

PARSHAS NOACH

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari

There are a number of different sources for the name Noah and each one of them expresses an important religious perspective that goes far beyond the personality of Noah himself.

According to the Zohar, the name No'ach is derived from 'menuchah' peace and comfort; as we read, 'but the wicked are like the troubled seas which cannot rest' (Isaiah, 57:20). A Tzadick is one who keeps the Covenant, while the wicked, who are the opposite of the righteous constantly abrogate it. Everything has roots both to that which is below and to what is above. However, one who desecrates the Covenant also spoils and weakens these roots and therefore no longer has a place or a specific time. The Ari HaKadosh taught that every exile, which is an uprooting and brings trouble, flows from the desecration of the Covenant by Israel whereby their roots had been weakened. So too, the wicked who do not keep the Covenant, are always troubled and restless just as the sea knows no peace or quiet. We know that the only thing that was missing in creation was peace and quiet until the Shabbat was created to complete the whole creation. So we see that a person can come to the sanctity of Shabbat only according to the degree to which he observes the Covenant during the six days of the week. Therefore every person should have the sign of the brit and the sign of the Shabbat otherwise he cannot come to the sanctity of the day. This will explain why it is necessary to have a brit 8 days after the birth of the child; the sign of circumcision after the sign of Shabbat. As the circumcision denotes that which is above the natural order, it needs to follow Shabbat that is also above the natural order. The Nations of the world who live according to the natural order have only 7 mitzvot, whereas Israel who observes Shabbat is able to go beyond the natural order and observe Taryag Mitzvot.

No'ach, who alone in his generation was able to observe Mankind's Covenant with God, could therefore be saved from the Flood.

"Blessed be the person who did not walk in the counsel of the ungodly' (Psalm 1:1), this is No'ach' (Bereishit Rabbah, 1:1). Noah did not follow the counsel of the generations of Enosh, of the Flood and of the tower of Babel, therefore he was saved from the Flood. These generations committed the sin of idolatry, sexual corruption and bloodshed respectively.

The first generation sinned through their desire for honor. Maimonides explains that the beginning of idolatry flowed from the error of this generation of Enosh; 'and then [in his day] they began to call on the Name of the Lord' (Bereishit, 4:26). They thought that just as a human king wishes to honor his servants so too G-d wishes to honor the forces of nature that He created. Therefore human beings

should worship these forces and thereby give honor to God; actually a reflection of their own desire for honor. (Mishneh Torah, Hilkhos Avodah Zarah, chapter 1, halakhah1).

The people who built the tower of Babylon were filled with jealousy and this led them to be afraid that they would be dispersed and others take their place. So too, Nimrod their king was frightened that he would be deposed by one of his jealous subjects. They built the tower to defy G-d and thought that then they would be able to remain in their own territory. As we read in the midrash, in their frantic search for security from G-d, they shed blood whenever this expedited the building of their tower.

The sin of the generation of the Flood was corruption even as it is written, 'and the Earth was corrupt' (Bereishit, 6:11). Actually, such corruption included all three sins, idolatry, bloodshed and sexual immorality of which these three generations were guilty. In our world Shabbat educates against all three and this is the reason and message of the three meals- shalosh seudos- that we eat on that day.

No'ach was able to keep himself away from all three sins and therefore suffered none of the punishment of these three generations.

'And HaShem smelled [the sweet aroma [of the sacrifice]]' (Bereishit, 8: 21). Rabbi Eliezer said No'ach was named after this sacrifice. 'And the ark rested 'nach' on Mt. Ararat' (ibid, 4). Rabbi Yose taught that he was named after the resting of the Ark' (Bereishit Rabbah 33). Rabbi Yose saw No'ach's redemption as flowing from the distance he set between his soul and that of the generation of the Flood. This separation was expressed through his attachment, as it were to the Ark and therefore he was named for it's settling on Mt. Ararat. This explanation relates to the beginning of Noach's spiritual development and Rabbi Yose sees the beginning of spirituality as the most important. Rabbi Eliezer understood that the attainment of the goal is important so No'ach received his name from the sacrifice he brought after his salvation.

[In view of these many statements and others like them attesting to No'ach being a tzaddik, the Shem Mi Shmuel needed to explain a contrary assessment quoted by Rashi on verse 9 in chapter 6]. 'No'ach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; the use of 'in his generations' led some rabbis to teach that this is to his discredit, since if he could be righteous only in that evil generation, had he lived in the time of Avraham, he would not have been considered a tzaddik.'

Why is this to his discredit? Even though his righteousness is only relative, nevertheless he was still a tzaddik. No'ach, as we have seen is Shabbat. On Shabbat, a day that is completely Torah and Avodah of the mind, there is only 'oneg' but not simcha, that is the outpouring of rejoicing reserved for the chagim. Shabbat is fixed in time, it is separate from human activity and there is no human imprint on it. No'ach was completely separate from the people of his generation and just as they had no effect on him, so too he had no effect on them. He could not bring them to do teshuvah and his tzidkut could exist only with their destruction. Avraham is like the Chagim. Even though Shabbat is

greater than the chagim, nevertheless in this respect they have a greater spiritual power since they have a relation with people. They are celebrated, with 'simcha' according to the decisions of a human bet din that sets the calendar and they reflect the experiences of the nation of Israel. Avraham [like Moshe and Shmuel to whom No'ach is compared in another source] had a relationship with the people of his generation, despite their evil deeds and irrespective of their spiritual level. Therefore he could teach them and bring them to teshuvah. His tzidkut did not require their destruction unlike No'ach, and that is the discredit of the latter.

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