

SELECTIONS FROM KEDUSHAT LEVI

The Institute for Jewish Spirituality  
(Translation: Rabbi Jonathan Slater)

Parashat Noah

s.v. first drasha, section beginning *Akh n'dakdek*

“[This is the line of Noah.—] Noah was a righteous man; he was blameless in his age; [Noah walked with God]” (Gen. 6:9)

Consider Rashi’s comment on Gen.7:7: “even Noah’s faith was limited (lit., Noah was among those of limited faith).” How could this be, since Scripture itself testifies that Noah was “a righteous man, blameless in his age”? Further, it is troubling that Noah did not pray (to stop the Flood and) that the decree be annulled.

We can explain it this way: there are two types of tzaddikim who serve the Creator. There is the tzaddik who serves the Creator and has no desire other than to be the servant of the Creator, and in that he also believes that he has the power in the upper realms to direct creation according to his will. This is the tzaddik who is reflected in the passage in Moed Katan (16b): “‘the righteous rules by fear of God’ (II Sam.23:3), [God asks,] ‘Who rules over me? The Tzaddik.’ The Holy One decrees and the tzaddik annuls the decree in favor of the good.”

Yet, there is another sort of tzaddik, one who serves the Blessed Creator, and who is so very humble in his own eyes that he thinks to himself, “Who am I that I should pray to annul the decree?” and who therefore does not pray to do so.

Even though Noah was a great and blameless tzaddik, he was very small in his own eyes, and he did not have faith in himself that he was a tzaddik with the capacity to annul decrees. Rather, he thought of himself as only equal to the rest of his generation. He thought, “If I am to be saved in this ark, and I am no more righteous than the rest of this generation, they too will be saved.” Therefore, he did not pray to save that generation. This is what Rashi meant in his comment that Noah’s faith was limited. That is, Noah was small in his own eyes, limited in faith in himself as a blameless tzaddik who is able to annul decrees, since he did not consider himself much at all. That is the intent of the verse, “I am about to destroy them with the earth” (Gen.6:13). That is, (God says) “I will do according to My will. Since there is no tzaddik who will pray to annul this decree, therefore I will destroy them with the earth.” Then, later God says, “I now establish My covenant with you” (9:9), even though there is no tzaddik who will pray to annul the decree, nevertheless I will keep My covenant with you.

אך נדקדק בפרוש רש"י ז"ל:  
אף נח מקטני אמנה היה. הא"י יכול להיות  
זה? כי התוב מעיד עליו: נח איש צדיק  
תמים היה בדורתי. ועוד קשה: למה לא  
היה מתפלל נח לבטל הגזרה? נבוא לבאר.  
כי יש שני מיני צדיקים שעובדים הבורא: יש  
צדיק שעובד הבורא, ואין לו חשק רק להיות  
עובד הבורא, ומאמין שיש לו פנ בעליותים  
להנהיג העולמות כרצונו. כמו שאמרנו חז"ל  
(מועד קטן טו:): 'צדיק מושל בקצאת אלהים  
(שמאל כ. ג.) מי מושל ב? צדיק. הקדוש-  
ברוך הוא גזר, וצדיק מבטל הגזרה לטובה.  
יש צדיק אחר, שעובד הבורא, ברוך הוא,  
והוא שפל בעיני עצמו מאד ומאד, וחושב  
בלבו: מי אני שאתפלל לבטל הגזרה?! לכן  
אינו מתפלל לבטל

ונח. הגם שהיה צדיק גדול ותמים,  
היה קטן בעיניו מאד, ולא היה לו אמנה  
בעצמו שהוא צדיק מושל ויכול לבטל הגזרה.  
אדרבה, היה חשוב בעיניו כשאר הדור, והיה  
חושב: אם אני אהיה נצול בפכה, ואני  
אין צדיק יותר משאר הדור — הנה גם-  
כן נצילי: לכן לא היה מתפלל על הדור.  
וזהו שפרוש רש"י א"אף נח מקטני אמנה  
היה. רצה לומר: נח היה קטן בעיניו באמנה  
שהוא צדיק תמים, שיכול לבטל הגזרה, שלא  
היה חשוב בעיני עצמו כלום. וזהו פרוש (ו).  
(א): והני משחיתם את הארץ. רצה לומר:

הני אעשה כרצוני. כי לא יש צדיק שמתפלל  
לבטל הגזרה. לכן אני משחיתם את הארץ.  
ואחר כך אמר (ט. ט): ואני הנני מקים את  
בריתי אתכם. רצה לומר: אף-על-פי שאין  
הצדיק מתפלל לבטל הגזרה, אף-על-פי-כן  
הנני מקים את בריתי אתכם.

In the Talmud the rabbis debate Noah's true standing as a tzaddik – was he truly righteous or was he righteous only relative to his generation. In our lesson, however, we assume that Noah is truly a tzaddik. Yet, his righteousness is limited by his lack of faith in himself, held passive by his fear of heaven and his humility. He saw himself only “in his generation,” that is, as no better than the rest of his fellows. He did not recognize that as a pure and upright person, as a true tzaddik, he had the power to overturn God's decree, to save his generation. In the Hasidic tradition, the preferred model is that of the tzaddik who intervenes on behalf of Israel to change things for the better. This is how Levi Yitzchak solves the problem he set out at the start: how can Noah be called a tzaddik, yet not stand in the breach, serving as the prophetic “loyal opposition” to save his people? Well, he may be a tzaddik, but not of the higher sort. In this manner, Levi Yitzchak uses Noah as a foil against which he can set up the Hasidic tzaddik, the wonderworker, the protecting shepherd of Israel as the true leader for his time.

**Guide:**

1. We are very aware of the dangers of hubris, of ego and of the excesses of power. What are the dangers of excess humility?
2. The Hasidic tradition relies on the verse “He fulfills the desires of those who revere Him” (Ps.145:19), meaning that the devotion of the tzaddik is such that God will fulfill his desire, his will. Is this a phenomenon to which we can relate? How do you understand this verse? Is there any way in which you can describe a human capacity to change God's will?
3. What kind of tzaddikim would we prefer to be? Which God do we serve – and when: the God of “what is” or the God of “what is supposed to be”? What are the benefits and dangers in each case? What might be the consequences of our choosing the wrong approach? Can we manage to do both?
4. Can you be humble and still powerful?
5. Practice: we are constantly confronted with moments of decision: to act or not to act. Pay attention over the next week to those moments when you are called upon to act to protect another person (in your family, in your congregation/community, on the street) – from another's anger or impatience, from injustice or wrong-doing, from violence or hostility. Notice when you are able to respond, and when you hesitate. Pay attention to the inner voices that urge you on or hold you back. How do you feel when you are able to act, and how do you feel when you hold back? What is the source of your energy in acting, and what is the nature of the resistance to acting? Sit with your awareness and consider yourself in light of our lesson. When are you Noah (and when might that be appropriate) and when are you the tzaddik who can work for the benefit of others (and when might that lead you to overreaching)?