

# The Path To Follow

Noach

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## Some View it as a Criticism

It is written, "These are the offspring of Noah – Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations" (*Bereshith* 6:9). Why does the Torah mention Noah's name twice? Furthermore, why did the Sages view this as a criticism of Noah, with some Sages saying: "In comparison to his generation he was righteous, but if he had lived in Abraham's generation, he would not have been considered of any importance"? Does the Torah not state that Noah was a righteous and perfect man? Why did the Sages feel the need to move away from the primary meaning of the verse?

We may say that the generation of the flood corrupted the earth even in regards to things it did not touch. Noah and his family were the only ones not influenced by their generation, and the only ones who did not sin. Since Noah avoided sin, Hashem supported and encouraged him, for "if one comes to purify himself, he is given help" (*Shabbat* 104a). Although Noah did not fulfill *mitzvot*, Hashem gave him a reward as if he had done so, for he abstained from sin. This is due to the fact that if a person "commits no transgression, he is rewarded as though he has fulfilled a *mitzvah*" (*Kiddushin* 39b).

Regarding this, the Sages have said: "The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: 'My sons, present to Me an opening of repentance no larger than the eye of a needle, and I will expand it into openings through which wagons and carriages may pass'" (*Shir HaShirim Rabba* 5:3). Since Noah had made a small opening, Hashem immediately expanded it into a large opening, and he was the only one to survive in his generation. Hence the fact that Hashem supported Noah was not a criticism, but resulted from Noah creating a small opening of repentance, which Hashem expanded.

Generally speaking, a person does not find favor in the eyes of Hashem unless he separates himself from the wicked. Even if he does not have the opportunity to perform a *mitzvah*, if he distances himself from the wicked – if he does not live with them, heed their advice, or act like them – he is considered a righteous man, deserving for the world to have been created for him. Likewise with Noah, we see that the entire world was only saved by his merit because he distanced himself from the wicked. This was the good deed of Noah, that he did not follow the ways of the wicked. Had Noah lived in Abraham's generation and simply tried to distance himself from sin, it would have been useless, for Noah's generation was unlike the generation of Abraham. In Noah's generation, it was sufficient to distance oneself from sin and not deal with the ungodly, whereas in Abraham's generation it was not enough to simply distance oneself from sin. One also had to perform good deeds.

### The World is Like an Inn

How was Noah able to not get enticed by the people of his generation? It was because he considered himself as a foreigner in this world, like someone who travels from place to place, his "home" simply being the next place he is heading to. When a person considers himself to be a foreigner in this world, he does not fall into sin. Such is the way of the *tzaddikim*: They make themselves into foreigners in this world, reflecting their entire lives upon the fact that they must render an accounting to the Creator at the end of their days, and that they must return to a place of maggots and dust. If a person constantly thinks about the accounting that he will have to render, he will not feel at home. He will feel like a foreigner, and since the *tzaddikim* make

themselves into foreigners in this world, they deserve to be citizens in the World to Come.

The present world is like an inn, and the people of this world are like clients who rent a room there. Now whenever someone rents a room at an inn and becomes responsible for it, but then starts to damage something inside, the owner will come and throw him out. Thus men in the generation of the flood believed that this world belonged to them, and they began to damage the earth and fill it with violence. What did the Owner do? He wiped them off the face of the earth. Yet Noah, because he considered himself as a foreigner in this world, was saved from the waters of the flood.

How do we know that Noah did not consider himself as a citizen of this world? It is from what is said about him: "These are the offspring of Noah – Noah." Now we know that one increase after another leads to a decrease. The name Noah evokes *menucha* ("rest"), and since Noah's name is mentioned twice, we understand that he had no rest in this world, but was like a foreigner in it. Perhaps this is what the Sages meant when they said, "*Talmidei chachamim* have no rest in this world or in the World to Come" (*Berachot* 64a). Since they consider themselves as foreigners, and since foreigners do not rest – for they do not consider themselves as permanent residents, but are constantly thinking about their next destination, not where they actually are – they find no rest, not even for an instant.

Some of our Sages, however, believe that this contains a criticism of Noah. They say that if Noah had lived in the time of Abraham, he would not have been considered of any importance, for our father Abraham said of himself: "I am a foreigner and a resident among you" (*Bereshith* 23:4). Let us think about this for a moment: If he was a foreigner, he could not have been a resident, and vice-versa. Yet our father Abraham, although Hashem gave him the land of Canaan as a gift – to him and his descendants after him – still did not consider himself a permanent resident, but rather a foreigner.

