

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

Was Noach a *tzadik* – or not? *Rashi* quotes a dispute in which *yeish dorshin l'shevach*, some interpret the phrase *b'dorosav*, in his generations, in a praiseworthy manner. Noach was righteous even in his corrupt generation. Certainly, had he lived in the generation of Avraham *Avinu*, he would have earned even greater accolades. Others, however, are critical of Noach, ascribing to him the title of *tzadik* only in comparison to the morally depraved generation in which he lived. Had Noach lived in a generation whose members were morally upright, he would not have been that noticeable. It all depends from which vantage point we are viewing Noach.

The **Berditchever, zl**, was wont to interpret the *Kohen Gadol's* prayer of *Yom Kippur*: *She'lo yitztarchu amcha Bais Yisrael ze la'zeh v'lo l'am acher*. Loosely translated, “That Your nation, *Bais Yisrael*, need not come on to the assistance of one another, or of another nation.” Simply, this means that we ask Hashem to provide us with the means to be self-sufficient. We should be able to make it alone, without the assistance of others. *Horav* Levi Yitzchak explains this “assistance” in a novel manner. There are times when a Jew falters and, unfortunately, is not acting up to par. While he is not yet a sinner, he has certainly digressed from his previous spiritual plateau. Nonetheless, if this Jew is placed on a pedestal opposite another Jew who, in comparison, is spiritually deficient to him, the first Jew looks “good.” Likewise, when *Klal Yisrael* collectively acts inappropriately, we can always counter that, in comparison to other nations, we are the paragon of moral rectitude.

This is what is meant by, “That Your nation need not come on to the assistance of others.” We should be able to maintain our moral spiritual standing without requiring the support of a comparison check with others. Each Jew should maintain his own strong spiritual affiliation, so that he never needs to be compared to someone of a lesser standing. The nation should be on such a lofty spiritual perch that we never need to be compared to others in order for us to look good.

Noach was a great man, but was this relative to others, or did he have his own spiritual standing? Did he require a comparison check, or was he free-standing? This is the question that *Chazal* dispute. It is also a lesson for ourselves. How do I look when I am “alone”? Do I need the support of being compared to others, or can I stand alone?