

"And Noach, master of the land, planted a vineyard." (9:20)

When Noach went ashore following his lengthy journey on the ark, his first activity was to plant a grapevine. Later, he drank its wine "and became inebriated." This act ultimately led to an embarrassing situation which culminated in his cursing his grandson, Canaan. When we view the positive and negative actions of our forebears, we must delve into their origins in order to learn from them. What was Noach's mistake and what lessons may be derived from it?

Horav A. H. Lebowitz, Shlita, cites *Sforno* who interprets Noach's violation in the following manner. "*And Noach began*"- his mistake lay in the manner he generated his activity upon arriving safely on the land. He began with an action which lacked refinement and did not reflect appropriate judgment. This impropriety led to a tragic misdeed. A slight error at the onset can create havoc and tragedy in the end. Because wine is not a nourishing substance, Noach should not have made it his first priority upon debarking from the extended trip on the ark.

This seems peculiar. Wine does have both practical and holy uses. Indeed, wine is required in the observance of many *mitzvos*. Undoubtedly, someone of Noach's noble character must have planted the grapevine with the proper intentions, for the sake of Heaven. Wherein lay his sin? *Horav Lebowitz* explains that the sin originated in a misdirected sense of priorities. Planting a grapevine is a prerequisite for serving Hashem, but it does not take precedence over other activities necessary for rebuilding the world. The grapevine symbolizes pleasure and not necessity. This should not have been Noach's first act. This slight indiscretion led to disaster for himself and for his descendants.

With this thesis, we are confronting a transgression in the form of unbecoming behavior. We have a popular Jewish dictum of *xg yahb yxtp*, it is inappropriate. Some view this merely as good advice. This should not be the case, for a sin which originates here and now can have far reaching implications. We tend to overlook certain types of inappropriate behavior, with the common defenses, "What am I doing wrong?" or "Where is it cited in *Halacha*?" As *Horav Lebowitz* explains, activity unbecoming a *Torah* observant Jew need not be written explicitly in the *Torah*. A mandate issued from our *Torah* leadership deeming a certain activity or manner of dress unbecoming should be sufficient. As Hashem's chosen people, we are especially obligated to act in a dignified manner consistent with our royal status. Transgression is relative to the sinner and the One before Whom one sins.