



# RABBI PARKOFF'S CHIZUK LETTER

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## PARSHAS NOACH

### NOACH & AVRAHAM – A MATTER OF RESOLVE

Adapted from Ora Shel Torah, by Mori v'Rabi Rav Zeidel Epstein, zt"l.

"These are the descendants of Noach, Noach was a pure righteous man in his generations, Hashem walked with Noach."

"In his generation." Rashi cites a dispute among Chazal. Some darshan this possuk positively – if in a generation of decadence he remained a tzaddik, even more so if he would have been surrounded by tzaddikim. Others, however, darshan this negatively – he was only a tzaddik when compared to reshaim. If he would have been in Avraham's generation he would have been a nobody.

We see that Chazal used Avraham Avinu as the measuring stick to gauge Noach's righteousness. In what way was Avraham different from Noach? Chazal focus on the language used by the Torah to describe each of them. Concerning Noach the Torah states, "Hashem walked with Noach," whereas by Avraham the possuk uses a different phraseology: "Hashem in front of whom I walked." Chazal call attention to the variance of the tenor of these p'sukim: Noach needed Hashem to support him, while Avraham cultivated his inner strength and built himself up into becoming a tzaddik.

This sounds strange. Doesn't the Torah testify that Noach was not only a tzaddik, but pure and perfect as well? That is all very true. However, in one aspect he showed weakness. He needed Hashem to help him retain his righteousness. He needed Hashem's support. Without Divine encouragement, he could not maintain his Avodas Hashem.

Not Avraham. He walked in front of Hashem. He pushed himself, and encouraged himself. He found the courage and support within himself to gain his spiritual pinnacle.

If Hakadosh Baruch Hu would have withheld His support from Noach, his avodas Hashem would have collapsed. This is the wonderful chessed Hashem does for all of us. He accompanies a person wherever he goes and protects him from falling into the snares of his Yetzer. Even a rosha like Bilaam was sent an angel of mercy to prevent him from sinning. Nevertheless, the real goal is that a person should find within himself the strength to achieve his path in Avodas Hashem and not to wait for the Divine inspiration or encouragement.

"Why was Avraham called the Ivri (meaning on the other side)? Because the entire world was on one side, and he was on the other." He refused to think or believe as they did. As a young child Avraham was already fighting against the conventions of the world, the prevalent lifestyle, and popular beliefs. He was born into a generation of decadence and idol worship. The entire generation denied the existence of Hashem. (Sound familiar? Read the New York Times.)

Avraham went from place to place declaring that Hashem is the Creator. For many years he searched for the "Owner of the Palace." It wasn't until finally at the age of 70 that Hashem peered out to him and said, "Here I am." This was his first prophetic revelation. But even prior to this, Avraham was willing to throw himself into a fiery furnace for his beliefs, in spite of the fact that the "Owner of the Palace" had not revealed Himself to him nor given him any measure of support or encouragement. His lifelong service flowed from his own personal recognition and conviction that there must be a Creator. Having emanated from within himself, his avodah had the strength to stand ground against the entire world.

Noach's biography shows us a person of different fiber. "Noach was 600 years old and the flood waters covered the earth." Noach left the Ark and faced utter destruction and desolation. There was no life anywhere, and no vestige of mankind's former preeminence. Upon leaving the Ark, Noach came face-to-face with a cold new reality that was shockingly and profoundly different from anything he had ever known. We read about the generation before the flood: "There was no end to all the people" (*Koheles* 4:16). Rashi explains that the pre-Flood generation had multiplied immeasurably and filled up the earth. A woman would conceive and give birth three days later. And then again after three more days! There were probably millions, if not billions, of people populating the earth. Now, everything Noach had known, everything he had been familiar with was gone. In its place there was nothing — absolutely nothing. Just pure desolation. Only he and his family. At this instant, he was faced with new momentous test: was he going to despair and mourn over a past that was forever lost? Or would he forge ahead, confident that the Almighty would help him rebuild a new and better world?

Noach made his decision. One can't give up. He realized the futility of grieving over the past and understood the necessity of looking to the future and starting over. He chose the path of life. However, he felt he needed moral support. In order to insure that he not fall into the depths of despondency and that he could conjure up the inner strength to start anew with joy, he planted a vineyard. This would put him in a good mood and enable him to engage in the task of rebuilding, thereby bringing joy to Hashem. Thus Noach's first step was to make wine. By drinking wine, he hoped to fortify his resolve and blunt his discouragement over the terrible destruction that faced him and the daunting task of rebuilding the lost world. Indeed, Scripture itself informs us that wine has the power to "gladden man's heart" (*Tehillim* 104:15). Noach had good reason for his course of action, and

these words from *Tehillim* would seem to support his choice. Is he, then, to be faulted for his decision?

