



Noach Found Favor in the Eyes of Hashem in the Merit of His Descendant Avraham Avinu Their Lives Overlapped 58 Years the Gematria of Noach

This week, we will focus on the opening passuk of parshas Noach (Bereishis 6, 9): **אלה תולדות נח, נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדורותיו: את האלקים התהלך נח—these are the offspring of Noach; Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noach walked with Hashem.** Apropos the words **“in his generations,”** Rashi comments that some of our sages interpret these words as being complimentary, while others interpret them as being derogatory. Would he have been an even greater tzaddik in a generation of tzaddikim or was he only a tzaddik in comparison to the people of his generation? Perhaps, had he lived in the generation of Avraham, he would not have been considered meritorious or special at all.

The comparison between Noach and Avraham stems from the fact that Noach was not simply described as a tzaddik, but he was specifically described as a tzaddik **“in his generations.”** As Rashi notes, these seemingly superfluous words are surely teaching us something. Also, why is Noach being compared specifically to Avraham?

Additionally, it behooves us to examine the elucidation in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 108a) concerning the juxtaposition of the conclusion of the previous parsha—**“and Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem”**—and the beginning of this week’s parsha—**“these are the offspring of Noach; Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations”**: **תנא: דבי רבי ישמעאל, אף על נח נחתך גזר דין, אלא שמצא חן בעיני ה', שנאמר: נח חסיד וצדיק וקדוש ונורא. נח חסיד וצדיק וקדוש ונורא. נח חסיד וצדיק וקדוש ונורא.** According to the Academy of Rabbi Yishmael, the decree to punish and destroy the world with the mabul also included Noach; however, he was

spared, since he found favor in the eyes of Hashem, as it states (ibid. 6, 7): **“I have reconsidered My having made them; but Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem.”** So, if the Torah depicts Noach as a **“tzaddik,”** why was he included in the decree? Furthermore, if he was flawed and deserved to die in the mabul, then how did he find favor in the eyes of Hashem? After all, the Torah explicitly describes Hashem as a G-d (Devarim 10, 17): **“אשר לא ישא פנים ולא יקח שוחד”**—**Who does not show favor and does not take a bribe.**

Noach’s Character Flaw According to the Commentaries

We will begin our inquiry by presenting the prevalent opinion among our commentaries concerning the blatant flaw in Noach’s character. Among these commentaries are three luminaries named after Moshe Rabeinu—the Alshich hakadosh, the Chasam Sofer and the Yismach Moshe. The first two point out that clearly HKB”H could have spared Noach in many other ways that would have been much simpler. For instance, He could have simply sent Noach someplace unaffected by the mabul.

Nevertheless, HKB”H saved Noach from the treacherous waters of the mabul by incarcerating him in an ark with animals and beasts for an entire year. As the Midrash Tanchuma (Noach 2) explains, this was an extremely difficult ordeal: **“אמרו רבותינו, י”ב חודש בתיבה לא ראה שינה לא ביום ולא בלילה.**” **שהיה עוסק וזן הבריות שעמו”**—according to our Rabbis, during the twelve months in the “teivah,” Noach did not sleep day or night, since taking care of the animals and feeding them

occupied all of his time. Evidently, Noah was punished for secluding himself in his house and not rebuking the people of his generation; hence, he was secluded in the “teivah.”

The Yismach Moshe adds another vital point. We learn in the Zohar hakadosh (Noach 67b) that even though Noah was a tzaddik, he possessed a major character flaw. He neglected to pray for the people of his generation not to be exterminated. This is in stark contrast to Moshe Rabeinu, who beseeched HKB”H after the “cheit ha’eigel” to spare the people of Yisrael (Shemos 32, 32): **“ועתה אם תשא חטאתם, ואם אין מחני נא מספרך אשר—כתבת—and now, if You would but bear their sin; but if not, erase me from Your book that You have written.”**

It is for this reason that the mabul is associated with Noah, as per the passuk from the haftarah (Yeshayah 54, 9): **“כי מי נח—זאת לי אשר נשבעתי מעבור מי נח עוד על הארץ—for like the waters of Noah shall this be to Me, as I swore that the waters of Noah would never again pass over the earth.** Noah could have averted the mabul with his prayers. Due to his failure to pray for his generation, the death decree of the mabul was also issued against Noah.

