

Parashat Noach 5783, 2022:

And Noach Walked with Hashem

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, Shayndel bat Mordechai Yehudah, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Noach is one of the most fascinating people in Tanach, if for no other reason than the Almighty chose him to restart humankind in the aftermath of the Flood. The final verse in Parashat Bereishit sheds light as to why Hashem made this choice: “*v’Noach matza chane b’einai Hashem—And Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem.*” (6:8). What was the source of this special status? The first verse in our *parasha* helps us answer this question: “*These are the generations of Noach; Noach ish tzaddik haya b’dorotav—Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noach walked with the Almighty.*” (6:9)

The first part of this *pasuk* contains the word, “*b’dorotav* (in his generations).” Although the Talmudic sages, Rav and Shmuel, and Rashi (1040-1105), debate whether this term connotes a positive or negative perspective, the Ramban (1194-1270) takes a decidedly positive stance:

In my view, the most satisfying explanation, according to the simple meaning, is that he [Noach] was *hatzaddik b’dorot hahame*—the only righteous person in those generations; there wasn’t a righteous or *tamim*—perfect person in his generation besides him. Similarly, “For it is you [Noach] that I have seen to be *tzaddik*—righteous before Me in this generation” (7:1) – there was no one else that was worthy of being saved in that generation. It states “in his generations” because many generations had passed since the time people began to corrupt their ways, and there was no righteous person on earth except for him. (Translation, Sefaria.org with my emendations)

Herein, the Ramban cites the second of the two instances in *Sefer Bereishit* wherein the word, “*tzaddik*,” is mentioned in reference Noach: “For it is you [Noach] that I have seen to be *tzaddik*—

righteous—before Me in this generation” (7:1) Classic Torah exegesis leads us to ask, “If Noach was given the appellation of, *tzaddik* in the earlier *pasuk*, “*Noach ish tzaddik haya b’dorotav*,” (6:9) why did the text repeat it once again?” My rebbe and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known as the “Rav” by his followers and disciples, addresses this question in his combined analysis of *Sefer Bereishit* 6:22 and 7:1. In so doing, he draws an easily overlooked parallel between Noach and *Avraham Avinu*:

“And Noah did; according to all that God commanded him..., for it is you that I have seen as a righteous man (*tzaddik*) before Me.” Abraham’s greatness was based on his firm belief in God’s promises...Abraham often found himself in situations where he was ridiculed due to his faith. Therefore, with all of Abraham’s accomplishments, the one attribute that God explicitly praises is his pure belief: “And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him as righteousness.” (15:6). Noah’s belief was similarly tested—he built an ark for many years, explaining to onlookers that God was set to destroy the world, while they derisively laughed at him. Despite all the obstacles, and the taunts of his contemporaries, Noah did not deviate from God’s command. Once Noah clearly demonstrated his belief by completing the ark, God therefore remarked on his righteousness. (Public lecture, Boston, 1977, cited in *Chumash Mesoras HaRav, Sefer Bereishit*: with Commentary Based Upon the Teachings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Dr. Arnold Lustiger, editor, page 51, underlining my own)

In the Rav’s view, a significant difference obtains between the two times Noach is labelled a *tzaddik*: “*Noach ish tzaddik haya b’dorotav*,” represents “Noach the potential *tzaddik*.” While he had sterling *middot* (ethical characteristics) and faith in Hashem, Noach had not yet faced the challenge of *emunah* (faith) under fire, that is, the contempt of the rest of the world for maintaining his seemingly incomprehensible theological positions. Once, however, he did “according to all that God commanded him,” demonstrating his *bitachon* (*emunah in action*) by completing the construction of the ark, despite the derision of his peers, his level of *tziddkut* (righteousness) changed. Now he was “Noach the actual *tzaddik*,” and “God therefore remarked on his righteousness.”

For the Rav, Noach emerges as the precursor of *Avraham Avinu* for, like Avraham, he refused to be swayed by the innumerable detractors and falsehoods of his age. Despite the obstacles before him, Noach ever “walked with the Almighty.”

We, too, live in a time of unceasing challenges. May we, like Noach, have the strength to overcome the impediments in our path, actualizing our *emunah* into righteous actions, and thereby ever walk with the Almighty. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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*** My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at:

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*** I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik's English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link: [The Rav](#)