

Parshas Noach

Perfect In His Generation

The parsha tells us that Noach was “perfect in his generations.” There are those who understand this as a positive statement and others who understand it as a negative one. This Sichah discusses the manner in which Noach compares to various generations of tzadikim.

This week’s *parsha* begins with a description of Noach’s character:

Text 1

These are the offspring of Noach—Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noach walked with G-d.

Bereishis 6:9

A perfect man

The simple reading of this verse, is expressive of the virtues and flawlessness of Noach. It calls him “righteous” and “perfect” and concludes by relating that he “walked with G-d.” Surely then, it would seem, that a man like Noach is someone we should strive to emulate, as he was a paragon of consummate perfection.

Notwithstanding these descriptions that extol his qualities, throughout rabbinic literature there have been rabbinic authorities that have judged Noach critically.

The basis on which they judged him negatively was founded upon their understanding of the verse’s statement that Noach was “perfect in his generation.” In the additional words, “in his generation,” the verse tells us that Noach’s greatness was only in *relation* to his generation. Compared to other generations though, he would have been judged on a different scale.

Others see the words “perfect in his generations” as an expression of Noach’s praise. He was righteous *despite* his corrupt surroundings.

How much more so would he have been righteous in a generation where the rest of its members were upright as well.

Text 2

Noach was a just man, and perfect in his generations. Rav Yochanan said: “In his generations, but not in other generations.” Resh Lakish maintained: “[Even] in his generations — how much more so in other generations.” Rav Chanina said: “As an illustration of Rav Yochanan’s view, to what may this be compared? To a barrel of wine lying in a vault of acid: in its place, its odor is fragrant [by comparison with the acid]; elsewhere, its odor will not be fragrant.” Rav Oshia said: “As an illustration of Resh Lakish’s view, to what may this be compared? To a vial of spikenard oil lying amidst refuse: [if] it is fragrant where it is, how much more so amidst spices!”

Talmud, Sanhedrin 108a

Though this Talmudic piece expresses the various opinions of Noach’s stature, it does not enumerate the specific generations in which Noach’s greatness would not have been noticed.

The following is a list of the various opinions which discuss this:

1	In his generations, but not in other generations. <i>(Talmud, Sanhedrin 108a)</i>
2	Were he to have been in the generation of Avraham, he would not have been able to find his hands or feet. <i>(Tanchuma, Noach 5)</i>
3	Were he to have been in the generation of Moshe or the generation of Shmuel, he would not have been [considered] a <i>tzadik</i> . <i>(Bereishis Rabba 30:9)</i>
4	If he had lived in any other generation, such as that of Avraham, Moshe or Dovid, then he would not have been considered at all. <i>(Zohar, 60a)</i>

The generations mentioned in the opinions listed above are, namely: (a) the generation of Avraham (Tanchuma); (b) the generations of Moshe and Shmuel (Bereishis Rabba); and (c) the generations of Avraham, Moshe and Dovid (Zohar).

It is self-understood that each of these above sources used examples of different *tzadikim* because of the variant implication that each was imparting.

A) Tanchuma: The Tanchuma's choice of comparison with Avraham is due to the fact that Avraham lived in the generation which immediately followed Noach (with their lives overlapping for 58 years). The most natural assumption would therefore be that when the Torah excluded other generations besides that

of Noach's, its intent was to exclude the generation of Avraham, which immediately follows.

B) Bereishis Rabba: By mentioning the generations of Moshe and Shmuel the contrast is understood as well.

Moshe was the greatest prophet that ever lived. It is obvious therefore, that Noach, although considered a perfect *tzadik*, would not have been noticed, were he to have been present in the same generation as Moshe.

Such was also the case with Shmuel. Were Noach to have lived in his generation, it is understood that he would not have been noticed in comparison to Shmuel.

Shmuel's greatness can be appreciated by the Talmud's comment on his mother Chana's prayer, when she prayed for a "man-child."

Text 3

Rav Yochanan said: "Seed that will be equal to two men—namely, Moshe and Aharon, as it says: 'Moshe and Aharon among His priests and Shmuel among them, that call upon His name.'"

Talmud, Berachos 31b

It therefore is clear that compared to Shmuel—whom the Talmud declares was comparable to Moshe—Noach would hardly be worth mentioning as a *tzadik*.

