

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

The *Torah* emphasizes “his generations.” This word stimulates various interpretations of Noach’s true level of virtue. Was he virtuous only because he lived in a generation that was synonymous with evil? Or would he have been considered much more righteous had he lived in a truly virtuous society? Regardless of the outcome of this dispute, we have to wonder. What is the basis for these two opinions? What aspect of Noach’s virtue provokes question?

Horav Eliyahu Schlesinger, Shlita, applies a thought from **Horav Meier Shapiro, zl**, to respond to this question. The quest for peace is most compelling. Every single day we read about continued strife in some area of the world. Indeed, only in the days of *Moshiach* will we finally merit peace. The *Navi Yeshaya* speaks about the day when animals which are by nature antagonistic to each other will live in harmony. *Horav* Shapiro asks why we strive for the time of *Moshiach* to achieve peace. Did not Noach accomplish a similar type of unity when, for one year, all animals and wild beasts lived together in the Ark? Why is that peace less idyllic than that of the time of *Moshiach*? One difference totally transforms the entire nature of their harmonious relationship. The peace in the Ark was coerced by circumstances. They were all victims of the Flood. They had to coexist in order to be saved. If they fought, they would all die! When *Moshiach* comes, we will be blessed with a self-motivated serenity. Everyone will just want to get along. Each person will see the beauty of peace and experience the satisfaction of living in harmony. No, we cannot compare the two forms of coexistence.

Horav Schlesinger continues that a similar idea applies to Noach’s leadership capabilities. Was he truly successful in uniting the survivors of the Flood? Was he really the great peace-maker? Or did the flood itself help him in this quest? It is easy to keep thousands of animals from all over the world living together when they have nowhere to go. Could Noach have achieved peace in a generation when there was no coercion, no external pressures? Was Noach really the great *tzaddik*, or was he a caretaker for a world under siege? Success is measured in light of the circumstances which precede it.