

Noach 5780

BS"D Parashat Noach 5780

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Noach's World

Rabbi Yochanan (in Sanhedrin 108a) – expounding on the Torah's statement that Noach was "righteous in his generation" (Bereishiet 6:9) – states that "had he lived in another generation, he would not necessarily have been considered righteous."

Rashi explains that had Noach lived in Avraham's time, Avraham's righteousness would have outshined all of Noach's deeds. Yet, neither Rabbi Yochanan nor Rashi explains how Noach was inferior to Avraham.

The key to understanding Noach is the action he took upon leaving the ark – he planted a vineyard. Noach and his contemporaries achieved impressive technological developments; they harnessed forces of nature to serve humanity in ways not yet known today. At first, peace and brotherhood reigned, resulting in the creation of a materialistic society that rejected every shred of spirituality. From there, the distance to moral deterioration and licentiousness was short.

At a certain moment, HaShem decided that the wisdom that humanity had imbibed from the Tree of Knowledge was serving its evil impulses to such an extent that it would lose its right to exist. Only one man preserved his divine image – Noach. He stood against a world of violence, murder, idolatry

and sexual immorality.

According to our Sages, Noach was famous in his generation as a man of science and technology whose genius had freed humanity from natural calamities that struck mercilessly. His scientific contributions were the basis for his generation's easy life. Yet Noach saw that his contemporaries had strayed from their spiritual traditions and had deteriorated into licentiousness. He also understood that his many discoveries had contributed greatly to that deterioration, and he felt a personal responsibility to restore his contemporaries to the path of HaShem. However, they were already past the point of no return.



At the end of the Flood – a year of toil and suffering for Noach – the ark came to rest on the peak of the Ararat mountain range. Noach opened up the ship's hold and saw before

him a world devoid of everything. He called out and his voice echoed off the cliffs of Ararat without a response. Noach struggled with his guilt feelings for his share in causing such a severe punishment. He could not accept the new reality nor build a new society from scratch. The only path before him was to escape through drunkenness and sweet slumber.

In contrast, let's consider the story of Avraham.

Avraham discovered HaShem at a young age. He developed a belief system which he transmitted to tens of thousands who had abandoned their faith to idolatry. Avraham's spiritual universe was perfect: there was a Creator of the Universe and He demanded of people that they lead a moral life.

Avraham was blessed with a son who had been educated to continue on the divine path until the entire world would accept faith in the One God.

When HaShem commanded Avraham to bring this son as a burnt offering, Avraham felt as if his spiritual world was about to collapse. The command to a father to sacrifice his son totally contradicted Avraham's belief that HaShem was the source of kindness and mercy. This was Avraham's great test.

Noach was tested and he failed, reaching the point of irreversible breakdown. Avraham, too, was brought to the breaking point. He had to choose between love for his son and love for HaShem, and he could not resolve the contradiction. Yet, unlike Noach, Avraham did not break down nor did he attempt to run away from a seemingly terrible reality. For three days, he advanced quietly and determinedly to Yerushalayim. His son, Yitzchak, asked him, "Here is the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the offering?" (Bereishiet 22:7). Still Avraham did not break down, even as he lifted the knife to slaughter his son. Only then did the angel cry out, "Do not harm the boy! Do not do anything to him" (Bereishiet 22:12).

The difference between Noach, righteous in his generation, and Avraham, righteous in every generation, is reflected in the breaking point. Noach broke down, finding no other solution to his suffering but escape. Avraham experienced suffering but not crisis. He would never stray from the God of love and kindness.

Every one of us is a descendant of Jews who did not break. They withstood the destruction of two Temples, wars, exiles and persecutions perpetrated by the Christians, the Muslims, the Communists and the Nazis – and none could break them.

Today, the Jewish people once more find themselves undergoing a test of faith. Should they return to the land of their forefathers or remain in the exile to sacrifice their children on the altars of gold and convenience?

In the future, historians will note that a small number of Jews blocked with their bodies the advance of murderous Islamists while building a national home in the Land of Israel. That minority of Jews are not only “righteous in their generation,” but righteous by the yardstick of all the generations.

Shabbat Shalom,

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