

# WHEN THE ILLEGITIMATE BECOMES LEGITIMATE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 118, Suicide: Is It Ever Permitted? Good Shabbos!*

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## First A Mensch, Then a Tzadik Tamim

This week's parsha begins with the words "These are the chronicles of Noach. Noach was a righteous faultless man (Ish Tzadik Tamim) in his generations" [Bereishis 6:9].

Rav Gifter once visited Ner Israel for Parshas Noach and made the following observation:

We see from this pasuk [verse] that Noach possessed three qualities. He was a Tzadik (righteous person). He was a Tamim (a completely faultless person). And he was an Ish (a 'person'). However, notice that the sequence of the adjectives is Ish, Tzadik, Tamim. We thus see, said Rav Gifter, that before a person can be a Tzadik or a Tamim, he first has to be an Ish -- a Mensch (one who acts like a proper and dignified man).

Rav Gifter told an interesting story. Rav Yisrael Salanter had a son-in-law who was about to take for himself, his own son-in-law. The future son-in-law was a tremendous scholar and Rav Yisrael's son-in-law was so impressed with him that he sent a notebook of the young man's Torah insights to Rav Yisrael Salanter, so that Rav Yisrael could see who his granddaughter was marrying.

Rav Yisrael read the Torah insights and he sent back to his son-in-law, "Yes. You've showed me that this son-in-law that you are considering is in fact a Gaon, but the verse does not say 'I gave my daughter to this Gaon'; it does not say 'I gave my daughter to this illui'; it says 'I gave my daughter to this **man**' [Devorim 22:16]. It is nice to be a Gaon and a Talmud Chacham, but first you must impress me that he is a Mensch."

(This future grandson-in-law whose chiddushei Torah impressed Rav Yisrael Salanter was none other than Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski).

## "In His Generation" -- Rash"i is Misunderstood

A famous Rash"i on the words quoted earlier "...in his generations" quotes two opinions. "There are those of our Rabbis who interpret favorably -- certainly if he had been in Abraham's generation he would have been more righteous (he would have had Abraham as a role model). And there are those who interpret unfavorably -- had he been in Abraham's generation he would not have been considered anything special."

The common understanding of this Rash"i is that there is a disagreement between the two opinions. According to the first opinion if Noach lived in the time of Avraham he would have been more righteous, according to the second opinion he would have been less righteous.

Rav Yakov Kaminetsky, z"tl, says the common understanding of Rash"i is erroneous. Rav Yakov claims there is no dispute between the two quoted opinions.

Everyone agrees that if Noach lived in the generation of Avraham he would have been a Tzadik -- just as righteous as he was in his own generation. The second opinion just adds that this righteousness of Noach would not have been considered anything special had he lived in Avraham's generation.

The reason is that Avraham worked on the wicked of his generation, to make them better and Noach did not work on the wicked of his generation to make them better.

However, this seems to contradict the Medrash that Noach did go around and try to convince people. He would tell them -- "You abandon the One Whose voice breaks the Cedars and you worship wood and stone! How can you be so foolish?"

The Medrash however goes on to say that while Noach did in fact chastise his generation and did care about the spiritual fate of these people, he made a mistake. He thought people were 'in to' Idolatry and consequently he would argue with them about that. In fact the people knew that Idolatry was meaningless. They actually lusted for sexual immorality. They needed a 'heter', so they started worshipping these things, so they could then feel justified in adopting a looser moral code. Noach chastised them about the wrong thing.

By putting the Medrashim together, we see that if Noach were in the generation of Avraham, he would not have been considered such a Tzadik because he chastised the people about the wrong things.

However, Rav Yakov asks, maybe Noach would not have been a Chochom (wise person), but he would still have been a Tzadik (Righteous person). Was his mistake one of piety or was it one of astuteness? He was a Tzadik! He tried, but he made a mistake. That is not a lack of righteousness. That is a lack of understanding one's generation.

Rav Yakov points out that we see an unbelievable thing from this Chazal: A lack of wisdom is a lack in righteousness. Wisdom is seeking the Truth. If a person wants to know the Truth and he seeks the Truth with his entire heart and soul, he will merit achieving the Truth. If he does not reach the Truth, it reflects not a lack of IQ; it reflects a lack of motivation.

Chazal are telling us is that if Noach was fully motivated he would have achieved the Truth. He was not lacking in intelligence. He was lacking in achieving the Truth, which stemmed from a lack of motivation and ultimately from a lack of total Righteousness.

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### **The Flood Comes When the Illegitimate Becomes Legitimate**

There is a uniquely insightful Medrash relating to a verse in this week's Parsha. On the verse "...for all flesh has corrupted their way on the land" [Bereishis 6:12] the Medrash [Vayikra Rabba 23:9] elaborates: "Everyone and everything became amoral. Even animals became so morally corrupt and decadent that one species mated with another species -- dogs with wolves, horses with donkeys, snakes with birds. The Generation of the Flood was finally wiped away when they started writing songs (according to one interpretation of the expression in the Medrash "...ad shekasvu Gumasiyos") extolling cohabitation of males with males and males with animals."

For years and years immorality was rampant, but the final straw in G-d's eyes was when songs praising homosexuality and bestiality made the "Top 40 Countdown." When the rock artists of Noach's time started writing songs about male with male and male with animal -- then the generation was eradicated.

What does this mean? Until that point, although people were immoral, and animals were immoral, there was still at least a semblance of feeling that "what we are doing is illegitimate".

"Sure, it's wrong, but we'll do it anyhow... behind closed doors. Sure, it's corrupt, but I don't go around bragging about it."

Society legitimizes something when art imitates life. When art can extol the merit of immorality, then it goes from illegitimate to legitimate. That's when G-d says, "Enough!". As long as there is a "Victorian Age" where everyone is immoral -- male with female and male with male -- but people know it is not right, that can still be temporarily "tolerated" by G-d. But when it becomes an "alternative life-style," a different form of normal life, when it becomes a subject for music and poetry, that's when G-d can "take it" no longer.

Another interpretation of the expression in the Medrash "...ad shekasvu Gumasiyos" is that they wrote marriage contracts between males. When they went down to City Hall and started taking out Marriage Licenses between two men, when they starting debating about making City Ordinances legalizing marriage between two males with all the rights of fully married couples, that's when Chazal say the fate of the Generation of the Flood was finally sealed.

Up until that point, it was at least looked down upon; people knew that it was wrong. But when they went ahead and proclaimed that it was an acceptable alternative life-style, then unfortunately the Flood came.

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### Personalities & Sources:

**Rav Mordechai Gifter** - Rosh Yeshiva of Telshe Yeshiva, Cleveland.

**Rav Yisroel Salanter** -- (1809-1883), founder of the Mussar Movement.

**Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski** (1863-1939) -- World-renowned Torah scholar and community leader; Vilna.

**Rash"i** -- Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105); France. Foremost Bible and Talmud commentator.

**Rav Yakov Kaminetsky** (1891-1986) -- Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Torah Vodaath, New York. Chumash commentary contained in Emes L'Yaakov.

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### Glossary:

**Mensch** -- (one who acts like a proper and dignified) man

**Gaon** -- Genius (in Torah learning)

**Illui** -- young Genius

**chiddushei Torah** -- novel Torah insights

**heter** -- lenient Halachic ruling

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#118). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: Suicide: Is It Ever Permitted? The other halachic portions for Parsha Noach from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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