In this manner, the Yismach Moshe explains the juxtaposition of the end of parshas Bereishis and the beginning of parshas Noach. Parshas Bereishis concludes as follows (Bereishis 6, 7): **“ויאמר ה' אמוחה את האדם אשר בראתי מעל פני—Hashem said, “I will obliterate mankind that I created from upon the face of the earth” . . . but Noah found favor in the eyes of Hashem.** As mentioned above, the Gemara learns from here that Noah was also included in the decree, but he was spared due to divine favor.

Then, the reason why Noah was included in the decree is explained at the beginning of our parsha: **“These are the offspring of Noah; Noah was a righteous man in his generations.”** Due to his righteousness, he possessed the capacity to transform “midas hadin” into “midas harachamim” with his tefilos. Yet, he neglected to do so. On the contrary: **“את האלקים התהלך נח”—Noach was complicit with “midas hadin,” associated with the name Elokim, to punish the people of his generation.** Therefore, the decree also applied to him, because HKB”H is very stringent in dealing with tzaddikim.

Avraham Was 58 Years Old when Noah Died

In this manner, we will explain how Noah was spared from the mabul due to divine favor despite these failures. Let us refer to the Midrash (B.R. 29, 5): **“But Noah found favor in the eyes of Hashem. These are the offspring of Noah.” Rabbi Simon said: We find that HKB”H bestows favor upon the later generations in the merit of the earlier generations. But where do we find that HKB”H bestows favor upon the earlier generation in the merit of the later generations? From the words: “Noah found favor in the eyes of Hashem.” It was in the merit of his offspring (as it is written: “These are the offspring of Noah”).**

In Chomat Anach, the great Gaon Chida brings down in the name of Rabeinu Ephraim, one of the early commentaries, that the Midrash is referring to Avraham Avinu, who descended from Noah’s son Shem. He refers to the passuk (ibid. 8, 1): **“ויזכור אלקים את נח ואת כל החיה ואת כל הבהמה אשר אתו: בתיבה, ויעבר אלקים רוח על הארץ וישוכו המים. ויעב’ אלקים רוח, סופי גימטריא אברהם.”** **“G-d remembered Noah and all the animals that were with him in the ark, and G-d caused a spirit to pass over the earth and the water subsided.” The last letters of the words רמ”ח are רמ”ח ויעב’ אלקים רוח are רמ”ח (248), the gematria of Avraham. In other words, HKB”H recalled the merit of Avraham, who was destined to descend from Shem, the son of Noah.**

We find a fascinating tidbit related to this topic in the commentary of the Chasam Sofer at the beginning of this parsha. He cites the Midrash stating that Avraham Avinu was 58 years old when Noah passed away. (Translator’s Note: The gematria of נ”ח is 58.) According to the Seder Olam Rabbah (Chapter 1), Avraham Avinu was 48y.o. at the time of the sin of the generation of the dispersion, whereas Noah lived ten more years after that incident. Thus, Avraham was 58y.o. when Noah passed away.

This is also pointed out in the commentary of the Ibn Ezra on the passuk: **“אלה תולדות נח נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדורותיו”**. He inquires: Why does the passuk say **“in his generations”** in the plural rather than **“in his generation”** in the singular? He answers that it is because the passuk is alluding to the generations that followed as well as the generation of the

mabul; because he lived until Avraham was 58y.o. This is the allusion inherent in the passuk: Avraham was ג'ח years old when **Noach** died.

In this vein, the Chasam Sofer explains the allusion in the passuk: **"These are the generations of Noach"**—in other words, the passuk is alluding to the cream of the crop, the greatest of his progeny; "נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדורותיו"—a true tzaddik--"צדיק תמים"—who lived for ג'ח (58) years during the lifetime of Noach, namely Avraham Avinu. This coincides nicely with the passuk (ibid. 17, 1): "התהלך לפניי והיה תמים"—where HKB"H instructs Avraham to walk before Him and be "תמים"—perfect. Upon seeing that the righteous Avraham descended from him: **"Noach walked with G-d"**—he passed on to the next world at peace.

The Lives of Noach and Avraham Overlapped ג'ח Years

It gives me great joy to connect the two teachings of Chazal. In the Gemara, they taught us that the decree to wipe out mankind with the mabul also applied to Noach. In the Midrash, they teach us that Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem in the merit of his progeny. On the one hand, he was guilty of not chastising the people of his generation and not praying on their behalf. On the other hand, he received divine favor on account of Avraham Avinu, who descended from him.

