

Parshas Noach

Presented By Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky Shlita, Dean

1. The Necessity of Identifying a Tzaddik

The Portion of Noach begins, “**These are the offspring of Noach...**” Then, the Torah digresses by saying, “**Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noach walked with G-d.**” Rashi addresses the question - if the Torah intended to discuss the offspring of Noach, then why interject with a description of Noach’s degree of righteousness. He cites Chazal who explain, based on the words of *Mishlei* (Proverbs), “*Zeicher tzaddik l’bracha* - A tzaddik must be remembered in a context of blessing.” Meaning, when a tzaddik is mentioned, one must describe his praiseworthiness so that people should realize his special value. Thus, when the Torah mentions Noach it must state, “**Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations...**” Based on a principle cited from *Mishlei*, when a tzaddik is mentioned he must be presented in a praiseworthy context. If this is so then why does the Torah only identify Noach in this manner and not the holy Patriarchs (Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov)?

Chazal tell us that that the word “*B’Hebarom* - when He (Hashem) created them (existence),” mentioned at the time of creation (Portion of Bereishis), alludes to our Patriarch Avraham. The letters “B’Hebarom” and the letters of Avraham are one in the same. Maharal of Prague z’tl explains that the allusion to Avraham through the word “B’Hebarom” indicates that he was not a continuation of the previous existence but rather, he himself was the beginning of a new existence. Although Avraham biologically descended from Noach, the father of all mankind, in terms of his dimension of being – he had no relevance to anything that preceded him. Nevertheless the Torah does not identify him as “tzaddik.” Additionally, Avraham miraculously survived the kiln of Kasdim because he would not bow to the idol. Yet if it were not for the Midrashic interpretation of “Ur Kasdim,” we would not be aware of his sacrifice for G-d. It was only after the binding of Isaac, the most difficult of all of the tests of Avraham, that the Torah states, “...now I (G-d) know that you are a G-d fearing man...” At the time of the binding of Isaac, Avraham was 137 years old. He had previously devoted his life to the espousal and dissemination of monotheism, yet the Torah does not identify him as “tzaddik.” (The Talmud tells us that Avraham had recognized G-d at the age of 52) How do we understand this?

The reason the Torah must refer to an individual as “tzaddik” (such as Noach) is because if it were not for this quantification, one would not be able to understand the spiritual caliber of that individual based on his life described in the Torah. In order for us to appreciate and value Noach for who he was, the Torah identifies him as a “tzaddik and perfect.” However, regarding a rasha (evil person), *Mishlei* concludes, “The name of Evil should rot.” Thus, when one mentions an evil person one must identify him in a pejorative manner so that his memory should be detested and despised. As a result his name should be obliterated forever and no individual would consider emulating his ways or admiring his life.

If a person lives his life as a tzaddik and can clearly be identified as such through his actions, then the Torah does not need to refer to him as “tzaddik.” When Avraham

our Patriarch was told by G-d to leave his land, his birthplace, and his father's household, he did so without questioning G-d – despite the difficulty. Subsequently, Avraham brought G-d's existence into the focus of humanity and began a legacy which evolved into the Jewish people. Avraham's life identifies him as that special person.

One may say that although Avraham's life declares that he is a tzaddik, there are those who may not appreciate and understand that his choices are of such a nature that would classify him as "tzaddik." Thus the Torah must be explicit to identify him as such. If one does not have the sense to understand that Avraham's life was synonymous with devoutness, then identifying him as "tzaddik" would not give that individual an appreciation for who he was. This type of individual may even find value in the life of rasha, (evil person) – despite the lack of spirituality.

If the Torah had not identified Noach as "tzaddik" how could we have understood his righteousness? One of his contributions that is known to us is that he invented the plough. As a result of developing this farming implement, farmers had an easier task of tilling their fields. The name "Noach" connotes that he alleviated to some degree the curse to mankind ("By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread"). This information only tells us that he was an inventor. Why was he worthy to be saved more the rest of mankind? The Torah tells us that the reason that he was chosen to be the lonely survivor of the Flood (together with his family) was because he was a "tzaddik" amongst his generation. In contrast, the Torah did not need to identify our Patriarchs Avraham, Yitzchak, or Yaakov as "tzaddik" because their lives alone declare them as such.

