

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Mazel Tov to Duv Guttman on his Bar Mitzvah. Mazel tov to his parents, Binyamin & Bassie Guttman and Shira Guttman; to his grandparents, Mr. & Mrs. Zvi Guttman, Mrs. Tzipporah Weingot, and Mr. & Mrs. Moshe Rosensaft. And to his great-grandparents: Mrs. Lila Weiss and Mr. & Mrs. Michoel Rosensaft.

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May all the sponsors be rewarded for their support of the shul with *bracha*, *hatzlacha*, and good health.

Our parsha opens with what may be the highest praise the Torah gives any human being:

נח איש צדיק תמים הנה בדורתי, את האלקים התהלך נח

Noach was a righteous man, wholehearted in his generations; Noach walked with God.

Righteous. Whole. Walking with God. Three descriptions, each one a lifetime's achievement. And yet Chazal, reading the same Pasuk, are surprisingly critical of Noach. So which is it?

Was Noach a hero or a disappointment? I want to suggest that he was both, and that the answer to the puzzle teaches us something about the kind of people the Torah wants us to be.

Start with the praise. The **Radak**, who reads the Torah with careful attention to its plain meaning,

explains the word *tzaddik* simply: צדיק – שהיו מעשיו בצדק הפך אנשי דורו שהיו אנשי חמס

Righteous: his deeds were just, the opposite of the people of his generation, who were people of violence.

We should not underestimate how hard that is. The **Rambam** writes in Hilchos De'os 6:1:

דרך ברייתו של אדם להיות נמשך בדעותיו ובמעשיו אחר רעיו וחבריו ונוהג כמנהג אנשי מדינתו

It is the nature of a person to be drawn, in his ideas and his actions, after his friends and companions, and to follow the customs of the people of his country.

Therefore, the Rambam says, a person must seek out good company. And if every place he knows is corrupt, he should live apart, and even go out to the caves and the wilderness, rather than adopt their ways.

That was Noach's world. There was no good company to seek out. חמס ותמלא הארץ חמס: the whole earth was filled with violence. And in that world, Noach remained a *mentsch*. *Tamim hayah b'dorosav*. In a generation that was broken, he was whole.

We are living in such an age. The pressure to think what everyone else thinks has never been greater, and it now arrives on a screen in our pocket every few minutes. Noach reminds us that a person can stand in the middle of all of it and remain whole.

As **Rabbi Sacks** wrote: *"To be a Jew is to swim against the current, challenging the idols of the age whatever the idol, whatever the age."*

And yet Chazal were not satisfied. **Rashi** brings the famous disagreement on the word b'dorosav:

יש מרבתינו דורשים אותו לשבח... ויש שדורשים אותו לגנאי, לפי דורו היה צדיק, ואלו היה בדורו של אברהם לא היה נחשב לכולם

Some of our Rabbis expound it as praise... and others expound it critically: by the standards of his generation he was righteous, but had he lived in the generation of Avraham he would not have been considered anything.

Rashi continues with a second comparison. Noach walked with God, es haElokim his'halech, while Avraham is told his'halech lefanai, walk before Me: Noach hayah tzarich sa'ad l'somcho, Noach needed support to hold him up, while Avraham strengthened himself and walked in his righteousness on his own. And the Midrash adds Moshe Rabbeinu to the comparison: chaviv Moshe miNoach. Noach began as ish tzaddik and ended as ish ha'adamah, a man of the soil. Moshe began as ish Mitzri and ended as ish haElokim (**Breishis Rabbah** 36:3).

Notice the direction of each life. Noach begins at the summit, ish tzaddik, and the Torah's last picture of him is a man planting a vineyard and drinking himself into disgrace. In contrast, Moshe begins as a stranger, so Egyptian in appearance that Yisro's daughters call him ish Mitzri, and he ends as the man of God. One life descended from greatness; the other climbed toward it. Chazal seem to be asking what made the difference.

But this is troubling. The **Gemara** (Rosh Hashana 25b) tells us יפתח בדורו כשמואל בדורו: every leader is judged in the context of his own generation. Why measure Noach against Avraham and Moshe at all?