It is apparent that Avraham Avinu made amends for Noach's shortcomings. Whereas Noach failed to rebuke the people of his generation, Avraham strove to guide the people of his generation in the ways of Hashem. This is the message of the passuk (ibid. 21, 33): "ויטע אשל בבאר שבע ויקרא שם בשם ה'—אל עולם"—**he planted an "eshel" in Be'er Sheva and there he proclaimed the name of Hashem, G-d of the Universe.** Corresponding to Noach's failure to pray on behalf of his generation, we find that Avraham prayed even on behalf of the corrupt populace of Sedom. As it is written (ibid. 18, 27): "ויען—אברהם ויאמר הנה נא הואלתי לדבר אל אדוני ואנכי עפר ואפר"—**Avraham responded and said, "Behold, now, I have begun to speak to my Lord although I am but dust and ash."**

Let us add an important point. During those last ג'ח (58) years of his life, during which Noach was privileged to know his descendant Avraham, Noach instructed Avraham not to

make the same mistakes he made. Instead, he should take care to chastise his contemporaries, guide them in the ways of Hashem and pray on their behalf. In other words, during those 58 years, Avraham Avinu was instructed by Noach himself to rectify his deficiencies. In that merit, Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem and was spared from the cataclysmic decree.

This explains very nicely the elucidation of the Midrash concerning the juxtaposition of pesukim. In reality, Noach should have died in the mabul, because he neglected to rebuke and pray for the people of his generation. However, he found favor--ג'ח—in the eyes of Hashem, in the merit of the last ג'ח (same letters in reverse)—58—years of his life. Hence, the text explains how he found this divine favor. As the Chasam Sofer explains: **"These are the offspring of Noach"**—the elite and most significant of his offspring—**"a perfect tzaddik lived for ג'ח (58) years in his generations"**—namely, Avraham whose lifetime overlapped 58 years with Noach's. During those last 58 years, he taught Avraham how to make amends for his shortcomings. In that merit, he found favor in the eyes of Hashem and was saved from the mabul.

We can now appreciate why the Torah emphasized the fact that a tzaddik lived **"in his generations."** The Torah is drawing a comparison between the generation of Noach and the generation of Avraham. Thus, we learn that Noach spared solely in the merit of his offspring Avraham. In this light, we can interpret Rashi's comment as follows: **There are those among our Rabbis who view him in a positive light. All the more so, had he lived in a generation of tzaddikim, he would have been even more righteous.** They were alluding to the fact that Noach rectified his failures in the generation of the righteous Avraham by instructing Avraham to chastise his contemporaries and pray for them.

Yet, there are those among our Rabbis who view him disparagingly. He was only a tzaddik in comparison to his generation. Had he lived in the generation of Avraham, he would not have been considered anything special. Here they are teaching us why he was spared solely in the merit of Avraham. In comparison to Avraham, he was nothing, because he neglected to rebuke his contemporaries and pray for them as Avraham did. Nevertheless, Noach's praiseworthiness came as a result of his failures. For, he saw

fit to teach Avraham the error of his own ways. Thus, the views of both sets of Rabbis represent divine truth. Noach found favor in G-d's eyes in the merit of his descendant Avraham, who made amends for his failures.

Transforming נ"ן into ח"ן

We can now better comprehend and enjoy together the wondrous ways of Hashem. Clearly, it was orchestrated from above that Noach would have the privilege of spending time with Avraham during the last נ"ן years of his life. So, let us introduce what the great Rabbi of Modzhitz, zy"א, writes in Divrei Yisrael in relation to the passuk: **"But Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem."** He refers to the following elucidation in the Gemara concerning Noach (A.Z. 6a): איש "צדיק במעשיו"—**he was a perfectly righteous man**—**perfect in his ways, righteous in his deeds.** Rashi comments: **"Perfect in his ways"—humble and of a lowly spirit. "Righteous in his deeds"—devoid of corruption (robbery).** In other words, the passuk is attesting to his humility and lowly spirit.

