

Parashat Noach, 5779, 2018:

A Tzaddik in His Time

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, and Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, the *refuah shlaimah* of Yakir Ephraim ben Rachel Devorah, Mordechai ben Miriam Tovah and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The conclusion of Parashat Bereishit paints a dire picture of mankind's imminent annihilation:

And the L-rd saw that the evil of man was great in the earth, and every imagination of his heart was only evil all the time. And the L-rd regretted that He had made man upon the earth, and He became grieved in His heart. And the L-rd said, "I will blot out man, whom I created, from upon the face of the earth, from man to cattle to creeping thing, to the fowl of the heavens, for I regret that I made them." (*Sefer Bereishit* 6:5-7, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

On the edge of this yawning abyss, a beacon of light pierced the seemingly impenetrable darkness: "But Noach found favor in the eyes of the L-rd." (*Sefer Bereishit* 6:8) Noach emerged as the savior of mankind. He "found favor" precisely because he "...was a righteous man, he was perfect in his generations; Noach walked with G-d." (*Sefer Bereishit* 5:9)

In his *Commentary on the Torah*, the Ramban (1194-1270) explains why Noach found favor before Hashem:

The reason why Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem is because all of his actions before Him were pleasant and pleasing. So, too, do we find [in the case of Moses where it states:] "And the L-rd said to Moses: 'Even this thing that you have spoken, I will do, for you have found favor in My eyes, and I have known you by name.'" (*Sefer Shemot* 33:17) [Noach, therefore, was similar to Josef] about whom the Torah states: "The L-rd was with Joseph, and He extended charisma to him, and He gave him favor in the eyes of the warden of the prison." (*Sefer Bereishit* 39:21) [In addition, Noach was similar to Esther] regarding whom it states: "... and Esther obtained grace in the eyes of all who beheld her." (*Sefer Megillat Ester* 2:15).

The Ramban continues his presentation and suggests the following:

Noach having found “favor in the eyes of the L-rd” is mentioned in contrast to the actions of his generation, since all of their actions caused despondency before Him, may He be blessed. [In contrast,] it says regarding him [Noach] that his actions were favorable to Him. Afterwards, [the Torah states explicitly] why he [Noach] was considered good before Him, i.e., he was a completely righteous individual. (Translation, and brackets my own)

According to the Ramban, Noach was comparable in status to Moshe, Yosef, and Esther. Like these individuals, he was unquestionably a *tzaddik* (righteous individual), a true hero of the spirit, and a model for us all.

The Ramban’s presentation of Noach’s greatness is further enhanced when we realize that he is the sole figure in Tanach to receive the appellation, “*ish tzaddik*” (*Sefer Bereishit* 6:9). In addition, within this verse, the Torah extends its praise and calls him “*tamim*” (“pure and unblemished”). What is the difference between these expressions? *Talmud Bavli, Avodah Zarah* 6a formulates it in this fashion: “*Tzaddik* – in his actions (*b’ma’asav*); *tamim* – in his ways (*b’drachov*).” Rashi (1040-1105), commenting upon the Talmud’s explanation of these terms, notes that *tzaddik b’ma’asav* teaches us that in stark contradistinction to the rest of his generation, Noach did not participate in robbery (*chamas*), whereas *tamim b’drachov* specifically refers to his consummate humility (*anav v’shafale ruach*). In short, both Noach’s behavior and *middot* (ethical characteristics) were second to none.

Given Noach’s stellar persona, Rashi’s midrashically-infused gloss on the phrase, “Noach walked with (*et*) G-d,” is difficult to understand:

But concerning Abraham, Scripture says “...I am the Almighty G-d; walk before Me (“*lefanai*”) and be perfect.” (*Sefer Bereishit* 17:1) Noah required [G-d’s] support to uphold him [in righteousness], but Abraham strengthened himself and walked in his righteousness by himself.

The etymological difference between these two *pasukim* (verses) resides in the use of the word “*lefani*” (“before Me”) that appears in 17:1, and the expression “*et*” that is found in 6:9. The Maharal (1520-1609) takes issue with Rashi’s comment. In his commentary on the Torah entitled, “*Gur Aryeh*,” he emphasizes that there is nothing in the expression “Noach walked with G-d” (“*et haElokim hithalech Noach*”) that indicates that “the Holy One blessed be He helped Noach” – any more than he helped Abraham. In other words, there is no substantive distinction between “*lefani*” and “*et*,” and, by extension, seemingly no difference between Noach and Abraham.

Instinctively, however, we know that Noach and Abraham were very different kinds of people. After all, Noach never prayed on behalf of his generation to save them from the impending flood, while 10 generations later, Abraham did precisely this regarding the evil people of S’dom. (*Sefer Bereishit* 18:23-32) Yet, if they were both *tzaddikim*, how can we account for this difference? In his *Kedushat Levi*, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak ben Meir of Berdichev, Russia (“the Berdichever,” 1740-1810) answers our question in his examination of the first verse of our *parasha*. He suggests that there are two archetypes of *tzaddikim* that serve the Creator:

One kind of *tzaddik* serves the Creator, may He be blessed, with tremendous fervor, yet, he remains focused upon himself and makes no attempt to bring the evil people nearer to the Creator, may He be blessed, to serve Him. Instead, he remains alone in his service to the Creator. (This and the following translations my own)

The Berdichever now proceeds to elucidate the qualities of the second type of *tzaddik*:

[A person in the second category of *tzaddikim*] serves his Creator and brings back (*u’machzir*) the evil people of the world [from their evil, i.e. to do *teshuvah*] so that they, too, can be amongst those who serve the Creator. [Prominent among them] was our father, Abraham, who was responsible for converting people to become converts. (See *Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 39:14)

In sum, the Berdichever provides us with two models of *tzaddikim*. The first is completely inner-directed and focused upon his own spiritual growth and relationship with Hashem. The second, as well, serves Hashem with his entire heart and soul, and furthermore fulfills his role as a servant of Hashem by bringing others *tachat kanfei HaSchechinah* (under the wings of the Almighty). As we have seen, the Berdichever explicitly states that Abraham was the embodiment of the second type of *tzaddik*. Subsequently, he notes that Noach was unquestionably the representative of the first kind of *tzaddik*:

Noach, for and by himself alone, sought to serve the Creator, may He be blessed. He did not, however, involve himself with his fellow man to bring them closer to become servants of the Creator blessed be He.

Based upon the Berdichever's trenchant analysis, we are now in a better position to note the differences that obtained between Noach and Abraham, and to understand why the Ramban favorably compared Noach to Moses, Josef, and Esther. I believe that the Berdichever profoundly understood human nature, and rejoiced in the many different kinds of people that are woven into the grand tapestry we call mankind. For this Chasidic master, all people, and all types of *tzaddikim*, have a role to play in the great drama of life. As such, Noach, in his generation, was exactly the archetype of a *tzaddik* that was required to ensure the continuation of the human race, while Abraham was the kind of *tzaddik* that was needed to help the world enhance its connection with the Almighty, and to ultimately found the Jewish people.

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

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*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpd>

*** I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.