

חסידות

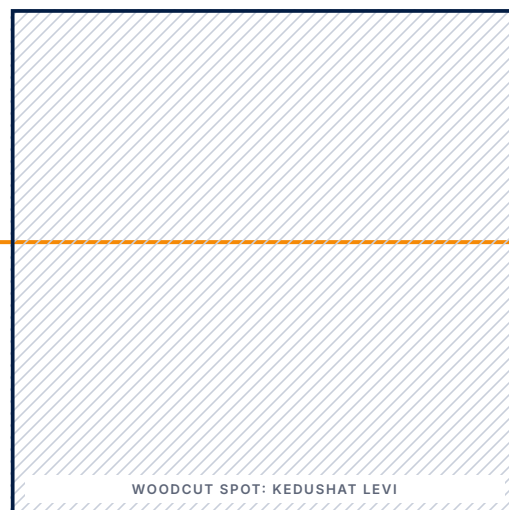
From the Chassidic Courts

BERDITCHEV · NOACH, KEDUSHAT LEVI

Why did Noah hesitate before entering the ark

Kedushat Levi

A true tzaddik (righteous person) who engages in outreach to sinners takes on a greater spiritual risk than one who remains aloof, since drawing close to sinners means absorbing some of the tainted sparks within them, making his own purification a far more demanding process—like an inner vessel that cannot be cleansed by merely immersing the outer one. Noah's hesitation to enter the ark is understood not as mere lack of faith but as reflecting this very tension: the righteous person's single-minded devotion can be disrupted by exposure to the allure of this transient world, and only by recognizing the eternal value of serving the Creator over fleeting worldly pleasures can he safeguard himself while still laboring to elevate others. AI SUMMARY



אלה תולדות נח, נח איש: Still another facet of the line, may be appreciated by the reader after we have “digested” Rashi’s commentary on Genesis 7,7 המבול מי הפני, “Noach (and family) entered the ark on account of the waters of the deluge.” Rashi uses this verse to state that Noah was deficient in his faith in G’d. [Rashi based himself on Bereshit Rabbah 32,6 who explains the extraneous words: “on account of the waters of the deluge,” as telling us that Noah did not enter the ark until the rising waters of the flood made this unavoidable.”] This exegesis appears to fly in the face of an explicit verse in Genesis 6,22 according to which Noah carried out every single one of G’d’s instructions without exception.

How could the author of the Midrash accuse Noah of being lacking in faith? If someone spent 120 years building an ark, anticipating a deluge, because G’d had told him to do so, how can this be interpreted as “lack of faith?” We must bear in mind that all the holy “sparks” are possessed of an urge to

serve their Creator, just as do the different categories of angels all of whom vie to fulfill the wishes of their Creator while being in awe of Him. The tzaddik, being a mortal human being and burdened with an evil urge within him, may not always serve his master with a similar degree of single-mindedness. He may be sidetracked by thinking of money, or the allure of secular attractions, including good-tasting fruit, etc.

One of the causes distracting the tzaddik from serving his Creator with the same degree of single-mindedness as the angels is that in order to bring the sinners closer to G’d, he must first befriend them. The sinners are sinners because they have within them some of the 288 sparks that “fell off” the Shechinah, as we explained on page 21. [A רשע, sinner, who too has been created in the image of G’d, contains within him some of these sparks, though they have become tainted through their close association with the sinner. Ed.]

] In the process of “outreaching,” as it is commonly known in our time, the exposure of the highest ranking type of tzaddik to the lure of secularism is such that he may momentarily forget his true calling, feeling drawn to these “perks” of olam hazeh, as advertised by Satan in eye-catching colors. A tzaddik engaged in such activities may be viewed as being engaged in a מלחמת מצוה, “a holy war,” on behalf of his Creator.

This idea is alluded to in the wording in Chagigah 3:1. The Mishnah there discussing different degrees of holiness, i.e. that קדשים, sacred parts of sacrificial animals, have a higher degree of holiness than t'rumah, the portion of the farmer's harvest that has to be given to the priest. An example given by the Mishnah illustrating this is that whereas two vessels which require ritual purification through immersion in a ritual bath may be cleansed even when one of them is inside the other, this ruling is not valid when the vessels in question belong to a higher level of holiness known as קדשים, vessels used in handling the remains of sacrificial animals, for instance. Apparently, the author of this Mishnah relates the rules pertaining to cleansing vessels that have become ritually impure to their respective origins.

In other words: the holier one's origin, the more stringent the rules for recapturing one's purity once it had been lost. The wording of the Mishnah, i.e. חומר בקודש מבתרומה, can be understood allegorically as: “the reason why higher ranking holiness is subject to more stringent steps of purification than lower ranking holy vessels, is because the higher ranking ones had been inside the lower ranking ones.”

The word תרומה chosen by the Mishnah, has a double meaning, i.e. it is something in need of being elevated further. Applied to the צדיק in our parable, it means that the tzaddik engaged in “outreach,” must be much more on guard against being drawn into the sphere of the sinner than the kind of tzaddik who does not venture to mix with the sinners even

in order to bring them closer to G'd. A tzaddik faced with this dilemma will do well to remind himself that the allures of this world are transient, and cannot be compared to the delights in store when the soul rejoins its place in heaven after having successfully discharged its duties while within a mortal body.

When our sages in Avot 6,10 stated that everything that G'd created, He created only for the sake of His glory, this is another way of saying that He desires to have satisfaction from the conduct of His creatures.

This is also the meaning of psalms 119,98 מאויבי תחכמני מצותך כי לעולם היא לי, “Your commandments made me wiser than my enemies; they always stand by me.” The letter מ in the word מאויבי must be understood in the sense of “more than.” When read thus, the word is a reference to the evil urge, which is not only David's enemy, but the enemy of every human being, implanting within us the powerful desires to taste the gratifications advertised. However, the psalmist, upon reflecting that what is eternal must be far more worthwhile than that which is merely transient, redoubles his resolve to serve only the Creator, rejecting the deceptive allure of physical delights.

Applied to the allegory in the Mishnah in Chagigah that we quoted, an addiction to the delights of this transient world, when compared to an addiction to serving the eternal Creator is like placing a tainted vessel inside one that is not tainted, hoping to purify it by immersing only the outer vessel in a ritual bath. Keeping the waters of the ritual bath “at arm's length,” is simply not good enough to cleanse oneself from the pollutants absorbed through contact with the defilements of the earthly environment. The inner vessel had lost some of the brightness with which it had been endowed as a result of G'd's original light having shone upon it before it became contaminated through contact with the sinner.