2. Purpose and Value

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that at Sinai, G-d put a mountain over the heads of the Jewish people and told them, "If you accept the Torah you will live, and if not you will be buried under the mountain." Tosafos (earlier commentator) asks, "Sequentially speaking the Jewish people had already declared their unequivocal acceptance of the Torah with "Naaseh V'nishma – we will do and we will listen." If this is the case, then why was it necessary to put a mountain over their heads?" Tosafos answers that when the Jewish people stood at Sinai, G-d had revealed to them the fires of *gehenom* (spiritual purgatory) after they unequivocally accepted the Torah. Thus, they became frightened and wanted to retract from their original commitment. It was only after this that G-d put the mountain over their heads and gave them the ultimatum.

The Midrash Tanchuma asks the same question posed by Tosafos- however it answers differently. The Midrash tells us that the reason Hashem needed to put a mountain over their heads, despite their unequivocal acceptance of the Torah, was because their declaration of "Naaseh V'nishma" only addressed the Written Law and not the Oral Law. The Midrash explains that the Written Law only gives one an understanding of the general principles of the Torah. However, in order to appreciate the details, nuances, and applications of the principles one must be steeped in the Oral interpretation. The Oral Law cannot be quantified as the verse in Iyov (Job), "The Torah is longer than the earth and wider than the ocean..."

The Midrash continues, "One can only come upon light through Torah." In order to acquire Torah one must not seek desire and glory in this world. One must be willing to sacrifice material pleasure in order to study Torah at an advanced level. As the Mishna in Pirkei Avos states, "Bread and salt you shall eat. Water in small measure you shall drink. On the ground you shall sleep. And a life of pain (deprivation) you shall live." This is stated as the prerequisite for one to acquire *Kesser Torah* (the Crown of Torah). The only

one who can fully appreciate the Oral Law is the one who toils for it in this context. The Jewish people were not willing to make this level of sacrifice – to be deprived of the material pleasures of life. Thus, they were only willing to accept the Written Law. Consequently, G-d held the mountain over their heads and compelled them to accept the Oral law as well despite the level of sacrifice.

The Midrash cites a verse in Yishaya, “The nation who walks in darkness saw great light. These are the members of the Talmud who saw great light because G-d illuminated their eyes within the context of what is forbidden, what is permitted, what is contaminated and what is pure.” A Jew has an understanding of reality only if he is privileged to be illuminated through the laws of the Torah – such as what is permitted and what is not permitted (issur v’heter). Darkness can only be dispelled through the study of the Oral Law. As King Solomon states in Proverbs, “The hedonist walks in darkness...” Even if one may have perfect vision and may have everything in a material sense, he is nevertheless walking in darkness because his perception of reality is only within the context of physicality. One can only have a sense of true purpose through the study of Torah. The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us, “Evil people, although they may be alive, are called dead.” Since the essence of a Jew is his spirituality, if it is not addressed or understood it becomes non-functional.

If one merits to develop himself within the spiritual realm, he will be able to utilize the physical for its most meaningful value. Rambam writes, “One who is inspired to acquire “kesser Torah - the crown of Torah” will be willing to make the necessary sacrifices.” If one is inspired nothing can dissuade him from attaining his goal. However if one does not have that sense of appreciation for spirituality, there are endless conflicts of interest that will prevent him from achieving that advanced spiritual level.

Rav Shach z’tl once said, “The wealthiest man in existence will never experience the level of joy that I experience in this world. When I am able to grasp and understand the words of Rambam or the Talmud, I experience a level of pleasure and fulfillment that cannot be equaled by any other pursuit.” Rav Shach z’tl not only had the world to come which is spiritual, he also merited to have the physical world through his spiritual expression.

3. Seeing G-d Through One’s Own Eyes

After Noach had completed building the Ark (120 year period) and gathering all the food that was necessary to feed all the species that it would contain, the Torah says **“And Noach did according to everything that Hashem had commanded him.”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that this verse is telling us that Noach entered into the Ark. **“Noach, with his sons, his wife, and his sons’ wives with him, went into the Ark because of the waters of the Flood.”** Rashi again cites Chazal, that this verse is telling us that Noach only entered into the Ark because of the Floodwaters. He was thus considered deficient in his faith because he did not enter the Ark immediately upon G-d’s command. How do we reconcile these two verses? The first verse indicates that Noach entered into the Ark as G-d had commanded him – meaning without hesitation and being fully committed to G-d’s Word. However, the latter verse states clearly that he only entered the Ark because he had no choice. The Floodwaters were upon him. If Noach had invested 120 years of his life building the Ark, as G-d had commanded him, how could he have (at the last moment) questioned if the Floodwaters would come?

