

חסידות

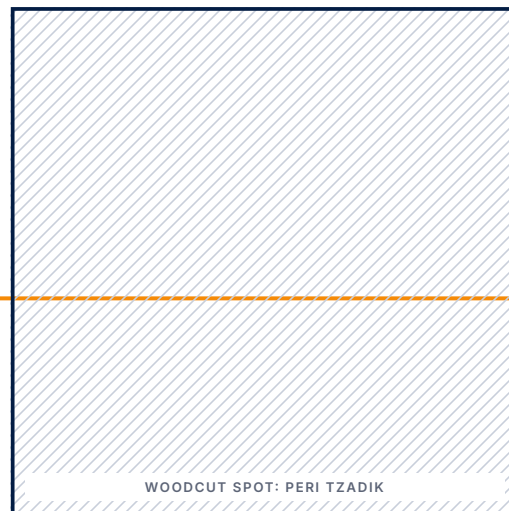
From the Chassidic Courts

LUBLIN · PERI TZADIK, NOACH

Why did Avraham get credit for twenty generations of failure

Peri Tzadik

The ten generations from Adam to Noach were meant to rectify every human flaw and ready the world for the giving of Torah, but because they sinned they were entirely swept away, leaving nothing of their spiritual vitality behind; the next ten generations, from Noach to Avraham, likewise failed through anger yet left sparks of holiness and life-force in the world, and it was Avraham Avinu—through his ten trials, his love of Hashem, and his independent discovery of the Oral Torah (Torah shebe'al peh)—who gathered and redeemed all that latent vitality, thereby "receiving the reward of them all" and bringing an end to Divine wrath. AI SUMMARY



"Eleh toldot Noach" (These are the generations of Noach). In the Tanchuma, [the midrash] opens: Blessed be the Name of the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, who chose Israel, etc., and gave us the Torah in writing, with hints, hidden and sealed things, and explained them through the Torah shebe'al peh (Oral Torah), etc. — and it expounds at length on the matter of Torah shebe'al peh; see there.

Now one needs to understand the connection of the matter of Torah shebichtav (Written Torah) and Torah shebe'al peh to this parashah. This can be understood through what is stated (Avot ch. 5): "Ten generations from Adam to Noach, to make known how much He is slow to anger, etc. Ten generations from Noach to Avraham, etc., until Avraham Avinu came and received the reward of them all."

Now, in many places the number ten corresponds to the Ten Commandments, which are aligned with the ten Sefirot (Divine emanations) that Hashem, blessed be He, emanated for the creation of the

world. There were ten generations from Adam to Noach in order to rectify every blemish and corruption of Adam HaRishon (the first man) and to be clarified in all the character traits; and then, in the generation of the Flood, it was fitting for the giving of the Torah, as stated in Midrash Rabbah (Mishpatim, ch. 30) and in the holy Zohar (vol. 3, 216b).

At that time the soul of Moshe Rabbeinu was present, as hinted in the acronym SHaGaM, the gematria (numerical value) of "Moshe." And they would have merited the Written Torah and the Oral Torah, hinted at in the verse "all the fountains of the great deep were split" — the wellsprings of chochmah (wisdom) from below — "and the windows of heaven were opened" — the gates of chochmah from above — as stated in the holy Zohar (vol. 1, 117a). And then they would have rectified every blemish of the serpent, as will occur in the future.

But because they angered Him, [the waters] turned into "waters of malice," and they were all swept away in the waters of the Flood, and none of them remained except Noach. For this reason, the ten generations before the Flood are each reckoned with a total that includes all the days of their lives. For the life they lived after they begot the head of the [next] generation was not a new life for them; rather, the whole essence of their life was only that the one who is counted in the reckoning of the generations emerged — the one from whom Noach emerged and through whom the world was rebuilt. This is unlike what they lived afterward, when they begot sons and daughters — nothing remained of that, for they were all swept away in the Flood. Thus the life they lived after begetting the head of the generation was included together with the life they lived before, and therefore it is termed "life" [in the singular sense]. And since all the days of their lives were included together, it is written "and he died" [in the singular form, summing it all].

This is unlike the ten generations from Noach to Avraham, in this parashah, where something remained even from what they begot after the head of the generation — for from those sons and daughters, nations remained, and there is life in them, as it is written, "and You give life to them all," as is known. But these are not comparable to the life they lived before begetting the head of the generation, from which Avraham and his seed descended in a chain — for they are "life everlasting." And since the two [kinds of] life are not similar to each other, therefore the life they lived before was not included together with the life they lived afterward. And since all the days of their lives were not included together, therefore it is not written of them "and he died" — except in the case of Noach, who did not beget at all after the Flood.

The life he lived after the Flood was included together with the life he lived until he begot Shem, Cham, and Yafet, from whom the world was rebuilt, and the years he lived afterward held no new life. Therefore it is written of him, "And all the days of Noach were... and he died." Similarly with Terach: after he lived seventy years and begot Avram, Nachor, and Haran, he did not beget at all [else], and the life he lived afterward held no independent root

of new life. Therefore all his days were included together, and it is written, "And Terach died in Charan."

Likewise, the ten generations from Noach to Avraham also total ten, [corresponding to the ten Sefirot], for it was fitting to rectify every blemish. And it says "to make known, etc." — that all the generations kept angering [Him] and passing away, until Avraham Avinu came and received the reward of all of them. This was not said earlier [regarding the first ten generations], because from these ten generations [from Noach to Avraham] something did remain, and all the vitality (nitzotzei kedushah, sparks) that was in them, Avraham Avinu received. For he was tested with ten trials, which likewise correspond to the ten Sefirot, and he withstood all of them and was clarified in all the character traits.

