



The 1973 Yom Kippur War served as a sudden and powerful blow to the Jewish state. The IDF incurred thousands of casualties, and a sense of chaos was prevalent. Buses loaded with soldiers heading south were rerouted to the north, and many fell in the battles, leaving no trace behind.

In the days following the war, Rabbi Ovadiya Yosef had to make difficult decisions regarding several cases of *Agunoth*, women considered married whose husbands had gone missing during the war. Rabbi Ovadiya worked hard to halachically annul their marriages if possible, and so bringing them some respite. He was deeply moved by their sorrow and did his best to alleviate their pain.

I was part of the process and helped him obtain relevant information from family members. I was summoned by him one day to arrive at an IDF base in the north. He was there to have a close look at one of the scenes of battle.

He told me as we met that all the trouble was worthwhile. "I lose sleep over this, but it is worthwhile even to release one *Agunah*."

He described an *Agunah* as an imprisoned individual. "Imprisoned individuals do not see the light of day, just like an *Agunah*. It is a great Mitzvah to help these women and save them."

In those days Rabbi Ovadiya became known as a person who helps those in trouble, caring for each individual.

In our weekly parsha we read about Noach, who is described as "a righteous man" who was "perfect in his generations."¹

Rashi bring a dispute about the meaning of the words "**in his generations**" - Some of our Sages interpret it favorably to mean that he would be even more righteous if he had lived in a generation of righteous people. Others interpret it derogatorily, that in comparison with his generation he was righteous, but if he had been in Avraham's generation, he would not have been considered of any importance."

The second position is bewildering – are we not commanded to judge our fellow in a favorable light? G-d tells him "for it is you that I have seen as a righteous man before Me in this generation"² – why judge him unfavorably?

The question becomes even more acute when we read about the animals entering the arch. The Torah describes "the clean beasts and the beasts **that are not clean**" entering the arch. The Torah refrains from using negative language even when relating to animals.

The Sages learn from here the significance of using clean language. If they are so strict on the issue, why speak ill of Noach?

There is a difference between a description and rendering judgment. When the Torah gives a description it can use lighter language, but when rendering judgment it writes "pure" and "impure."



The Baal Shem Tov's student learned from here a lesson that the Torah is teaching us. According to the second opinion, the Torah is rebuking Noach for not being active enough on behalf of his generation.

The midrash³ describes a discussion between Noach and Moshe. Noach claimed he was greater than Moshe, as he merited being saved from the flood.

Moshe responds that Noach saved only himself when he had the power to save more. Moshe, on the other hand, saved his entire generation of Israelites.

Noach, when witnessing the corruption of his age, hid himself, while Moshe went out to his brothers, sympathized with them and sought ways to alleviate their suffering.

Such a leader can save his generation, as well as the entire world.

Such was Rabbi Ovadiya, a leader who was one with the people and who sympathized with his brothers at all times. He dedicated many hours, at his own expense, for the common man. He went from place to place to teach Torah instead of investing in his own studies.

He taught laymen and artisans, sat in the market and taught Torah to everyone, anywhere.

Once, while sitting with him, he told me frankly: "Of all my actions in this world, I ask to be rewarded for my actions to bring Jews closer to their heritage and teach them Torah. This is the most important thing to me."

¹ Beresheit 6:9

² Beresheit 7:1

³ Eicha Rabbah 11:3