Yosef connection yet also reveals the point where they diverge.

There is a kabbalistic teaching that Yosef was a gilgul of Noach (Chida, Nachal Kedumim on Noach, and Rama M’Pano in Gilgulei Neshamos 153). One of Yosef’s mission in life was to be metaken Noach’s weakness, his personal p’gam. What was that defect?

Noach was an ‘imperfect tzadik.’ Although he succeeded in saving the animal world, he had no redemptive impact on his fellow neighbors; he could not lead them to teshuva. Noach failed to fulfill the mitzvah of “hochacha”-reprimand (See, Chasam Sofer, Parshas Noach).

Yosef HaTzadik, on the other hand, worked mightily to perfect the subtle art of hochacha through the course of his travails and travels. In his early life, we find: “V’Yavei Yosef es Dibasam Ra’ah el Avihem.” Yosef didn’t keep quiet when he perceived iniquity. He spoke up to correct the misdeeds of his brothers. Yet, this was a premature, unrefined hochacha. It was too strong, and instead of bringing the brothers closer, it

divided them.

It is only at the end of the story where we find Yosef having become master over the trait of hochacha, dispensing with it only at the right time and place. Throughout the long ordeal confronting his brothers, he worked to hold himself back from revealing himself. The hochacha had to come slowly and softly; otherwise, it would have utterly overwhelmed the shevatim. When the reveal finally came, it came with Yosef's tears and a sensitive demonstration of familial love: "Ani Yosef, Ha'Od Avi Chai?". In this manner, the shevatim were finally able to unite peacefully, and this is how Yosef was metaken the failings of Noach.

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RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

The Rainmaker

Noach lived through trying times to say the least. He survived not only a generation of spiritual chaos, but physical annihilation as well. However, Hashem walked with him and guided him. He instructed him every step of the way. He warned him of the impending flood. He instructed him to build an ark. He told him to bring all the animals to the ark. Yet Noach is labeled as a man who was lacking in faith. The Torah tells us that, "Noach with his wife and sons and his son's wives with him, went into the ark because of the waters of the Flood" (Genesis 7:6).

Rashi quotes a Midrash which proclaims that Noach, to a small degree, lacked faith as he only entered the ark "because of the waters of the Flood." The implication is that Noach did not enter the ark until the rain forced him to.

The obvious question is how can we say that Noach lacked, even to a tiny extent, faith? He had to believe! After all, he spoke to Hashem! He built the ark! He gathered all the animals! He was the only one in his generation to worry about the impending doom! Surely, he must have believed! Why is there a complaint against Noach? What is wrong in waiting until he had no choice but to enter? To what degree is he considered lacking in faith?

Rabbi Shimshon Sherer, Rav of Congregation Kehilas Zichron Mordechai, tells the following story.

In a small town there was a severe drought. The community synagogues each prayed separately for rain, but to no avail. The tears and prayers failed to unlock the sealed heavens, and for months, no rains came.

Finally, the town's eldest sage held a meeting with prominent community rabbis and lay leaders. "There are two items lacking in our approach, faith and unity. Each one of you must impress upon his congregation the need to believe. If we are united and sincere, our prayers will be answered!" He declared that all the synagogues in the city would join together for a day of tefilah. Everyone, men women and children

would join together for this event. "I assure you," he exclaimed, "that if we meet both criteria -- faith and unity -- no one will leave that prayer service without getting drenched!"

There was no shul large enough to contain the entire community so the date was set to gather and daven in a field! For the next few weeks all the rabbis spoke about bitachon and achdus (faith and unity). On the designated day the entire town gathered in a large field whose crops had long withered from the severe drought. Men, women, and children all gathered and anxiously awaited the old sage to begin the service.

The elderly rabbi walked up to the podium. His eyes scanned the tremendous crowd that filled the large field and then they dimmed in dismay. The rabbi began shaking his head in dissatisfaction. "This will never work," he moaned dejectedly. "The rain will not come." Slowly he left the podium. The other rabbis on the dais were shocked. "But rebbe everyone is here and they are all united! Surely they must believe that the rains will fall! Otherwise no one would have bothered to come on a working day!"

The rabbi shook his head slowly and sadly.

"No. They don't really believe," he stated. "I scanned the entire crowd. Nobody even brought a raincoat."

The level of faith that the Torah demanded from Noach would have had him bolt into the ark on the very morning that the Flood was meant to come. He had no inkling of the ferocity that was impending at the storm's first moments. Though it began as a light rainstorm his waiting until being forced by the torrents is equivalent to one who hears predictions of a tornado and stands outside waiting for the funnel to knock at his door. Noach should have moved himself and his family in the ark at zero hour without waiting for the rains to force him in. The instinctive faith should have kicked in turning the bright sunny day that he may have experienced into one that is filled with fatal flood water. But he waited to see if it would really come. And for that he is chided.

How often do we cancel plans or change a course of action on the say-so of the weatherman, but plan our activities so in contrast with the predictions of the Torah? Even Noach, who built the ark under intense pressure, is held accountable for the lack of instinctive faith that should have been interred in his bones. And on that level of faith, unfortunately, all of us are a little wet behind the ears. © 2020 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

