

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

Rashi cites a debate among the Sages concerning Noach's true spiritual plateau. Some maintain that Noach's ability to sustain his righteous achievement, despite being surrounded by a generation of corruption, is to his credit. Indeed, had he lived in Avraham *Avinu's* time, he would have achieved much more. Others maintain that Noach's righteousness was relative to a generation that was morally and ethically corrupt. Had he lived in Avraham *Avinu's* time, he would have paled in comparison. Veritably, a person should be judged in accordance with his environment, his challenges, his generation. Apples should be compared to apples.

There is one pressing question which should be addressed: Why Avraham? Since when do *Chazal* draw parallels between individuals? Is there a specific reason that our Patriarch is brought into the picture? *Horav Pinchas Friedman, Shlita*, quotes the *Midrash Tanchuma* which relates that at one time the people of an entire generation were held responsible for the sin of even a single individual. Indeed, *Chazal* say that the generation of the Flood contained many other righteous individuals like Noach, but they also perished as a result of the sins of the generation. Noach was spared because of his unique *z'chus*, merit. What merit did he have?

In the *Talmud Sanhedrin* 108a, *Chazal* state that actually Noach was slated to be included in the punishment for that generation as well. It was only because "Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem" that he was spared. So what did Noach do wrong? *Chazal* explain that Noach should have prayed for the members of his generation. He should have prayed for their repentance, for their pardon. In fact, the commentators teach that until Noach commenced the Ark's construction, he had not yet prayed for his generation. It was only after he began building, and his neighbors began inquiring about the big boat in his driveway, that he was compelled to tell them that Hashem was putting an end to their insidious behavior. There would be a Flood. However, this makes it more difficult to understand why he found favor before Hashem and was, thus, spared from the punishment suffered by the rest of his generation.

In the *Midrash Rabba (Bereishis 29:5)* *Chazal* make the following statement which sheds light on our dilemma: "We find Hashem acting kindly with the latter descendants in the merit of the earlier ones. From where do we see that Hashem does *chesed* with the earlier generations due to the merit of the later ones? 'Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem.' This was *b'zchus*, in the merit of, his descendants." Simply, *Chazal* are referring to Noach's three sons, who apparently served as a "protective agent" on behalf of Noach. *Rav Friedman* says that upon perusal of the early commentators, we note that this applies to Avraham *Avinu*, who was a descendant of Shem ben Noach. Concerning the *pasuk Va'yaaver Elokim ruach*, "And G-d caused a spirit to pass over" (the land and the waters; *Ibid.* 8:1), which refers to the end of the Flood, the *Chida* cites in his *sefer Chomas Anach*, (in the name of *Rabbeinu Efraim*, one of the *Rishonim*) that the last letters of these three words are: *reish, mem, ches*. The numerical equivalent of these three letters: *r(e)m(a)ch* is 248, which is the same as the numerical equivalent of Avraham's name. Hashem applied Avraham *Avinu's* merit to Noach, thus sparing Noach from the fate of his generation.

The *Chasam Sofer* quotes the *Seder Olam Rabbah* that claims that Avraham was 48 years old during the *haflagah*, dispersal, following the building of the Tower of Bavel.

Noach lived for ten more years after that. This leads the *Chasam Sofer* to interpret the opening *pasuk* of our *Parshah* in the following manner: "These are the generations of **Noach**." Who were the primary *toldos*, progeny, of Noach? "**Noach** was a righteous man": the primary progeny of Noach was an individual who was a *tzaddik*, about whom it is written, *His'halech le'fanai v'heyey samim*, "Walk before Me and be perfect" (*Bereishis* 17:1). That *tzaddik* was Avraham, who, was 58 years old (Noach, numerical equivalent

58) during the generations of his ancestor Noach. When Noach, the grandfather (Noach = 58), saw his grandson, Avraham, who was 58 years old when Noach died, then Noach went calmly, *b'menuchah* (Noach), to his rightful place in *Olam Habba*, the World to Come.

