

Light, Deeds, and Descendants: Noah and Naamah

Parashat Noah ☆ Genesis 6:9–11:32 ☆ October 17th, 2026

Blessing for Torah Study: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech HaOlam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu laasok b'divrei Torah.

“These Are the Toldot of Noah” — Deeds as Descendants

Genesis 6:9

אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת נֹחַ נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלָּךְ־נֹחַ:

This is the line of Noah. Noah was a righteous man; he was blameless in his age; Noah walked with God.

Rashi¹ on Genesis 6:9:1

אלה תולדות נח נח איש צדיק. הואיל והזכירו ספר בשבחו, שנאמר זכר צדיק לברכה. דבר אחר למדך ששקרא תולדותיהם של צדיקים מעשים טובים:

Since the text mentions him, it sings his praise, as it says, “The mention of the righteous shall be for a blessing” (Prov. 10:7). Another explanation: after “These are the progeny of Noah,” the text does not name his children but says he “was a righteous man.” This teaches that the real progeny of the righteous are their good deeds (Genesis Rabbah 30:6).

Or HaChaim² on Genesis 6:9:1

...עקר תולדותיהם של צדיקים מצוות ומעשים טובים... דקדקו לומר “עקר”...

The word “these” usually excludes something. The Sages read it as teaching that the principal descendants of a person are good deeds, reading נֹחַ נֹחַ (“Noah, Noah”) without a pause. They were careful to say “principal”: naturally the righteous also have other descendants.

Discussion Questions

- The parasha’s starting verse promises a family tree and yet delivers a character reference (Noah’s sons’ names come in the next verse). What does it mean that the Torah’s first “genealogy” of Noah is a list of virtues?
- Children can be shaped, but not controlled; deeds are fully ours. Do you think this is why Or HaChaim calls deeds the *principal* offspring of the righteous? What are some other reasons?
- Ham, one of Noah’s three sons, shames his father later in the parasha (Gen. 9:22). If deeds are Noah’s “real” progeny, might this midrash free parents from being measured by their children’s choices?
- What “descendants” do you hope to leave: a practice, a kindness, a cause, a teaching?

¹ Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040–1105, France), the most widely studied commentator on Torah and Talmud.

² Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar (1696–1743, Morocco and Jerusalem), a kabbalist/mystic whose Torah commentary became beloved in Hasidic circles.

Naamah — A Name Made of Deeds

Bereshit Rabbah 23:3³ (on Gen. 4:22, “the sister of Tubal-Cain was Naamah.”)

אָמַר רַבִּי אֲבָא בַר כַּהֲנָא, נַעֲמָה אֲשֶׁתוֹ שָׁל נֹחַ הָיְתָה, לָמָּה הָיוּ קוֹרִין אוֹתָהּ נַעֲמָה, שֶׁהָיוּ מַעֲשֵׂיהָ נְעִימִים.

Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said: Naamah was Noah’s wife. Why was she called Naamah? Because her deeds were pleasant (*ne’imim*).

Ramban⁴ on Genesis 4:22 explains why the Torah names her at all: she was known in her generation as a righteous woman who bore righteous children.

Siftei Chakhamim⁵ on Rashi, Gen. 4:22 notes a pattern. Naamah had three brothers, two righteous, and one (Tubal-Cain, maker of weapons) wicked. Noah had three sons, two righteous and one (Ham) not. Since children often resemble their mother’s brothers, this explains Noah’s family.

R. Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin⁶: if Naamah, a daughter of Cain’s line, was Noah’s wife, then the whole world, Abraham and Israel included, came from her. Cain’s repentance bore fruit through her.

Discussion Questions

- Rashi says Noah’s progeny are his deeds; the midrash in Bereshit Rabbah says Naamah’s *name* is her deeds. Who is better remembered: the one whose deeds are listed, or the one whose deeds became her name?
- Ramban praises Naamah for bearing righteous children. Siftei Chakhamim links Ham, the wayward son, to Naamah’s brother’s influence. What do these readings assume about a mother’s role in who her children become? How do those assumptions compare with the way we talk about parents today?
- R. Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin makes Naamah the bridge through which Cain’s line is redeemed. What does it mean that repair passes through a woman the Torah never names?

³ A collection of rabbinic midrash on Genesis, compiled in Israel around the 5th century CE.

⁴ Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (1194–1270, Spain and Israel), whose commentary weaves plain meaning with Kabbalah.