Over the course of the 120-year period when Noach was building the Ark, the members of his generation would approach him every year and ask him, “Why are you

engaged in this project of building an Ark?” Noach would respond by telling them, “Unless mankind changes its ways and reconciles itself with G-d’s Commandments through teshuvah (repentance), G-d will bring destruction through a Flood upon existence.” The members of the generation would respond, “If the Flood will come, it will come upon you and your family and not us.” On the 120th anniversary of the building of the Ark, the members of his generation approached Noach and asked, “Where is the Flood that you have been forecasting for the past 120 years?” Noach could not respond.

Noach was in a quandary not knowing if the Flood would actually occur. Was the decree of G-d withdrawn because of His Attribute of Mercy? Or did the Floodwaters not come at this particular moment because when G-d said “after 120 years the world will be destroyed,” He did not mean *exactly* after 120 years? The fact was, as Rashi cites Chazal, the Flood was delayed for seven days out of respect for the passing of Mesushelach who was the tzaddik of that era. Noach concluded that G-d’s destruction did not come upon existence because of His Attribute of Mercy. Despite Noach’s conclusion, Hashem commanded him to enter into the Ark. Yet, Noach still did not enter the Ark. Because he appreciated and understood the limitless Attribute of Mercy that G-d possessed he did not believe that there would be destruction. However when Noach saw the Floodwaters rising, he finally understood that his assessment of reality was incorrect.

Although Noach needed to be compelled by the Floodwaters to enter into the Ark, he nevertheless did have some level of faith. If he had lacked trust in G-d, as the other members of his generation, he would never have entered the Ark – even after seeing the waters rise. Prior to the Flood all living creatures began to flock to the Ark from all four corners of the earth. Every conceivable species entered into the Ark, which was a sight to be seen. One would imagine that upon witnessing such a miracle that the people of Noach’s generation would have believed that the end was coming just as Noach predicted. However, they denied reality. After all of the creatures had entered into the Ark it began to rain and the people were still oblivious to the fact that Noach’s prediction was true and the only alternative was teshuvah. Because they did not act upon all the blatantly clear indicators, to take the necessary steps to do teshuvah, they were destroyed together with all existence. Had the generation of Noach acknowledged their wrongdoing and did teshuvah the rainwater would have been “rain of blessing.”

The conflict of interest of Noach’s generation was so great that despite the obviousness of the moment, they chose not to recognize the truth. Although Noach also had his reasons for not immediately believing that the end was near, he came to that realization when he saw the rising of the Floodwaters.

We often read world events through our own eyes based on our own conflicts of interest. However, if one sees the world through the eyes of the Torah then one will process the experiences that come upon him with objectivity. G-d tested Avraham with ten difficult tests and he did not (even once) question Him. Avraham accepted the Word of Hashem unswervingly despite the seemingly overwhelming contradictions. G-d had commanded him to bring his beloved son Yitzchak as an offering, although He had previously told Avraham that the offspring of his son Yitzchak would be “like the stars of the heaven.” Noach’s personal conflict interfered with his understanding of G-d, which was not the case with Avraham. Noach only accepted the Truth when he had no other choice.

4. Man's Rise and Fall Through His Pursuits

The Torah states, **“Noach, the man of the earth (*ish adamah*), debased himself and planted a vineyard...”** The Midrash Tanchuma explains, “Once Noach became an agriculturalist he felt that he needed the earth and thus became debased. Reb Yehudah the son of Reb Shalom says, “Initially Noach was *ish tzaddik* (righteous man) and then he became an *ish adamah* (man of the earth).” This is because he chose to plant a vineyard.

The Midrash continues that there were three individuals who because they became associated with the earth became debased – Cain, Noach, and Uziel. Regarding Cain it is written that initially he was a “man of the earth (farmer) and subsequently because of what transpired “He became a wanderer.” Cain believed that the earth was his own and he was consumed with it. He killed his brother Hevel because Cain believed that he was the master of the earth since he developed it (as an agriculturalist). Ultimately he was punished by G-d to become a wanderer with no place on the earth that was his own.

Noach planted a vineyard which led to many serious consequences. He became intoxicated, which ultimately led him to be castrated by his son *Cham*. His son was cursed. The state of slavery came into existence (resulting from the curse to his son). All of these consequences came about because Noach had become the man of the earth (*ish adamah*). Uziel, who was a king, planted vineyards and also become deluded because of his own involvement with the land. Subsequently, Uziel had overheard a law being taught in the study hall, which stated, “A non-Kohen who officiates in the Temple will die (spiritual excision).” Being that he was not a Kohen, Uziel was angered that he was not allowed to perform the service in the Temple, despite the fact that he was a king. He thus officiated regardless of the prohibition and was ultimately cursed to become a leper and to lose his kingdom. Cain, Noach, and Uziel all failed because of their involvement in the earth.

