

NOACH INVENTS RETIREMENT

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: #1091 - V'Sain Tal U'Matar – Starting Too Early? Good Shabbos!

Retirement: A Concept Introduced by Noach for Noachides

The Medrash Shochar Tov in Tehillim says that three righteous individuals were the foundation of the earth. Adam, Noach, and Avraham. There is an expression that is used all too commonly. We refer to a person as a "*Tzadik Yesod Olam*" [A righteous person, foundation of the world]. There are plenty of righteous people, but the accolade "*Tzadik Yesod Olam*" is a very specific title referring to a very special type of righteous person: A *Tzadik* who is literally "the foundation of the world."

The world rests, so to speak, on the shoulders of such a *Tzadik*. Today there has been inflation in many areas. There is "grade inflation" in schools. Everything is inflated. Today, coming three times a day to daven with a minyan already seems to qualify a person as a "*Tzadik Yesod Olam*." This is an overstated exaggeration that cheapens a title that should be reserved for truly unique individuals. The Medrash says only the three aforementioned people deserve this title: Adam, Noach, and Avraham.

The Almighty created the world. He had envisioned that the world would come to perfection through the First Man. Adam was a "*Tzadik Yesod Olam*." Unfortunately, as we all know, within the first day of his creation, Adam sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge and the potential that was within him for the perfection of the universe went by the wayside.

The Almighty waited ten generations. There is a connection between the "Ten Generations" and the "Ten Utterances" with which the world was created. He waited ten generations to come up with another individual who had the potential to be the "*Tzadik Yesod Olam*"— the righteous individual upon whom the world would rest. That person was Noach. But unfortunately, in the interval of the ten generations that came into existence from Adam to Noach, the world had "gone down the tube." The Almighty did find Noach to be a *Tzadik*, and despite the fact that He decided to destroy the entire world, "Noach found favor in the Eyes of the L-rd" and Noach became the next person upon whom the Almighty wished to base the world. The *Ribono shel Olam*, as it were, started over with Noach – a new world.

Noach was to be the *Tzadik Yesod Olam*. Noach was saved. He saved the world. He repopulated the

world. Those who came after him are not called "Children of Adam," they are called "Children of Noach". We are direct descendants of Noach because all other descendants of Adam were destroyed. Noach, after saving the world, emerged from the Taiva and "And Noach, the man of the earth, debased himself (*vaYachel Noach*) by planting a vineyard." [Bereishis 9:20]. Rashi quotes Chazal that the word *vaYachel* implies debasement. Rashi points out that out of all the things that someone could plant, Noach should not have planted a vineyard.

Noach did plant a vineyard, he drank the wine, he became drunk, and Noach also failed in his mission to be the *Tzadik Yesod Olam*. Once again, it was not destined that the whole world should come to perfection during the days of Noach.

The *Ribono shel Olam* waited another ten generations—the "Ten Generations from Noach until Avraham." Finally, the Almighty found in the patriarch Avraham the *Tzadik Yesod Olam* for whom He had been waiting for twenty generations! Avraham Avinu had Yitzchak. Yitzchak had Yaakov. And Yaakov had the Tribes of G-d (*Shivtei K-ah*). We, *Klal Yisrael*, are the descendants of Yaakov and we are supposed to carry on this mission of bringing the world to perfection.

That which Noach failed to do, Avraham Avinu accomplished. The question is – this Noach, with which we begin the parsha – "Noach, was a completely righteous man in his generation" (This is not a paid announcement in a newspaper where you find all kinds of titles used; this is the Ribono shel Olam talking! He does not use such terminologies carelessly) – does appear to have the makings of a *Tzadik Yesod Olam*. And yet he went from being "*Tzadik Tamim*" [completely righteous] [Bereishis 6:9] to be coming an "*Ish Adamah*" [man of the earth] [Bereishis 9:20].

Chazal point out that Moshe began as a shepherd and he ended his life as an *Ish haElokim* [a man of G-d]. Noach, somehow, went in the other direction. How did this happen to Noach? How did this person who had such potential, and in whom the Almighty saw such potential – how did it happen to him that the first thing he did after leaving the Taiva was planting a vineyard and getting drunk?

There is a Sefer on Chumash called *Chikrei Lev* from a Rabbi Leibel Hyman Z"L (an old-time Baltimorean who was a Rosh Yeshiva in America, and who later moved to *Eretz Yisrael* where he was a Rav). He suggests a theory as to what happened to Noach:

During the whole period of the Flood, Noach had a horrible time. He was not enjoying life on a cruise ship. Besides the fact that the whole world was destroyed, and he was aware of that, Noach literally could not sleep. There are animals that eat during the day and there are nocturnal animals that eat during the night. Just feeding the animals – every single species that was in the world – by the time Noach came out of the Taiva, he was a broken man to say the least. He was, however, a man who felt that he accomplished his mission. He literally saved the world. From now on, everyone is going to be a *Ben Noach* – one of his descendants! What more can people accomplish in this world than what Noach accomplished? He saved the world and he saved it at great personal stress and pain. The experience was horrible!

When a person feels "I have done my job in this world" certain emotions go with that feeling: It is time for me to relax, to take off my shoes, put my feet up on the table, lean back, and enjoy myself. It is time for me to call it a career, call it a lifetime. The way Noach envisioned doing that was to plant a vineyard and drink the produce thereof and enjoy life. His attitude was: I have it coming! I earned it! I did what I was supposed to do! What else do You want from me?

