



# NOACH

Don't Walk into the Ark Alone

*Giving Up on Others Is Never an Option*

# PARSHAH OVERVIEW

## *Noach*

G-d instructs Noah—the only righteous man in a world consumed by violence and corruption—to build a large wooden *tevah* (“ark”), coated within and without with pitch. A Great Deluge, says G-d, will wipe out all life from the face of the earth; but the ark will float upon the water, sheltering Noah and his family as well as two members (male and female) of each animal species.

Rain falls for forty days and nights, and the waters churn for 150 more days before calming and beginning to recede. The ark settles on Mount Ararat, and

from its window Noah dispatches a raven, and then a series of doves, “to see if the waters were abated from the face of the earth.” When the ground dries completely—exactly one solar year (365 days) after the onset of the Flood—G-d commands Noah to exit the *tevah* and repopulate the earth.

Noah builds an altar and offers sacrifices to G-d. G-d swears to never again destroy all of humankind because of their deeds, and He sets the rainbow as a testimony of His new covenant with the human race. G-d also commands Noah

regarding the sacredness of life: murder is deemed a capital offense, and, while people are permitted to eat the meat of animals, they are forbidden to eat flesh or blood taken from a living animal.

Noah plants a vineyard and becomes drunk on its produce. Two of Noah’s sons, Shem and Japheth, are blessed for covering up their father’s nakedness, while his third son, Ham, is punished for taking advantage of his father’s debasement.

## QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

When someone close to you is making harmful choices and doesn't seem open to change, how do you know when to keep trying and when to step back?



# TEXT 1

*Genesis 6:9-13*

ט. אלה תולדת נח, נח איש צדיק תמים  
היה בדרתיו, את האלקים התהלך נח.  
י. ויולד נח שלשה בנים, את שם את חם  
ואת יפת.  
יא. ותשחת הארץ לפני האלקים, ותמלא  
הארץ חמס.  
יב. וירא אלקים את הארץ והנה נשחטה,  
כי השחית כל בשר את דרכו על הארץ.  
יג. ויאמר אלקים לנח, קץ כל בשר בא  
לפני כי מלאה הארץ חמס מפניהם, והנני  
משחיתם את הארץ.

9. These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with G-d.  
10. And Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.  
11. Now, the earth was corrupt before G-d, and the earth became full of robbery.  
12. And G-d saw the earth, and behold it had become corrupted, for all flesh had corrupted its way on the earth.  
13. And G-d said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth has become full of robbery because of them, and behold I am destroying them from the earth."



The Torah describes Noah as a "righteous man in his generation" who was chosen to survive the flood and rebuild civilization.

## TEXT 2

*Talmud, Sanhedrin  
108a*

אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: "בְּדוֹרוֹתָיו", וְלֹא  
בְּדוֹרוֹת אֲחֵרִים. וְרִישׁ לָקִישׁ אָמַר:  
"בְּדוֹרוֹתָיו", כָּל שָׁכֵן בְּדוֹרוֹת  
אֲחֵרִים.

אָמַר רַבִּי חֲנִינָא: מִשָּׁל דְּרַבִּי יוֹחָנָן,  
לְמָה הַדְּבָר דּוֹמָה? לְחֶבֶת שֶׁל יַיִן  
שֶׁהִיטָה מוֹנַחַת בְּמַרְתֵּף שֶׁל חוֹמֵץ.  
בְּמַקוֹמָה – רִיחָה נוֹדֵף, שְׁלֹא  
בְּמַקוֹמָה – אֵין רִיחָה נוֹדֵף.

אָמַר רַבִּי אוֹשְׁיָא: מִשָּׁל דְּרִישׁ  
לָקִישׁ, לְמָה הַדְּבָר דּוֹמָה? לְצִלוֹתִית  
שֶׁל פְּלִיטוֹן שֶׁהִיטָה מוֹנַחַת בְּמַקוֹם  
הַטְּנוּפֶת. בְּמַקוֹמָה – רִיחָה נוֹדֵף, וְכֹל  
שָׁכֵן בְּמַקוֹם הַבוֹסֵם.