Noach initially was a *tzaddik* whose involvement was only spiritual matters. However, because he chose to be involved with his vineyard he became debased/ an earthy individual. Had Noach chosen another profession or had he engaged only in Torah study he would have remained a *tzaddik*. If one becomes totally dedicated to his earthy/material pursuits then his sense of spirituality will be diminished. When an individual quantifies himself by the fruits of his own labor, then he will become the earthy person (*ish adamah*). One's sense of humility will also be lost - as we see regarding Uziel. The only way one can maintain his sense of humility and spirituality is to be solely focused on Torah.

The Midrash tells us that Moshe Rabbeinu was initially known as “*ish mitzri*” (Egyptian man) and then he became “*ish Elokim*” (Man of G-d). Moshe's spiritual direction was to the opposite of Noach's. Why was Noach's transformation from being a *tzaddik* to an *ish adamah*? The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that the first of the six sections of the Talmud (which is referred to as *Z'Raim*) is alluded to in the verse as “*emunah* –faith.” This is because the farmer understands that without his belief in G-d (G-d provides rains of blessing and wards off blight and locust) his crops will not succeed. He understands that despite the quality of his seed and soil, he is totally dependent on Hashem. The farmer, because of his personal circumstance, maintains this level of faith up until the time of his harvest. It is only after he has reaped G-d's bounty that he forgets his dependency on Him. He may even begin questioning the source of his success and may partially attribute it to himself rather than Hashem.

The Chofetz Chaim had a student who married and was given a substantial amount of money to enter into a business venture. After only one year, the student had lost all of the capital that was given to him. He came to the Chofetz Chaim distraught because of his loss. The Chofetz Chaim, after hearing what transpired, was not upset; but rather, he was happy. The student, being taken aback, asked the Chofetz Chaim, "Are you rejoicing over my loss?" The Chofetz Chaim replied, "The Gemara tells us that wealth is referred to as "wheel of fortune" – it comes and ultimately it goes. One who invests his life in material pursuits may ultimately lose all that he had invested. However if one occupies himself with the study of Torah, he will not only retain what he had learned but will also advance himself to a greater level. Since you have lost your fortune so quickly, thank G-d you have not yet forgotten what you had learned in yeshiva. Thus you remain spiritually intact. However, if this had happened years into the future, you would have been left without wealth and without Torah knowledge. Therefore what has happened to you is actually a blessing."

If a person becomes completely consumed with material pursuits, it will ultimately cause him to become spiritually diminished and less sensitive to his own spirituality. The only way one is able to maintain his spirituality is through continuous engagement in Torah study. It is not enough to have been engaged at one time; but rather, it is an ongoing process. As Rabbeinu Yonah explains in his commentary on Pirkei Avos, if a person believes that he is so knowledgeable that he has no need to learn from anyone, then he is a fool. Contrastingly, one who knows nothing but desires to learn from anyone, he is classified as Chacham (wise man) because ultimately he will attain a wealth of knowledge.

5. Noah's Inability to Acknowledge his Failure

Rashi cites Chazal, who explain that Noah was a small believer because he doubted if the Great Flood would actually occur. Therefore, the Torah tells us that Noah needed to be forced into the Ark by the Floodwaters. Noah devoted 120 years of his life to building the Ark and gathering all of the food that was necessary for the animals. On the 120th anniversary of Noah's project, an endless species of animals began to enter the Ark indicating that the end of existence was near, just as Hashem had told Noah. Nevertheless, Noah resisted until he was forced to enter by the rising Floodwaters. Evidently, Noah believed that the Flood was not going to occur. How do we understand this?

Perhaps Noah believed that because Hashem is All Merciful he would not destroy the world despite the failings of his generation. The only reason Noah initially built the Ark was to engage them in dialogue so he could convince them to do teshuvah - under the threat of destruction. Before the Floodwaters actually began to rise, Noah had difficulty believing that the destruction of the world was going to occur.

Another understanding is that since Hashem had told Noah that the Flood was only going to occur if the people of his generation did not repent and correct their ways, his mission and responsibility was to influence them to do teshuvah and avert the destruction of existence. The Prophet refers to the waters of the Flood as "*Mai Noach* - the waters of Noah" indicating that since Noah failed in his mission, the world was being destroyed by the Great Flood. Because Noah was a tzaddik who was perfect in his generations and intimate with G-d, he had the potential to succeed at his mission of influencing the world positively. However, he did not succeed despite all of his efforts.

