

IN HIS GENERATION

by Rabbi Label Lam

"These are the generations of Noach, Noach was a completely righteous man in his generation, Noach walked with Elochim." (Breishis 6:9)

In his generation: There are those from our sages that learn this as an expression of praise: How much more so had he been in a generation of righteous people he would have been even more righteous. There are others that learn this as a- denigration: In relation to his generation he was righteous. Had he been in the generation of Avraham though, he would not have been considered worthy whatsoever. (Rashi)

These and these, they are both the words of the living G-d! (Eruvin 13B)

How can both statements about Noach be true? Shouldn't the truth about a matter be more precise? Was Noach righteous or was he not? How can both be true?

One fine day this summer I found myself as a back seat driver with a group of gentlemen on a ride that would take us almost six hours in each direction. The driver arrived with his luxury SUV to pick us up and he immediately plugged the desired destination into his built in GPS navigator. The other front seat passenger stepped in with his portable guidance system and he proceeded to enter the same final address.

The fun started immediately. The projected time of arrival varied between them by a good number of minutes. Then the voice commands began to disagree about how to reach the highway. Now one was saying we should exit and turn around while the other was insisting we continue to proceed on the thruway. It was comical. Not until the last fifteen miles did they begin to agree consistently.

They were each computers with legitimate maps and either one alone could have delivered us to our desired location. Maybe one was inclined to give the most direct approach while the other took into account other conditions and factors like whether we are likely to confront lights, slower speed zones, rush hour traffic, or whether the road allows for commercial vehicles etc. There are any number of factors that might play a role in picking and programming one route over another. The only trouble might come if we mix n match rather than to stay consistent with one message. Only by the trip's end when the variables were few might the voice commands hope to be coordinated.

Entertainment aside, we realized that we had been treated to an excellent example of the Talmudic notion of "these and these, they are both the word of the living G-d!"

Was Noach righteous or not? If we weigh the difficulty factor, considering that he had to resist the enormous corruptive influences swirling about him and we project that without the social pressure of those head-winds he would have striven even farther, then he could have been an equal to Avraham. However, when we become aware that Noach had no proactive program to reach and save the doomed population of his time as Avraham did in his day and age, then albeit he was a loyal and dutiful servant of G-d but he was not quite of the stature of Avraham. Can we ever know how he would have been in the time of Avraham? Was he righteous in spite of his generation or only relative to his generation? HASHEM could have placed him in Avraham's exact time period to test the thesis but since history took a certain road all we may ever know is that *"Noach was a completely righteous man in his generation."* DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).