Abraham considered himself as a foreigner in this world with regards to his own affairs. Yet with regards to the affairs of Heaven, he made himself into a very powerful resident, reprimanding people and bringing them closer to G-d. Abraham spread His kingdom around the world, causing Hashem's Name to be spoken by every living being (*Bereshith Rabba* 39:16). The result was that all the inhabitants of the world knew that this great city has a leader. Yet because he considered himself a foreigner, not a resident – not even with regards to the affairs of Heaven – Noah did not reprimand his generation. As the Sforno writes, "Noah, even if he rebuked the evil deeds of the nations, did not teach them to know G-d and walk in His ways, despite being righteous and perfect in thought and deed" (*Sforno, Bereshith* 6:8).

That is why some people believe that this is a criticism of Noah, for Noah considered himself a foreigner and did not reprimand his generation, since only a permanent resident can do so. As for Abraham, although he considered himself a foreigner, he only acted as such in regards to his own affairs. In regards to the affairs of Heaven, however, Abraham made himself a citizen and reprimanded his contemporaries.



## Concerning the Parsha

### If I Am Not For Myself...

The holy Jew of Pshischa used to say, "Everyone claims that he is only working for the sake of his children, in order for them to become good Jews and *bonei Torah*. When these children become adults, they also fail to pay attention to their own conduct, claiming that they are only working for their children as well. Despite all this, I would like to see a son who is worthy of the name!"

This is why Scripture states, "These are the offspring of Noah – Noah," for Noah did not neglect his own spiritual growth for the sake of his children. Instead, he worked on himself, and was worthy of being called a son, who also has a duty to serve G-d. This is the meaning of the teaching, "The main offspring of the *tzaddikim* are their good deeds," for the *tzaddikim* see their good deeds as their very own children.

It is said that the *gaon* Rabbi Yosef Charif, who served as the Rav of New York, was once visited by a local wealthy man who said to him: "For decades, I've spent both days and nights working on various projects, and thank G-d I have amassed a considerable fortune. Yet now that I've reached old age, I would like to do something for my portion in the World to Come. My children are constantly involved in large and complex projects, and I'm afraid that they're too busy to think about me or take time to pray for my soul after I leave this world. That is why I need your advice on what I should do with the vast sums of money that I've accumulated during my lifetime." Rabbi Yosef Charif advised him to give large amounts to several Torah institutions and charitable organizations. He ended by saying, "At the beginning of *Parsha Noah* we read, 'These are the offspring of Noah – Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations.' Here Rashi says, 'To teach you that the main offspring of the righteous are their good deeds.' In fact the good deeds that a person does in life are his real children. That is why we must not entrust our children with bringing us into the World to Come through their good deeds, especially in a generation as poor as our own, a generation in which our children's awareness of Judaism is diminishing from '*maftir*' to '*niftar*.' In such an unfortunate situation, parents must certainly not wait for their children to do something for them. It is the parents themselves who must focus on building their World to Come with their own hands. As the Tanna in *Pirkei Avot* says, 'If I am not for myself, who is for me?' And if not now, when?"

### Learning From Noah

It is written, "These are the offspring of Noah – Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with G-d, and Noah fathered three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth" (*Bereshith* 6:9-10).

"These are the offspring of Noah," Rashi explains, "teaches you that the main offspring of the righteous are their good deeds." As such, we can explain the internal logic of the verse as follows: From the fact that Noah was an upright and perfect man, his offspring were his good deeds, as the verse underlines: "Noah fathered three sons: Shem" – this is the good name that a person acquires through his deeds, as King Solomon said: "A good name is better than fine oil" (*Kohelet* 7:1), and thus Noah acquired a good name for himself through his deeds; "Ham" – an allusion to the fulfillment of all the *mitzvot* with warmth and enthusiasm; "and Japheth" – beautifying each *mitzvah* as much as possible, as well as all of one's deeds, for them to be "a prestige for those who do them, and a prestige that comes from man." Noah conducted himself in accordance with these three fine ways.

### Behind the Blame, Praise

It is written, "Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations" (*Bereshith* 6:9).

Rashi states, "Some of our Sages interpret this favorably: How much more had he lived in a generation of righteous people, he would have been

even more righteous! Others interpret it derogatorily: In comparison to his generation he was righteous, but had he lived in Abraham's generation, he would not have been considered of any importance!"

Here the Rebbe of Kuzmir, Rabbi Yechezkel, said that the power and greatness of a righteous and perfect man resides in the fact that "some interpret it derogatorily." If we see a leader who has no opponents, this is an obvious sign that he is filled with lies and flattery, finding twisted ways to be at peace with everyone. On the other hand, a great leader who is guided by compassion and truth will arouse accusations and hatred against him from the evildoers of the generation, those not inclined to support the path of truth taken by their leader.

