



Noach

The Man G-d Praised

Why Ordinary People Sometimes Need Extraordinary Words

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

How often do you compliment people, and is it more often than you criticize?



TEXT 1A

Genesis 6:9

נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו,
אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֵּךְ נֹחַ.

Noah was a righteous man, wholesome
in his generations; Noah walked with
G-d.

The Torah usually doesn't praise even its greatest people, but with Noah it goes out of its way to emphasize praising him.



TEXT 1B

Rashi, ad loc.

הואִיל וְהִזְכִּירוּ סֵפֶר בְּשִׁבְחוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר:
"זֵכֶר צַדִּיק לְבִרְכָּה".

Scripture mentioned him, so it related his praise, as it states, "The memory of the righteous is for a blessing" (Proverbs 10:7).

TEXT 2

Rabbi Yehudah Loew,
Gur Aryeh, ad loc.

וְאִם תֹּאמַר, הֲלֹא כַּמָּה פְּעָמִים הִזְכִּיר
אַבְרָהָם וַיַּעֲקֹב וְלֹא הִזְכִּיר שְׂבָחָם?

You might ask: Why does the Torah
mention Abraham and Jacob without
mentioning their praise?

QUESTION

The Torah mentions many great people without praising them, so why is Noah the exception?



The Torah mentions Abraham, Jacob, and earlier figures like Adam without explicit praise, even though their **greatness** is clear.

TEXT 3

Genesis 5:24

וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ חֲנוֹךְ אֶת הָאֱלֹקִים, וַאֲיָנֹו
כִּי לָקַח אֹתוֹ אֱלֹקִים.

And Enoch walked with G-d; then he
was no more, for G-d took him.

Enoch was very holy
and helped elevate the
world and lessen the
Flood's intensity, yet
the Torah does **not**
explicitly praise him.



TEXT 4A

Genesis 5:27

וַיְהִיו כָּל יְמֵי מֶתוֹשֶׁלַח תְּשַׁע וְשָׁנִים
שָׁנָה וּתְשַׁע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת.

And all the days of Methuselah were
969 years, and he died.



Methuselah, the
oldest person in the
Torah, lived 969
years, even longer
than Adam and Noah,
showing great merit.

TEXT 4B

Genesis 7:4

כִּי לַיָּמִים עוֹד שִׁבְעָה אָנֹכִי מַמְטִיר עַל הָאָרֶץ
אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה, וּמָחִיתִי אֶת כָּל
הַיָּקוּם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה.

For in another seven days I will cause rain to fall
upon the earth for forty days and forty nights, and
I will blot out all the beings I made, off the face of
the planet.

QUESTION

Why did G-d give Noah exactly seven days of warning before the Flood?

ANSWER

Because the Flood was meant to begin right away, but it was delayed for seven days for Methuselah, the one remaining righteous person, so that he could pass away and be properly mourned.

TEXT 4C

Rashi, ad loc.

אלו שבע ימי אבלו של מתושלח הצדיק,
שחס הקדוש ברוך הוא על כבודו ועכב את
הפרעות.

These are the seven days of mourning for
Methuselah, for G-d protected his honor
and delayed the punishment.



Despite Methuselah's righteousness, the Torah does not praise him.

TEXT 5

Genesis 7:1

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' לְנוֹחַ בֹּא אִתָּהּ וְכָל בֵּיתְךָ אֵלֶּי
הַתֵּבָה, כִּי אֶתְּךָ רָאִיתִי צַדִּיק לְפָנַי בַּדּוֹר
הַזֶּה.

And G-d said to Noah, "Come, you and all your household, into the ark, for I have seen you righteous before Me in this generation."

QUESTIONS

1. If the Torah is usually sparing with praise, why is Noah praised repeatedly?
2. Why does the Torah wait until the Flood story to praise him, instead of doing so when he was first mentioned in the previous Torah portion?

