

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

Chazal offer a number of interpretations for the phrase “in his generations.” Some commentators interpret this as praise for Noach, who was able to transcend the evil even of his generation. Indeed, had he lived in a generation in which righteousness was the way of life, he would have been even greater. Others contend that he could stand out only in his own generation, in which evil was the standard. Horav Shlomo Margolis, Shlita, feels that “b’doroso,” “in his generations,” reflects the limited effect of Noach’s righteousness – it lasted only during his generations. He was not able to inspire others, to imbue his descendants with his way of life. His inspiration was, regrettably, short-lived. We wonder why? After all, he certainly tried to infuse others with the righteous perspective, to live a life of virtue and integrity. What happened?

We suggest that since people, by nature, are resistant to criticism, they will look for any excuse to justify their actions, especially at the expense of the individual who is rebuking them. If they can find a loophole, anything to malign or impugn the integrity of the “mocheiach,” admonisher, they will do so. The people needed to find fault with Noach, so that they could reject his message. They found one thing wrong with Noach: his son, Cham. “Who is Noach to reprove us? Let him take care of his own family!” they declared. While Cham’s behavior was certainly not Noach’s fault, since Noach probably did everything within his power to guide his errant son, people used it as an excuse not to listen to Noach. It is unfortunate that, in this regard, the attitude of people has not changed very much.