

## Torah Musing --Genesis 6:9

### בכל דור

## In Each Generation...

In classic rabbinic exegesis every word, phrase and letter in the Tanak (Bible) has significance and can be the subject of exposition. Bereshit (Genesis) 6:9 demonstrates this principal during an exchange between Reish Lakish and Rabbi Yohanan (they were 2nd generation *Amoraim*/teachers and study partners, 250-290 CE).

In Sanhedrin108a (BT) during a discussion of Genesis 6:9, the two Rabbis disagree concerning the meaning and addition of נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדורתו *Noah was righteous and perfect in his generation*. They question the addition of the seemingly superfluous phrase "*in his generation*." If Noah is righteous and perfect, then he is righteous and perfect and there is no need for the addition of "*in his generation*."

א"ר יוחנן בדורותיו ולא בדורות אחרים וריש לקיש אמר בדורותיו כ"ש  
בדורות אחרים

Rabbi Yohanan says: Relative to the other people of his generation he was righteous and wholehearted, but not relative to those of other generations. And Reish Lakish says: In his generation he was righteous and wholehearted despite being surrounded by bad influences; all the more so would he have been considered righteous and wholehearted in other generations.

Reish Lakish and Rabbi Yohanan are both missing the main point! It is not because one generation is so good or that another was so bad! Genesis 6:9 is not concerned with *why* Noah is deemed righteous and perfect. The central idea is that he is *judged in "his generation"*. How often do we judge others according to the standards and morés of another generation? When zoot suits, platform shoes and miniskirts were all the craze, the elders looked upon them with disdain. The use of Ebonics is often criticized by older adults however Ebonics has meaning and significance for millennials and generation Z. In a recent episode of a Hulu series, a teacher reacts negatively when a parent arrives wearing a shirt with the *B* word

sprawled across the chest. The teacher request that she cover the shirt and the parent dons a silk pullover with the word "slut" on the chest. The teacher makes the assumption that the parent is a struggling single parent and in need of assistance to purchase appropriate clothing. She offers to take her to a consignment store but the parent retorts that she has no need of consignment clothes because she and her husband are founders and owners of a multi-million-dollar clothing line and the silk pieces come from their rather successful collection. Should Abraham and Jacob be judged harshly for respectively marrying a half-sister and two sisters when it was acceptable in their eras but later prohibited? Should Booker T. Washington's conciliatory and accommodationist remarks in the Atlanta Exposition speech concerning race relations in 1895 be considered fool-hearty in 2023? Naturally there are some things and actions that are egregious in any generation but standards change and what is admissible or unacceptable in one generation is deemed inappropriate or suitable by another.

As Noah was judged *in his generation*, may we also be judged צדיק תמים --righteous and perfect *in our generation*.

נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדורתו

Noah was righteous and perfect in his generation.

שבת שלום מביתנו לביתך

**Shabbat Shalom From Our House to Your House**

**Rabbi Malchah**