

**SELF-IDENTIFICATION IN AN EVER-CHANGING WORLD**

This week, we read the story of one of the most cryptic characters in all of תנ"ך. Although he lived a very long life of 950 years, very little is written about נח. We have no recount of his life before the תיבה, which was almost 500 years.

We're first introduced to נח at the end of last week's פרשה. First, we are told that he was the son of למך.<sup>1</sup> The פסוק then goes on to say he was named נח because he was supposed to provide relief for the people from their work. The מדרש תנחומא<sup>2</sup> clarifies the פסוק as meaning that because of the curse wrought upon אדם הראשון, they'd sow wheat and would reap thorns and thistles. Once נח was born, the curse was over. Another פשט is that agricultural tools were introduced in the days of נח. On this, the גמרא<sup>3</sup> states that when a צדיק is born, good comes into the world, using our פסוק as a proof. It would therefore seem that נח was a צדיק. This is a valid assumption, as our פרשה starts off<sup>4</sup> "נח איש צדיק". However, the פסוק adds "תמים היה בדורותיו", leading us to question the true nature of נח's status of a צדיק. What exactly does "בדורותיו" come to teach us?

There is an interesting מחלוקת brought down<sup>5</sup> regarding this question, but I also find it interesting who said each opinion. רבי יוחנן said this expression in the פסוק should be interpreted לגנאי, as a disgrace. The אברהם of his generation comes to show that in a more righteous generation, such as in that of אבינו, he wouldn't have been on such a high מדרגה. However, ריש לקיש reads the פסוק through the lens of שבח, praise. Being that נח was already on such a high level, how much better he would have been with better influences around him. We know from the גמרא<sup>6</sup> that ריש לקיש used to be a robber and gladiator, and was brought back onto the right path (interestingly enough by רבי יוחנן). We see that ריש לקיש had the mentality of a fulfilled potential. Getting back to the topic at hand, we see a proof within the פסוק itself for רבי יוחנן. The תורה תמימה<sup>8</sup> brings down that when the מבול started, נח had to be forced into the תיבה, because he was lacking in his אמונה<sup>9,10</sup>. Therefore, the תורה תמימה wants to suggest that the לשון of davka brought out the opinion of רבי יוחנן, for if ריש לקיש was indeed correct, and he was this really big צדיק, he wouldn't have to be forced in, because his אמונה wouldn't be lacking at all!

The תורה תמימה continues further and proves this from our davening. In ראש on מוסף זכרונות. "וגם את נח באהבה זכרת...על כן זכרוננו בא לפניך...להרבות זרעו כעופרי תבל" השנה, we say "and נח too, You remembered with love... Therefore, his remembrance came before You...to multiply his seed like the dust of the earth". He wants to suggest that the לשון of "על כן" suggests that the reason to spare נח was something temporary, as opposed to a more perpetual aspect. רקב"ה only remembered נח for his temporary צדקות. I believe the תורה תמימה got this idea from the end of last week's פרשה. The פסוקים<sup>11</sup> tell us how רקב"ה said He will destroy the world and all its inhabitants. Yet, the next פסוק, the last פסוק

1 בראשית ה.כט

2 מדרש תנחומא בראשית יא

3 סנהדרין קיג:

4 בראשית ו.ט

5 סנהדרין קח.

6 בבא מציעא פד. עם פירוש רש"י

7 עיין תענית כא.

8 בראשית ו באור טו

9 בראשית ז.ז

10 בראשית רבה לב.ו

11 בראשית ו.ז-ח

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of פרשת בראשית, tells us how נח found favor in הקב"ה's eyes. This juxtaposition tells us that הקב"ה considered destroying נח as well, but he found favor in His eyes. For הקב"ה to even have a אמינא to destroy נח, it must have been that he wasn't really such a big צדיק.

It is interesting to note that after the מבול, the next time we meet נח is when he got drunk, and his sons had to cover his nakedness. How is it that he could've gone from such a high level of צדקות to this lowly, drunken state? The כתב סופר says that נח's צדקות lied in the pressure of not wanting to be like those around him. Now that there was no one around him, he failed to internalize his character beforehand, and fell to the level of the now extinct degenerates whom he saw wiped away before his very eyes.

While we may never know who נח really was, we can learn a lesson from him through his progeny. We see that when שם and יפת covered up נח, the פסוק<sup>12</sup> relates the story in the singular, saying "ויקח שם ויפת". Rashi explains that שם took more of an initiative, while יפת was a bandwagoner. The מדרש<sup>13</sup> tells us that נח didn't believe in himself. We see this in the מדרש that נח had to be supported by הקב"ה in his undertaking, as opposed to אברהם, who "walked before G-d". שם believed in himself enough to do what was right even when no one was watching, which is why we are called "Semites". יפת, on the other hand, cared what other people thought about him. In today's day and age, we are more inclined towards self-identification, not letting others put labels on us, telling us who and what we are. Instead of turning this into the controversy we all know and love to argue about, we should put a positive spin on this. We should be finding ourselves, who we want to be, even and especially if it goes against everyone else's wishes. We should be זוכה to be like שם and אברהם, able to stand tall in a world where everyone around us is short. With that, we should unlock our true potential, and be the best עובדי השם we can possibly be. אם ירצה השם, this unlocking of our identities should bring משיח and the המקדש, speedily in our days.

12 שם ט.כג

13 בראשית רבה ל'י