

ALSHICH

INSIGHTS FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

ספר בראשית

פרשת נח

2 NOVEMBER 2024

HOW RIGHTEOUS WAS NOACH?

Chapter 6

9) These are the offspring of Noach. Noach was a righteous man (איש צדיק), perfect in his generations. Noach walked with God.

ט) אלה תולדות נח נח איש צדיק תמים הָיָה בְּדוֹרֹתָיו אֶת הָאֱלֹקִים הִתְהַלֵּךְ נֹחַ.

10) And Noach fathered three sons, (אֶת) Shem, (אֶת) Cham and (וְאֶת) Yafes.

י) וַיֹּולֵד נֹחַ שְׁלֹשָׁה בָּנִים אֶת שֵׁם אֶת חָם וְאֶת יָפֶת.

Consider the following questions:

1. Why does the *parashah* begin, *These are the offspring of Noach*, but then does not immediately state their names? Furthermore, when they are mentioned in the next verse, they are introduced with the phrase, "**And** Noach fathered three sons," which suggests that these children were additions to the previously-mentioned *offspring of Noach*. What is the explanation?
2. Why do we need to be told that Noach fathered *three sons*? Surely we can work out the number for ourselves!
3. Why is each son's name punctuated by the word אֶת? This word could have been left out without changing the meaning. And why is Cham mentioned before Yafes, when he was the youngest?

In order to answer our questions, we need to make the following introduction. In a certain sense we can say that a righteous person has the ability to produce three different types of "offspring" – two of them spiritual and one of them physical. Some righteous people perfect themselves to the extent that they are able to produce all three types. Others produce only two, and still others only one. What are the three types? The first of the two spiritual "offspring" are the mitzvos that a righteous person performs in his lifetime. Each mitzvah produces a spiritual entity that acts as a person's defender (in the Heavenly court), and there is no greater "offspring" than this. The second type of spiritual offspring are all the people he has influenced to do *teshuvah* and all the people he has taught Torah, as these are his true "children." The third type of offspring are the physical children he brings into the world with his wife.

Our *parashah* begins, *These are the offspring of Noach*, and then tells us that *Noach was a righteous man... Noach walked with God*, without stating his children's names. The Torah is thereby hinting to us which of the three types of "offspring" Noach possessed: By repeating his name and describing his righteousness solely in terms of himself and not in terms of his interaction with others, the Torah is telling us that he possessed only the first type of offspring. He performed mitzvos, but he did so in isolation from the rest of the world. *Noach walked with God* – but he did not help others do *teshuvah*. The second verse then speaks about the

third type of “offspring,” namely his physical children, which it named, by stating, **And** Noach fathered three sons... (with the word *And* hinting that they were additions, in a way, to the *offspring* mentioned in the previous verse.) [\[This answers Question 1.\]](#)

Now, Noach’s sons were not all on the same level. To help us understand their interrelationship, let us look at what our Sages (*Vayikra Rabbah* 30:12) tell us about the mitzvah of taking the Four Species — *lulav*, *esrog*, *hadasim*, and *aravos* — during Sukkos:

There are four species. The *esrog* has fragrance and taste; the *lulav* (date palm) has taste but no fragrance; the *hadas* (myrtle branch) has fragrance but no taste; and the *aravah* (willow branch) has neither taste nor fragrance. So, too, among the Jewish people, there are some who have Torah and good deeds; some who have Torah but not good deeds; some who have good deeds but not Torah; and some who have neither. God commanded, “Let all the groups be joined together,” and in this way those who are worthy will give protection to those who are unworthy.

So too with Noach’s children: Cham was not worthy. We see this from his actions after the Flood, when Cham sinned greatly. Some of our Sages say that he emasculated his father, and some say that he defiled him (*Sanhedrin* 70a). Although he had not yet sinned when the Flood began, still, this indicates that his basic personality was flawed. Meanwhile, Yafes was on an intermediate level, and Shem was properly righteous. In order to ensure that the merits of each brother should protect the other, God combined them into one group by calling them “three sons” (all together) although we can work out the number perfectly well for ourselves. It is telling us that they were not all worthy and righteous and therefore had to be bundled together so that so that they all would be saved. [\[This answers Question 2.\]](#)

Nevertheless, to show that they were not all on the same level and of equal worth, the Torah separates between each one with the word **וְ**. In order to protect the unworthy son in the most efficient way, Cham was placed in the middle of the “bundle,” even though he was the youngest of the three. Therefore, the Torah lists them as Shem, Cham, and Yafes, with Cham sandwiched between his two more worthy brothers so that their merit would shield him and he would be saved. [\[This answers Question 3.\]](#)

THE ALSHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508–1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title “HaKadosh” (the holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the *Shulchan Aruch*. The Alshich is most noted for his monumental Tanach commentary.

The Alshich uses his creative insight and encyclopaedic knowledge of Tanach, Talmud, and Midrash to weave together his profound interpretations. He simultaneously focuses on the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all with one or two concepts.

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