

Our *Parashah* opens, "These are the offspring of Noach-- Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noach walked with *Elokim*." Later, the *Parashah* describes how Noach and his family were saved from the Flood, presumably because of Noach's righteousness. Yet, the final verse of last week's *Parashah* states: "But Noach found *Chen*/ grace in the eyes of *Hashem*." Our Sages understand the word "*Chen*" as being related to "*Chinam*" / "free; for nothing," implying that Noach was not deserving of the favor that *Hashem* showed him.

R' Ovadiah Seforno z"l (the "*Seforno*"; 1470-1550; Italy) explains: Noach himself was worthy of being saved, but he was not worthy of saving his children, as we read in *Yechezkel* (14:14-15): "Even if these three men—Noach, Daniel, and Iyov—would be in it [*Eretz Yisrael*], they would by their righteousness save only themselves—declares *Hashem Elokim* . . . those three men in it would save neither sons nor daughters; they alone would be saved, but the land would become desolate." Why? Because, explains the *Seforno*, they were righteous for themselves, but they did not teach their respective generations, in contrast to Avraham, Moshe, Shmuel, and others like them, who inspired their contemporaries.

The *Seforno* continues: Noach did rebuke his contemporaries about their behavior that was destructive to society, but he did not teach them to know *Hashem* and to walk in His ways. True, he was a perfect *Tzaddik* in thought and deed, but one who is righteous only for himself can save only himself. On the other hand, one who helps to lead others to spiritual perfection may merit to save them from physical dangers as well. (*Be'ur Ha'Seforno*)

Noach נח

## Tefilah

This year, we will iy"H devote this space to discussing various aspects of our prayers.

Last week, we presented the view of R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (*RambaM*; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt) that the verse (*Devarim* 11:13), "To serve Him with all your heart," instructs us that there is a *Mitzvah* to pray, though the frequency and text of prayer are not dictated by the Torah.

R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (*RambaN*; 1194-1270; Spain and *Eretz Yisrael*) writes: What *RambaM* states is not universally agreed to; in fact, the *Gemara* states multiple times that prayer is a Rabbinic Mitzvah. For example, the *Gemara* (*Berachot* 21a) says that one who is unsure whether or not he recited *Kri'at Shema* must recite it (again), because *Kri'at Shema* is a Torah *Mitzvah*. In contrast, says the *Gemara*, one who is unsure if he prayed does not pray (again), because that is a Rabbinic *Mitzvah*.

*RambaN* continues: Likewise, *RambaM*'s position that the frequency and text of prayer is not specified by the Torah, though prayer itself is required by the Torah, does not seem correct to me. If prayer is not required daily, when is it required--once a year? Once in a lifetime?

Rather, writes *RambaN*, prayer is not a [Torah] obligation at all. Instead, it is part of *Hashem*'s Attribute of Kindness that He listens to our prayers and answers them. As for the verse cited by *RambaM*, "To serve Him with all your heart," that verse instructs us to perform *Mitzvot* with our hearts, *i.e.*, with *Kavanah*. This means paying attention to, and thinking about, what we are doing, and not performing *Mitzvot* mindlessly. It also enjoins us not to doubt whether there is any purpose to our *Mitzvah* observance.

[*RambaM* cites the *Midrash Sifrei* as his source that the verse, "To serve Him with all your heart," refers to prayer.] *RambaN* writes: The *Sifrei*'s reference to the verse is merely an "*Asmachta*" [literally, "support," *i.e.*, a mnemonic to help us remember a *Halachah* by associating it with a verse, though the verse is not the true source of that law.]

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**“You shall make a Tzohar for the Ark.” (6:16)**

*Rashi* writes: Some say this was a window. Others say it was a precious stone that gave light to them.

R' Shlomo Pappenheim *z"l* (1740-1814; *Dayan* / rabbinical court judge in Breslau, Germany) explains: The word “Tzohar” comes from the root “צַר” (*Tzadi-Reish*), which connotes focusing or intensifying. For example, a woman’s very intense labor pains are called “*Tzirei Leidah*.” The period of intense mourning leading up to *Tisha B’Av* is called “*Bein Ha’meitzarim*.” In our verse, the *Tzohar* was something--either a window or a gem--to focus and intensify the sun’s light. This, too, is why midday is called “*Tzaharayim*.”

(*Cheishek Shlomo*)

**“The whole earth was of one language and of common purpose.” (11:1)**

*Rashi* explains: Their language was *Lashon Hakodesh* / the holy tongue (Biblical Hebrew).

