

# PARSHAS NOACH - THE GOOD RASHA AND THE BAD TZADIK

*by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein*

## The Good Rasha and the Bad Tzadik<sup>1</sup>

*Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations. Noach walked with G-d.*

No good goes unrewarded. People can be considered good for different kinds of admirable behavior, and even earn the distinction of being called righteous. The Torah doesn't simply call Noach "righteous" and nothing more, because righteousness would have been insufficient to save him from the wide-spread calamity that engulfed everyone else. In times of monumental disaster, Chazal teach, even the righteous are not spared.

Therefore, the Torah tells us that he was also "perfect." Actually, it doesn't call Noach perfect, but calls his righteousness perfect. There are more- and less- perfect kinds of righteousness; Noach achieved the more significant kind. The term tzadik describes a person's relationship with HKBH. It says nothing of the way he treats human beings. Perfected righteousness, however, means that Noach was good as well to the people of his time.

The distinction between two types of tzadik is a familiar one. Chazal employ it, for instance, in speaking of the difference between a tzadik who is treated well in this world, to one whose circumstances are not so happy. Only the tzadik gamur, the "complete" tzadik, is guided through a succession of untroubled years.

Elsewhere<sup>[2]</sup>, Chazal differentiate between the "good" tzadik, and the tzadik who is not good. They find room for this distinction in a pasuk: "Say [about the] righteous that it is good, for they shall eat the fruits of their deeds. But woe to the wicked who does evil, for the payment for his deeds will be done to him<sup>[3]</sup>." If we must tell a tzadik that it is good, there must be a kind of righteousness that is not so good. The "good" tzadik, Chazal explain, is one who is good to his fellow man. He can expect to taste the fruit of his deeds even in this world. Similarly, there is a wicked person who is not so wicked, because he is good to people. Only the thoroughly wicked - the wicked who does evil, meaning that he treats people evilly - will experience punishment for his deeds in the here and now.

If this sounds correct, it shouldn't! What are we relating to the tzadik when we tell him that he will only see reward in this world if he is good to people? He need not be righteous at all for that to happen. Even the wicked are rewarded in this world for their kindness to others! Moreover, Chazal

teach us that even an idolater will be rewarded for his noble behavior to other humans, as in the case of Dama ben Nesina, who was so richly rewarded for the respectful way he treated his father.

Something is missing in our equation. It is found in the final phrase that describes Noach. Noach "walked with G-d." Noach was not such a righteous person by his nature, by "accident" of birth. He had to work at it, forcing himself to do as Hashem would want him to do, because he made himself walk with G-d. Gradually, he became a better person, perfect in his righteousness because he became good to people as well as to his Creator.

This made the difference between surviving the Flood and perishing along with everyone else. Righteousness - even perfect righteousness - might entitle a person to protection that lies within the laws of Nature. To ride out the effects of the Mabul, however, Noach required Divine protection that ignored teva, rather than worked with it and through it. This will only happen to the tzadik who goes beyond his own nature, and turns himself into a better person, which includes goodness to other people.

This change is expected and predictable. When the tzadik nurtures his righteousness through his effort, responding to Hashem's Will, he gradually transforms himself. The natural outcome of sustained righteousness is growing into a loftier position. If anything, it is his initial position that is artificial and cannot last. The tzadik who is not by his own nature good to others lacks this goodness only at the beginning of his development. He may find it difficult to be good and kind, but eventually, he becomes permeated with Hashem's goodness, and develops the capacity that first evaded him. Similarly, the wicked person who is good to others cannot persist in this goodness. When he distances himself from Hashem, he gradually becomes more thoroughly wicked, so that after a while, he no longer is good to others either.

This, then, is the meaning of the verse in Yeshaya. Only the tzadik "gamur" reaps the fruit of his good in this world, because only the person who is righteous in his behavior to Hashem shows goodness to people on a sustained basis. "Gamur" does not mean absolute, or to the fullest measure. It means complete, as in the end of a long process. The tzadik who stays righteous for a long time because of his commitment to Hashem gradually becomes a completed tzadik, a better person in his relationship with others, even if this was not his original inclination. Similarly, the wicked person ultimately loses his good nature towards his fellow man. He becomes thoroughly evil, so that he is punished even in this world.

## **Of Servants and Slaves<sup>4</sup>**

*Cursed is Canaan. A slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers.*

Canaan did not hold exclusive rights to the institution of slavery. Both Shem and Yefes would see many of their descendants sold into slavery, or pressed into full servitude as spoils of war. Neither can it be said that something about Canaan would ensure that all his progeny would become slaves.

This simply is not true. Some of Canaan's offspring would lead great, free nations.

Canaan's curse was more subtle. While all families of Man would produce some slaves, those that stemmed from Canaan would better fit the role. The descendants of Shem and Yefes who became slaves would show inner resistance to slavery. Their yearning for freedom would in time pay off, and they would shake off their shackles. Slaves from the stock of Canaan would find slavery suitable and bearable, and persist in their lowly station.

Canaan's curse was that many of his offspring would be altogether suited for the job of slavery.

---

1. *Based on Ha'amek Davar and Harchev Davar, Bereishis 6:9*

2. Kiddushin 40A

3. Yeshaya 3:10-11

4. Based on Ha'amek Davar, Bereishis 9:25

---