

United We Stand

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Parshas Noach

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The Parsha's Path

Adapted from 5781.

Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations (6:9).

This week's Parsha tells the dramatic story of Noach and the Flood, when G-d chose to destroy the wicked world that had developed and start a new one with Noach as the founding father. Noach is introduced as a "righteous man, perfect in his generations," but the meaning of this is not so clear. What is being added by "in his generations"? Rashi cites the Midrash, which presents two opposing views: According to some, this comes to praise Noach, saying that if he was righteous even under the wicked pressures and influences of his society, how much more righteous would he be in a generation filled with righteous people. According to the other view, though, the pasuk means to say that Noach was only righteous in comparison to the other people in his generation, but in the generation of Avraham he would have been a nobody.

It can be widely assumed that Noach was not on the level of Avraham Avinu - the end of the account of the Flood, when Noach debases himself with wine, testifies as much - and we can probably assume that, as with all people, external influences would impact Noach; thus, he surely would have been led, on some level, to greater heights in a generation full of righteous people! What exactly is at the heart of the midrash's argument?

Perhaps we need to examine the wording of the midrash more carefully. According to the opinion that the pasuk is praising Noach, Noach would have been more righteous *in a generation of righteous people*. In contrast, the view that says the pasuk is deprecating Noach, Noach would have been a nobody *in the generation of Avraham*. Perhaps these two views aren't really arguing at all.

The generation of Avraham, by all indications, was little better than Noach's. The Torah's accounts of Avraham's experiences are filled with base men and immoral societies (most notably Sodom), and the midrash testifies that the world had once again forgotten about G-d until Avraham reintroduced monotheism.

Returning to our Parsha, Rashi's next comment, on the same pasuk, is most revealing: *Noach walked with G-d* - Rashi notes that in reference to Avraham G-d

says "Walk before me" (17:1). While Noach needed support to guide him, Avraham strengthened himself and was righteous on his own.

Noach was righteous and ready to follow G-d wherever G-d would lead him, but he didn't have the inner strength to take charge himself. G-d needed him in the generation of the Flood, so he became a Somebody, but in the generation of Avraham, he wouldn't have been needed and would have remained a Nobody. In contrast, Noach's need for support means that he would have flourished in a generation full of righteous people to encourage him.

Noach's personal story has a somewhat tragic ending as he becomes drunk from his vineyard and never becomes worthy of fathering the Jewish people. In the face of adversity, he could draw strength from G-d, but after his mission was fulfilled he was doomed to lose steam. Noach reminds us that no matter how righteous we can be, the real difference between a scion of Noach and a scion of Avraham lies beyond the surface, namely, what motivates our righteousness. The Ben Noach needs the external stimuli of support or adversity; the Ben Avraham is righteous because he knows, internally, that he is supposed to be righteous, even when nobody's watching. The Ben Noach is known as the righteous man for the ark he builds in the public eye, but the Ben Avraham is righteous for what he does in the privacy of his tent.

During this extremely difficult and tragic time, we all feel a sense of revulsion with the evil and adversity around us, pushing us to be our best selves with an outpouring of loving-kindness, heartfelt prayer, and increased commitment. This sensitivity is truly remarkable and commendable. Yet, to do a full *teshuvah* that lives up to our legacy as Bnei Avraham, this transformation must transcend our current crisis and become integrated into our essence, as an internal force that never wanes. In the next essay, we hope to present one idea on how we can achieve this.

Deeper Meanings

... an olive leaf it had plucked was in his mouth (8:9)

*In explaining why G-d chose to destroy the world, the pasuk says, "vatimalei haaretz **chamas**," and*

the world became filled with Hamas. While Rashi, quoting Chazal, explain Hamas to mean financial corruption, I have heard others explain it to refer to violence. Fundamentally, it seems the idea of Hamas is the epitome of selfish egotism to the point that one must eliminate all who oppose one's ideology and agenda, when the whole world - especially those that represent goodness, Hamas's opposite - represents a threat which must be eliminated. It behooves us, then, to not only do our utmost to eradicate Hamas on the battlefield, but any traces of it from our hearts as well. With that in mind, we present this article from 5779 with one idea on how we might achieve this end, and in that merit eliminate Hamas in all its forms forevermore.