R' Mordechai Neugroschl *shlita* (*Eretz Yisrael*) writes: The Generation of the Dispersion, *i.e.*, the generation that planned the tower, knew the secrets of *Lashon Hakodesh* and wanted to use them to turn the spiritual roots of creation to their own purposes, regardless of *Hashem’s* will. They failed to understand that, indeed, the letters of *Lashon Hakodesh* are very powerful, but only because that is *Hashem’s* desire. One cannot twist them to use against *Hashem’s* will. Fittingly, their punishment was that *Lashon Hakodesh* was taken away from them and they were forced to speak other languages. Only Avraham Avinu, who did not participate in the generation’s sin, was able to continue using the holy tongue.

(*Mi’darchei Ha’lev Ha’Yehudi* p.50-51)

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Alternatively, continues *RambaN*, the *Sifrei’s* statement that serving *Hashem* with all one’s heart refers to prayer is teaching that we should pray to Him in a time of trouble, and that we should look to Him alone for salvation, as a slave is dependent on his master. We read similarly (*Bemidbar* 10:9), “When you go to wage war in your Land against an enemy who oppresses you, you shall sound *Teru’ah* / short blasts of the trumpets, and you shall be recalled before *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, and you shall be saved from your foes.” This verse teaches that it is a *Mitzvah* to cry out before *Hashem* with prayer and *Teru’ah* over every trouble that befalls us. King Shlomo alluded to this when he prayed at the dedication of the *Bet Hamikdash* (*Melachim I* 8:35-39), “Should the heavens be restrained and there be no rain, . . . if there be famine in the land, if there be pestilence, blight, mildew, locusts, or grasshoppers, or if an enemy oppresses [*Yisrael*] in any of the settlements of the land -- any plague, any disease -- for any prayer and any supplication any person of Your people *Yisrael* shall offer -- each person knowing his own affliction -- when he spreads his palms [in prayer] toward this House, may You hear from the Heavens . . .”

(*Hasagot Ha’Ramban: Asei* #5)

**“Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations.” (6:9)**

*Rashi z"l* comments: Some of our Rabbis explain the phrase “in his generations” to Noach’s credit: he was righteous even in his generation, and had he lived in a generation of righteous people, he would have been even more righteous. Others interpret the phrase to Noach’s discredit: in comparison with his own generation, he was righteous. But, had he lived in the generation of Avraham, he would have been of no importance. [Until here from *Rashi*]

R' Srayah Deblitzki *z"l* (1926-2018; Bnei Brak, Israel) writes: To encourage every person to strengthen his Torah study and his service of *Hashem* generally, and to “decorate” himself with *Mitzvot*, I copy here from the writings of the *Arizal* (R' Yitzchak Luria *z"l*; 1534-1572):

R' Chaim Vital *z"l* (1543-1620; Tzefat and Damascus) asked his teacher, the *Arizal*: How can you say that I have a lofty soul, when the smallest person in earlier generations was such a *Tzaddik* and *Chassid* / righteous and pious person that I do not even reach his heels?

The *Arizal* answered: Know that the greatness of a person’s soul is not measured by his deeds, but rather by the epoch and generation in which he lives. A small deed in this generation is worth many *Mitzvot* performed in earlier generations, because the forces of impurity are so strong now. If you had lived in a generation when the forces of impurity were weaker, you would have performed much greater good deeds and have had much more wisdom than many of the great people of those earlier times. This is what our Sages mean when they say that Noach would have been even more righteous if he had lived in a generation of righteous people. [Until here from the *Arizal*]

R' Deblitzki continues: In reality, the *Arizal’s* generation was a “*Dor De’ah*,” a generation of spiritual giants. The *Arizal’s* neighbors in the small town of Tzefat, *Eretz Yisrael*, included, among many other great sages, R' Yosef Karo *z"l*, author of the *Shulchan Aruch*; the Torah commentator, R' Moshe Alsheich *z"l*; and the great *Halachic* authorities R' Yosef Trani *z"l* (“*Maharit*”) and his son R' Moshe Trani *z"l* (“*Mabit*”). There were many more giants in the diaspora at the same time. Shortly before that generation [in 1492], numerous Jews had given their lives in Spain for the sanctification of G-d’s Name, and thousands of others had left behind everything they owned and moved from Spain to other countries, rather than deny the Living G-d and His Torah. If the *Arizal* called that a lowly generation, what can we say of our own time? Certainly, then, every *Mitzvah* we perform and every word of Torah we study has unimaginable worth! Knowing this, a Jew should rejoice in the opportunity to serve his Creator and constantly strengthen his Torah study and Divine Service.

(*Sefer Et L’drosh: Shovavim* p.112)