And he merited to fulfill the entire Torah before it was given (as stated in Yoma 28b) — meaning even the Oral Torah, as stated there, even [the laws of] eruvei tavshilin. And [he merited] the whole Torah, since he was not commanded concerning it, but rather his two kidneys became like two rabbis, flowing and teaching him Torah and wisdom, as it is said (Bereishit Rabbah ch. 61) — and this is the aspect of Torah shebe'al peh, which flows in the heart from the words of the living God. This is what the Tanchuma says afterward regarding the greatness of Torah shebe'al peh: that only one who loves the Holy One, blessed be He, with all his heart, all his soul, and all his might learns it, etc. And the attribute of ahavah (love) is the attribute of Avraham Avinu, as it is written, "Avraham who loves Me" — and he loved the Holy One, blessed be He, with all his heart, all his soul, and all his might, and he merited the Oral Torah.

And just as in the generation of the Flood it was the time for the Torah to be given through the soul of Moshe Rabbeinu — namely, the Written Torah, which included within it also the Oral Torah, as it was at the giving of the Torah [at Sinai] — so too in the generation of the Dispersion (Dor HaPlagah) it was the time for the revelation and spreading of the Oral Torah. And the main spreading of the Oral Torah was in Babylon, as stated (Sukkah 20a). Therefore, when they sensed in Shinar the place fit

for the revelation of the spreading of the Oral Torah, they built a Tower (migdal) as a counterpart to the Beit HaMikdash (Holy Temple), which is the place from which Torah goes out to all Israel (as stated in Sanhedrin 86b); and they built, in opposition, a tower for the spreading of their vanities.

At that time Avraham Avinu was forty-eight years old, as stated by Rashi (Shabbat 10b, s.v. "she'yeshivatah"). And then Avraham Avinu recognized his Creator, as stated (Bereishit Rabbah ch. 30) — meaning that he merited the entire Oral Torah. And afterward, four years passed until he began the "two thousand years of Torah."

These four years that preceded correspond to the first three [Sefirot] and to the attribute of chesed (lovingkindness), which is the attribute of Avraham Avinu. And afterward he began the two thousand years of Torah with the attribute of gevurah (might), for "Torah comes from the side of gevurah" (as stated in Zohar vol. 3, 72b) — and this is the Oral Torah, as stated in the Tikkunim (Tikkun 21) and in the holy Zohar (vol. 2, 167a): "And from the left side the Oral Torah was given." This is the meaning of "until Avraham came and received the reward of all of them" — meaning the vitality (nitzotzei kedushah) and the life-force that was in them, which is the holiness of the Oral Torah, and Avraham Avinu merited it.

This is what Rashi comments: "until Avram — the anger of the Omnipresent [subsided]" — for once Avraham Avinu came, there was no more wrath, since he merited and took the reward of them all. And this was written after the first trial, and it says, "to make known how much He is slow to anger, etc." The Tosafot Yom Tov writes that there are two kinds of "wrath": one that is prolonged and ultimately destroys everything, as in the Flood; and one that is prolonged but does not come to actual total destruction, etc.

And the holy Rebbe, of blessed memory, said in the name of the holy Rebbe of Lublin, of blessed memory, who explained the saying, "Whoever the Holy One, blessed be He, is patient with, their

innards shall be patient — rather, He prolongs His wrath and 'gives His own' (gavei dilei)" — meaning the explanation of "gavei dilei" is "He raises up His own anger" [i.e., sets it aside/elevates it].

Now, this statement is mentioned in the midrash (Bereishit Rabbah ch. 67) regarding "one cry Yaakov cried out against Esav, etc. — and where was he repaid for it? See there" — and there the reading is "ma'arich apei u'gavei dilei." It is likewise mentioned in the Yerushalmi (Shekalim ch. 5, halachah 4) regarding Nechunya the well-digger, whose son died of thirst, and so on, and also in our Talmud (Bava Kama 50a), where the reading is "ma'arich ruchei u'gavei didah." In both these places it seems that the explanation of "gavei dilei" is that He later collects His own [debt], to repay him in kind.

And certainly the words of the holy Rebbe, of blessed memory, are true. According to what has been said, both are true: "gavei dilei" means that He raises up His own — as here with Avraham Avinu, who received the reward of them all and merited the entire Oral Torah of the generation of the Dispersion, and the wrath was removed from the world. And consequently He "collects His own," for since He took from them the root of their life-force and the vitality within them — in the secret of "and You give life to them all" — their life was uprooted from the world. This is the meaning of "to make known how much He is slow to anger, etc.," as stated.

And this is the connection of this statement to the parashah of "Eleh toldot Noach." For the main point of the parashah is how Avraham Avinu received the Oral Torah that belonged to the generation of the Dispersion; and on Shabbat is the time of the Written Torah, as it is said (Shabbat 86b) — according to all opinions, the Torah was given to Israel on Shabbat — and it is also the time for the increase of the Oral Torah, as stated in the holy Zohar (vol. 1, 47b): "On the seventh day — this is the Oral Torah, for it is the seventh day" — meaning, [the sefirah of] Malchut, the mouth; we call it Torah shebe'al peh.

