

## Parashat Noach: Mi Anachnu? Becoming the Best People we can be



### Aims:

1. Understand Noah's description in the Torah
2. Recognise the importance of interacting with the wider world to make a difference and the challenges this brings
3. Make a positive contribution to oppose an injustice in the world

*This Choveret Chinuchit is dedicated to the refua of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, haRav Ya'akov Zvi ben Liba. May he have a refua shelema amongst all the other cholim of Israel.*

## So, who's the guy our Parasha is named after?

Noach is described as an "ish tzaddik, tamim haya b'dorotav; et haElokim hit'halech Noach - a righteous man, perfect in his generation, a man who walked with G-d" (Bereishit 6:9). At first glance, Noach seems like the perfect role model. When we enter self-reflection and introspection, when we ask ourselves "Mi Anachnu? Who are we?" Noach appears to be the gold standard we should aim for.

Yet Rashi points out that not everyone understands this passuk like this. Some of our Rabbis explain that Noach was great compared to his generation, but if he was in Avraham's generation, he would not have been considered anything of significance. While others explain that whilst he was righteous in his (poor) generation, he would have been even greater in a better generation.

### Point to Ponder

Would you rather be the best of a bad bunch or average in a good generation?

## Defining our goals

Rav Hirsch defines a 'tzaddik' as someone who "looks at everything objectively, nothing from the standpoint of his own interests, but everything from the point of view of what is right. It is primarily social justice."

### Point to Ponder

Can you think of an example when you, or someone you looked up to, had to make the choice between acting in their own interests and doing what was right? Did this change your opinion of them?

"Tamim on the other hand, is preferable connected with ... derech (path). Derech is primarily the development through which a person going to the consummation of his own personality." Unlike 'tzaddik' which is about deeds that relegate your own personality to the background, "in derech the satisfaction and perfection of his own personality is the aim" to the extent that the ultimate goal is self-mastery over your actions so that nothing immoral will come of them.

Noach engaged in social justice by building the teiva, the ark. The construction process took 120 years – Noach didn't spend over a century building it for fun! He didn't do it for his own self-interest but rather "so that the people of the Generation of the Flood should see him busy with it" and thus allow him to encourage them to repent. (Rashi, Bereishit 6:14)

Noah was tamim in his generation, he was perfectly moral. The wickedness of his generation, like the water of the flood itself, did not engulf him.

Yet despite all this, his greatness is still minimised by some of our Sages.

### **"A tzaddik in a fur coat"**

Rabbi Sacks summarises Noah in two sentences: "Noah was righteous but not a leader. He was a good man who had no influence on his environment."

He explains "The Hassidim had a simple way of making this point. They called Noah a *tzaddik im peltz*, "a righteous man in a fur coat." There are essentially two ways of keeping warm on a cold night. You can wear a thick coat, or you can light a fire. Wear a coat and you warm only yourself. Light a fire and you can warm others too."

### **So, coat vs fire?**

When we are introspective, and think about who we are and who we want to be, we need to ask ourselves this question: 'Am I going to wear a thick coat or light a fire?' It is imperative that we strive to go beyond making the right decision devoid of self-interest, and instead encourage others to also do what is right. We must work on developing into the best we can possibly be from a moral perspective, and helping others do the same. We must be tzaddikim and tamim but must also help those beside us to achieve this as well.

Is it possible to engage with the scary, 'big wide world' and remain morally unaffected? Rav Hirsch explains that "such a struggle as Noah had to endure does not remain without some weakening influence on one's character. But surely, on the other side, even a somewhat lesser degree of morality and honesty, attained and kept in such times, weighs incomparably heavier in G-d's scales than a greater amount in any better times."

Concrete  
Concept

## Peula Ideas:

- 📖 **Be good in a bad bunch (or beyond!) –** develop the understanding of a wicked society, and not following in their footsteps:

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- Mafia/Wink Murder
- Follow the Leader
- Reverse Follow the Leader (everyone has to do to their own thing)

Concrete  
Concept

- 📖 **Stand your ground –** don't let those around you take you away from what you believe in:

- Just a minute
- Steal or share

- 📖 **Making a difference in the world –** pick a cause and educate your chanichim about it. "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." – Nelson Mandela.

- This could be the cultural genocide and oppression of the Uyghur Muslims in China
- Climate change and global warming
- Or another of your choice