The Saba of Shpola said, "Those who interpret Noah's conduct in a derogatory way render a great service to Israel, for they see by *Ruach Hakodesh* that almost every righteous person among the Jewish people has aroused opposition. Who was greater than Moshe Rabbeinu, who was suspected of things that were far from him! Yet here the first righteous man mentioned in the Torah was Noah, and if everyone had admired him, all the righteous would have learned that if they had any opponents, it would mean that they were not righteous. It is for this reason that some have deliberately understood the first righteous man to be blameworthy, thereby teaching us that having opponents is not an obvious sign of a character flaw. After all, it is said: 'Noah found favor in the eyes of Hashem.'"

### Forbidden to Eat Meat

It is written, "G-d said to Noah, 'The end of all flesh has come before Me'" (*Bereshith* 6:13).

Two Jews were seated for a holiday meal and enjoying their food. When a meat dish arrived at the table, one of them pushed his plate away and stopped eating. His friend asked him why he stopped eating, saying that it's an explicit verse: "Do not hide yourself from your flesh" (Isaiah 58:7). In response, he also cited a verse, "The end of all flesh has come before me," explaining: "My doctors have forbidden me from eating meat."

### A Complete Guarantee

It is written, "The earth had become corrupt before G-d, and the earth was filled with robbery" (*Bereshith* 6:11).

It is taught in the name of the *gaon* Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin that if a person acquires money in an honest way, beyond any suspicion of robbery, then it is completely safe. Thieves will not be able to take it, and its owner will lose none of it. This concept is illustrated by something that Rabbi Chaim experienced when a group of community leaders came to see me to discuss a swindler who made them incur great financial losses.

While they were recounting their troubles to Rabbi Chaim, one of them accidentally moved a tablecloth, causing everything on it to come crashing to the floor. Rabbi Chaim's guests were very upset with themselves, for who knew what kind of losses they had inadvertently caused Rabbi Chaim? Yet before they could even consider what had happened, Rabbi Chaim quickly reassured them: "There's nothing to worry about gentlemen. I'm certain that not even a single glass has broken. You see, everything on the table is completely protected, for everything was purchased with money acquired in a faultless way."

A closer look at the glasses proved that Rabbi Chaim was right. The Rav added that it was not by accident that the tablecloth had slipped and everything fell to the floor. It was intended as a sign for them, teaching that when money is completely legitimate, there is no reason to worry about anyone, not even swindlers. Just as they saw tonight, no one has the power to steal any legitimate money by way of deception.

### How to Avoid Robbery

The Gemara cites Rabbi Yochanan as saying, "Come and see how great is the power of robbery. For although the generation of the flood transgressed all laws, their punishment was only sealed when they stretched out their

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hands to rob, as it is written: 'For the earth is filled with robbery through them, and behold, I will destroy them with the earth' [*Bereshith* 6:13]" (*Sanhedrin* 108a). The Chafetz Chaim wrote, "How grave is the sin of robbery, for Heaven hastens to hear the cry of one who has been robbed, and the gates are never closed before those who cry out in this way" (*Sefat Tamim* ch. 3).

A few years ago, a kollel in the city of Rehovot published, under the direction of the *gaon* Rabbi Y. Israelsohn, a *halachic* collection dealing with the subject of robbery and extortion. From this collection, we have cited numerous accounts dealing with relevant issues.

### No Peace in Falsehood

The Vilna Gaon wrote, "One who steals something from someone and does not return it until the end of his days, both are obligated to return to earth, the thief and the victim." The Vilna Gaon also said, "One who studies will see no blessing in his learning if he has something that is not his." When a man engages in business, let him do it honestly. Let him say "no" when it is no and "yes" when it is yes. Above all, let him not think that he will lose out if he acts in this way. On the contrary, not only will he not lose out, he will not find any peace in falsehood and deception, for wealth and possessions do not come from work and effort. Many people toil without success, and although we may see some people who succeed in this way, they will end up losing their wealth, which will not endure" (*Me'am Loez, Ki Teitzei* 25).

It is forbidden to benefit from anything that belongs to another person without his permission, even if we are certain that if he knew of it, he would be happy because he cares deeply for us. Hence it is forbidden to take anything from the garden of someone without his permission. People must be made aware of this, for it often happens that they stumble in this area due to a lack of understanding.

It is forbidden to benefit in any way from something as a result of robbery, as long as the item is still in the possession of the thief. One whose money is considered stolen, it is forbidden to accept *tzeddakah* from him. As for one whose money is not legitimate, if he allows himself to use it because he believes that he has not broken any laws, it is permitted to accept *tzeddakah* from him.

