

Torah On One Foot

Rabbi Matthew Berger



Above and Beyond

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk once referred to another rabbi (he spoke in Yiddish) as a *tzadik in peltz*, a “righteous person in a fur coat.” When it’s cold outside, you can either build a fire or wrap yourself in a warm coat. If you wear the coat, you’re the only one who gets warm. If you build a fire, everyone can get warm.

In this week’s Torah portion, we learn about Noah, a man who was righteous in his generation. He saved the animals and cared for his family. By all accounts he was a good person. He followed God’s commandments to the letter. Yet no one else was saved. By contrast, ten generations later, Abraham stood up to God and demanded that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah be saved if even ten people were decent. In this way, the innocent would not be swept away with the guilty.

The heroes or *tzadikim* in every generation look above and beyond their immediate needs and care for the community as a whole. They are the ones who create and stoke the fire, in both a literal and figurative sense.