Now, we have learned in the Gemara (Shabbas 104a): אמרי ליה רבנן לרבי יהושע בן לוי, אתו דרדקי האינדא לבי מדרשא ואמרו מילי דאפילו בימי יהושע בן נון לא איתמר כוותייהו... נון כפופה גון פשוטה. נאמן כפוף נאמן. **The Rabbis said to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi: Young students came to the Beis Midrash today and they made comments concerning the letters of the "aleph-Beis" that were not said even in the times of Yehoshua bin Nun.** They expounded on all the letters of the "aleph-Beis," even on the letters that have two forms. In relation to the letter "nun," they expounded: **The bent "nun" and the straight (erect) "nun" allude to a faithful person ("ne'eman") who is bent over and a faithful person ("ne'eman") who is erect.**

According to Rashi, this teaches us that a faithful, kosher person should be bent over and humble in this world; as a result, he will ultimately stand tall and erect in Olam HaBa. This then is what the Torah is implying about Noach with the statement: **"But Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem."** The first letter of the name נ"ן is a bent "nun"; this implies that Noach demonstrated humility in his behavior. Therefore, HKB"H rewarded his exemplary behavior by transforming and rearranging the letters נ"ן into ח"ן, which has a straight,

elongated "nun." In other words, by saving Noach from the mabul, HKB"H enabled him to stand tall and erect.

Following his lead, I would like to propose an interpretation of the statement: **"But Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem."** We find an intriguing idea in the Chiddushei Chasam Sofer. He addresses the Gemara's assertion that these elucidations were not said even in the times of Yehoshua bin Nun. How did they know this? To answer this question, he refers to the exposition: **The bent "nun" and the straight "nun" allude to a faithful person ("ne'eman") who is bent over and a faithful person ("ne'eman") who is erect.**

Indeed, humility is an admirable, outstanding quality. This, however, only applies with regards to one's personal honor and self-esteem. With regards to the honor of Heaven, one must adopt an attitude of pride and arrogance related to kedushah, in keeping with the passuk (Divrei HaYamim II 17, 6): **"ויגבה לבו בדרכי ה'—his heart was uplifted in the ways of Hashem.** Without a degree of pride and arrogance concerning matters of kedushah, one is liable to fall prey to the yetzer's ploy of misguided humility. It encourages a person to believe that he is a sinner not worthy of serving Hashem and performing acts of kedushah—such as studying Torah and performing mitzvos. Hence, one must be proud to serve Hashem with all of his might.

With this understanding, the Chasam Sofer asserts that the **"bent nun"** alludes to the trait of humility—to a person sitting bent over humbly with a lowly spirit. On the other hand, the **"straight, elongated nun"** alludes to a person who serves Hashem and performs acts of kedushah with pride. Clearly, a person must serve Hashem in both of these ways—like a **"bent nun"** and like a **"straight nun."**

Yehoshua bin Nun Led Yisrael with Strength and Vigor

In this manner, the Chasam Sofer explains the Gemara's (ibid. 105b) teaching that the elders in the times of Yehoshua bin Nun died young, because they did not eulogize him properly. Let us refer to the passuk (Devarim 31, 7): **ויקרא משה ליהושע ויאמר אליו לעיני כל ישראל חזק ואמץ כי אתה תבוא את העם—Moshe summoned Yehoshua and said to him in front of all of Yisrael, "Be**

strong and courageous, for you shall come with this people to the land that Hashem swore to their forefathers to give to them."

Rashi comments: **Moshe said to Yehoshua, "The elders of the generation shall be with you. Everything should be done in accordance with their opinion and advice." But HKB"H said to Yehoshua (ibid. 23), "For you shall bring Bnei Yisrael to the land that I have sworn to them. Bring them without their having a choice in the matter. Everything depends on you. Take them and hit them on the crown of their head (if necessary). There is but one leader per generation and not two leaders per generation."** Thus, the Torah states explicitly that Yehoshua was commanded to lead Yisrael with strength and vigor.

Now, the Torah attests to Moshe Rabeinu's extreme humility (Bamidbar 12, 3): **"וזהאיש משה עניו מאד"**. He was comparable to a **"bent nun."** Yehoshua, on the other hand, who led with strength was comparable to a **"straight nun."** Therefore, the elders, who were unaware that he had been commanded to lead in this manner, did not eulogize him appropriately. In truth, Yehoshua was an extremely humble human being. This is attested to by the comment of the Targum YoNasan (Bamidbar 13, 16): **"וכדי חמא משה ענוותנותיה קרא משה להושע בר נון יהושע"**—**when Moshe recognized his humility, Moshe called Hoshea the son of Nun Yehoshua.** Notwithstanding, he led Yisrael mightily, because he was commanded to do so.