It is forbidden for a person to disregard building permits and expand his home in the direction of his neighbors, thereby restricting the space they have access to. This also touches upon the prohibition of not respecting the boundaries of one's neighbor. It is therefore forbidden to install fixed posts in a common yard to support one's own balcony without the permission of every other owner.

If a minor steals or causes damage, the *Beit Din* must punish him to prevent him from growing accustomed to such behavior. Even someone who does not represent the *Beit Din* must prevent a minor from causing damage, but only the father or the *Beit Din* may punish him.

It is forbidden to study from a book belonging to someone else without his knowledge, even if just reading from it. This also applies to a *siddur* or *machzor*, which requires the permission of its owner. In our time, we must ask for permission to use a *tallit* or *tefillin*, for many people do not like it when others use such items without permission. However for an ordinary prayer book, it seems that today most people do not mind. If one knows that the owner will not mind when people read his other books, then it is permitted.

One who borrows a book or an object for a certain period of time, but does not return it on time, is also considered a thief if the owner has not extended his permission for the extra time.

When someone borrows but cannot repay, either with money or something else, the lender is forbidden from demanding his due, for whoever pressures the poor when he knows that they cannot repay transgresses a prohibition, as it is written: "Do not act towards him as a creditor" (*Shemot* 22:24). The lender is even forbidden from appearing before him, for the borrower will

be ashamed to see him if he cannot reimburse him. If the lender does not know whether the borrower has the means to repay him, but believes that he can, then he is allowed to ask him.

When several people are together in a public area, such as in synagogue or on a bus, it is forbidden for an individual to cool or heat the place if it harms others or causes them to suffer. This applies during a time of year when people generally do the opposite of what the individual in question is doing.

It is forbidden to steal another person's time. It is forbidden to enter a private or public place when it is not your turn. When a person is in line waiting to see a certain individual, and that individual wants to see someone else – who has not been waiting in line – then if that individual is not obligated to meet people (such as a *talmid chacham*, who does not have a public responsibility, or a private physician), it is permitted. However if he is a public official, such as the local Rav, or a person is waiting in line at the bank or for public transportation, then it is forbidden to jump the line and enter when it is not your turn.

It is also forbidden to steal another person's sleep. Hence it is forbidden to wake someone up, or to make noise at unusual times, even in your own home. In regards to using a noisy air condition, it depends on the customs of the area. In any case, if someone is ill and the noise would disturb him, his needs must be taken into account due to *chesed*.

It is forbidden for a worker or individual employee to use the owner's telephone without permission. In the workplace, this also depends on permission being granted. Hence it is forbidden for a worker or employee to work for himself or others with the materials, tools, and time of his supervisor without having received his permission.

If one has taken possession of another person's money through illegitimate means (either by robbery or in some other way), and has repented but is ashamed to admit to the victim that he has his money, he may give him an equivalent amount without his knowledge. For example, he may deposit it in the victim's bank account or give it to him as a gift. If the victim is aware of it, then the person must also ask his forgiveness for having stolen from him and caused him pain. If this is too difficult, he may rely on the fact that the victim will recite *tefillah zakah* on the eve on Yom Kippur (a prayer in which he forgives all the evil done to him).

It is forbidden to leave money or goods in a place where children may take it without the permission of their parents, even if the parents see no harm in leaving it there. This is done in order to prevent children from growing accustomed to stealing.

## In the Light of the Parsha

### Noah's Good Deeds

It is written, "Noah found favor in the eyes of Hashem" (*Bereshith* 6:8).

The Ohr HaChaim *HaKodesh* writes, "This does not pertain to his deeds, for in regards to Hashem's regret for having created man, being a *tzaddik* was useless. We must therefore say that he found favor and was not destroyed. This does not prove that he was not a *tzaddik*, but that being a *tzaddik* could not save him. What saved him was the favor that he obtained through *mitzvot*, for we must realize that some *mitzvot* are able to gain favor for man, some of which are known."

I say that Noah performed three *mitzvot* in order to find favor in Hashem's eyes, the first of which we shall touch upon here. Of Noah's generation we read, "Every imagination of the thoughts of [man's] heart was but evil continually" (*Bereshith* 6:5). This implies that Noah had a good heart, constituting the first *mitzvah* that allowed him to gain favor in Hashem's eyes.

