



Ohr Yerushalayim News

כ"ז מרחשון תשע"ז - נח - 5th November 2016 - Volume 9 - Issue 14

News This Week

Seuda Shlishis

The Seuda Shlishis season starts this Shabbos after the second Minyan for Mincha. If you would like to sponsor individually or jointly please put your name/s by the relevant week on the list on the notice wall.

Ovos uBonim Restarts

Ovos uBonim restarts this week, an hour and fifteen minutes after Shabbos. Looking forward to seeing all dads and their lads there!

18th Anniversary Shabbaton

As plans come together with what promises to be an epic and momentous weekend of Parshas Toldos 2nd-3rd December, celebrating the Kehilla's 18th anniversary, starting with a communal Friday night meal for the entire family, a programme packed Shabbos and culminating in a grand Melava Malka and Siyum Hashass, may we remind all members, to ensure all Gemorah learning for the Siyum is complete by that date. A handful of slots are still available to be snatched up on the foyer notice wall.

Anyone who has any past pictures or videos from shul events are kindly asked to email through to pastpics@ohryerushalayim.org.uk

To Be a Tzadik, Or Not To Be a Tzadik Dani Epstein

Imagine an industry where lying, cheating and complete dishonesty is par for the course, such as...oh, I don't know...banking.

Now, one day, you get a call from your bank manager who says to you: "We have gone through our records and discovered that we really have not dealt with you properly. We could have paid you more interest, our bank charges have been excessive and we want to make this up to you."

During a long meeting he explains everything to you, and then demonstrates how they will be totally transparent with you in the future, how they will compensate you for charges they should have never levied and generally be completely honest.

This is of course a complete fairy tale, a work of pure fiction. If we take this clearly ludicrous example a little further, the entire concept will become even more absurd. Imagine a bank whose motto is "honesty, fairness and transparency". And they actually live up to it. They go out of their way to save you money, and work long hard nights to make your money stretch further. Every mistake they make is immediately rectified, and they compensate you for it without quibble.

In today's climate, they would be treated as bumbling idiots by the other banking institutions. They would be the laughing stock of the money markets. And yet they soldier on, making slim profits but firmly insistent on remaining true to their credo.

How would we regard them? Surely they would be hailed as heroes; trailblazers; tzadikim.

So it really leaves us scratching our heads when we read the famous comment in Rashi about Noach. Let's have a look at the relevant verse first.

אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֵי נֹחַ, נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו
These are the descendants of Noach, Noach was a righteous man, he

was complete in his generations
This translation leaves something to be desired, since in Loshon Hakodesh words will often have a contextual meaning that has to be thought out carefully. We have this in English as well. You can 'elect' to have a coffee and 'vote' for your MP, or 'elect' your MP and 'vote' to have a coffee. Whilst they seemingly mean the same thing to a foreign reader, there is a subtlety that is lost unless one is familiar with idiomatic English. A bus driver might tell a slow-moving passenger taking their time to exit to "come on, get off". Again, a potential source of confusion.

There is this qualification: בְּדֹרֹתָיו – in his generations. This seems to make little sense, because either he was or was not a tzadik – why add a qualifier? Is it really a qualifier? Very mysterious.

At this point Rashi quotes the gemoroh in Sanhedrin (108a): Rav Yochanan said: "בְּדֹרֹתָיו – in his generations" but not in any other generation, but Resh Lokish maintained that he was a tzadik in his generation, how much more so in other generations.

The position of Resh Lokish is very easy to understand. When surrounded by unmitigated corruption and vice, Noach succeeded in rejecting that all and kept himself pure. What an incredible and unique achievement! Who other than Noach in the history of mankind had been faced with such a challenge and succeeded?

Rav Yochanon, on the other hand, seems to be quite counter-intuitive. If under the direst circumstances Noach came through as pure as the driven snow, then any other generation which posed far fewer challenges would surely result in him being an even greater tzadik? How can Rav Yochanon have ever come to such a conclusion?

As it happens, there are many meforshim that quite cheerfully ignore this particular gemoroh and cast Noach in the purest of light.