Rabbi Yochanan says, "In his generation he was righteous but not relative to those of other generations." Reish Lakish says, "In his generation he was righteous; all the more so would he have been in other generations."

Rabbi Chanina says, "There is a parable for Rabbi Yochanan's opinion. To what is this matter comparable? To a barrel of wine that was placed in a cellar where vinegar is stored; in its place, its fragrance is noticeable. When it's not in its place, its fragrance is not noticeable."

Rabbi Oshaya says, "There is a parable for Reish Lakish's opinion. To what is this matter comparable? To a flask of perfume that was placed in a location of filth. In its place, its fragrance is notable, and all the more so would it be in a location where there is perfume."

# בְּדוֹרוֹתָיו — In his generation

The sages debate what this word is adding

RABBI YOCHANAN



Limiting his praise

REISH LAKISH



Enhancing his praise

## QUESTIONS

1. Why does it matter whether Noah was relatively or absolutely righteous?
2. If the verse can be read either way—positively or negatively—why not judge Noah favorably and interpret it as praise?

OPTIONAL

## TEXT 3

*Talmud, Pesachim 3a*

דָּאָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻעַ בֶּן לֵוִי: לְעוֹלָם אַל יוֹצִיא אָדָם דָּבָר מְגוֹנָה מִפִּיו, שֶׁהָרִי עֵקָם הַפְּתוּב שְׂמוֹנָה אוֹתִיּוֹת, וְלֹא הוֹצִיא דָּבָר מְגוֹנָה מִפִּיו. שְׁנֵאֲמַר: "מִן הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה וּמִן הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר אֵינָנָה טְהוֹרָה".

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: A person should never express a crude matter, as the formulation of a verse was distorted by the addition of eight letters rather than have it express a crude matter, as it is stated: "From the pure animals and from the animals that are not pure [*asher einenah tehorah*]" (Genesis 7:8).

OPTIONAL

The Torah avoids speaking negatively even about animals.

Why would it add words that seem to limit Noah's praise?



# TEXT 4

Zohar, vol. 1, Genesis  
88a

אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוּדָה . . . תָּא חֲזִי, מִשָּׁה לָא  
תְּלָה מְלָה בְּזִכּוּתֵיהּ אֱלָא בְּזִכּוּת אַבְהֹן  
קִדְמָאִי. אָבֵל נַח לָא הָוָה לִיה בְּמֵאן דִּיתְלִי  
בְּזִכּוּתָא כְּמִשָּׁה.

אָמַר רַבִּי יִצְחָק: וְעַם כָּל דָּא, פִּיּוֹן דְּאָמַר  
לִיה קוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא "וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי  
אִתְּךָ," הָוָה לִיה לְמַבְעֵי רַחֲמֵי עַלְיֵיהּ.  
וְקַרְבָּנָא דְאַקְרִיב לְבַתֵּר, דִּיקְרִיב לִיה מִן  
קִדְמַת דְנָא, דְלָמָא יִשְׁכַּךְ רוּגְזָא מְעַלְמָא.

אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוּדָה: מַאי הָוָה לִיה לְמַעְבַּד?  
דְּהָא חֲיִיבֵי עַלְמָא הוּוּ מְרַגִּיזִין קַמִּי קוּדְשָׁא  
בְּרִיךְ הוּא, וְאִיהוּ יְקָרִיב קְרַבָּנָא? אֱלָא וּדְאִי  
נַח דְחִיל עַל גְּרַמִּיָּה הָוָה, בְּגִין דְּלָא יַעֲרַע  
בֵּיהּ מוֹתָא בְּגוּ חֲיִיבֵי עַלְמָא דְהָוָה חֲמִי  
עוֹבְדֵיהוֹן בִּישָׂא כָּל יוֹמָא, וְהִידּוּ מְרַגְזִין קַמִּי  
קוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא כָּל יוֹמָא.

Rabbi Yehudah said, "Come and see: When Moses prayed to G-d, he didn't rely on his own merit but rather on the merit of the forefathers. Noah, by contrast, didn't have anyone whose merit he could rely on like Moses did."