The Torah tells us that indeed this was his fatal error. He fell from his exalted position. We read: "And Noach became profaned" (*Bereishis* 9:20). It was definitely proper for him to engage in farming. But he should have first planted a more beneficial and productive type of crop.

It's true that Noach had done something very important and essential. Scripture itself testifies to the value of wine, both in its power to lighten one's heart, and regarding the role it plays in the sanctification of the Almighty (e.g., making kiddush). Ultimately, wine has a vital and necessary function in the world. However, at this early stage, when the entire world was waiting to be rebuilt, producing wine was somewhat of an extravagance that paled before the pressing tasks awaiting him. In short, with such monumental and important work facing him, despair was a luxury not to be indulged in at this point. If he gave any thought to the matter at all, he should have concluded that if the Almighty had kept him alive until now, He would not abandon him in the future. His certainty that Hashem would aid him in rebuilding the world should have been absolute and unwavering, and that alone should have served as his source of comfort. But that was not the case. And even if it was only to some slight degree, it revealed a deficiency in Noach's power of determination. He was lacking in his fortitude to carry out the task before him.

Avraham, on the other hand was the paradigm of resolve. The Chofetz Chaim (*Al Hatorah*) makes a point of Avraham's willpower. The possuk states, "And Avram took... and he went to the Land of Canaan and he came to the Land of Canaan" (*Bereishis* 12:5). Avraham Avinu, once he made up his mind to go to the Land of Canaan, he made sure that he got to the Land of Canaan.

Regarding his father, however, we find a different phraseology. "And Terach took Avram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter in law, the wife of Avram his son, and they went forth with them from Ur Casdim to go to the land of Canaan, and they came as far as Haran and settled there" (11: 31). Terach started out to go to Canaan, but never made it there.

This teaches us that a person should strive to follow the footsteps of Avraham Avinu. If he takes upon himself to go to Eretz Canaan, he must go there. He mustn't change his plans at all, or stop off in the middle of the journey. Once you have made up your mind on a certain good path, follow through and don't give up.

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### **Never Give Up!**

Poalei Agudas Yisroel had recently yielded on the issue of Sherut Leumi (National Service for women). This was a very disconcerting decision, because in the opinion of the Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah, Sherut Leumi was absolutely prohibited. Moreover, as the new elections approached, the Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah decided to run for the Knesset together with Poalei Agudas Yisroel against the opinions of Rav Shach and the Steipler Rav. Rav Shach was absolutely devastated and

beside himself.

At that time, Rav Lorincz visited the Steipler. The Rav asked him how Rav Shach was faring. "He's very broken and beside himself. He has been so tremendously disappointed he says he doesn't have the strength to go on."

The Steipler felt Rav Shach's pain. He then turned to Rav Lorincz and said, "I want you to go to Rav Shach and in my name tell him the following:

"The Torah describes at length how Avraham Avinu davened over and over again trying to save S'dom. It takes up a whole parsha of the Torah. Avraham started to appeal that perhaps there are fifty tzaddikim in the city. Then he went down to forty, thirty, twenty. But there weren't even ten. Being there were not enough tzaddikim, the decree was sealed. 'And the Lord went his way, as soon as He had left talking with Avraham; and Avraham returned to his place.' (*Bereishis* 18:33). What is the import of these words, 'Avraham returned to his place'? It seems unnecessary and extraneous.

"The answer is," explained the Steipler, "that the Torah is coming to teach Rav Shach that after doing everything in his power to save the situation, and yet failing to reach the goal, he has to be like Avraham and "return to his place." He has to go back and continue executing his obligations as if nothing had happened. Lack of accomplishment never justifies, under any circumstances, that the person become broken and unable to continue his holy work. Give this over to him word-for-word in my name. He did everything he could; he left nothing out. Therefore he must now fulfill 'and Avraham returned to his place' and continue leading the people as before."

Rav Lorincz performed his task and gave over the message to Rav Shach, word-for-word. Rav Shach breathed deeply and said, "Go, this time in my name, and tell the Steipler I accept his words and I will continue, with Hashem's help, in my service to Klal Yisroel."

### ***Wishing Everyone A Gut Shabbos!***

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Rabbi Parkoff is author of "Chizuk!" and "Trust Me!" (*Feldheim Publishers*), and "Mission Possible!" (*Israel Book Shop - Lakewood*).

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