⁵ Rabbi Shabbetai Bass (1641–1718, Prague and Amsterdam), whose supercommentary aims to explain the questions behind Rashi’s comments.

⁶ Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen Rabinowitz (1823–1900), a Hasidic master of the Izbica-Lublin school, known for his book, *Pri Tzadik*.

“Righteous in His Generations” — A Light Measured Against Darkness

Rashi on Genesis 6:9:2

בדרותיו. יש מרביתינו דורשים אותו לשבח, כל שכן אלו היה בדור צדיקים היה צדיק יותר; ויש שדורשים אותו לגנאי, לפי דורו היה צדיק ואלו היה בדורו של אברהם לא היה נחשב לכלום:

“In his generations”: some of our Rabbis read this to his credit: he was righteous even in his generation, so in a generation of righteous people he would have been more righteous still. Others read it to his discredit: compared with his own generation he was righteous, but in Abraham's generation he would have counted for nothing (Sanhedrin 108a).

A way to picture it: a candle in a dark room looks brilliant; the same candle at noon is barely visible. Rashi's two readings ask whether Noah was a true light or only looked bright because everything around him was dark.

Discussion Questions

- Is righteousness absolute, or always measured against one's surroundings? Can a light be “distorted” by the darkness around it, seeming brighter (or dimmer) than it is?
- Rashi's favorable reading says Noah shone *despite* the dark; the critical reading says he shone only *because of* it. Which reading speaks more to you, living in our own generation?
- Think of someone (maybe it was you!) who was “the only one” to do the right thing in a group. Did that make them more admirable, or more lonely? How do you think Noah felt?

The Tzohar — A Window or a Shining Stone?

Genesis 6:16

צַהַר תַּעֲשֶׂה לַתִּבָּה וְאֶל־אֲמָהּ תַּכְלִינָהּ מִלְמַעְלָה וּפֶתַח הַתִּבָּה בְּצִדָּהּ תִּשִּׂים תַּחְתִּים שְׁנַיִם וּשְׁלִישִׁים תַּעֲשֶׂהּ:

Make an opening for daylight (*tzohar*) in the ark, and terminate it within a cubit of the top. Put the entrance to the ark in its side; make it with bottom, second, and third decks.

Rashi on Genesis 6:16:1

צהר. יש אומרים חלון ויש אומרים אבן טובה המאירה להם:

Some say this was a window; others say it was a precious stone that gave them light (Genesis Rabbah 31:11).

Bereshit Rabbah 31:11 (excerpt)

רבי אבא בר כהנא אמר, חלון. רבי לוי אמר, מרגליות. ... מרגלית היתה לו והיה תולה אותה, ובשעה שהיא כהה היה יודע שהוא יום, ובשעה שהיתה מבהקת היה יודע שהוא לילה.

Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said: a window. Rabbi Levi said: a precious stone. ... For all twelve months Noah needed neither sun nor moon. He hung up a precious stone: when it was dim he knew it was day, and when it shone brightly he knew it was night. Rabbi Huna added: we once hid from soldiers in a cave in Tiberias with lamps; when they dimmed we knew it was day, and when they shone we knew it was night.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks notes that by the time of the midrash, *teivah* (ark) also meant “word.” The debate becomes a question about Torah: is it lit from within, like the stone, or does it need a window to the world? He links the stone to the Zohar, whose very name means “radiance,” and the window to Maimonides. Chizkuni suggests Noah had both, a stone for the dark days and a window for when the sun returned. (“The Light in the Ark,” from *Covenant & Conversation*, Noach 5780)

Discussion Questions

- The *tzohar* (stone/window) looks dim by day and bright by night. Its light never changes; only the darkness around it does. How does this image inform the debate about Noah’s “relative” righteousness?
- Rabbi Huna’s story is not about Noah; it’s about hiding from soldiers in a cave. Why would he add a memory of persecution to a midrash about Noah’s ark?
- A window lets in outside light; a stone makes its own. Which kind of light do you rely on in hard times: community and the world outside, or something within?
- Which is more like Noah, the window or the stone? Which is more like Naamah, whose name is her deeds?

***A closing practice:** The tzohar was either a window that let light in or a stone that made its own. Write or think of one sentence about which kind of light you want your deeds to be, and share it with your chevruta or someone sitting near you.*

Shabbat Shalom — may our light reach past our own ark this week.