This then is the meaning of the Gemara's contention that the young children expounded what was not expounded in the times of Yehoshua bin Nun. It is specifically referring to the exposition of **"the bent "nun" and the straight "nun."** On the one hand, it is essential to behave with humility; on the other hand, it is essential to demonstrate pride and strength, in keeping with the passuk: **"His heart was uplifted in the ways of Hashem."** Had they expounded this in the times of Yehoshua, the elders would have recognized his true character and eulogized him properly.

The Chasam Sofer concludes by stating that this is alluded to by the very name Yehoshua: **"והיינו יהושע בן נון שהבין עניו הגון כפשיטתו"**. He states that Yehoshua understood the significance of the letter "nun" but does not explain what that really means. Seemingly, he is teaching us that while Yehoshua understood

that a person must possess a humble, lowly character reminiscent of the **"bent nun"**; when it comes to leadership, one must demonstrate strength and vigor reminiscent of the **"straight nun,"** as he was commanded to do by Hashem.

As a loyal servant in the presence of his master, I would like to embellish this sacred thought. If we examine his father's name, **נוח**, we find that it begins with a **"bent nun"** and ends with a **"straight nun."** As we have explained, the former alludes to the trait of humility, while the latter alludes to the pride and arrogance associated with matters of kedushah. The letter **"vav"** in the middle connects the two aspects of the letter **"nun."** This then is the allusion inherent in the name **Yehoshua bin Nun.** He truly understood the significance of the letter **"nun"**—the magnificent combination of personal humility and the pride of kedushah.

Due to His Humility Noach Neglected to Rebuke and Pray for the People of His Generation

Proceeding along this sublime path, we will now elaborate on the passuk: **"But Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem."** We presented the elucidation in the Gemara: **"Even upon Noach the punishment was decreed, but he found favor in the eyes of Hashem."** It seems that his failure to rebuke his contemporaries and pray on their behalf was due to his humility. He considered himself unworthy to rebuke them and pray for them. Therefore, he, too, was punished. To be saved from the mabul, he was forced to be incarcerated in the **"teivah"** with animals and wild beasts.

After enduring this humiliating punishment, he recognized the error of his ways. He had behaved with inappropriate humility even in matters related to Hashem. Hence, he sought to correct this shortcoming. To assist him, HKB"H arranged for him to meet Avraham, so that he could teach Avraham not to follow his example. Rather, he should admonish his contemporaries and pray for them. This is the significance of the **נ"ח (58)** years that their lives overlapped. They enabled Noach to transform and rearrange the name **נ"ח** with a **"bent nun"**—alluding to humility—to the word **ח"ן** with a **"straight nun"**—alluding to the pride and arrogance associated with kedushah. This then is the explanation of the Gemara's statement: **"Even upon Noach"**—who resembled a **"bent nun"**

because of his humility—**“the punishment was decreed. But he found favor in the eyes of Hashem”**—because he foresaw that Avraham would descend from him, and he would be able to transform the letters נ”ח into the letters ח”ן.

At this point, let us add a pleasant tidbit related to the passuk: **“But Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem.”** We have learned in the Gemara (Megillah 31a): **“כל מקום שאתה מוצא גבורתו של הקב”ה אתה מוצא ענוותנותו—wherever you find HKB”H’s greatness, you find His humility.** As we learn from our sacred sefarim, HKB”H created man with two distinct eyes. With one eye, he is meant to recognize his own lowliness; with the second eye, he is meant to recognize the greatness of the Creator, to epitomize the words: **“His heart was uplifted in the ways of Hashem.”**

Now, so to speak, HKB”H also looks upon Yisrael with two distinct eyes. With one eye, HKB”H treats us with divine humility; He waives His honor to forgive a sinner who regrets his transgressions and performs teshuvah. With the second eye, He demonstrates His sovereignty by punishing the wicked, as it states (Mishlei 29, 4): **“מלך במשפט יעמיד ארץ—through justice a king establishes a land.** This then is the allusion inherent in the passuk: **“ונח מצא חן בעיני ה’”**. In the merit of Avraham, who rectified Noach’s shortcomings, he was able to transform the letters נ”ח into the letters ח”ן; he ultimately exemplified both aspects of the letter “nun.” As a result, he found favor **“in the eyes of Hashem”**—this caused HKB”H, as it were, to also look upon him with both distinct eyes. HKB”H demonstrated both His greatness and His humility.



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