Rav Hirsch, for instance, focuses on the word אִישׁ. As a rule, this word refers to someone of great importance, or someone who takes on a great responsibility. In Pirkei Ovos, Chazal famously state: "לְהִיְתוֹת אִישׁ - in a place where there are no men, do your best to be a man". Of course they do not mean be a "man" at all,

The Week Ahead

שבת פרשת נח	
Candle Lighting	4.14pm
Mincha	4.19pm
Shacharis	9.00am
סוף זמן ק"ש	9.34am
1st Mincha	1.30pm
Rov's Shiur	3.30pm
2nd Mincha	4.00pm
Seuda Shlishis	Following
Maariv & Motzei Shabbos	5.20pm
Ovos uBonim	6.35pm
Sun	7.15am / 8.20am
Mon / Thurs	6.45am / 7.10am / 8.00am
Tues / Wed / Fri	6.45am / 7.20am / 8.00am
Mincha & Maariv	4.10pm
Late Maariv	8.00pm

but be a person who gets things done in the public arena, whether it is organising zedokoh, bikku cholim or shiurim etc.

In Noach's case, says Rav Hirsch, had he been some shlepper with little intelligence and common sense, then he would have never achieved the level of tzadik that he did. It was because he had made himself into an איש – a man of intellect - that he was able to pull himself away from the moral decay of society and eventually become the father of the entire human race.

The Ramban mentions Rashi parenthetically but is not happy with his stance, and therefore argues that the word בְּדִרְתָּיו merely highlights the fact that there was no tzadik in those generations that was worthy of being saved, and brushes away any potential argument such as Mesushelach, who also was a great tzadik. He does not employ the word בְּדִרְתָּיו as a qualification of Noach's righteousness.

Needless to say the Abravanel weighs in on the Ramban and points out that in Noach's lifetime there was not only Mesushelach but Shem, Ever and Avrohom, all who were greater than Noach. The argument that the Ramban offers that בְּדִרְתָּיו refers only to the period prior to the mabul does not wash with the Abravanel, since – as he points out – the word is used in a general way which would imply that during Noach's entire life he was “the” tzadik. Therefore the Abravanel concludes that בְּדִרְתָּיו refers to all the changing times in Noach's life. In his youth, maturity and old age he was always a tzadik.

This merely serves to highlight the difficulty mentioned previously regarding Rashi's position. He is seemingly left in the cold as the one meforesh quoting the argument in the gemoroh between Rav Yochonon and Resh Lokish without qualification, an argument completely ignored by major commentators of the likes mentioned previously. And it is pretty obvious why this machlokes is glossed over, simply because it is incomprehensible.

A man who stood up to the worst corruption in the history of mankind would surely rise to vastly greater heights if surrounded by great tzadikim such as Moshe or Shmuel.

The Malbim is unwilling to simply let this particular gemoroh lie unchallenged, and has a unique take on it.

He explains (the similar medrash, not the gemoroh) that there is no argument at all – there are two different words being dealt with here: בְּדִרְתָּיו and תַּמִּים. The latter refers to the fact that if he succeeded in being a tzadik amongst a generation of reshaim then surely in a generation which had tzadikim he would have been much greater.

The word תַּמִּים refers to doing something totally for the sake of rectitude and avodas Hashem. This is easy when surrounded by unmitigated evil, since no-one will appreciate the goodness of the man, in fact they despised Noach. There was no opportunity for Noach to gain any kind of pecuniary or other advantage from being a tzadik.

In a generation when tzadikim are appreciated and respected, however, this aspect of his tzidkus – the תַּמִּים – would be far more difficult to sustain, since even the common people would want to honour him and perhaps provide him with gifts as well.

The Malbim addresses two more midroschim that help to shed light on this conundrum of a machlokes, and notes that was a pivotal difference between Avrohom and Noach. The former needed no help in order to recognise Hashem and follow his ways. In fact Avrohom came to the realisation of Hashem's existence through his own philosophical analyses. Noach, on the other hand, was perfectly well aware of Hashem's existence from early childhood, yet needed some help from Hashem in order to prevent him to falling prey to the moral corruption of his times.

