

Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations... And Noach, and his sons... went into the Ark because of the waters of the Flood. (6:9; 7:7)

Upon perusing the commentaries, we note contrasting opinions concerning the true nature of Noach's *tzidkus*, righteousness. The Torah begins by stating that Noach was righteous – in his generations. This leads to a debate among the commentators concerning Noach's status had he lived in a generation blessed with such a saint as Avraham *Avinu*. Was Noach a relative *tzaddik*, in relation to the wicked of his generation, or could he have passed the litmus test even in Avraham's generation? In the next chapter, the Torah tells us that Noach entered the *Teivah*, Ark, "because of the waters of the Flood." This implies that our hero waited until the last minute before entering the Ark. Indeed, *Chazal* (quoted by *Rashi* 7:7) say that Noach *mi'ketanei emunah ha'yah*, he was of the lesser believers. On the one hand, he believed that there would be a flood. On the other hand, he did not enter the Ark until the water was up to his mouth. How are we to understand Noach? Was he a reluctant *tzaddik*?

From the numerous explanations, I have chosen two that have positive connotations and simultaneously teach us important lessons about human nature. What I feel must be underscored is that after pondering over these exegeses, we have an entirely new outlook on what has been a somewhat prejudicial perception of the individual whom the Torah refers to as the "first *tzaddik*." The *Sabba*, *zl*, *m'Shpoli*, popularly known as the *Shpoler*

Zayde, explains that actually those who are *dorshin l'gnai*, take a dim view of Noach's righteousness, are doing *Klal Yisrael* a great service. These commentators saw *b'Ruach Ha'Kodesh*, through Divine Inspiration, that practically every *tzaddik* throughout time will be plagued by detractors. Regardless of his piety, someone, somewhere, will have a jaundiced view of him. They will find something negative to comment about or, as is becoming increasingly common, they will fabricate something to discredit the *tzaddik*. After all, who is greater than Moshe *Rabbeinu*? Nonetheless, there were those who suspected him of inappropriate behavior. As nonsensical as it sounds, this is human nature. It is fostered by envy and nurtured by insecurity, but it happens all of the time.

If the first *tzaddik* in the Torah would have had no detractors, he would have established the defining criteria for determining who is and who is not a *tzaddik*. Thus, these commentators went out of their way to be negative about Noach, in order to teach future generations of *tzaddikim* that those who belittle do not negate the righteousness of the individual. Even Noach had detractors. Yet, the Torah tells us about Hashem's sign of approval with His personal confirmation: "And Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem" (6:8). Can anyone ask for more?

Concerning Noach's seemingly diminished faith, as indicated by *Chazal* referring to him as *mi'ketanei emunah*, *Horav Yitzchak zl*, *m'Vorke*, explains that indeed, Noach waited until the last

second to board the Ark. He hoped beyond hope that the Flood would not come – not because he lacked faith, but because he **believed in people**. Noach cared **about** the *ketanei emunah*, the individuals of little faith, hoping that they would ultimately repent, thus circumventing the need for punishment. Regrettably, they did not, and he was compelled to enter the Ark.

I wonder, are we any different? There is an entire world of alienated Jews out there, who have been estranged for generations from the Torah and *Yiddishkeit*. Yet, we have *kiruv* organizations, outreach professionals and nonprofessionals, who do not seem to give up hope of bringing back the *ketanei emunah*. True, these people appear to be too far gone, but every once in a while, there is a success story that is off the charts. Each story renews our hope for others, motivating us to reach out to the unaffiliated, while rejuvenating our own personal conviction.

I recently read an article in which the author questions her ability to go on praying for the miraculous recovery of a little seven-year-old girl, whom the doctors said had lost her battle with cystic fibrosis. Yet when the doctors had sadly issued a death sentence, no one stopped praying. Why? Well, what about a miracle? Could it be that some of us have difficulty with miracles because we always give up before they occur? Could it be that when Hashem challenges our faith, it is precisely at that point of resignation that we blow it. If we would just hold on for one more moment, perhaps we would experience the salvation.

This is what Noach endured. He did not want to throw in the towel – on anyone. This is perhaps one of life's greatest struggles. The ability to cling fast, long after reality tells us that it just cannot be. Trusting in Hashem when the odds are stacked against us is the meaning of enduring faith or faithful endurance – to learn the art of forbearance, to hold on with perseverance and resolution, regardless of the struggles, the odds, the reality. To do this is to understand the meaning of genuine faith.