This week's Parsha recounts how after the Flood is over, Noach doesn't know exactly when it's safe to open the doors of the Ark and leave; the world is still completely flooded and needs to dry out. The sixty-foot-tall boat had landed on a tall mountain, and he couldn't possibly see how wet the ground was from the tiny window at the top. Thus, Noach resorted to sending birds, knowing that if they would return, the land was still uninhabitable, but if they did not come back, they had found an inhabitable place to nest. There was also a famous intermediate stage, when the bird at hand (a dove) had brought back an olive branch. This symbolized that the Earth was drying, but needed a little bit more time to be fully ready.

A critical read at this episode reveals a striking question: Why an olive branch? The Torah could have simply told us that the dove brought back a branch, and that would have conveyed the dryness of the land. Why specify that it came from an olive tree?

Rashi and Ramban both cite Bereishis Rabba (33:6), which explains that in reality this episode was coming to teach a lesson: It is better (that the dove) receive sustenance from this (olive tree), which is bitter, but comes from G-d's Hand, than to receive sustenance that is sweet from Noach's hand.

The lesson, as Ramban points out, is that if it is better for a bird to get sustenance from G-d than man, even if it is inferior, how much more so should man rely on G-d for sustenance as opposed to his fellow man.

But why *did* the dove teach Noach/us this message just as the flood is ending? What relevance does this have to anything that's going on?

The answer, perhaps, can be found by referring to a Ramban much earlier in the Parsha, which explains why the generation of the Flood was destroyed (6:13). It is explained there that what sealed the fate of the generation was *Chamas*, robbery and fraud. In other words, the one sin that caused the devastating

destruction of the flood was a lack of financial integrity. Why? Because unlike some other sins, Chamas is not only intrinsically a sin against G-d, it is a sin against one's fellow man.

As the world was about to begin again, there was one thing that was crucial to ensure above all else - that the reason for the destruction never apply again. Even though G-d promised not to destroy the world again, the worst thing would be if that promise actually became necessary. Thus G-d sent the dove to bring the all-important message to Noach: that it is always better to rely on G-d than man. This is the antithesis of financial corruption. When someone values the gaining of money, possessions, and worldly pleasures, then already on some level he is tempted by corruption. If dishonesty is the way to meet his goals, then maybe it can be justified, and the more extreme the desire, the greater the justifications will become. However, when one fully understands that everything they have comes from G-d, and that's all they want and not a penny more, then there's no reason for corruption to tempt them. They are completely uninterested in even a hint of ill-gotten gains. This was the dove's message - don't fall into the trap of the generation of the Flood. Understand that G-d is your only priority. This is the only way to fully maintain integrity and master both your relationship with G-d and your fellow man. Let us all strive to remember the olive branch and know that whatever lot comes our way, our only interest is what G-d grants to us.

Goal of the week

Besides for doing everything you can to support Israel and those who are suffering, remember that all of *Klal Yisroel* is suffering and you can bring those around you immeasurable support by greeting them with a smile.

This week's bulletin is dedicated for a swift salvation and safety for those who are captured and our soldiers, and a Refuah Shelaima for all those who are wounded and ill, as well as Shaindel Temma bas Rochel Zlotta, Masha Sarah bas Tziviah Leah, Bracha bas Shoshanah, Reuven ben Golda, Yitzchok Moshe haKohen ben Miriam, and Gavriel Margoliot Ben Malka. Please have them in mind in your Tefillos.

*May We Have A Shabbos
Full Of Yeshuos & Nechamos*

OUR MISSION

To Bring The Third Beis - Hamikdash By Facilitating Jewish Unity Through Torah