



# GROWTH

## At The

# SHABBAT TABLE

## PARSHAT NOACH

### Missed Opportunity?

Nobody in the Torah received as many accolades from G-d as Noach. We find great things written about our patriarchs and *tzaddikim*, but not to the extent that was said about Noach – “A righteous man, wholesome in his generation; someone who walked with G-d.” The big question is: what happened to him? At the end of the *parshah*, we find Noach having debased himself, lying in his drunkenness. What happened to the great Noach, the wholesome *tzaddik*?

We can try to understand this with a story, a true incident that R' Label Lam recounted personally. *He was praying in shul on the Friday night following Simchat Torah, which fell out on Thursday that year. After the prayers concluded, he stayed a while to discuss a halachic matter with another rabbi in the shul. There didn't seem to be a rush, as the memory of an abundance of food from the holidays was still fresh. After several minutes had passed, they bid each other farewell, and walked to their own homes. As R' Lam neared his home, walking with his two young sons, he noticed another prominent rav standing across the street. He wanted to discuss his question with the rav, but saw his kids pat their stomachs, look at their watches, and point to their house. R' Lam assured his kids that it would only take a few short minutes, and that they were still stuffed from the holidays anyway. He made his way over to the rav, and after a few minutes of discussing the matter, R' Lam interrupted: “Do you smell smoke?” The rav replied in the affirmative. Odd; they didn't see smoke coming from anywhere. R' Lam decided he wanted to investigate, even though the kids were signaling that they were waiting for a delicious Friday night meal. He approached the nearest house, the one they were standing right in front of, and knocked on the door. A lady opened the door; there were six other girls sitting on the couch behind her. She explained that she was waiting for her husband to return from shul to commence Kiddush. R' Lam inquired if anything was wrong, and if she smelled smoke; she answered that everything was fine, and that the smoke wasn't coming from them. They bid farewell, and R' Lam decided to try once more. He knocked on the neighboring house, where a few young guys opened the door, obviously already halfway through the meal. R' Lam asked the same question, and they, too, said everything was good by them. But they were curious, so they took a few minutes to explore. They exited the back of their home and saw an unsightly scene. They quickly ran back to the front to call R' Lam, who hurried to the back of the house. There, he saw that his original hunch was indeed founded; the fire was coming from the first house, which he had just visited prior! He ran through the backyard to the back of the first house, and quickly understood. The owners didn't have time to dismantle their sukkah yet, as *isru chag* was *erev Shabbat*, and, in an effort to clear some space, they leaned their sukkah-beds vertically on one of the spotlights. The bed caught fire, which started to spread rapidly.*

*Acting fast, R' Lam broke into their sukkah, grabbed the flaming bed, and threw it across the sukkah to the outside. The ladies in the house saw what happened; their lives had just been saved. Firefighters were called, and the situation calmed down. After Shabbat, R' Lam's phone rang. It was the neighbors; they had called to thank him profusely for saving their lives in such a heroic fashion. “I'm just glad everyone is okay,” he answered, right before they hung up the phone. Immediately afterwards, R' Lam related, he burst out into tears. He couldn't help crying, shuddering at the thought of what could've happened had he not interrupted to investigate the smoke. What if he had just ignored it, or had assumed that someone had already called 911, and simply have gone straight home to start the meal? What terrible calamity could have happened...?*

Chazal explain that, despite all the rampant evil in the world, the flood could have been avoided if there were just 9 good, decent people around. So long as there was Noach, his wife, their three sons, their wives, and a *tzaddik* named Metushelach, they would have 9 virtuous individuals and Hashem would combine Himself with them to be the 10<sup>th</sup>. The merit of 10 being upright (even with G-d counting Himself among them) would serve to protect the rest of the world at large. That is why the *mabul* took place a week after Metushelach died; after the great *tzaddik* departed this world, there weren't enough righteous people to sustain the planet anymore.

As Noach exited the ark, he looked out and saw a world of emptiness. Everyone he knew, everything he knew – was completely obliterated, wiped off the face of the earth. After seeing with his own eyes all the very real destruction that had taken place, which he could have possibly prevented, he suddenly was overtaken with guilt too heavy to bear. “*What could've been?!?*” yelled a piercing voice that clouded his entire mind. He could've prayed. He could've been *mekarev* just **one** person; had he influenced just one fellow, perhaps he could have averted the global catastrophe. But it was all too late now. He trembled; he couldn't handle it. He turned to alcohol to help him cope with his new reality. While we use wine to *remember*, whether by *kiddush* to remember *yetziat Mitzrayim* or on Purim to remember the miracles, Noach used wine to try to *forget* and numb the pain, which eventually led to his disgrace.

No one wants, at the end of their lives, to look back and feel overburdened with remorse. The future is still in our hands now; let's make sure to utilize it correctly and do as much good while we still can.

“*It's never too late to become all that Hashem created you to be*”  
(R' Shmuel Reichman).

“*Most people barely know themselves; what does it matter what they think of you?*”