

NOACH (GENESIS 6:9-11:32)

You Can't Climb a Grapevine

2002 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

Noah was a "*Tzaddik*", a righteous man. Noah was a perfect *Tzaddik*.

Noah was a man of total righteousness, in his generation. (Genesis, 6:9)

What is meant by "*a man of total righteousness, in his generation*"? He certainly wasn't a man of total righteousness in any other generation. He only lived in his own generation!!

There are two schools of thought:

1 - Noah was a *Tzaddik* in spite of the fact that he was surrounded by a generation of wicked people; he didn't succumb to the peer pressure. He would have been even more righteous had he lived in a righteous generation that would have nurtured and encouraged his innate goodness.

2 - Noah was considered a *Tzaddik* only by virtue of the fact that he was surrounded by a generation of wicked people; compared to the rest of them, he was considered righteous. Had he lived in Abraham's time, Noah would have been considered insignificant. He was, in effect, "a big fish in a small pond."

Regardless of which of these two opinions one accepts, (Rashi quotes both opinions and seems to favor the latter), it is fair to say that Noah was a great man, chosen by G-d to become the father of the surviving human race. He was certainly far beyond the level of anyone in our own generation. Noah was the humble servant of G-d. For years he toiled, ignoring the taunts of those who rejected his prophecy and ridiculed his construction project. He warned them that G-d would destroy them if they didn't change their ways. But they ignored him.

*Noah did everything as G-d had told him. Then G-d said to Noah, "Come to the Ark . . . for it is you that I have seen to *be righteous. . . "(6:22-7:1) G-d blessed Noah. . . (9:1) G-d said to Noah. . . I estab**lish my covenant with you. . . " (*8-9)*

Noah was, without a doubt, a *Tzaddik*. However, in spite of his righteousness, he allowed himself to become a "*man of the earth*," a base individual*:*

Noah, the man of the earth, debased himself, and planted a vineyard. (The Talmud says that this vineyard miraculously grew and matured the day it was planted.) *He drank of the wine and became intoxicated, and uncovered himself in his tent.* (9:20)

The story gets worse. Noah, lying there drunk and naked, was humiliated by his son and grandson, Ham and Canaan. Noah's other sons, Shem and Japheth, entered the tent walking backwards so as not to view their father's compromising situation, and they covered him. When Noah sobered up, he realized how his son and grandson had dishonored him, and he cursed them. Noah blessed Shem and Japheth for their respect and sensitivity.

How did Noah, this great man, who is called **a man of righteousness**, descend so quickly to become **a man of the earth**? How did the savior of mankind so quickly find himself in a drunken stupor, subject to the scorn of his own son and grandson?

Rashi tells us that the problem was with his emphasis. He had just saved the remnant of the world from total annihilation. It was time to rebuild. He could have chosen a more constructive first project than planting a vineyard. Why didn't he plant wheat and provide the world with the "staff of life?" The world had just been destroyed due to rampant immorality. Couldn't Noah have found a better first step than getting himself a drink?!!

As I was typing this, my daughter looked over my shoulder and reminded me of the contrast between Moses and Noah. The *Midrash* points out that Moses went from being **a man of Egypt**** (Exodus, 2:19) to **a man of G-d**. (Deuteronomy, 33:1) Noah went from being **a man of total righteousness** to becoming **a man of the earth**. Moses spent his lifetime growing. Noah allowed himself to fall. Once we head in a negative direction, it is amazing how quickly and far a person can sink.

We are not on the level of Moses. We are not on the level of Noah. What we need to remember is the importance of the direction in which we are headed.

The Talmud tells us that G-d allows us to go in whatever direction we want. If we want to climb the spiritual ladder, He will help us accomplish our goals. If we prefer to go in a negative direction, He won't stand in our way.

There is something that is much more important than where we are currently. The real question is, where are we going?

Have a great Shabbos.

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