Rav Moshe Shternbuch, in Ta'am V'Da'as, answers with precision. Notice that the Midrash does not say that in a generation of tzaddikim Noach would have been nothing. It says in the generation of Avraham. In any generation of tzadikim, Noach would have been a tzaddik. He fell short only next to Avraham, because Avraham excelled exactly where Noach did not: להיטיב לאחרים. Avraham dedicated himself to bringing others close to Hashem. In his own righteousness, says Rav Shternbuch, Noach reached the peak. What he lacked was the chessed of influencing others. There is the greatness of remaining righteous in a corrupt world, and there is the even more noteworthy greatness of making that world less corrupt. Noach had the first. Avraham and Moshe had both.

The **Zohar** is even sharper. The Navi Yeshayahu calls the flood mei Noach, "the waters of Noach" (Yeshayahu 54:9). Why is the flood named after the one man who was saved from it? Because once Noach was told that he and his family would be saved, la ba'a rachamin al alma, he did not ask for mercy on the world (Zohar I, 67b). And the **Sforno** adds that Noach's family was saved only as a gift of grace, ki lo limdu es doram lada'as es Hashem: they did not teach their generation to know Hashem, as Avraham and Moshe did (Sforno, 6:8).

Compare that with Avraham, who stood before Hashem and argued for Sedom, and whose life produced הנפש אשר עשו בחרן. Compare it with Moshe, who after the cheit ha'egel was offered the very deal Noach accepted. Hashem said: let Me destroy them and make of you a great nation. Moshe refused. מחני נא. מספרך: if You will not forgive them, erase me from Your book.

Noach was a tzaddik in his own space. But the Torah is teaching us that this is not enough.

And yet it is hard to believe that Noach simply did not care. He spent a hundred and twenty years building the teivah. **Rashi** asks why Hashem troubled him with such a project at all:

ולמה הטריחו בבנין זה, כדי שיראוהו אנשי דור המבול עוסק בה מאה ועשרים שנה ושואלין אותו מה זאת לך

Why did He burden him with this construction? So that the people of the generation of the flood would see him occupied with it for a hundred and twenty years and ask him, 'What is this for?' (Rashi, 6:14)

The **Ramban** adds that Hashem made the ark enormous for the same reason:

ראה השם יתברך לעשותה גדולה כדי שיראו אותה בני דורו ויתמהו בה ויספרו עליה וידברו בענין המבול וכנוס הבהמה והחיה והעוף לתוכה, אולי יעשו תשובה.

so that people would see it, wonder about it, talk about the flood, and perhaps do teshuvah

The teivah itself was a hundred-and-twenty-year invitation. So Noach did try. Why did it fail?

Rav Soloveitchik offered a profound answer, recorded in *The Rav Thinking Aloud on the Parsha*. Why did Noach not daven, while Moshe did? Noach held that the dor hamabul was so entrenched in sin, in theft and violence, in avodah zarah and immorality, that they could never be pulled out of it. Moshe believed that no matter how deeply Klal Yisrael had sunk, they always retained the capacity to rise. That is why Moshe davened, and Noach did not.

But that brings us back to our question. If Noach did not believe they could change, why did he spend a hundred and twenty years warning them? The answer is that there is an enormous difference between telling someone that he must change and genuinely believing that he can. The first requires a sense of duty. The second requires faith. Noach fulfilled his duty. Moshe went further. He could look at a nation that had just worshipped a golden calf and still see what they might become.

I think the Rav is telling us something essential about influence. Action and tefillah acquire an entirely different power when they are rooted in a belief in people: a belief that no matter how low someone has sunk, he can still climb out. People can feel when we have given up on them. Noach believed enough in his generation to warn them. He did not believe enough in them to pray for them. Noach spent a hundred and twenty years telling people they had to change. Moshe stood before Hashem insisting that they still could.

Avraham believed in people, and so he could move them. Moshe believed in people, and so he could lead them. Noach did not, and so he could only save himself.

This is not only a lesson for leaders. It is also a lesson for every parent, every teacher and every friend. How do we speak about the child who is struggling, the relative who has drifted, the Jew who no longer comes to shul? Do we speak about them the way Noach spoke about his generation, as a lost cause? Or the way Moshe spoke about Klal Yisrael after the egel, as people who could still rise? The words we use, and even the tone in which we use them, tell people what we believe about them. And people have a way of becoming what we believe they are.

