

Noach

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*R*ashi last week brought a disagreement about the basis of Noach's name:

He named him Noach, saying, "This one will give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands from the ground, which God has cursed." (Bereishis 5:29)

This one will give us rest—*yenachameinu*. He will give us rest from the toil of our hands. Before Noach came they did not have plowshares, and he made [these] for them. Also, the land was producing thorns and thistles when they sowed wheat because of the curse of the first man, but in Noach's time, it [the curse] subsided. This is the meaning of *yenachameinu*. If you do not explain it that way, but from the root *nacheim*—comfort, the sense of the word does not fit the name [Noach], and you would have to call him Menachem instead. (*Rashi*)

In other words, *Rashi* is saying, if we explain the word according to its apparent meaning, "this one will console us," Noach should have been named *Menachem*, which means *consoler*, instead. Since he was called *Noach* we have to assume that his father saw Noach has a kind of savior of the generation, at least far as working the land was concerned.

But is there really that much a difference between the two ideas? Either way, Noach comforted his generation, so why all the words to tell them apart? What deeper message, if any, is there emanating out from within this seemingly mundane explanation of a seemingly mundane Biblical name?

Well, for one, if you hold up the name Noach (*Ches-Nun*) to a mirror you see *chayn* (*Nun-Ches*). That's what Noach found in the eyes of God to be saved from world-wide destruction. That doesn't work with the name Menachem. Not good enough? Okay, then let's go deeper.

Comforting others who are going through a difficult time is a great *mitzvah*, which is

why we have *balachos* like sitting *shivah* after a death. But those doing the comforting can often turn it on when they have to, and turn it off when they are done. It's kind of like a performance, even if sincere. It doesn't mean we do not care about the person or their suffering, just that we were not that personally affected by their pain beyond while in their presence.

But do something to make the lives of others easier? That goes way beyond just the time we spend together with others who are struggling. It usually means that, we are involved in their situation before we are together with them, and remain with it even after we have left them. It means that we don't only take responsibility for how they feel at the moment, but for how they will feel the rest of their life.

Had Noach only been Menachem, someone who only comforts others in their times of need, he might not have found the necessary *chaym* to be saved from strict Divine justice, and the destructive flood it brought on mankind. It's because he did things that bettered the lives of others that he caught God's attention, and mercy, and survived to talk about it with the post-apocalyptic world.

This may also be why the word *zeb* in last week's *parsha* introducing Noach gets such attention with its extra cantillation note. The same word, in the song at the sea, means this:

Zeb—this is my God. He revealed Himself in His glory to them, and they pointed at Him with their finger (indicated by *zeb*). By the sea, [even] a maidservant perceived what [the future] prophets would not perceive. (*Rashi, Shemos 15:2*)

How did Noach, living in such a selfish world, know to be more concerned about others than himself? Because he perceived God in the world, and chose to emulate Him. It takes quite the *tzaddik* to remain a *tzaddik* in a dog-eat-dog, look-out-for-number-one type of society. But as the Torah testifies in this week's *parsha*, Noach was a *tzaddik* in his generation. . . despite all the forces working against him.

The *Gemora* says that both Rabbah and Abaye descended from the house of Eli, whose descendants were cursed with short lives (*Rosh Hashanah* 18a). Rabbah focused primarily on Torah learning, and became a famous *talmid chacham* until this day, even though he died at age 40. Abaye however also emphasized *gemilus chas-sadim*, acts of lovingkindness, and merited to live until 60 years of age.

There is probably more to the story than the *Gemora* is sharing, but its main point is, look how powerful caring for and taking care of others is! There is nothing more valuable to God than His Torah, and learning it is, seemingly, the most important thing we do as Jews.

But it is one thing to go through Torah, and something very different for Torah to go

through you. We learn Torah to learn more about God. We learn more about God to become more like Him, and He is always doing acts of lovingkindness. We were created in the image of God. When we take care of others, we *live* in His image.