Rabbi Yitzchak responded, "Even so, once G-d told Noah, 'And I will establish My covenant with you' (Genesis 6:18), Noah should have pleaded for mercy on the people. Instead, he waited until after the Flood to offer a sacrifice. He should have brought it earlier—maybe it would have calmed G-d's anger and spared the world."

Rabbi Yehudah replied, "What could he have done? The people of the world were guilty and constantly provoked G-d. And Noah was afraid for himself. He didn't want to put his own life at risk by getting involved. He saw how corrupt they were, how they angered G-d every single day, and he didn't want to be caught in their downfall."

When G-d revealed His plan to restart civilization,  
Noah did not pray for his generation.

**RABBI YEHUDAH**



**Noah wasn't to blame; the  
generation had no merits**

**RABBI YITZCHAK**



**Noah should have prayed  
regardless**



Differing views in Torah often reflect different perspectives on the same issue, not actual conflict.

## TEXT 5

*Talmud, Bava  
Metzi'a 11a*

וְאִיבְעִית אֵימָא: מַר אָמַר תְּדָא, וּמַר  
אָמַר תְּדָא, וְלֹא פְּלִיגִי.

One sage said one thing, and another said something else—but they're not arguing.

## TEXT 6

*Rabbi Yeshayahu  
Halevi Horowitz,  
Shenei Luchot  
Haberit, Torah  
Shebaal Peh, Kelal  
Leshonot, Sugyot 13  
(Ot Mem)*

"מר אמר חדא ומר אמר חדא ולא פליגי", בפרק קמא דמציעא . . . ואף על גב דמשמע דפליגי, קאמר התם דחד מיירי . . . וחד מיירי, ולא פליגי. וכהאי גוונא איכא טובא בתלמוד.

וכן יתבונן האדם לראות בעומק שכלו להשוות הדיעות החלוקות בכל מה שיוכל להשוותם, הן בתלמוד הן בפוסקים.

"One sage said one thing, and another said something else—but they're not arguing." Even when it seems like they disagree, the Talmud explains that one is speaking about one case, and the other about a different case—so there's no real conflict. This kind of resolution appears often throughout the Talmud.

A person should train themselves to look deeply and use their intellect to reconcile differing opinions wherever possible, whether in the Talmud or among the Halachic authorities.

## REEVALUATING THE DEBATE

- **The sages who praised Noah...** address the historical Noah.

He remained righteous despite his generation and fulfilled everything expected from him in his time and context.

- **The sages who seemingly limit Noah's praise...** address our relationship with Noah.

His circumstances were different from ours, so we should not emulate everything, especially regarding prayer.

## ANSWER 1

Debating Noah's righteousness shows that the Torah is both describing his greatness in his time and teaching us lessons for today.

# TEXT 7

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Likutei  
Sichot 25, p. 21*

אויך רבי יצחק איז מודה, אז דאס וואס נח האט ניט מתפלל געווען על אנשי דורו איז ווייל ער האט (אין יענעם מצב) ניט געקענט מתפלל זיין אויף זיי, היות אז "לא הוה ליה במאן דיתלי בזכותא כמשה" - עס איז ניט א חסרון אין נח'ן.

רבי יצחק קומט נאר באווארענען, אז עס זאל ניט ארויסקומען א תקלה חס ושלום אין א שפעטערדיקן דור, מיינענדיק אז ס'איז ניט קיין חסרון אויב מ'איז ניט מתפלל פאר אנשי הדור; דעריבער זאגט רבי יצחק, אז מען מוז דרש'נען (ארויסברענגען) אז די זאך פאר זיך איז אן ענין של גנאי (כאטש אז ביי נח'ן גופא האט ניט געקענט זיין באופן אחר),

Rabbi Yitzchak, too, agrees that the reason Noah didn't pray for his generation is because, in his situation, he simply couldn't. As the Zohar says, "he didn't have anyone whose merit he could rely on like Moses did" (Zohar, vol. 1, Genesis 88a). So, this wasn't a personal failing in Noah.

