

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

One of the more well-known debates among *Chazal* concerns the nature of Noach's righteousness: Was it the real thing, or was it relative to the evildoers of his generation? Some sages maintain that it is in his praise: Noach was righteous even in his generation, which was corrupt. How much more so would he have been righteous in the generation of Avraham *Avinu*, which did not suffer from such an ignominious population? Others feel that *b'dorasav*, in his generations, is a critique of Noach, suggesting that only in his generation, which was extremely wicked, could he have earned such a righteous reputation.

In any event, Noach's reputation has always been questioned. Was he, or was he not, a *tzaddik*? *Horav Shimon Shkop, zl*, understands this debate more positively. First and foremost, Noach was a righteous person. That is indisputable. The issue (as he sees it) is: Which generation presented a greater test, a more difficult hardship, toward maintaining his righteousness?

Those who interpret *b'dorasav* as praise feel that to achieve the spiritual plateau of righteousness in a generation of evil is a greater challenge. Indeed, had he lived during Avraham's tenure, he would have benefited from the Patriarch's inspiration, in addition to having to contend with a generation that was simply ignorant – not corrupt. In Avraham's generation, Noach would have fared better, but his righteousness was never impugned.

Those who view *b'dorasav* negatively feel that when one's surroundings are replete with individuals whose lives are filled with corruption, thievery, slander, disloyalty to one another and to one's spouse, it is understandable that any decent human being would be repulsed by such decadent behavior. Viewing the evil of others is what spurred Noach to a life of righteousness. Had he otherwise lived during the generation of Avraham, it is no indication that he would have chosen a life of the spirit. One thing is for certain: Everyone is in agreement that Noach was a *tzaddik*. The issue is only concerning his motivation to climb the ladder of spirituality and the challenges that confronted him on his ascent to spiritual distinction.