C) Zohar: The Zohar, however, which singles out the three generations of Avraham, Moshe and Dovid, is difficult to understand. What is the significance of these three generations that

particularly conveys the
inconsequentiality of Noach?

Three *tzadikim* & three steps

In the Zohar's statement that the service of Noach could not be compared to the service of Avraham, Moshe and Dovid, it is evident that there is some point of comparison between their three ways of serving G-d. Therefore, the Zohar must therefore tell us that notwithstanding the greatness and righteousness of Noach, he cannot be compared to them.

The three characters enumerated by the Zohar are not merely three of the most righteous men in Jewish history, but are as well, three men that each began a step in the process of the ultimate purpose of the world.

These three *tzadikim* names form the acronym, "ADaM" (Avraham, Moshe and Dovid). This testifies that these individuals brought about the steps which lead to the goal that man (ADaM) is to reach and affect in this world.

Although Noach, too, was similar to ADaM—in the sense that like Adam, he is the father of all mankind, and that Noach served G-d in a manner similar to three *tzadikim*—compared to these three *tzadikim*, however, he is negligible.

The purpose of the world is for (1) the Jewish people; (2) the Torah; and (3) to ultimately be in a state which a king is ruling upon it.

These three goals are expressed in the service of these three *tzadikim*.

Avraham began the Jewish nation, Moshe's primary achievement was that he gave the Torah to the Jewish people, and Dovid brought the Jewish people to its finalized state through establishing the Davidic dynasty.

This is what the Zohar means by saying that Noach would not be considered as anything compared to these *tzadikim*. For, although Noach was indeed a *tzadik*, he did not bring about the purpose of creation.

The ultimate service

Each one of these *tzadikim* served G-d in a specific manner which was in an aspect similar, yet dramatically different from an characteristic of Noach's service of G-d.

Each of these generations imparted another one of the three elements of the abovementioned goals of man on this world: (1) not to be affected by the negativity of the world that surrounds a person; (2) to effect the world so that it should no longer be negative, so that it will have a firm existence; and (3) to transform the world into a G-dly place.

Noach mirrored these three ways of serving G-d—albeit on a much lesser scale—in the following ways:

- 1) Avraham: One of the main elements that stood out in the character of Avraham—the first Jew—was his strength in his ability to stand up for monotheism against an entirety of civilization that worshipped idolatry. The Medrash¹ says: "The world served idolatry, and Avraham arose, and through his own wisdom, served the Holy One Blessed be He."

Indeed, the Torah aptly describes him as, "Avraham *Ha-Ivri*"—Avraham the Hebrew. This epithet is expressive of the tenacity that Avraham possessed to stand up to his entire generation. The word "*ivri*" in Hebrew means side. Calling him "Avraham, of the side" communicates how he possessed the

¹ Piskasa Rabasi 33.

will power to stand up to an entire generation of idolaters. He declared to the world that their belief system was mistaken and that there is only one true G-d. As the Medrash relates,

Text 4

The entire world was on one side and he [Avraham] was on the other side.

Bereishis Rabba 42:8

It was this strength of character that Avraham bequeathed to the Jewish people as the cornerstone in how an individual must serve G-d. A person cannot become disheartened by the fact that the world does not believe in G-d as he does. Rather, he must learn from Avraham, the founder of Judaism, and stand up for what he knows to be true.

It is through this axiom that the Jewish people have learned to stand up against those nations that have hindered their Jewish practice and service of the Almighty.

Similar to the way that Avraham went against the grain and stood up for what he believed, Noach, too, did the same.

Noach lived in a society where the decadence and evil of the people reached a point where G-d destroyed the generation—yet, he himself was not drawn to their ways. Notwithstanding the pressures and temptations that he must have been exposed to, the Torah testifies: “Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations.” He stood up for morality and was a paradigm of virtuous scruples.

² Iyov 24:18.

Not only did Noach not follow his generation in their corruption, on the contrary, he actively rebuked them, urging that they repent from their ways, so as not be destroyed in the flood.

Text 5

Rav Yossi of Caesarea taught: “What is meant by the verse², ‘He glides swiftly, as on the water’s surface; their portion in the land is cursed?’ This teaches that the righteous Noach rebuked them, urging, ‘Repent; for if not, the Holy One, blessed be He, will bring a deluge upon you and cause your bodies to float upon the water like gourds, as it is written, “He glides swiftly [i.e., floats] as on the waters.” Moreover, you shall be cursed for all future generations, as it is written, “Their portion in the land is cursed.”’”

