

FROM LIFE

by Rabbi Label Lam

And Noah began (profaned himself)- the man of the earth, and planted a vineyard. And he drank of the wine, and was drunk and he was uncovered within his tent. (Breishis 9:20-21)

And Noah began: "Vaychal"- This can be understood as "he made himself profane"- for he should have first engaged in planting something different. — Breishis Rabbah . i.e., he should not have planted a vineyard, from which wine is produced, but other trees. (Rashi)

Why did Noah degrade himself by planting wine first and getting drunk? ` Was he not introduced to us as a "righteous and perfect man"? Why did he deviate so dramatically from his stature as an extra good man?

Here's a story hot off the presses, pun intended! Just this past Friday night I was enjoying a slow paced and conversation filled walk back with a few of my boys accompanied part of the time by a local Talmud scholar who was filling my ears with interesting ideas about a subject of common interest. It could not have been more peaceful and delightful except for the fact that I was feeling hungry and I could hardly wait for the delicious Shabbos meal to begin. As we turned the corner for the final stretch of about five houses or so, I noticed on the opposite side of the street a young Rav from the neighborhood who was also slowly making his way home. I remembered that I been struggling with an unresolved question in Hallacha and I thought that this may be the opportunity to seek an answer.

I crossed the street to greet him and we started our discussion while continuing to walk. While on our way, I perceived a smell of smoke. He stood still and curiously agreed that somebody must have been burnt leaves or perhaps dinner. As we passed the next house it became suspiciously evident that it might be coming from this house. Taking the risk of being intrusive we knocked on the door and inquired about the smell of smoke. There was a mommy and a few young daughters waiting for the father to come home. The house was quiet and calm and smoke free. We expressed our concern based on the smell of smoke and curiously proceeded to the next house where the scene was serenely similar and smoke free.

We were almost ready to abandon our search assuming someone had a wood burning stove somewhere in the neighborhood when a neighbor from the second house prompted by our inquiry noticed smoke billowing from the Sukkah on the porch of the first house. I immediately ran over and kicked open the door and found two mattresses standing upright leaning against the back wall of

the house and resting on a flood light. The mattresses were on fire. I dragged one mattress in flames off the porch and a neighbor pulled off the other. We estimated that in a matter of a few minutes the entire house would have been suddenly engulfed in flames. The family was on the inside a few feet away where the window was shut due to the cold weather. I went home and ate a delicious Shabbos meal.

After Shabbos I received a call from my neighbor who expressed his deep and sincere gratitude. I told him that I was only glad that things had turned out the way they did considering how it almost did not. After hanging up I reflected on how horrible I might have felt had I walked on by and not taken an extra step to investigate- how waking up the next morning knowing I could have done something and failed to act- and how filled with regret and angst I might have been. I realized it was a close for them and for me too.

Noach was different than Avraham. He is credited with remaining good and decent but criticized for not having an active program to reach out and help save others. After a year in the Ark, Noach stepped out for the first time assessed the magnitude of the human devastation. Everyone was gone. He suffered from survivor syndrome. So he turned to wine. While some drink wine to remember, as we do on numerous occasions like Kiddush, many indulge in drink to forget. That haunting agony lead Noach to drink not L'Chaim "to life" but M'Chaim - **from life**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).