After 120 years, Hashem told Noah to enter into the Ark indicating that he had

failed in his mission. The destruction of the world was due to his failing. Noach had difficulty accepting that he failed in his mission because he knew that he had been capable of turning his generation around. Therefore, Hashem had to force Noach to understand that he had failed through the rising of the Floodwaters.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that when Moshe Rabbeinu became frustrated with leading the Jewish people by himself, Hashem told him to appoint seventy elders to assist him. Moshe used a lottery method to determine who would be the seventy elders to assist him. Given the number of eligible people, Moshe wrote the word “elder” on seventy pieces of parchment and wrote nothing on two of them. Moshe chose seven elders from each of the twelve tribes and had them draw lots. The seventy who had drawn lots with the word “elder” were chosen while the two who drew the blank lots were told by Moshe, “Hashem has no interest in you.” Although every one of the seventy-two individuals seemed to have met the grade as an elder, nevertheless the two that were rejected were blatantly told that they were not qualified and had no choice but to accept that reality.

Korach, a Levite by birth, was a wise elder and the wealthiest Jew, believed that after Moshe and Aaron, he was the most qualified for the appointment. When Korach was not chosen to be the leader of the Levites and was passed over by a younger cousin, he was incensed. He could not accept the fact that it was due to his own spiritual deficiency. Rather, he attributed it to nepotism and thought that Moshe deliberately passed him over. Because of his unwillingness to accept the fact that Hashem rejected him, he attempted to usurp Moshe’s authority, which in fact would have destroyed the Jewish people.

Noach could not accept that he, the tzaddik of the generation, had not succeeded in influencing the people of his generation to do teshuvah. Noach’s ego prevented him from willingly admitting failure and from entering the Ark upon the command of Hashem. He had to be forced by the Floodwaters to accept failure.

6. *The Source of Conscience* (from Bereishis)

The Torah tells us that after Adam and Eve ate of the Tree of Knowledge, **“Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they realized that they were naked; and they sewed together a fig leaf and made themselves aprons...”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “...they realized that they were naked...” to mean that Adam and Eve realized that they were stripped of the one mitzvah that they were given by G-d – namely not to eat of the Tree. Since they had transgressed, they were “naked” from that mitzvah.

The Torah continues, **“Hashem G-d called out to Adam and said to him, “Where are you?” He said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I am naked, so I hid.”** This verse is referring to Adam’s shame due to his physical nakedness and not to the “nakedness” referred to in the previous verse. The cause of Adam’s sense of shame and his awareness of his naked state came about after he had eaten from the Tree. Before that, there was no shame.

What was the change took place within Adam? Partaking of the Tree of

Knowledge caused confusion and introduced an element of evil into his being, which had been pure. One would think that after having relevance to evil a person would be less ashamed by physical nakedness. Shouldn't Adam have been ashamed of his physicality when he was more pure? The Torah is telling us that this was not the case.

Chazal tell us that prior to Adam partaking of the Tree, his dimension of spirituality was at a level that radiated a holiness that had a semblance to G-d's own radiance. Adam's radiance was so intense that the heavenly angels had confused it with G-d's radiance and began singing his praises. His level of clarity and perception of Truth was so acute that he was able to see from one end of the world to the other. There was nothing that was obscured from his view. Because his physicality was totally spiritualized, he was at this very advanced level.

After Adam had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, Chazal tell us that he was spiritually diminished. He no longer radiated holiness as before. He immediately understood and sensed that his own spirituality was no longer at the level that it had been prior to the sin. He thus experienced and internalized the reality of his own diminishment to the core of his being. He understood that his physicality had been reduced to that of an animal and that he no longer had the semblance of his previous state. This was the source of Adam's shame.

One who senses spirituality also understands that the physicality of his being is only a means and not an end unto itself. The physicality of a human being is purely "the animal" of the person. All of the physical tendencies of man are shared by the animal kingdom. Thus, the more one is in touch with his own spiritual essence, the more he will understand that the body itself is not a source of pride. One who quantifies himself solely through his occupation or material status and does not value his spirituality will have a lesser degree of shame. Shame/conscience is rooted in the spirituality of the human being. The inherent characteristic of shame/conscience has relevance to every Jew because we descend from Avraham our patriarch. He established within himself this unique dimension of spirituality. He did not inherit this characteristic; but rather, through his own quest for the Truth, he came upon G-d and advanced himself to that special level of spirituality. Thus, his shame/conscience was one of a kind.

The Jew's level of conscience is unique. There is no other nation who has conscience like the Jewish people because they descend from Avraham. It is because of this innate characteristic within the Jew that causes him to do certain things and refrain from others. One who has lost his sense of shame is a person who is devoid of spirituality. It is because humanity has totally embraced physicality as the "end all" that society conducts itself the way it does.