

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

We do not find another leader treated as negatively and judged as harshly as Noach. The Torah writes, *Tamim hayah b'dorosav*, "Perfect in his generations." *Chazal* interpret, "in his generations" in two ways. Some maintain this to be praiseworthy. Noach was righteous and perfect, even though he lived in a generation that was so corrupt that it had to be wiped out. Others counter that this statement is far from laudatory. Indeed, it implies that Noach's righteousness was viewed relative to his community. They were so evil that they made him look good! The issue is not whether Noach was good or not. He was certainly righteous, but was this only in comparison to the failings of his generation, or was he the real thing? Why do we seem to grapple only concerning Noach? Nowhere else do we find *Chazal* looking so askance at a leader.

Perhaps the reason we question the true character of Noach is that he failed. He had over a century to convince the people that the end was near; yet, he failed. *Chazal* wonder why. Why did such a great leader miss the opportunity to save his generation? The people obviously did not heed Noach's warnings, because they probably thought that he was slightly unhinged. Had they really respected him, they would have listened. Noach survived the Flood – alone, with his immediate family. The remainder of his generation had its chance, but eschewed it. Why did they not listen to Noach? This is the question that *Chazal* analyze. Could it be that Noach was not that great of a *tzaddik*, or at least insufficient to impress people?

Noach had an incredible fortuity handed to him on a silver platter. Saving the world is an opportunity that does not often present itself. Noach had this chance twice: before the Flood; and after the Flood. Yes, Noach lived for 350 years following the Flood. Hashem created a new world, but even in this new world we find the *dor haflagah*, generation of the dispersion, who were prepared to wage war with the Creator! Where was Noach? Where was his influence? This is why *Chazal* take issue with the word, *b'dorosav*, in his generations. Perhaps he was simply better than everyone else. That is it – better, but not necessarily righteous.

Others feel that living with moral degenerates, such that one is not being influenced by their repugnant behavior, is in and of itself the greatest accolade. To resist temptation when everyone is acting abominably is a sign of a righteous character. Noach was a real *tzaddik*, because anyone less would not have survived that horrible influence.

Nothing breeds success – like success. Nothing earns a person positive attention like success. Nothing detracts from one's positive attributes like failure. It may not be fair, but it is a fact of life. Life is filled with incredible opportunities for growth and success. Some make the right choices. Others make the wrong choices. A third group just does not bother choosing.

What prevented Noach from reaching out to the people of his generation? For one hundred and twenty years, he slaved over the Ark. This was his idea of outreach – warning people of the gloom and doom that would envelop and destroy them if they did not repent and alter their lifestyles. This

is not the way to reach people. There are those who refer to Judaism as the religion of “no.” When asked what Judaism is, they invariably respond by itemizing all of the prohibitions that are part and parcel of an observant Jew’s lifestyle. Unfortunately, they forget to present all of the positive aspects of Judaism, including all of the positive consequences of adhering to the prohibitive commandments. To convince a person of the beauty of Jewish life, we must demonstrate its beauty – not focus on what is prohibited and the punishment that accompanies transgression. People respond to the positive. No one is interested (at first) in the negative aspects. It is only after time that one comes to see the profundity behind each and every *mitzvah*.

In his commentary to *Bereishis* 6:8, *Sforno* distinguishes between Noach and Avraham Avinu. Three great individuals were spared as a result of their having found *chein*, favor, in the eyes of Hashem: Daniel; Iyov; and Noach. They alone were spared – not the members of their generation. They were not like Moshe *Rabbeinu*, Avraham *Avinu* and Shmuel *HaNavi*, who reached out and taught and led their respective generations. A righteous man who perfects himself is worthy of saving himself – alone, but one who perfects others as well merits to be the medium for saving others. Noach admonished, but he did not teach his generation about Hashem. He taught them that corruption – both ethical and moral – is destructive to a vibrant society. It undermines their goals and harms them individually and collectively. Noach never taught them that there is a G-d Who created and continues to guide the world. Noach’s approach has become the standard *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, route employed by Judaism’s secular streams, who realize that by acknowledging Hashem, they are obligated to serve Him and observe His Torah. Thus, they save neither themselves nor their constituents, who have all, for the most part, become victims of assimilation.

Avraham taught the members of his generation that there is a Creator, Who, as G-d of history, also supervises the life and destiny of each and every human being. He explained that belief in Hashem is accompanied by obligations. Unless one makes demands on his students, his lessons will be short-lived. When one gives and gives and does not ask for anything in return, he will receive very little in return.