



**Shoeless Yom Kippur  
Parshas Noach**

Erev Yom Kippur, the congregation surrounded the young rabbi and took in his every word as he elaborated on the laws of the holiday. At the end of the learning session they were provided with Hebrew-Chinese prayer books.

Yaakov was one of the participants; a Jew who had no connection to his heritage and knew very little about the holiday. My grandson, Rabbi Henig, explained to him the laws of the holy day and helped him prepare.

The man said that he lived far away from the synagogue and wished to participate in the prayers and therefore was getting a hotel room for the holiday, which was still a 45-minute walk away from the synagogue. My grandson, who was moved by the gesture, resumed his holiday preparations.

The evening prayers commenced with "Kol Nidrei", but the man did not come. Rabbi Henig looked back from time to time, to see if he had arrived, but he did not come during the entire holiday. Perhaps he had changed his mind? My grandson was worried about his missing "congregant", however, there was nothing he could do because of the holy day.

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Our weekly parsha commences by telling us that Noach "was a righteous man, he was perfect in his generations."<sup>1</sup>

Our Sages provide different commentaries to these words: "Some of our Sages interpret it 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, however if he had been in Abraham's generation, he would not have been considered of any importance."<sup>2</sup>

This argument is disturbing. Shouldn't we always seek to judge everyone favorably? Why would one view Noach in a derogatory fashion?

Further on in the parsha, the question becomes sharper - Noach is commanded to take into his ark "Of all the clean animals you shall take for yourself seven pairs, a male and

its mate, and of the animals that are 'not clean', two, a male and its mate."<sup>3</sup> - our Sages learn from here that one should be careful with his words, as the Torah does not call them impure or use another negative term but uses only positive terms- why not interpret the Torah's view of Noach in this same positive manner?

The Ba'al Shem Tov's students learn that the Torah is teaching us a lesson; we should not learn from Noach, who did not act to save his generation.

Our Sages tell us of a discussion between Noach and Moshe. Noach claims he is greater than Moshe, for he merited to be saved. Moshe replies that he is greater, as Noach did not have the power to save his generation, but Moshe did have the power to save the Jewish Nation, who was condemned at one point to be annihilated by G-d.<sup>4</sup>

Noach, when seeing his generation's actions, secluded himself. Moshe, the leader that he was, was active in fighting for his brethren and spent all his days working and praying for the sake of the Jewish Nation.

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Two hours after Yom Kippur came to an end my grandson received a phone call. Yaacov was on the line. He was very moved as he told my grandson of his private Yom Kippur experience. He was preparing himself to leave for the services on Yom Kippur eve and then remembered that the rabbi had told him that the wearing of leather shoes was prohibited on Yom Kippur. He had no non-leather shoes; he searched for a pair, but could not find any.

"I returned to the hotel full of sorrow. I told myself I would not desecrate the holiday, no matter what. I took the prayer book and began to leaf through it, going through it several times over the course of the holiday."

My grandson felt compelled to share the story with me. I was very moved, and said: "If Rabbi Levy Yitzchak of Berditchov, who was known for his favorable outlook and defense of the Jewish People, was alive he would raise his eyes to the sky and say - 'Creator of the Universe, see your beloved sons. Yesterday he was distant and disinterested, and today he spent the entire day in prayer. Where can you find such a nation?'"

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<sup>1</sup> Bereshiet 6:9.

<sup>2</sup> Talmud Tractate Sanhedrin, 108a.

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<sup>3</sup> Beresheit 7:2.

<sup>4</sup> Midrash Rabbah Dvarim 11:3.