Rav Friedman adds that Avraham derived the concept of *chesed* from Noach, who dedicated his entire sojourn on the Ark to one long act of *chesed*. There was nary a moment when he was free, so devoted was he to caring for the myriad creatures accompanying him on the Ark. Avraham said, "If they survived the Flood only due to their total devotion to the **animals**, to the point that when Noach once came late to feed the lion, he was bitten and badly injured, how much more so will I be spared from punishment in the merit of my acts of *chesed* on behalf of **human beings**."

This indicates that Avraham's acts of *chesed* were inspired by Noach. If so, what greater merit is there for Noach than the fact that **he** was the inspiration for Avraham *Avinu* becoming the *amud ha'chesed*, pillar of lovingkindness? This is the deeper meaning of Noach being saved because of Avraham.

Our inspiration can come to us through a number of means. The following story demonstrates how a young *yeshivah* student's life was positively influenced by someone who had lived some sixty years earlier. What makes the episode even more striking is that neither the benefactor or the beneficiary knew each other, nor was there any intention on the part of the benefactor to influence the young beneficiary.

The story, which is related by Rabbi Binyamin Pruzansky in "*Stories That Warm the Heart*," centers around a young Israeli *yeshivah*-high school student, who was not very enthusiastic about learning. He attended *yeshivah* because it was the thing to do. During the summer *bein ha'zmanim*, intersession, his *yeshivah* took a trip to Poland. It was an inspirational journey to visit and pray at the burial sites of the great *rabbanim* and *roshei yeshivah* of pre-World War II Europe. The concentration camps were also included in the trip. In other words, this was not a trip for the carefree tourist. This was a serious, emotionally-charged journey of consciousness.

Our *yeshivah* student, whom we will call Shlomo, had no interest in being inspired. He went on the trip with much the same attitude that he attended *yeshivah*: it was the thing to do. Everything

changed when he passed through the intimidating gates of Auschwitz with its infamous sign *Arbeit macht frei*, "Labor makes (you) free." The trip had now taken on a serious – almost compelling – tone. Suddenly, all of the stories of the Holocaust came to life in stark reality. Shlomo felt himself transported to that tragic period in our history. He heard the screams, felt the despair, smelled the stench. He was there! He felt himself riding in the cattle car, crammed in with other broken, hapless Jews, waiting to arrive at their destination – thinking they knew what "arriving" meant.

The innocent Jews thought they were going to labor camps. They were grossly mistaken! By the time they discovered that there really was no labor, only deportation and then death, it was too late. As Shlomo stood in the room, which they had just been informed was the last place the confused masses passed through prior to entering the gas chamber, his eyes welled up with tears. As he was thinking these melancholy thoughts, he suddenly noticed what looked like a handprint pressed into the wooden beam where he stood. At first, it was hardly noticeable, but, after close inspection, he was sure that it was someone's handprint.

Thoughts began to churn in Shlomo's mind. This was the handprint of a Jewish inmate who was waiting to be led to the gas chamber. The man was holding onto the beam with every fiber of his being, praying, begging Hashem, "Please, allow me to live!" He must have made promises, expressed his willingness to give up every material/physical pleasure just so that he could live a little longer. Perhaps he dreamed of liberation, having a family and raising children in the Torah way. Alas, Hashem said, "No," and this man became another one of the *Kedoshim*, martyrs. Not, however, before he had pressed his handprint into the wood. His chance was over, but someone else might pick up the torch and carry on.

Shlomo broke down. The man whose handprint he was contemplating would have given anything to live even another few hours, and he, Shlomo, was squandering away his life on foolishness. He sensed that he owed something to that man and to the many others like him, who wanted so much to live, but whose lives were snuffed out prematurely. Shlomo made a promise that, from that day on, he would change. Every minute would be valued; every minute would count. This moment was the turning point in Shlomo's life, as he applied the brakes, shifted gears, and put himself into overdrive. He never looked back – all because of the inspiration he had received from someone he did not know, who, in fact, had died many years earlier. Inspiration transcends time.