TEXT 6

Rashi, Genesis 6:9

”בְּדֹרֹתָיו”. יֵשׁ שְׂדֹרְנִישִׁים אוֹתוֹ לְגַנְאִי, לְפִי
דֹּרוֹ הָיָה צַדִּיק וְאֵלּוֹ הָיָה בְּדֹרוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם
לֹא הָיָה נֶחֱשָׁב לְכָלָם.

“In his generations”: Some offered a derogatory interpretation: Noah was righteous but only relative to his generation. Had he been in Abraham’s generation, he would not have been considered of any importance.

We might think Noah was the most righteous man.



The Torah says “**righteous in his generation**” to show that, in a time full of corrupt people, he stood out.

TEXT 7

Rabbi Moshe Alshich,
Torat Moshe, Genesis
6:9

”אֶת הָאֱלֹקִים הִתְהַלֵּךְ”, וְלֹא עִם הָאָנָשִׁים לְהִתְזַיֵּר בְּתִשּׁוּבָה. רַק כָּל
כַּשְׁרוֹתָו הָיָה מִמֶּנּוּ אֶל הָאֱלֹקִים בְּלִבָּד . . . שְׁלֹא שָׁם פָּנָיו לְהִיַּשִּׁיר אֶת
הַזּוֹלָת לַעֲשׂוֹת נִפְשׁוֹת רַבּוֹת. אוֹ לְהַשִּׁיבָם מִדֶּרֶךְ הָרָעָה. כִּי כָּל צִדְקוֹ
לֹא הָיָה רַק מִמֶּנּוּ לֵה' . . . כִּי לֹא הִשִּׁיב מֵעוֹן רַק אֶת עֲצָמוֹ לְבַדּוֹ.

“Noah walked with G-d”: But not with the people: he did not work to inspire them to *teshuvah*. Instead, all his uprightness was directed from himself toward G-d. . . . He never turned his attention to guiding others or to saving many souls, nor to returning them from their evil path. All his righteousness was only between himself and G-d. . . . He only turned himself back from sin, not anyone else.

Noah was a “***tzadik*** in a fur coat”: righteous, but focused on saving himself and his family, not on guiding others.



NOAH

title: *tzadik*



demoted to man
of the earth



He only cared for himself.

MOSES

title: Egyptian man



ascended to
man of G-d



He cared for others.

TEXT 8

Rabbi Meir Simchah
Hakohen of Dvinsk,
Meshech Chochmah,
Genesis 9:20

בַּמִּדְרָשׁ: תְּחִיב מֹשֶׁה מִזֶּה. נֹחַ
מִשְׁנֵקֶרֶת "אִישׁ צַדִּיק", נִקְרָא
"אִישׁ הָאֲדָמָה"; מֹשֶׁה מִשְׁנֵקֶרֶת
"אִישׁ מִצְרַיִם", נִקְרָא "אִישׁ
אֱלֹהִים".

הַעֲנֵן, דִּישׁ שְׁנֵי דְרָכִים בְּעִבּוּדַת
הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרֵךְ. דֶּרֶךְ אֶחָד מִי
שְׂמִיחָה עֲצָמוֹ לְעִבּוּדָתוֹ יִתְבָּרֵךְ
וּמִתְבּוֹדֵד, וַיֵּשׁ מִי שְׂעוּסָק בְּצָרָכֵי
צָבוֹר וּמִבְטָל עֲצָמוֹ בְּשִׁבְלֵי הַכָּלָל
וּמִפְקִיר נַפְשׁוֹ עֲבוּרָם.

אִם כֵּן צָרִיךְ לִהְיוֹת לְפִי הַמּוֹשָׁג
שֶׁזֶה שְׂמִתְבּוֹדֵד יַעֲלֶה מַעְלָה
מַעְלָה, וְזֶה יֵרֵד מִמִּדְרֵגָתוֹ . . .

The Midrash says: Moses was more beloved than Noah. Noah started out "a righteous man," but later he's called "a man of the earth." Moses is first "an Egyptian man" and later "a man of G-d."

