

SICHA SUMMARY

Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 25

Noach, Sicha 1

The Verse

Noach was a righteous man, he was perfect in his generations; Noach walked with G-d. (*Bereishis* 6:9)

The Sages

Some of our Sages interpret “his generations” [the word בְּדֹרֹתָיו] favorably: “How much more so if he had lived in a generation of righteous people, he would have been even more righteous.” Others interpret it derogatorily: “In comparison with his generation he was righteous, but if he had been in Abraham’s generation, he would not have been considered of any importance.” (*Sanhedrin* 108a)

The Zohar records a similar dispute. It notes that, unlike Moshe who prayed to G-d to forgive the Jewish people after the sin of the golden calf, Noach did not pray for the people of his generation. Rabbi Yehuda justifies this behavior, explaining that Moshe was able to invoke the merit of his forefathers, while Noach could not, as he

had no righteous forbearer. Rabbi Yitzchak criticizes Noach, saying that, nonetheless, he should have prayed for his people.

The Question:

The Torah does not speak disparagingly about someone without cause. Furthermore, we are instructed to “judge every person to the side of merit.” Why do some sages choose to read the phrase, “in his generations” negatively when a positive reading is available? And why does Rabbi Yitzchok choose to fault Noach for his lack of prayer, instead of justifying it as Rabbi Yehuda did?

The Explanation:

All are in agreement that Noach’s behavior was justified for his generation. Before Avraham, the world did not have the expectation of taking radical responsibility for the moral and spiritual health of the other. Noach did not have righteous ancestry to invoke before G-d. But for those who read the Torah, which means instruction, in our generations, there is the danger that we will adopt Noach’s position which is no longer tenable. After Avraham, after the Giving of the Torah, we are

inextricably responsible for each other, and must reach out to teach the path of the Torah and mitzvos to every Jew.

Therefore, “others interpret it derogatorily:” “Interpret” in Hebrew also means to seek and search. Meaning, we who seek and search for the paths of proper conduct cannot apply Noach’s standard to ourselves, because that would be derogatory **for us**. This is not a negative of Noach himself, who was a flawed man in flawed times. But if we follow Noach’s example, then that is indeed derogatory behavior.

Rabbi Yitzchok can be understood in the same way. He is not saying that Noach is to be blamed for not praying for his generation. He is saying that we cannot learn from Noach to excuse ourselves from our responsibility toward others.

The lesson is obvious: Even if we try to bring others to the light of Torah and mitzvos and do not succeed, we cannot desist from the work and claim we did our best. We cannot stop praying to G-d for our generation.