Herein lies Noach's tragic mistake. There is no such thing as "I did my job. Now I can go and retire." One can retire when he is in the grave. Until that time, we have a mission to complete. No matter how great the accomplishment that we have had in this world thus far, this world is "today to do it; and tomorrow to receive reward." [Eruvin 22a]

The *Chikrei Lev* makes a very interesting sociological observation. There is a common—almost universal—opinion in the world that after a person completes his job he retires. That, he says, is a concept for Children of Noach. It started with Noach. This was Noach's gift to the world—the idea of retirement. Therefore, his descendants—Bnei Noach—follow in his footsteps. If you are lucky, you can do it at 62, if you retire on full Social Security, you can do it at 66, if you become a millionaire you can do it at 54, and so forth. But at some point, you retire. And then what do you do? I don't know. You can travel the country, you can read the paper, you can take up bridge.

That is not what the *Ribono shel Olam* expected from human beings. Retirement is something a Jew should never think about. That does not mean that a person can never stop working a job. But no one should have the attitude "I am finished. I can sit back and relax now."

I recently met someone who had a heart attack at a young age. I had lunch with him, I was sitting and talking with him and I asked, "How is your health?" He told me, "Baruch Hashem, I can take care of myself now." Then he told me, "My doctor is retiring." This can be a traumatic event. Someone may have been with a doctor for thirty, forty, or fifty years. Now that he knows my conditions and my medical history so well, he is retiring. Who am I going to start with now?

His doctor—who was a religious Jew—retired on August 31st. My friend, who had been this doctor's patient, davens in a Kollel in a certain city. On September 1, who should walk into the Kollel? It was his former doctor, with an Art Scroll Gemara Brochos under his arm. He is retired. A person does not need to practice medicine—or accounting or law or computers or whatever it is—for his entire life. People should live and be well! But a person must do something. A person needs to do something worthwhile and fulfilling.

That was Noach's mistake. "I already did what I was supposed to do. What else do You want from me? Now I am going to sit back and enjoy myself." That is a *Bnei Noach* attitude—not a *Bnei Yisrael* type of attitude.

Avraham Avinu came. He was the third *Tzadik Yesod Olam*. That which Adam could not accomplish and Noach could not accomplish, Avraham was able to accomplish. Not only did he accomplish, but he fixed this false ideology of Noach. How is that?

The Ramban says that the tenth of the Ten Tests with which Avraham Avinu was tested was the burial of Sara. After the *Akeida* [Binding of Yitzchak], Avraham Avinu needed to go and bargain on the price of a plot for Sara, even though the *Ribono shel Olam* had already promised him all of *Eretz Yisrael*. This is the tenth test. Everyone asks the question: Okay, it was a hassle. It was unpleasant. He might be distressed. However, if test number nine was *Akeidas Yitzchak* and Avraham passed the test successfully, is test number ten not somewhat anticlimactic? It does not seem to be on the same scale at all! Why is that the ultimate test?

The answer is that this does not suggest that burying Sara was more difficult than the *Akeida*. The *Akeida* was the most difficult test—to be asked to slaughter one's beloved son. Nothing surpasses the difficulty of that! But after the *Akeida* and eight prior tests, Avraham could well have thought "I reached the pinnacle." I passed the ultimate test. He could have had the thought "I have been to the mountain! What more do You want from me? Enough already! What do You want from me, Master of the Universe?" No! That was not his attitude.

Avraham had no complaints. He had no questions. He went from the *Akeida* to dealing with the hassle of negotiation with Ephron and paying an exorbitant price for a burial plot for his wife, Sara. That is why it is the tenth test. It is the test of how a person deals with life after he figures and feels that he is entitled to the easy life now. He rejects the tendency to claim, "I did what I had to do, now give me a break!"

By passing the tenth test, Avraham Avinu corrected the sin of Noach, beginning the legacy of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov – the legacy that no matter what we have done in our lives, it is not over until literally the *Chevra Kadisha* comes or until we are physically unable to continue.

Again, this is not suggesting that we need to die in our offices. No one in the history of mankind ever said on his death bed in regret, "I wish I spent more time in the office." However, we must remain productive. When we reach the "Golden Years," while we can perhaps "sit back" and take it easy from our work, we must remember that the Jewish approach remains, "It is today when it must be done; and tomorrow when the reward will be received."

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Noach is provided below:

- # 027 - The Abortion Controversy
- # 069 - Ma'ariv and Mitzvos in the Land of Midnight Sun
- # 118 - Suicide: Is it Ever Permitted?
- # 165 - Euthanasia

- # 211 - Animal Experimentation
- # 255 - Preventing a Suicide
- # 301 - Teaching Torah to Non-Jews
- # 345 - Milah for Non-Jews: Is it Permitted
- # 389 - Abortion to Save a Baby?
- # 433 - Assisting in a Suicide
- # 477 - Tzedakah and Non-Jews
- # 521 - The Ben Noach & the Nectarine
- # 565 - The Golam
- # 609 - Cosmetic Surgery
- # 653 - The Har Habayis -- The Temple Mount in Halacha and Hashkafa
- # 697 - The Case of the Fascinating Ger
- # 741 - Your Wife's Medical Bills: Who Pays?
- # 785 - Spreading Bad News
- # 829 - Bending the Truth of the Torah
- # 873 - Stem Cell Research
- # 917 - Did Shimshon Commit Suicide?
- # 960 - Geshem Reigns -- Mashiv Haruach U'moreed Hageshem? Hagoshem?
- #1004 - Shinui Hashem: Changing the Name of a Choleh
- #1048 - Zichrono Le'vracha: On A Living Person?
- #1091 - V'Sain Tal U'Matar - Starting Too Early?
- #1134 - Are Non-Jews Only Obligated in "The Seven Mitzvos"?
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