The difference between these two personalities are reflected by their circumstances and achievements within their lifetimes. Before the flood, everyone was aware of Hashem's existence and His mitzvos, they simply ignored all of that and gave into to their lusts or found clever ways to bend the rules. In Avrohom's generation, they were, generally speaking, morally upright (the flood was still in living memory) but had fallen to serving avodoh zoroh. Avrohom drew many people away from idol worship, Noach got nowhere with anyone other than his immediate family.

Therefore one might conclude that בְּדִרְתָּיו might refer to the fact that Noach was a tzadik by comparison to the generations prior to the flood, but after the flood we see tzadikim who influenced others and were far greater than him. So perhaps the standard for “tzadik” went up and a required attribute would be influencing others, not something which Noach did at all due to the circumstances. So it's not really a criticism, or a put-down in any way, merely an assessment of the situation at the time. If anything, it's a further criticism of the generation, that they were so far gone even a great tzadik like Noach was unable to influence even one of them.

All well and good, but what about Rashi? He simply paraphrases the machlokes in Sanhedrin, surely he cannot in good faith accept a straight criticism of Noach when practically no-one else is?

The Mizrochi offers several explanations. It's possible that the machlokes hinges around the phrase אֵת הַאֱלֹקִים הִתְהַלֵּךְ נח. Rav Yochonon will hold like Rashi's explanation for הִתְהַלֵּךְ נח – i.e. Noach needed support from Hashem unlike Avrohom. Resh Lokish would hold that with regards to Avrohom the posuk says הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי – that he walked before Hashem, but was not fully occupied with Hashem since he spent time drawing people away from idol worship, whereas Noach had nothing to do with his generation since they were beyond saving, hence he “walked with Hashem” - he was fully occupied with Hashem without distractions. So in this way Noach was greater than even Avrohom.

Another possibility, says the Mizrachi, is that the posuk really should have said בְּדִרְוֹ in the singular form. Therefore Rav Yochonon would argue that the plural refers to the ten generations from Noach until Avrohom which did have tzadikim far greater than Noach, such as Avrohom, Shem and Ever. Resh Lokish holds this refers to the generations from Odom until Noach, in which case Noach was an outstanding figure.

Now, what is clear is that even Resh Lokish agrees that Noach had the potential to be a greater tzadik than he was, since even he says that כָּל שֶׁכֵּן – how much more so – would Noach had been a greater tzadik had he lived in the times of Moshe or Shmuel. What is equally clear, says the Mizrochi, is even Rav Yochonon would agree that had Noach lived in the times of Moshe or Shmuel he would have been an even greater tzadik.

The argument merely hinges around this qualifier – בְּדִרְתָּיו – which can swing either way as explained previously.

The upshot of all this is that in fact no-one is actually criticising Noach at all, although at first glance this would not appear to be the case from a simple reading of Rashi. Quite clearly, Noach was an outstanding individual who was a unique personality in his time.

This really serves to highlight something very important with regards to Rashi, maamorei Chazal – statements from Chazal – and medroschim. It's all too easy to take Rashi at face value, the way we studied his perush in school. But if we study Rashi in this fashion, we are working at a child's level. When Rashi quotes a statement from Chazal or a medrash, we have to ask ourselves whether or not it makes any sense to us with a more mature understanding, and if not, then we have to dig deeper.

Likewise, when it comes to maamorei Chazal, we can never take them at face value since they never intended their words to be taken thus. Every statement was carefully worded, every word chosen with the greatest care to convey a vital message in the most cryptic and brief form possible. After all, Rashi himself said: דִּי לַחֲכִימָא בְּרַמְיָא – a hint is sufficient for the wise.

In this case, most of the meforshim simply bypassed this particular machlokes for one reason or another which seems a bit strange, considering that this was essentially all Rashi comments on the topic. After a bit of digging, one can see that Rashi is simply explaining the qualifier, and that explanation does not impinge on their take on the whole subject. At the end of the day, Noach was a great tzadik, and there are many lessons to be learned from his story. This seems to explain why the Ramban, the Abravanel and others did not involve themselves in this topic.