Here's the idea. People serve G-d in two very different ways. One person separates him- or herself and focuses on spiritual work in isolation. Another throws themselves into the needs of the community, setting aside their own spiritual comfort, even putting themselves on the line for the sake of the public.

Logic would suggest that the one who withdraws and serves G-d in seclusion should keep rising higher and higher, while the one involved in communal affairs should lose spiritual ground. . . .

TEXT 8

Rabbi Meir Simchah
Hakohen of Dvinsk,
Meshech Chochmah,
Genesis 9:20

וּבְכָל זֹאת, מְצָאנוּ שְׁנֵי הַתְּבוּדָה
וְלֹא הוֹכִיחַ אֶת בְּנֵי דֹרוֹ . . . בְּכָל
זֹאת, אַחֵר שֶׁנִּקְרָא "אִישׁ צַדִּיק",
יֵרֵד מִמַּדְרָגָתוֹ וְנִקְרָא "אִישׁ
הָאֲדָמָה". וּמִשָּׁה נִקְרָא "אִישׁ
מִצְרִי" שֶׁהוֹכָרַח לְגִלּוֹת — שְׁזֵה
מוֹרָה פְּתִיתוֹת בְּנֶפֶשׁ — הוּאִיל
וּמִסֵּר עֲצָמוֹ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהַרְיָגָת
מִצְרִי נִקְרָא "אִישׁ אֱלֹקִים",
שֶׁהִגִּיעַ לְתַכְלִית הַנְּשַׁלְמוֹת מָה
שֶׁיּוּכַל הָאָדָם לְהַשִּׁיג.

But we see the reverse. Noah kept to himself and didn't rebuke the people of his generation. Even though the Torah first calls him "a righteous man," he later drops to the level of "a man of the earth." Moses, on the other hand, begins as "an Egyptian man"—a label tied to exile and spiritual lowliness. Yet because he gives himself up for the sake of Israel and even risks everything by striking the Egyptian, he rises to be called "a man of G-d," reaching the highest level a human being can attain.

QUESTION

So if that's the case, why does Noah still receive such strong praise in the Torah, and why emphasize the praise at the moment his flaws are most exposed?

TEXT 9

The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, *Likutei
Sichot* 5, p. 282

קען דאך א איד טענהן ווי זאגט מען אים אז ער
זאל זיך אפֿלערנען פון נח'ן . . . ?

נח איז דאך געווען א צדיק תמים. און אפילו אין
זיין דור איז ער געווען א צדיק, ומכל שכן אויב
ער וואלט געווען אין א בעסערן דור. איז ער
דאך געווען אן אויסנאם. איז ווי קען ער זיך
גלייכן צו נח'ן? ווי קען ער זיך ראטעווען פון די
מים הזדונים?

דעריבער זאגט די תורה "בדורותיו", לגנאי, אז
אויך נח איז געווען א צדיק תמים מער נישט ווי
בדורותיו. און בדורו של אברהם לא היה נחשב
לכלום.

און די דרגא פון צדיק איז שייך אויך ביי אים,
כדלקמן. במילא קען ער זיך אפֿלערנען פון נח'ן.

A Jew might argue: How can we be
expected to learn from Noah . . . ?

Noah was perfectly righteous. He was even
considered righteous in his generation; all
the more so had he lived in a better
generation. He was an exception. How can
we compare ourselves to him? How can we
save ourselves from the raging waters?

Therefore, the Torah says "in his
generations" in a derogatory sense. Even
Noah was only perfectly righteous relative
to his generation. In Abraham's generation,
he would have been considered of no
account.

This is a level of righteousness to which we
can all relate; we *can* therefore learn from
Noah.

ANSWER

Noah wasn't extraordinary; he was just an ordinary person who stayed firm in a corrupt world, did what was right, built the ark, and saved life. The Torah highlights him to show that you don't have to be special to do what's right.