Talmud, Sanhedrin 108a

Noach, too then, possessed a resolve which was similar to the steadfastness of Avraham and stood up against the corruption of his generation.

- 2) Moshe: Moshe taught man, through the giving of the Torah to positively affect the world. The impact that Torah has on the world is to the extent that not only is the world not a contradiction to Torah, but Torah is the foundation for the presence of the world.

This idea is expressed in the following statement in the Talmud:

Text 6

Rav Chizkiah said: “What is meant by [the verse]³, ‘From heaven You made judgment heard; The earth feared, and was tranquil.’? If it feared, why was it tranquil, and if it was tranquil, why did it fear? But, at first it feared, yet subsequently it was tranquil. And why did it fear? — Even in accordance with Resh Lakish. For Resh Lakish said: ‘Why is it written, “And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day;” What is the purpose of the additional “the?” This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, stipulated with the Works of Creation and said thereto: ‘If Israel accepts the Torah, you shall exist; but if not, I will turn you back into emptiness and formlessness.’”

Talmud, Shabbos 88a

Torah brought a stability to the world which had not existed before the Torah was accepted by the Jewish people.

Similar to what was achieved in the world through Torah, Noach affected through ensuring that the world would not again be destroyed.

When Noach left the ark he brought sacrifices to the Almighty from all the kosher animals that he had taken into the ark. G-d, pleased by Noach’s actions, had mercy on mankind, and resolved not to completely destroy mankind again. The Torah tells us—

Text 7

And I will establish My covenant with you, and never again will all flesh be cut off by the flood waters, and there will never again be a flood to destroy the earth.

Bereishis 9:11

We see then, that similar to the way that Torah established the existence of the world, Noach did the same.

- 3) Dovid: The essential objective of kingship, as established by the Davidic dynasty, was not only to establish a practical government, but to establish a G-dly kingdom in the world. A king was the conduit to bring the sovereignty of G-d into this world.

Text 8

The purpose and the intent behind the appointment of a king, is that through him and his [efforts] the Jews will be nullified to G-d...Since the king is nullified to the sovereignty of Heaven and the Jewish people are nullified to the king, it is through him and his [efforts] that the Jews will be nullified to G-d. This is the mission of the king at all times: that through him and his [efforts] the created beings will be nullified to G-d. For he will be nullified [to G-d] and they will be nullified to him.

Derech Mitzvosecha, Mitzvas Minuy Melech, pg. 108

Dovid *HaMelech* actively accomplished this through completing the conquest of the Land of Israel.

Through this effort, he brought about a revelation of G-dliness into a part of the world which G-dliness had previously not been apparent. He transformed land owned by gentiles into “The Holy Land.”

Under the rule of his successor and son Shlomo, the nations of the world recognized this sovereignty and brought

³ Tehillim 76:9.

Shlomo gifts—symbolizing the effect that his G-dly rule had on the world.

Through Dovid it is made apparent that the mandate of Torah and Judaism is to transform and elevate the world until it reaches a G-dly status.

Ultimately, the full of extent of this will be realized through the final king of the Davidic line—King *Moshiach*. In his time, G-dliness will be revealed in the world in a comprehensive manner, and all nations and creatures will be permeated by the sovereignty of the Almighty.

Text 9

For then I will change the nations [to speak] a pure language, so that they will proclaim the Name of G-d, to worship Him with a united resolve.

Tzefanya 3:9

In the time of *Moshiach*, all nations will come to Jerusalem and to the Temple in order to be taught the proper path in serving G-d⁴. During that time, the animal kingdom will no longer be violent, as the verse says, “A wolf shall live with a lamb, and a leopard shall lie with a kid; and a calf and a lion cub and a fatling [shall lie] together⁵.” The reason that the world will be transformed is because the entirety of the world will be affected by the knowledge and sovereignty of G-d⁶.

Noach, too, transformed the world in a way similar to Dovid, akin to what will be expressed during the time of *Moshiach*.

Noach elevated the animals that were in the ark to a condition where they co-existed as they will in the future time of *Moshiach*. All the animals lived together in the ark, including the wild ones. Yet, instead of attacking one another, they lived in peace.