### A Great Responsibility

We know just how grave is the sin of one who causes large numbers of people to sin. It is said that such an individual is not allowed to repent, and that *teshuvah* is difficult and long, for Heaven will not help him. He will therefore need a great deal of merit for his *teshuvah* to be accepted. To whom does all this apply? It applies to a woman who goes about indecently-dressed, making a great number of people sin without any effort on her part, without even realizing it in fact, since it is so easy. Many people sin on her account, and thus she accumulates a massive number of sins, becoming part of those who make the public sin and who are not allowed to repent. Let us be clear about what an indecently-dressed woman can do: Imagine a wholesome young man – a *ben Torah*, or a G-d fearing individual at the very least – who puts an effort into absorbing Torah and a fear of G-d while learning in the Beit HaMidrash. Now imagine that he goes outside after a few hours of learning Torah and sees such a woman. He can lose everything by looking at a single indecent thing, for such a woman will have caused him to lose all his spiritual gains. Every Jewish woman must realize the enormous responsibility that rests upon her shoulders, in order not to place such an obstacle before young Jewish men.

## Your Eyes Shall Behold Your Teacher

### Don Yitzchak Abrabanel

The *gaon* Don Yitzchak Abrabanel *Zatzal*, known for his commentaries on Scripture, was one of the great men of Israel when Jews were expelled from Spain. He was among the descendants of the house of David who arrived in Spain after the destruction of the First Temple. Born in 1492 to Don Yehudah in Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, he studied Torah in his youth with Rabbi Yosef Hayun and Rabbi Yosef Ya'avetz, the famous commentator of *Pirkei Avoth*.

Becoming known for his great wisdom, Don Yitzchak Abrabanel was appointed by King Afonso V as Portugal's royal treasurer. When his son Johanne ascended to the throne, however, Don Yitzchak was forced to flee because of threats made against him by his enemies.

Upon his arrival in Spain, he was shown great honor by King Ferdinand, who appointed him as his own royal treasurer. However this did not last long, for on Av 9, 1492 Jews were expelled from Spain, and Don Yitzchak was also forced to leave on the long road of exile. He passed through one country after another, until he eventually arrived in Venice near the end of his life.

In one of his letters, he states that he never had time to open a book while working in royal courts, composing his books only in the years that followed.

Don Yitzchak Abrabanel died in Venice on Cheshvan 8. 1492. His children laid him to rest in the city of Padua.

### Words That Traversed the Heavens

It is written, "A light shall you make for the *teva*" (*Bereshith* 6:16). The term *teva* ("ark") can also mean "word" – a word of Torah and prayer. The verse would then mean: "A light shall you make for the *teva*" – each word of Torah that emerges from your mouth must be clear and brilliant.

Heaven once revealed to the Arizal that there was a man living in a certain town who had prayed more effectively than him during the holidays of Tishri, a man whose prayers had traversed the Heavens. The Arizal went to this town and began looking for him. When the Arizal found him, he asked: "Are you a *ben Torah*?" The man said no. "Do you know how to pray?" the Arizal continued. "No I don't," said the man. The Arizal then asked, "What did you do on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur?" The man replied, "Rabbi, I don't even know the entire alphabet! I only know *aleph* to *yud*. When I arrived in synagogue and saw that everyone was focused in prayer, while I didn't even know how to pray, my heart sank. I then called out the letters of the alphabet from *aleph* to *yud* and said, 'Sovereign of the universe, assemble these letters into words as You desire, and may they be a favorable offering in Your eyes.' I then repeated this with all my strength, heartbroken as I was."

As it turned out, the heartfelt words of this Jew had done more in Heaven than the prayers of the Arizal!

## In the Light of the Haftarah

### Personal Guarantors

It is written, "For this shall be to Me like the waters of Noah: Just as I swore..." (*Isaiah* 54:9).

Noah did not sufficiently reprimand his generation, nor did he pray for them to repent. This is why the flood is called "the waters of Noah," not "the waters of the flood." The Gemara states, "Whoever can forbid his household [to commit a sin] but does not, he is seized for [the sins of] his household; [if he can forbid] his fellow citizens, he is seized for [the sins of] his fellow citizens; if the whole world, he is seized for [the sins of] the whole world" (*Shabbat* 54b). A person should help those who bring Jews closer to their Father in Heaven; he should support them in every possible way and make their work easier. He thereby exempts himself from the duty of reprimanding others, for all Jews are guarantors for one another.

Why is it written *zeh bazeh* (literally, "one in place of the other"), instead of *zeh lezeh* ("one to the other")? It is because an ordinary guarantor is only approached after the debtor has been addressed, whereas a "personal guarantor" is considered to be like the debtor himself. He is approached directly, even before the debtor himself is addressed. This is why the Jewish people are guarantors for one another, a guarantee that commits each Jew to doing everything possible for his fellowman not to sin. Otherwise the guilt will be considered as his own!