Rabbi Yitzchak's intention is only to prevent a possible misunderstanding in later generations, lest someone think that failing to pray for others isn't a flaw. That's why Rabbi Yitzchak insists we must interpret this aspect of Noah's story as a shortcoming. Not because it was a shortcoming in Noah himself but to make it absolutely clear that failing to pray for others is a flaw in general.



## TEXT 7

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Likutei  
Sichot 25, p. 21*

ווייל מען דארף זיך משתדל זיין בכל  
האופנים האפשריים צו מתפלל זיין און  
בעטן רחמים פאר א צווייטן אידן.

און דערפאר איז דעת רבי יצחק ניט אין  
סתירה צום כלל "הוי דן את כל האדם לכף  
זכות" - ווייל אויך לויט רבי יצחק'ן איז עס  
ביי נח'ן ניט געווען קיין "חובה" חס ושלום,  
נאר ער באווארנט ווי די זאך איז אן ענין  
של "חובה" ביי אנדערע.

We must always do everything possible  
to pray for and seek mercy on behalf of  
another Jew.

This is why Rabbi Yitzchak's view doesn't  
contradict the principle of "judge every  
person favorably" (Mishnah, Avot 1:6).  
Even he agrees that Noah had no actual  
obligation to pray. He's simply  
emphasizing that for others, in different  
circumstances, this is a real obligation.

## ANSWER 2

The Torah includes a critical reading of Noah to warn us never to focus only on ourselves, since we have the tools and responsibility to help others.

We must never give up on another Jew, no matter how far they may stray.



## TEXT 8

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Torat  
Menachem 3, p. 314*

המבואר בספרים בפירוש מאמר רבותינו זכרונם לברכה "כל מה שיאמר לך בעל הבית עשה חוץ מצא", ש"בעל הבית" קאי על הקדוש ברוך הוא, ובכל הענינים צריכים לקיים את דברי הקדוש ברוך הוא, "חוץ מצא", שאם יאמר הקדוש ברוך הוא "צא ממחיצתי", חס ושלום . . . בענין זה לא צריכים לשמוע אפילו להקדוש ברוך הוא, כביכול.

The commentaries explain the meaning of the sages' statement, "Whatever the host tells you to do, do—except leave" (Talmud, Pesachim 86b). On a deeper level, the "host" refers to G-d. In all areas of life, we are meant to follow G-d's instructions—except in one case: if G-d were to say, "Leave My presence," G-d forbid. In that one area, we don't obey, not even G-d Himself, so to speak.



Praying that someone does *teshuva*, is a powerful way to help them return to the right path.

# TEXT 9

*Talmud, Berachot  
10a*

הָנָהוּ בְּרִיּוּנֵי זְהוּוֹ בְּשִׁבְבוּתֵיהֶּ דְּרַבִּי מֵאִיר, וְהוּוֹ קָא מְצַעְרוֹ לֵיהּ טוּבָא. הָנָה קָא  
בְּעֵי רַבִּי מֵאִיר רַחֲמֵי עַלְוֵיהּ כִּי הֵיכִי דְלִימוּתוֹ.

אָמְרָה לֵיהּ בְּרוּרִיא דְּבִיתָהּ: מֵאִי זַעְתָּךְ — מִשׁוּם דְּכָתִיב "יִתְמוּ חַטָּאִים", מִי  
כָּתִיב "חַוְטָאִים"? "חַטָּאִים" כָּתִיב. וְעוֹד, שְׁפִיל לְסִיפֵיהּ דְּקָרָא "וְרַשְׁעִים עוֹד  
אֵינָם", כִּינּוֹן דְּ"יִתְמוּ חַטָּאִים" "וְרַשְׁעִים עוֹד אֵינָם"? אֶלָּא בְּעֵי רַחֲמֵי עַלְוֵיהּ  
דְּלֶהְדְּרוּ בְּתַשׁוּבָה, "וְרַשְׁעִים עוֹד אֵינָם".