Noach was not just a normative *tzadik*, he was an individual whose service of G-d incorporated the three distinctive goals that were expressed by Avraham, Moshe and Dovid.

When the Zohar tells us that Noach was not considered anything⁷, it is not to discredit his tremendous accomplishments. For, indeed, Noach integrated the three goals of the world: (1) not being affected by the evil of his surroundings; (2) giving the world a stable presence; and (3) converting the world into a G-dly abode.

However, though their ways of serving G-d were similar, there are focal differences between Noach’s service of G-d and the service of the three *tzadikim*—Avraham, Moshe and Dovid. Because of those differences, the Zohar tells us that “He was not considered at all.”

Practice makes perfect

The reason that Noach’s manner of serving G-d was not at all comparable to that of Avraham, Moshe and Dovid was because the manner in which he served G-d was similar to practice before accomplishment of an actual objective.

Noach can be compared to the education process that one employs to teach their child

⁴ See Yeshayahu 2:3.

⁵ Ibid., 11:6.

⁶ Ibid., 11:9.

⁷ As opposed to employing the language of the Medrash, “That he would not be righteous.”

before they become responsible to fulfill the actual *mitzvah*.

Although the child does the same *mitzvah* as the adult, there can be no comparison between the two. The child is merely practicing the *mitzvos* so that he can become accustomed to them. The training is not an end for itself, but an exercise for the actual event to come.

It is for this reason that the *mitzvah* of education is defined: (a) primarily that the child should not transgress a negative commandment (in order that he should not develop negative habits and tendencies), and is less pronounced in positive commandments that he can learn later⁸. (b) We educate the child to do the *mitzvos* out of fear⁹ and not for truth's sake.

The reason fear is stressed is because we are mainly concerned with the child *developing* good habits as opposed to truly *servicing* G-d.

In education, the *mitzvos* that are performed are for the *child's* sake, so that *he* become accustomed to certain practices. When an adult performs a *mitzvah* he is doing it for the *mitzvah's* sake, to fulfill the commandment of G-d.

In a sense, Noach was not serving G-d, but was performing the preparatory actions, as a child fulfills them. In the same way as with a child the negative is stressed as opposed to the positive, and fear more than truth, so too, Noach served G-d in a similar manner.

Noach was righteous "in his *generations*." Meaning to say, that in the aspects in which they were evil, he was righteous. Their evil was particularly expressed in the way they dealt with their fellow, as the Torah tells us: "the earth is filled with robbery"¹⁰. So too, the righteousness

of Noach was primarily regarding things that were between him and his fellow man. In those aspects he was ethical and moral, but not as much in matters pertaining exclusively to his Creator.

While being ethical and moral is a tremendous thing, its main purpose is to make the world a decent and civilized place, so that *afterwards* a person can do *mitzvos* and serve G-d.

This is similar to education, which serves as a means to an end. In the same way that with the education we do not stress a deep commitment to G-d, but rather fulfilling the *mitzvos* out of fear, Noach too only entered the ark and served G-d because he was fearful of the impending flood, and not because of a deep commitment to the Almighty¹¹.

In light of the above, we can understand the differences between the Noach's service of the Almighty and the manners in which Avraham, Moshe and Dovid served G-d.

- 1) Standing up against the world: When Avraham took a stand against the world, it was not merely for basic morality, but primarily to establish monotheism. He did not stand up for G-d because he feared G-d's retribution, or because serving G-d would save his life. On the contrary, he served G-d even when doing so endangered his life! He served G-d because G-d is Truth, and not for any ulterior motive.
- 2) Strengthening the existence of the world: Noach only caused that the world would not be *destroyed*, but he did not strengthen the state that the world was in. When Moshe, however, revealed the Torah to the world, he *strengthened* the

⁸See Shulchan Aruch Admur HaZaken, Orach Chaim 343:2.

⁹ See Rambam, Laws of Teshuvah 10:2.

¹⁰ Bereishis 6:13. See Rashi *ad loc*.

¹¹ Bereishis Rabba 32:6.

very existence of the world in an active way.