TEXT 10

The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, *ibid.*,
p. 45

בַּעֲת מְעַן רַעְדֻט וְנֶעֱגַן יַעֲנַעְמָם טוֹב אֲוִן לְשַׁבַּח הָאֵל עִם אַ וְדַאי אַ גּוֹטֶטע ווירקונג אױף
דַּעַם וְנֶאֱס מִלױבֶט אִים. אֲוִן בְּמִילָא גִיט עִם אִים אַ חִיזוּק וְסִיּוּעַ אִין זײַן עֲבוּדָה. מְעַן
בְּרַעֲנָגֶט אַרױס אִין אַ גִּילױ׳דִיקֶן אֲוִן פֿוֹעַל׳דִיק אױסְדֶּרוּק זײַן טוֹב אֲוִן זײַנַע מַעֲלֹות.

אַזױ אִיז עִם אַפִּילוּ בְּנוֹגַע אַ לְשַׁבַּח וְנֶאֱס מְעַנְטֶשֶׁן זײַנַען מִשְׁבַּח. אֲוִן עַל אַחַת כַּמָּה וְכַמָּה
בִּי לְשַׁבְּחִים פֿון דַּעַם אױבְּעֶרֶשְׁטֶן. אֲוִן בְּיַחְדּוֹד אַז זײ לְשִׁינַען בְּפִירוּשׁ אִין תּוֹרָה.

When we speak of another person's goodness and praise them, it certainly has a positive effect on the one being praised. Consequently, it gives them strength and support in their Divine service. Our words trigger—in a revealed and effective manner—this person's goodness and virtues.

This is so even regarding praise offered by human beings. How much more so when the praise comes from the Almighty, and especially when it's stated explicitly in the Torah.

ANSWER 1

G-d's praise of Noah wasn't just a compliment: It gave him strength. Being called righteous and capable gave him confidence to face a corrupt world, build the ark, and complete his mission.

TEXT 11

Rashi,
Deuteronomy
32:48

"בַּעֲצָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה בָּא נֹחַ וְגו'", בְּמֵרָאִית אֹרֹחַ שֶׁל יוֹם.

לְפִי שֶׁהָיוּ בְּנֵי דָוִד אוֹמְרִים, "בְּכֶךָ וְכֶךָ אִם אֲנִי מִרְגִּישׁ בּוֹ, אֵין אֲנִי מִנִּיחִין אוֹתוֹ לְכַנֵּס בַּתְּבָה. וְלֹא עוֹד אֶלָּא אֲנִי נוֹטְלִין כְּשִׁילִין וְקִרְדָּמוֹת וּמִבְקָעִין אֶת הַתְּבָה".

אָמַר הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: "הֲרִינִי מִכְּנִיסוֹ בַּחֲצֵי הַיּוֹם וְכָל מִי שֶׁיֵּשׁ בְּיָדוֹ כֶּתֶל לְמַחֹת יִבֹּא וְיִמָּקֶה".

[Regarding Noah, it is written] "Noah entered [the ark] in the midst of that day" (Genesis 7:13), which means in broad daylight.

[Why did G-d instruct him to enter the ark in broad daylight?] Because the people of his generation said, "If we observe him entering the ark, we will not let him enter. Not only that, but we will also take clubs and axes and splinter the ark."

G-d said, "I will bring him in at midday, and whoever has the power to protest, let them come and protest."

ANSWER 2

When building and entering the ark, Noah faced mockery and pressure from the society around him. G-d praised Noah on these occasions to give him courage and strength to withstand the world and carry out his task.

OPTIONAL

We see from Moses that he lost the chance to enter Israel, not only for hitting the rock but also for speaking in anger.



OPTIONAL

TEXT 12

Midrash, *Pesikta
DeRav Kahana*,
chapter 14

“וַיִּצְוֶם אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל” (שְׁמוֹת ו,
יג).

מָה צִוּוּם?

אָמַר לָהֶם: אַל תִּקְרוּ לְבָנִי
”מוֹרִים”.

