

## Traveling First Class in Wartime

"Noach ish tzaddik tamim haya b'dorosav" (6:9). In Sanhedrin 108a, R. Yochanan reads b'dorosav critically: only in his own generation was Noach a tzaddik, and not in other generations. Reish Lakish reads it as praise: if he was a tzaddik even in his generation, he would have been one all the more in a better generation. [The Alter of Novardok](#), R. Yosef Yoizel Horowitz, in *Madregas HaAdam*, written during the First World War, explains that the Amoraim are not arguing about the substance of Noach's righteousness or how it measured against Avraham Avinu's. He lived a righteous life. Their question is what made Noach a tzaddik, and what forced him into it.

The Alter gives a *mashal* from the railways of his day. A man who travels first class in peacetime, when every car on the train has empty seats, shows you that he is wealthy. In wartime, soldiers pack the cheaper cars, and a first-class ticket proves nothing about the passenger's means, since it was the only way onto the train.

Why was Noach traveling “first class” - living a life of higher spiritual elevation? R. Yochanan suggests that the corruption of his generation left him with no choice. He was forced to choose a righteous path so he wouldn't mingle with the lower classes around him. The only seats available to a good person were in first class. Reish Lakish disagrees not with Noach's stature, but with his motivation. In Avraham's generation, he could have lived a moral life in coach. But, of his own volition, he strove for something higher and holier.

In recent years, many of us were pushed into first class. We davened more, learned more, and showed up for Klal Yisrael because there were no other options. The other “cars” were “full.” The Alter would assert that this does not diminish that growth. Sitting in First Class is still sitting in First Class. But Reish Lakish reminds us that we have what to prove when other options seem available. If things lighten this year, as we pray they will, we must keep pushing ourselves to the front of the train.