- 3) Elevating the world: The change that Noach brought about in the animals wasn't an end in itself, but was to ensure that the animals survived the flood. It wasn't due to the revelation of G-dliness that the animals changed, but rather the opposite. Because the *animals* needed to survive the flood, a deep level of G-dliness was revealed, in order that they could live in peace and survive. When Dovid changed the world, it was in a way that the *actual* G-dliness transformed the universe. In the same fashion, *Moshiach*—the scion of Dovid—will change the world as well.

sovereignty in the world.	the times of <i>Moshiach</i> .	revelation of G-dliness.
---------------------------	--------------------------------	--------------------------

A deeper dimension

Noach connected to G-dliness in the way that it expresses itself *within* the world, but not in the manner in which G-d *transcends* the world.

His perception of G-dliness affected him to the extent that he wasn't drawn after the rest of the wickedness of his generation in bringing *destruction* to the world. Yet, Noach was not able to *transcend* the confines of worldly limitations.

Avraham, on the other hand, perceived G-dliness in a fashion which transcended the world, and his way of serving G-d was therefore on a greater level.

Noach reached the highest level that a human being can reach without transcending the world. The other three generations of *tzadikim* attained a level of G-dliness that transforms the world itself.

When one reaches a depth that is deeper than the world, he is able to affect the material permanently, and transform the world to a different state.

It is for this reason that Torah affirms the existence of the world. Because Torah is inherently higher than the world¹², it is able to affect the world in a deeper way than the world would have been on its own.

Since the world was created for the sake of Torah¹³, and not vice versa, the Torah affects the world in a way that not only does not negate it, but strengthens its existence.

Kingship as well, transforms the complete identity of the serf. The serf's whole identity is

<i>ADaM</i>	Noach	The Dissimilarity
Avraham stood up against the world to teach monotheism.	Noach was moral in a corrupt generation.	A) Noach only stood up for moral ethics, as opposed to truly serving G-d. B) He did so because he was fearful of the flood and not because of truth.
Moshe strengthened the existence of the world through the giving of the Torah.	Noach ensured that the world would not be again destroyed by a flood.	Noach only ensured that the world would not be destroyed, but did not strengthen its actual existence.
Dovid transformed the world through revealing G-d's	Noach transformed the animals in the ark in a similar way to	Noach transformed the animals out of necessity, not because of a

¹² See Pesachim 54a.

¹³ See Rashi, Bereishis 1:1.

that he is a servant of his king. So too, when ours and the world's identity is that we are servants of the Almighty, our entire character is transformed.

This is aptly expressed in the following statement, which speaks of the time of *Moshiach*:

Text 10

For the land shall be full of the knowledge of G-d as water covers the *sea*.

Yeshayahu 9:11

The sea and the water are not two separate things; they are one and the same. In the same way, when *Moshiach* will come, our identity will be completely one with G-d's, as if we had no personal life of our own. When this happens, we and the entire world will be transformed, to the extent that even animals will change their natural tendency of violence.

The lesson

The Zohar's critical comment regarding Noach is not for the purpose of disparaging him, but is said in order to teach a lesson for our lives.

The Talmud explains, that the Torah does not say negative things, even regarding animals¹⁴. Undoubtedly, the Torah does not speak unfavorably concerning the righteous.

¹⁴ Rav Yehoshua ben Levi said: "One should not utter a gross expression with his mouth, for the Torah employs a circumlocution of eight letters, rather

Text 11

Torah did not speak disparagingly of an unclean animal, [would] it speak disparagingly of the righteous?

Talmud, Bava Basra 123a

Being critical of Noach is not to negate or discredit the way that he served G-d, but to allow us to learn from him.

We are to take a lesson, that although in his generation he reached the greatest level achievable, in our times, we must take example from the manner of service that Avraham, Moshe, and Dovid introduced to the world.

We must stand up to the world because we possess the truth and wish to follow it, not because we are fearful—we must bring actual change to the world and not merely prevent its destruction—and last but not least, we should transform the world until it reaches a point in which it becomes one with G-d.

We should serve G-d like Avraham, Moshe and Dovid. Noach was only able to serve G-d in a way that related to the world. We, however, are able to surpass that level and serve the Almighty in a way that transcends the world.

than utter a gross expression, for it is said, "Of every clean beast . . . and of the beasts that are not clean." Pesachim 3a.

*(Based on Likutei Sichos 35, p. 15ff. Reworked by
Rabbi Dovid Markel.)*