There were hooligans in Rabbi Meir's neighborhood who caused him a great deal of anguish. Rabbi Meir prayed for G-d to have mercy on him that they should die.

Rabbi Meir's wife, Beruriya, said to him: What is your thinking? Do you base yourself on the verse, "Let sins cease from the land" (Psalms 104:35)? But is it written, "Let sinners cease"? "Let sins cease" is written.

## QUESTION

If everyone has free will, what's the point of praying for someone to mend their ways?

## TEXT 10

*Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer  
Halevi Eidel's, ad loc.*

ויש לעיין בזה, דודאי באדם המבקש רחמים על עצמו להחזירו בתשובה ניהא, דאף על גב ד"הכל בידי שמים חוץ מיראת שמים", הרי אמרו "בדרך שאדם רוצה לילך מוליכין אותו" (מכות י, ב), ו"הרוצה לטהר מסייעין לו" (יומא לט, ב), וזה המבקש רחמים על עצמו להחזירו בתשובה, הרי זה בכלל ה"רוצה לטהר כו".

אבל לבקש רחמים על חברו להחזירו בתשובה, קשה: מה יועיל בקשתו — הא אמרינן "הכל בידי שמים כו"?

This raises a serious problem: When a person prays for themselves to return to *teshuvah*, it's understandable. Even though "everything is in the hands of Heaven except fear of Heaven" (Talmud, Berachot 33b), the sages said: "In the path a person wants to go, they are led" (Talmud, Makot 10b), and "One who wants to become pure is helped" (Talmud, Yoma 39b). Someone who prays to return is included in that—they want to become pure, so they're helped.

But when someone prays for another person to do *teshuvah*, the question is harder. What can that prayer achieve? Isn't fear of Heaven entirely in that person's own hands?

## EXPLANATION 1

You can pray to G-d to change their circumstances, soften their heart, or send them the right influence at the right time.

## TEXT 11

Rabbi Moshe  
Feinstein, Igrot  
Moshe, Orach  
Chayim, vol. 4, ch.  
40, p. 65

על תפילת ברוריא על הרשעים שישובו בתשובה, שהקשה המהרש"א הא הכל בידי שמים חוץ מיראת שמים? . . .

צריך לומר שהתפילה היתה שלא יהא להם נסיונות וממילא ישובו, שלא היא חוטאים אלא מחוסר פרנסה וכדומה.

וגם שייך להתפלל שה' יתברך יזמין להם שישמעו דברי מוסר מאנשים צדיקים וישובו על ידי זה בתשובה. וזה יותר נכון.

On the story of *Beruriya* praying that the wicked should repent, the *Maharsha* raises a question: How could she pray for that if “everything is in the hands of Heaven except fear of Heaven”? . . .

The answer is that she was praying that they wouldn't face tests—like poverty or hardship—that were pushing them toward sin.

It's also possible to pray that G-d arrange for them to hear words of inspiration from righteous people, and that through that, they return.

## TEXT 12

*Rabbi Avraham  
Borenstein, Avnei  
Nezer, Choshen  
Mishpat 149*

ומחוייבים להתפלל עליהם שיחזרו בתשובה  
שלימה וישבו לעדת ישראל לגמרי, וה'  
יתברך יסיר את לב האבן.

We ought to pray that they return with complete *teshuvah* and fully rejoin the Jewish people, and then G-d will remove their heart of stone.

## EXPLANATION 2

Praying for someone's teshuvah does not take away their free will; rather, it expresses your personal care and concern for them.

## TEXT 13

Siddur Tehillat  
Hashem, *Liturgy for  
the Amidah Prayer*

הַשִּׁיבֵנו אָבִינוּ לְתוֹרָתְךָ, וְקַרְבֵּנוּ מִלְּכֵנוּ  
לְעִבּוּדְךָ, וְהַחְזִירֵנוּ בְּתַשׁוּבָה שְׁלֵמָה לְפָנֶיךָ.  
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', הָרוֹצֵה בְּתַשׁוּבָה.

Bring us back, our Father, to Your Torah. Draw us close, our King, to Your service. And return us in complete *teshuvah* before You. Blessed are You, G-d, Who desires *teshuvah*.

