

These are the offspring of Noach – Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generation. (6:9)

A well-known debate exists among the sages concerning the term “generations” as it relates to Noach: Was he righteous only in the context of his generation, which was evil? Or, alternatively, even in his evil generation surrounded by moral corruption, he was able to remain righteous. Certainly, in the generation of Avraham *Avinu*, he would have been righteous. In other words, how would Noach have fared in Avraham’s generation, which was on a much higher plateau? The question is obvious: What provoked the sages, who viewed Noach in a less-than-favorable manner, to state: “Had he lived in the generation of Avraham, he would have been insignificant.” Why is it necessary to add what seems to be a harsh statement: “He would have been insignificant?” Perhaps Noach might not have received the *tzaddik* accolades, but he certainly would have been on a higher plane than most of the people in Avraham’s generation.

The *Apta Rav, zl (Ohaiv Yisrael)* (who usually takes a positive, complimentary approach), explains that actually there is no debate, since both perspectives concerning Noach are true. The one who opines that had Noach lived during Avraham’s generation, he would surely have been a *tzaddik*, has a self-evident position. The fact that he was able to maintain his spiritual status quo, despite being surrounded by individuals for whom moral depravity was a way of life, is an obvious testament to Noach’s righteousness. The second opinion which holds that had he lived in Avraham’s time he would be insignificant, is a commentary concerning Noach’s self-view. His only goal was to serve. Nothing else mattered. He took a dim view of his spiritual achievements, because his only concern was spiritual continuity. He would muse to himself, “So what if I am able to maintain my spiritual integrity? I am surrounded with *reshaim*, evil, depraved people. Thus, in comparison to them, I am considered a *tzaddik*. What if I had lived in a generation of *tzaddikim* – would I be so lauded? No! In a generation of righteous people, I would be insignificant!” The Torah attests to Noach’s self-chastiment. *B’dorasav*, in his generation. Noach felt that his excellent reputation was relative only to his generation.

Noach is held accountable for not doing more to reach out to the members of his generation. The *Chasam Sofer* posits that Noach spent a year cooped up in the Ark with all of his “passengers,” whom he was relegated to serve day and night. This was his atonement for not exerting himself more to save the people of his generation. As he had been unsuccessful in his outreach efforts, he should have at least prayed for them. Apparently, he did not do enough. Noach’s behavior vis-à-vis his community is contrasted to that of Avraham, who not only reached out, but he even prayed to save the sinners who had crossed the line. Apparently, the distinction between Noach and Avraham went beyond the backdrop of their generations. Noach’s approach toward outreach was to insulate himself. Avraham was all over, calling out in the Name of Hashem, teaching a pagan world about monotheism. Wherein lay their point of divergence?

Horav Pinchas Friedman, Shlita, quotes the *pasuk* that precedes the creation of man: *Naase adam*

b'tzalmeinu kidmuseinu, "Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness (*Bereishis* 1:26). The question which the commentators pose is obvious: Hashem alone created man. As such, it should have stated, *E'eseh adam*, "I will make man." The *Yismach Moshe*, *zl*, quotes the *Baal HaTurim* who wonders why, concerning the creation of man, the Torah does not write *va'yaar Elokim ki tov*, Hashem saw that it was good," as it writes concerning every other creation. Surely, his creation was good. He explains that all other creations achieve *sheleimus*, completion/perfection as soon as Hashem places them in this world. Thus, the Torah can write that their creation was good. Man, however, is a *baal bechirah*, has the ability to perfect himself. Indeed, he must work hard and long to achieve this. If he ignores his G-d-given mission, instead spending his days seeking all forms of physical gratification, he will not be worthy of Hashem granting him His *Ki Tov* stamp of approval.

Based on the exegesis of the *Baal Haturim's* exegesis, the *Yismach Moshe* explains the meaning of *Naase Adam*, in the plural. *Adam* is used to describe man's elevated status over animals. If the Torah would have written *eeseh adam*, it would imply that man was created to perfection, when, in fact, Hashem created man in such a manner that he would strive to perfect himself. Thus, *Naase Adam* means, "Let us together, Hashem and man, create the perfection of man." The Almighty wants us to partner with Him in creating "ourselves."

We have, however, another explanation for the term *Naase Adam*. It is incumbent upon every one of us to create an *adam*, to teach and reach out to others, so that we recreate them as observant committed Jews. Indeed, *Chazal* (*Sanhedrin* 69b) teach, "He who teaches his friend's son Torah, it is considered as if he made him." Hashem wants each of us to make a man, to create a spiritual metamorphosis in those who are distant, and to strengthen those who are near.

Veritably, both explanations are dependent upon one another. One cannot achieve his personal perfection; he cannot become an *adam* until he perfects his fellow. Noach worked on himself. Avraham reached out to others. This was his approach to perfecting himself. As long as the rest of the world did not acknowledge Hashem's sovereignty, Avraham viewed himself as less-than-perfect. A Jew does not live for himself. We are here to serve. What greater service can we perform than reaching out to others?