וְכִיּוֹן שֶׁהִקְנִיטוּ עַל מִי מְרִיבָה, אָמַר
מֹשֶׁה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל: ”שִׁמְעוּ נָא
הַמוֹרִים” (בְּמִדְבָּר כ, י). אָמַר לָהֶם
הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: כָּל עֲצָמֵי הָיִיתִי
מְצֻנָּה אֶתְכֶם אַל תִּקְרוּ לְבָנִי מוֹרִים,
וְאַתֶּם קוֹרִים לְבָנִי מוֹרִים? . . .
”לָכֵן . . . לֹא תָבִיאוּ” (שָׁם, יב).

“And G-d commanded Moses and Aaron
concerning the Children of Israel” (Exodus 6:13).

What did G-d command them?

He said to them, “Never call My children
rebels.”

When the Jews provoked Moses during the
“waters of conflict” episode, Moses said to
Israel, “Hear now, you rebels” (Numbers 20:10).
G-d said to them, “All this time I have
commanded you not to call My children rebels,
and now you went ahead and called them
rebels? . . .

“Therefore, . . . you will not bring [them in]”
(Numbers 20:12).

OPTIONAL

A true leader doesn't
put people down, even
in frustration: a leader
lifts others up.





Words have power. Criticism magnifies mistakes, but praise builds people up. With children especially, encouragement can change everything: they start to believe in themselves and rise.

TEXT 13

The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson,
correspondence,
“Days of Chanukah,”
5721 (1960)

בְּרָצוֹנִי לְהוֹסִיף נִקּוּדָה אַחַת נוֹסֶפֶת הַמוֹפִיעָה בְּהַדְגָּשָׁה גַּם בְּכַתְבֵּי הַחֲסִידוֹת. וְהִיא שְׂבַעַת
שְׂמוֹכִיתִים יְלָדִים, עַל הַהוֹרָה אוֹ הַמּוֹרָה לְהִיזָהָר שֶׁלֹּא לְעוֹרֵר בְּיֶלֶד תַּחֲוִישָׁה שֶׁל חוֹסֵר
אוֹנִים אוֹ יִיאוֹשׁ חֲלִילָה. בְּמִילִים אַחֲרוֹת, אָסוּר שֶׁהֵיֶלֶד יִקְבֹּל רוּשָׁם כְּאִילוֹ הוּא עֲצָמוֹ
אִינוֹ רָאוּי וְכִי הַכּוֹל אָבוּד וְכוּ', וּלְפִיכָךְ הוּא יָכוֹל לְהַמְשִׁיךְ לַעֲשׂוֹת כָּכָל הָעוֹלָה עַל רוּחוֹ.
לְהִיפֹךְ, יֵשׁ לְעוֹדֵד אֶת הַהַרְגָּשָׁה שֶׁל הֵיֶלֶד שֶׁהוּא מְסוּגָל לְהַתְגַּבֵּר עַל הַקְּשָׁיִים הָעוֹמְדִים
בְּפָנָיו בְּעֶזְרַת כּוֹחַ רָצוֹן וּנְחִישׁוֹת.

I would like to add a point that's also emphasized in Chasidic writings. When rebuking children, a parent or teacher must be careful not to leave the child feeling helpless or in despair, G-d forbid. In other words, children should never be made to feel that they are unworthy and beyond hope, for which reason they may as well continue doing whatever they desire.

On the contrary, one should encourage children to feel capable of overcoming their difficulties with willpower and determination.

KEY POINTS

1. The Torah goes out of its way to call Noah a righteous person. No one else in the Torah was given this accolade.
2. At the same time, the Torah also informs us that the righteous Noah was an ordinary person.
3. Knowing that he was ordinary enables us to learn from him. If Noah, an ordinary person, could resist peer pressure and remain righteous in a generation of wicked people, so can we.
4. Noah was empowered to rise to extraordinary heights because G-d complimented him.
5. When we compliment others, especially children, we accentuate and reveal their strengths in ways they cannot do on their own.

