

From the High School

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Some Sages comment that if Noach was able to be righteous in such a decadent and corrupt generation, then his great righteousness would have been even greater had he been afforded the opportunity to live among righteous individuals. Other Sages comment that in comparison to the wicked in his generation Noach was deemed a *tzadik*, but had he lived among virtuous people he would have been insignificant.

As a yeshiva student at the Telshe Yeshiva, one of my rebbeim shared that while these opinions seem incompatible, they are not necessarily contradictory. The *midrash* is highlighting both the virtues and potential pitfalls of living in an environment that is isolated from Torah morals and antithetical to Torah values. If one is successful in maintaining a Torah way of life and continuing their quest for spiritual growth, one is praiseworthy for having bucked the trend and holding steadfast to one's beliefs and values. At the same time, we can only imagine that given the opportunity to associate with spiritually like-minded individuals, such a person would reach even greater heights. In fact, it is also important to note that there is a certain feeling of heroism and almost a glamour associated with holding on while one attempts to swim against the current. Often, this feeling alone is sufficient to satisfy one's religious feelings and it may replace a person's desire for constant growth. Such an individual must ask one's self how he or she will fare upon re-entering the vibrancy of the Jewish community. Will one still maintain one's spiritual trajectory or succumb to mediocrity, rote and routine?

As members of the American Jewish community, we are often faced with both sides of this equation. On the one hand, hopefully we are part of a Jewish community of *tzadikim* and *temimim*, but on the other hand, as we periodically observe the larger American community and some of its antithetical Torah views, we can get the feeling of being a Noach and being tasked with the mission of moral survival and persistence. May the Almighty assist us on our journey towards eternity with the blessing of being *tzadikim* and *temimim* in every situation.

- Rabbi Shlomo Landau — HS, Judaic Faculty

Answers to questions on page 1

- (1) *Shem, Cham and Yefet*
- (2) 7 male and 7 female
- (3) A raven
- (4) Olive tree
- (5) He mixed up the languages

Parshat Noach

Friday, October 12, 2018

ג חשוון תשע"ט

From the Lower School

1. What are the names of *Noach's* three sons?
2. How many *Behemot Tehorot* (pure animals) of each species did *Noach* bring on the ark?
3. What was the first bird that Noach sent out to search for land?
4. What tree did the branch that the dove found come from?
5. What happened to the people building the Tower of Babel?

— Rabbi Aron Srolovitz, Assistant Principal of JKHA

Answers can be found on the last page.

From the Middle School

The Power of Potential

The first pasuk in this week's parsha begins with the famous depiction of Noach as an - איש צדיק תמים היה בדורותיו - as a pious and righteous man in his generation. Rashi explains that this pasuk can be interpreted either positively – that if Noach was considered righteous in his generation one can only imagine what type of a righteous person he would be in a more virtuous generation – or negatively – that Noach was only considered righteous relative to the others in the generation, but that had he been living in Avraham's generation he would not have stood out at all.

The Maharal posits two possible interpretations of Rashi's depictions of Noach to explain why Noach merited to be saved. While Noach may not have reached the spiritual level of Avraham, he did excel in his generation, and that is something to be celebrated and rewarded. Noach lived in a challenging time, when the world was full of corruption to which Noach could have easily succumbed. Yet Noach

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From the Middle School

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stood alone in the face of all of this challenge; he worked the hardest and developed himself as the tzadik of HIS generation, and therefore he merited to be saved. So often we attempt to compare ourselves to the accomplishments and achievements of others. However, the lesson that we learn from this interpretation of the Maharal is that we need to ensure that we are focusing on and excelling in our *דורותינו*, our particular life circumstances, and becoming the best person that we can.

The Maharal's second interpretation is that Noah was not saved because of who he was. In reality, Noah in his generation was not all that special and impressive. Rather, Noah was saved because of Hashem's confidence in who Noah could become. Even when we feel mired in situations of challenge and difficulty we must remember that we possess the potential to soar beyond these circumstances, and we should continue to strive to become even greater people.

- Dr. Ruth Glasser — JKHA School Psychologist

From the High School

Did Noah Need the Taiva

In this week's *parsha*, *parshat Noach*, Hashem tells Noah that everyone in the land has sinned and Hashem is going to send a flood to completely destroy the world. Hashem says that He will save Noah and that his descendants will repopulate the world. To be saved, Hashem says that Noah must build an ark and gather two of each animal to live along with him and his family on the ark. Noah builds the ark over the course of 120 years. During the flood he and his family live on the ark for 40 days and 40 nights as the *passuk* says, "*Vayehi hageshem al ha'aretz arba'im yom v'arba'im laila*, (7:12).

When learning the story of Noah and the *teivah*, one may ask: Why does Noah need to build an ark for 120 years in order to be saved from the flood? If Hashem is going to save Noah anyway, why does Noah need to spend 120 years building an ark? Couldn't he be saved in any other way?

Rabbi Shraga Simmons of Aish explains that the midrash says that Hashem wanted Noah to take on such a strange project so that while he was building the ark, those around him would ask Noah what he was doing and Noah would be able to influence them to change their wrong ways. Noah did not need the ark, as he was already worthy of being saved, but the ark was to help to inspire others to be saved; however

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Noah was not successful and after 120 years he did not convince those around him to change. Instead, he took the ark as an opportunity to save himself.

Rabbi Simmons compares Noah's actions to a wealthy man who in the winter warms himself by wearing warm coats instead of building a fire. By wearing warm coats, the wealthy man only helps himself; had he built a fire, he would have benefited those around him. Noah chooses to save himself instead of helping those around him change their evil ways as well. For this reason, in *Yeshayahu* the the flood is called "the waters of Noah" (54:9).

Kabbalists say that the word for ark, "*teivah*," also means "word." In life, we want to isolate ourselves and take care of our family, just as Noah aimed to do. The reality is that it is our responsibility to reach out and use our **words** in order to help those around us do good. Noah was given 120 years to build the *teivah*. We too, are given 120 years, a lifetime, to build our *teivah*, to reach out, influence those around us, and make a positive impact. The winter's coming—let's build a fire to stay warm!

- Abigail Rosenfeld is a Freshman at RYKHS

Being *Tzadikim Temimim*

Over the years I have had many conversations with our students and alumni as to the pros and cons of different universities as they pertain to their religious growth. Students that attend schools with a strong Jewish presence and a vibrant religious life tout the virtues of ensuring their ongoing Jewish connection by selecting an institution with many religious outlets and opportunities. In contrast, often I hear students express the sentiment that they have always been surrounded by a strong Jewish community, so that by selecting a school with a small Jewish population and limited religious possibilities they feel that can finally own their Judaism when they still remain strong in their commitment to Torah and mitzvot. While I am not going to attempt to justify one school of thought over the other, it is interesting to note both of these sentiments are expressed in the beginning of *parshat Noach*.

The *parsha* begins by extolling the virtues of Noah as a "*tzadik*" (a righteous man) and a "*tam*" (perfect) but not before adding the words "*bedorotav*," "in his generation" (*Bereishit* 6:9). Rashi, quoting *Midrash Tanchuma*, brings conflicting interpretations in the word "*bedorotav*."

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