# TEXT 14

*Rabbi Yonah  
Landsfer, Me'il  
Tzedakah, section 7*

ונראה לי עוד בנדון שלנו, דאב על בנו  
רשאי להתפלל, דמצינו ברא מזכה אבא,  
ואם כן אין לך צער גדול מזה . . .

אכן בנדון שלפנינו בשביל אותו התינוק  
שנשבה עמו, רשאי להתפלל גם כן  
עליו, דהרי משום צער הגוף מתפללים  
בעד חבירו, קל וחומר לשכינה. ואם כן  
מעתה שהוא תינוק, אנחנו אביהם של  
יתומים ומוטל עלינו . . .

ובהיות שאין תקוה אם לא על ידי חזרת  
אביו כנודע, על כן יש מקום להתפלל  
גם בעד אביו, כדי שלא יטמע ביניהם.

It also seems to me, in our case, that a father may certainly pray for his son. After all, a son brings merit to the father, and there is no pain greater than this.

As for the other case in which the child was taken along with him, it is also permitted to pray on the child's behalf. After all, we are allowed to pray for another person's physical suffering—how much more so for the pain of the Shechinah. And since this child is young, we are considered his adoptive parents, and the responsibility falls on us. . . .

Given that there is no hope for the child's return unless his father also returns, it follows that we should pray for the father as well, so that the child not be lost among them.

We should never give up hope on another Jew, and we should always pray for them. G-d responds to this and changes their circumstances.



# TEXT 15

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Likutei  
Sichot 25, p. 22*

לערנט רבי יצחק א הוראה, אז עס קען טאקע זיין  
אז ער האט באמת געטאן וויפל ער האט געקענט  
— ס'איז ניט נאר א דמיון, נאר על פי שולחן  
— ערוך (תורת אמת) האט ער געטאן בשלימות —

אבער אף על פי כן דארף מען וויסן, אז דערביי  
טאר מען ניט בלייבן; מען טאר ניט זיין צופרידן  
פון דעם מצב נאר מען מוז האלטן אין איין  
"מכריז" זיין "ועם כל דא . . . הוה ליה למבעי  
רחמי עלייהו"! דער ניט בעטן רחמים על דורו  
איז א מצב של "חובה".

און דאס גופא איז גורם אז עס זאל ווערן א מצב  
פון "זכות" — אז דער אויבערשטער איז מבטל  
די סיבות פון דעם מצב בלתי רצוי, און גיט א  
אידן א געלעגנהייט צו בעטן רחמים על אנשי  
דורו, ביז צו פועל זיין אז זיי זאלן תשובה טאן.

Rabbi Yitzchak is teaching a powerful lesson.  
It's possible that Noah truly did all he could—  
not just in his own mind but fully in line with  
the Shulchan Aruch. He did everything right.

And still, we must know: That's not enough.  
We must never be satisfied with doing what's  
technically sufficient. We have to keep  
sounding the call—"Even so, . . . [Noah]  
should have pleaded for mercy on the people!"  
Not praying for your generation is a moral  
failure.

This very awareness creates new merit, and G-d  
removes the obstacles creating the negative  
situation. He creates new opportunities for us  
to ask for mercy on behalf of others—until we  
succeed in awakening them to do *teshuvah*.



When someone close to you makes harmful choices, keep trying and praying without giving up hope. Sincere prayer causes G-d to open unexpected paths for their return.

## KEY POINTS

1. The sages debate the extent of Noah's righteousness, some arguing that he wasn't as great as Abraham and that he should have prayed on behalf of his generation.
2. Those who do make these arguments aren't disparaging Noah per se; rather, they are warning us not to learn from his legacy as our circumstances are different: we must always pray for another.
3. Sometimes what looks like a debate is really just two perspectives on the same truth—not a disagreement at all.
4. We can never give up on another Jew. At the very least, we must pray for them to be inspired to do *teshuvah*.
5. There are multiple ways of addressing how such prayers aren't in contradiction to the notion of free will.

