

Shabbat 17 October 2015 – Parshat Noach

The Tzaddik in the fur coat

“I come to elucidate the simple explanation of the verses.” These are, in his own words the explanation of what Rashi’s commentary is aiming to achieve; To explicate the verses on its down-to-earth level that even a five year old child would be capable of understanding.

In the Sedra we are introduced to the personality of Noah. The Torah says “Noah was a righteous man; he was perfect *in his generations*.” Rashi asks why it was necessary to add the word *in his generations*; it would have been enough to have said he was a righteous man alone? Is the Torah here trying to convey a profound message about the very nature of Noah?

Rashi gives two responses to this question. “There are Sages who explain this in praise of Noah. *In his generations* he was a righteous man, but if he had lived in the generation of righteous people he would have been even greater. And there are those who explain this critically of Noah; *in his generations* he was a righteous man, but if he had lived in the generation of the righteous he would have been insignificant.”

Rashi has sourced his material from the Midrash, who also draws upon these two opinions. However, Rashi, is usually very succinct. It is understandable why Rashi quotes the first reason. Noah was living at a time where the world was corrupt; therefore we read how Noah was righteous in his generations to teach us that one man can be good, even though people around him were not. However what good is it to be told this disparaging information about Noah?

There is the famous Chassidic parable of the Tzaddik in a fur coat. He may feel warm when it is cold outside, however everybody around him still feels the cold. The truly righteous would light a fire to benefit those around him. This was the problem with Noah, his righteousness was restricted to his family and the self but did not extend further. It is this point that Rashi has highlighted.