

United We Stand

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Parshas Noach

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The Parsha's Path

Eileh Toldos Noach Ish Tzadik - These are the children of Noach. Noach was a righteous man (6:9)

... Another explanation, to teach you that the primary 'children' of the righteous are good deeds (Rashi).

Throughout Sefer Bereishit a recurring theme seems to be "toldot" - children. Rabbi Menachem Liebttag points out that if we look carefully, every single story in Sefer Bereishit is introduced by "*Eileh Toldot ... - These are the children of ...*", with a list of descendants wherever relevant. This begins with "*Eileh toldot shamayim va'arets - these are the children of Heaven and Earth*" - introducing mankind as uniquely created using both Heaven and Earth and setting out this task as maintaining that synthesis. Noach is introduced after a lengthy description of the toldot of Shes, the generation of the Tower of Babel is introduced after describing the descendants of the children of Noach, and Avraham is introduced after yet another chronology of the descendants of Shem with "*Eileh Toldos Terach*," and so on.

It would appear that the significance of *toldos* is far from peripheral. The *pasuk* that begins the first chronology, beginning with Shes, seems to introduce all of sefer Bereishis as follows (5:1): *Zeh sefer Toldos Adam - This is the book of the children of Man*. Ramban actually says this verse introduces the entire Torah. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Nedarim 9:4) records the following discussion: "*Veahavta 're'acha kamocha*" - Rabbi Akiva said, "*this is a great principle of the Torah*." Ben Azzai said, "*Zeh sefer toldos Adam*" is an even greater principle."

We may be familiar with the first half of this Yerushalmi, but less familiar with the second half - likely because it seems so cryptic. Ben Azzai seems to be elevating the theme of *toldos* to a central foundation of the Torah, even more fundamental than "love your fellow as yourself." But what exactly does it mean that the Torah is a *sefer toldos Adam*? In what way are the chronologies of the Torah so significant, even primary?

Rabbi Liebttag develops a beautiful approach based on a careful analysis of the progression of the narratives in Bereishis, but I think we can more or less arrive at the same conclusion by looking at the second half of the verse *Zeh sefer toldos Adam*. The verse reads in full: *Zeh sefer toldos Adam biyom biro E-lokim Adam bidmus E-lokim asa oso - This is the book of the children of Man, on the day G-d created Man, in the image of G-d He created him*.

As we noted before, Man is unique in that he is created from both Heaven and Earth. This gives him the capacity to be G-d-like, through sanctifying the Earth with an

infusion of the Heavens and thereby uniting the two. Adam was originally created with this perfect harmony and, according to the midrash, would have lived forever having maintained this ideal, but the sin of the Tree of Knowledge shattered that. The earthly became estranged from the heavenly, and the image of G-d imprinted on Man became distorted. It would be up to Man's descendants to restore this image and repair the bridge between Heaven and Earth.

The goal of the Torah, then, is for us to be *toldos Adam*, children of Adam, *biro E-lokim Adam*, as Adam was the moment he was created. The Torah's chronologies bridge the generations from Adam, challenging us to remember where we come from and what we're supposed to aspire to be. With each set of "toldos" Man is challenged to create a legacy that will perpetuate and return us to the legacy of Adam pre-sin, to restore the image of G-d, to "re-bridge" Heaven and Earth.

Most of early humanity failed to propel us in that direction, their legacy merely being a biological link in the chain of humanity. Enter Noach.

Noach's *toldos* are, first and foremost, not his children, but his righteousness: *Eileh toldos Noach, Noach Ish Tzadik, tamim hayah bidorosav, es ha-E-lokim hishalech Noach - These are the descendants of Noach, Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generation. Noach walked with G-d*. Noach's legacy, even more important than birthing children, was that he modeled living a life with G-d. In this way, Noach's descendants were poised to redeem humanity, bridging us with the original creation of Adam.

This is why *Zeh sefer toldos Adam* is perhaps the greatest principle of the Torah. As fundamental as loving others as ourselves is, that is but one component of the ultimate goal to move humanity forward, thereby bringing humanity back to our ideal state in Gan Eden, where Heaven and Earth become one.

As elated as we all are with the return of the hostages (despite other unknowns), the Jewish world was devastated to learn of the sudden passing of Rabbi Moshe Hauer zt"l this past Shemini Atzeres. While I did not know him personally, I have read many of the weekly *divrei Torah* he sent out through the OU and since his passing have read several of the innumerable *hespedim* that have been written about him by Jewish leaders across the spectrum of Orthodoxy and beyond. Rabbi Hauer personified the ideal of *Zeh sefer toldos Adam*, clearly recognizing the project of the Jewish people and humanity to collectively come closer to G-d - and thereby, ourselves. He was a *talmid chacham* with extraordinary empathy and concern for every Jew and every human being, which was

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inextricably linked with his desire to bring all of them closer to G-d and His Torah. These values - Torah and chessed - were completely inseparable and interdependent, for he understood that Torah is the only path to humanity's redemption, and that the only path to Torah is our shared humanity. May his legacy continue to inspire us to return to the full realization of *zeh sefer toldos Adam* as we come together in the service of G-d. *Yehi zichro baruch.*

Deeper Meanings

Reprinted 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.

It is not easy to live up to the title of Ben Avraham all the time, and Chazal didn't expect us to do so easily - that's why it's so crucial to put ourselves in an environment where we can spiritually thrive, with friends neighbors, mentors and colleagues who will spur us to greater heights, and remove potential distractions from our environs. But as much as we can set ourselves up for success, the only way to never run out of steam is if we keep fanning the flame within us, reminding ourselves of who we are even when we are not being told to build an ark.

Goal of the week

Have a conversation with someone from a different religious background.

This week's bulletin is dedicated for a Refuah Sheleima for Yisroel Zev ben Menya Rochel, Masha Sarah bas Tziviah Leah, Gavriel Margoliot ben Malka.

Please have them in mind in your Tefillos.

Have A Great Shabbos !!

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