Think about what it means for a child to grow up knowing that his parents believe in him, even when he has disappointed them. Think about what it means for a student to have a rebbe who sees possibilities in him that he cannot yet see in himself. And think about what it means for a Jew who has wandered far from Torah to meet someone who sees not how far he has fallen, but how far he can still rise.

Why didn't Noach believe? **Rashi** gives a startling hint. When the Torah tells us that Noach entered the teivah mipnei mei hamabul, because of the waters of the flood (7:7), Rashi comments: אף נח מקטני אמונה היה, מאמין ואינו מאמין שיבא המבול, ולא נכנס לתיבה עד שדחקהו המים. *Noach too was of little faith. He believed and did not believe that the flood would come, and he did not enter the ark until the waters pushed him.* (Rashi, 7:7)

How can that be? A man who spent a hundred and twenty years building an ark obviously believed in Hashem.

The **Kedushas Levi** asks exactly this question, and also asks why Noach did not daven to annul the decree. His answer is remarkable. Noach did not lack faith in Hashem. He lacked faith in himself:

ונח הגם שהיה צדיק גדול ותמים, היה קטן בעיניו מאוד, ולא היה לו אמונה בעצמו שהוא צדיק מושל ויכול לבטל הגזירה
Although Noach was a great and wholehearted tzaddik, he was very small in his own eyes, and he had no faith in himself that he was a tzaddik with the power to annul the decree.

Noach thought: if I am being saved, and I am no better than anyone else, then they will be saved too. So he did not daven. His humility, admirable in so many ways, became the very reason he failed to recognize the power of his own tefillah.

Noach struggled with two different kinds of faith. He did not fully believe that the people around him could change, and he did not fully believe that he himself had the power to help them change. One is a failure of faith in others. The other is a failure of faith in oneself.

Chazal understood that there is a connection between how we see ourselves and how we see others.

Rabbi Akiva taught that ואהבת לרעך כמוך, love your neighbor as yourself, is a great principle of the Torah.

Ben Azzai said there is an even greater one:

ואהבת לרעך כמוך – רבי עקיבא אומר: זה כלל גדול בתורה. בן עזאי אומר: זה ספר תולדות אדם, זה כלל גדול מזה

"Love your neighbor as yourself: Rabbi Akiva says, this is a great principle of the Torah. Ben Azzai says: 'This is the book of the generations of man' is a greater principle than that." (Sifra, Kedoshim 4:12)

And that pasuk goes on to declare that every human being was created בְּדְמוּת אֱלֹהִים, in the likeness of God (Bereishis 5:1).

Why is that greater? Perhaps because kamocha, as yourself, can depend on how a person sees himself. But the tzelem Elokim does not depend on how we happen to feel about ourselves. It is a truth about every human being, including ourselves.

And perhaps that was Noach's struggle. He saw his own smallness, and he saw the corruption of his generation. But he could not fully see the possibilities Hashem had placed within either of them. He did not believe enough in the power of his own tefillah, or in the capacity of others to change.

Together, these two failures produce a devastating result: a righteous man who can hold onto his own goodness, but cannot imagine that his goodness might transform the world.

So what does Noach's teivah teach us? The Rambam taught us that sometimes we all need one. When the culture around us is corrupt, we must build a protected space and surround ourselves with good influences. Our shul is a teivah. Our schools and our homes are teivos. Without them, nobody survives the flood.

But the story does not end inside. At the end of the year comes the command:

בראשית ח: ט"ז: צא מן התבה אתה ואשתך ובניך ונשי בניך אתך

Go out of the teivah, you and your wife, your sons and your sons' wives with you.

The teivah was never meant to be a permanent home. It was meant to be a preparation. A teivah that never opens its doors is no longer a refuge. It becomes a hiding place. Without the teivah, the street changes us. But if we never leave the teivah, we never change the street. May we have the courage to be different without becoming distant. May we believe in ourselves enough to act, and in others enough never to give up on them. And may we merit to see a world transformed by that faith, with the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash, bimheirah v'yameinu.