

Parshat Noach 5778

נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק Noach is the only person in the Tanach called a Tzadik. Yet many say that Noach lost an opportunity to help the people of his generation repent. That he accepted Hashem's ruling to destroy the world but didn't try to change it. Should he be looked down upon when in reality he did exactly what Hashem asked of him? Avraham Avinu when told of Sedom's upcoming destruction, argued with Hashem, and ultimately saved Lot and his family. But is this comparable? Hashem spoke to Noach just a few times before the flood, telling him of the pending destruction and instructing him to build the ark. Avraham had 24 years (from age 75 to 99) communicating with Hashem before Sedom was mentioned. Perhaps he felt able to question Hashem's ruling because of this closer relationship.

The Kedushas Levi holds there are two types of Tzadikim. Some are so close to Hashem that they are able to plead with Him after his decision has been made. Others consider themselves not worthy enough to argue with Hashem. On this bases we can say that Avraham is the former and Noach the latter which would explain why Noach didn't question Hashem's decision to "קָחָךְ כָּל-בְּשָׂרָה".

The Baal Shem Tov quotes Tehillim 92, : "הַצַּדִּיק כַּתְמָר יִפְרַח כְּאֶרֶז בְּלִבְנוֹן יִשְׁגֶּה" "The righteous bloom like a date-palm; they thrive like a cedar in Lebanon" to explain the two types of Tzadikim. One is glued to Hashem, יִשְׁגֶּה. He doesn't go out to influence others like the cedar which doesn't bear fruit, but grows closer to Hashem doing what he is told without question. The other type is כַּתְמָר יִפְרַח who spreads out to help others like the fruits of a date palm and influences them to follow Hashem's ways. Thus Noah is the classic example of someone who is righteous but not a leader. Who are we to judge which type is superior?

Also, Noach was told immediately that "קָחָךְ כָּל-בְּשָׂרָה". Perhaps Avraham had the courage to beg for the people of Sedom because Hashem gave him the opportunity by saying, "זַעֲקֵת, מְאֹד הַחַטָּאת וְהַפְּסָאָה בְּיַד כְּבֹדָה מְאֹד" "The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave!" He didn't begin by saying that He would destroy them; only that they sinned. So Avraham felt able to pray and ask for them to be saved.

Furthermore, Noach was told by Hashem "כִּי-מְלֵאָה הָאָרֶץ חַמְסָה:" "for the earth is filled with lawlessness" (Noach 6:13). As only Noah and his family and the animals were saved, there is an implication that no other Tzadikim could be found in that generation. Knowing this might explain why Noach didn't plead for the world to be saved. Hashem had effectively told him that no-one else was worthy enough. This was not the case for Avraham who davened for the sake of any Tzadikim left in Sedom, since he didn't know whether there were any. He didn't live in Sedom and couldn't see their wickedness. Noach lived amongst lawlessness. How could he argue against it? Was he really meant to speak to these lawless people in an age when no one would listen? Sometimes people don't even listen to the

voice of Hashem Himself. An example of this is Hashem warning Kayin of the danger of his violent feelings toward Hevel – "לָמָּה חָרָה לְךָ הַלְמָה... וְאֵתָה תִּמְשַׁל-בּוֹ" "Why are you distressed? Why are you depressed? ... sin is crouching at the door. It urges towards you, but you can be its master" (Bereishis 4: 6-7). Yet Kayin didn't listen, and instead went on to murder his brother. If Hashem speaks and men don't listen, how can we criticise Noah for not speaking when all the evidence suggests that they would not have listened either?

Whether or not Noach was righteous before the flood, we see how he went astray after it. Perek 6: 18 "וּבָאתָ אִלֵּי-הַתְּבֵּה אִתָּה וּבְנֵיךָ וְאִשְׁתֶּךָ וְנָשֵׁי-בְנֵיךָ אִתְּךָ:" "and you shall enter the ark, with your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives" Rashi explains that the males and females are mentioned separately to show that no physical relationships were permitted in the Ark. Then in Perek 8:16: "צֵא מִן-הַתְּבֵּה אִתָּה וְאִשְׁתֶּךָ וּבְנֵיךָ וְנָשֵׁי-בְנֵיךָ אִתְּךָ:" "Come out of the ark, together with your wife, your sons, and your sons' wives" Here Rashi points out that the husbands and wives are mentioned together to show that now, after the flood, they can resume normal life and repopulate the earth. Nevertheless, in Perek 8: 18 "וַיֵּצֵא-נֹחַ וּבְנָיו וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְנִצְאֵי-נֹחַ וְנָשֵׁי-בְנָיו אִתּוֹ:" "So Noah came out, together with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives". Noach is mentioned separate from his wife showing that he didn't want to repopulate the world.

Noach refusing to have children is perhaps understandable as he had just witnessed the world's destruction! So Hashem covenanted with Noach not to destroy the world again in his generation. But this wasn't enough for Noach. He still wouldn't procreate. Hashem explains over and over again (for 9 pesukim!) even adding in the words "בְּרִית עוֹלָם" an everlasting covenant". But Noach still wouldn't procreate. We understand this because we are only told of his three sons he fathered before the flood.

In Perek 9:16 Hashem shows Noach a rainbow (as it says in Kiddushin, חַס עַל כְּבוֹד – *anyone who does not care about his Creator's honour, it is fitting for him not to have come into the world. What is this?* *Rabba says: This is one who gazes at a rainbow*). The rainbow shown to Noach was in lieu of destroying the world again, since Hashem was "angry" that Noach refused to procreate. This was Hashem's last conversation with Noach. Noach subsequently does more shameful things.

So even if Noach is to be regarded as a Tzadik before the flood (the words describing him as so are in the past tense), we see that post flood he disobeys Hashem. The Medrash Raba (Bereishis 36:3) points out that Moshe he started life being called a Mitzri but ending as a man of Hashem; whereas Noach started as a Tzadik and ended as an Ish Adama.

Based on the writings of Rabbi Silverman and Rabbi Sacks