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Noach the Tzadikel

By Rabbi Nissan Antine

Why does Noach get such bad press if his behavior seems to be a model for all religious people to follow? Noach is a prophet who "finds grace in the eyes of God." In response to God's command, he puts his life on hold to build an ark and then dedicates all of his energy to taking care of God's creatures during the flood. Finally, we are told two times that Noach was a tzadik in God's eyes.

Yet, in the eyes of the Rabbis, Noach is nothing special. They take every Midrashic opportunity to let us know that while Noach might have been good, he was not great. "Noach was perfect in his generation." The Rabbis tell us that in Abraham's generation he wouldn't have been anything special. "Noach walked with God." Noach walked with God because he needed the support. Abraham, on the other hand, walked in front of God because his righteousness sustained itself. Why do the Rabbis use every opportunity to chip away at Noach's character and why are they constantly comparing him to Abraham?

When I was a high school student in yeshiva, there was a certain kind of student who was referred to as a tzadikel. The tzadikel was usually a meek student who scrupulously followed Halakha and who was somewhat of a teacher's pet. He always did what he was told. Every time I read the story of Noach and hear the Torah call him a tzadik, I always think of the tzadikel at my yeshiva. Noach's name means pleasant (as in *Rayach Nichoach* – a pleasing aroma). He is pleasant, never confrontational and always obedient. He is the first tzadikel! How different is Noach then the two heroes

of the Bible; Abraham and Moshe? Abraham is very confrontational. When God proposes to destroy Sodom and Gemorah, Abraham protests. Abraham walks in front of God. He is a leader and not a follower.

Perhaps even more compelling than the comparison between Noach and Abraham is the comparison between Noach and Moshe. Both Noach and Moshe are placed in almost identical situations. God tells Noach that He will destroy the entire world and allow the covenant to be realized in Noach's descendants. God tells Moshe on numerous occasions (after the sin of the golden calf and after the sin of the spies) that the entire Jewish people will be destroyed and that the covenant will be realized through Moshe's descendants. Yet, how different are the two responses. Noach obeys and Moshe protests. Moshe tells God that I am not going along with the plan. God is "forced" into relenting because, ironically, as much as Moshe needs God, God needs Moshe. The divine will was that Moshe protest. The situation with Noach is very similar. If Noach doesn't go along with the plan, if Noach isn't so pleasant, then God needs to reconsider the plan. But Noach is obedient and the whole world is destroyed.

As we read Parshat Noach we need to remember that being a tzadikel is not the ultimate religious goal. While listening and following might be important in many situations, we always have to be ready to fight the fight for this is ultimately what God desires.

Rabbi Nissan Antine is the Assistant Rabbi and Director of Education at Beth Sholom Congregation and Talmud Torah in Potomac, MD and an alumnus of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School.