

“And Shem lived five hundred years after begetting Arpachshad, and he begot sons and daughters.” (11:11)

Interestingly, in recounting the ten generations from Adam until Noach, the *Torah* writes the word, “*va’yamos*”, “and he died,” after each person that is mentioned. Upon mentioning the ten generations from Noach until Avraham however, the *Torah* uses the word, “*ve’yechi*,” and he lived,” referring to how long the individual lived. Why does the *Torah* make this distinction between the generations? *Horav Yaakov Moshe Charlap, z.l.*, cites the *Mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos* 5:2, wherein it is stated: “There were ten generations from Adam to Noach which informs (us) how great is His (Hashem’s) patience, for all these generations continued to anger Him, until He finally brought upon them the waters of the flood.” In the following *Mishnah* the *Tanna* says, “There were ten generations from Noach to Avraham, which informs (us) how great is His patience, for all those generations continued to anger Him, until Avraham *Avinu* came and received the reward that was due them all.” While these *Mishnayos* are apparently similar, each demonstrating Hashem’s patience, the ending is glaringly different. Avraham *Avinu* received the reward for all of his predecessors, after which no cosmic destruction had occurred. Noach, however, was himself saved, while the rest of the world was obliterated.

The generations preceding Noach apparently had no *zechusim*, merits, not even one that they might have been able to combine with those of another generation. They were thoroughly wicked. Hence, the *Torah* writes, “*va’yamos*,” “and they died.” They did nothing but sin; they left nothing but destruction. They died, gone forever from this world. The generations from Noach to Avraham had some merit. There was something to salvage. Avraham inherited their *zechusim*, in effect, giving them life. They lived on through Avraham *Avinu*. They did not die; they were not gone forever.

Wherein lay the difference between these two sets of generations? *Horav Charlap* explains that the generations preceding Noach sought to drive out *tov*, “good,” altogether. They grasped the evil way of life, and it became their lifestyle. Not good – only evil! Since there was nothing positive about their existence, there was no area in which Noach could give them *mussar*, reproach. In order for rebuke to be effective, some established relationship must exist between the sinner and the individual who is rebuking. Noach was a righteous, perfect individual while the others in his generation represented evil incarnate. There was no area of common ground. Consequently, Noach was compelled to leave by himself in the Ark.

In the generations preceding Avraham, however, the people were different. Their intentions were not to act totally evil. If they were able to do the right thing, if they could act correctly, they would. They had no qualms about evil, but it was not their first course of action. They had some merit. Avraham had people with whom to speak. They did not die; they lived on in Avraham.