

Derasha (Sermon) For Noah
 By: Rabbi Noah Gradofsky
 Temple Israel of Long Beach 10/15/04

נח אלה תולדות נח נח איש צדיק תמים הנה בדרתיו את האלהים התהלך נח *This is the lineage of Noah, Noah, a righteous man, he was perfect in his generation. Noah walked with God.* (Gen 6:9, Trans. my own). The Bible describes Noah as "*perfect in his generation.*" The Biblical commentator Rashi (based on Babylonian Talmud 108a) reports that these words could be taken either as higher praise for Noah, or as a limitation of Noah's praise. You see, Noah's generation was not a good generation. The verse says ותמלא הארץ חמס the earth was filled with lawlessness (Gen. 6:11, trans. JPS). So, when we are told Noah was "*perfect in his generation,*" these words could be further praise of Noah, saying that since Noah was perfect in his generation, had Noah existed in any other generation, he would have been an even greater צדיק (*tsadik* righteous person). On the other hand, these words could be read as a limitation of Noah's praise - meaning that though he was perfect for his generation, had Noah lived in another age, say the generation of Abraham, he would not have amounted to much of anything.

Now, both these reads of the verse have one idea in common - that a person is judged in context. Noah lived in a generation of evil. On the other hand, a person is to be praised for their ability to triumph over adversity. Noah was able to avoid the pitfalls of the behavior around him. You see, Noah had a choice. He saw a world of immorality around him. A world of violence, robbery, and all forms of evil. Noah could have succumbed. Instead, he became a true *tsadik*, and the savior of the world and humanity. And it is the fact that Noah excelled despite the obstacles that earns him the praise of being צדיק תמים - *a perfect righteous person.*

This week, we lost a Noah. We lost a person who was dealt a great deal of adversity. A person who could have lost hope - a person who in fact had contemplated suicide. But rather than succumbing, this person brought hope and light into our world. We lost a person who was dealt one of life's hardest blows, and then earned his once mythical title . . . Superman.

I remember the day that Christopher Reeve had his horse accident. People spoke about how ironic it was that most actors who once played Superman had ended their lives with tragedy and physical adversity. They said it was a message from God - a reminder that none of us are Supermen. In the years since his accident Christopher Reeve taught us a different lesson. He taught us that even life's most difficult situations present people with the opportunity to do a world of good. Reeve returned to acting and producing movies - sending a message of hope to millions, that dedicated effort can lead to great achievement despite adversity. He also used his condition as a tool for positive change - advocating for medical research into spinal cord injuries, and raising millions of dollars for that cause.

Now, Reeve ascended to his greatest heights after an accident that robbed him of his physical abilities. But we need not experience that type of loss in order to learn from his example. What are the things that we use as an excuse to limit our own achievement? Are we too busy? Too old? Too young? Not educated enough? Not rich enough? Superman's legacy is that we not accept those limitations, and that we sometimes use those apparent limitations as an opportunity for achievement and triumph. In fact, it is when we triumph over our limits, as did Reeve, we automatically do double the good that we might have thought, since we remind others of what they may be capable of as well.

What achievement is in store for us as individuals and as a community? How do we become *tsadikim* in *our* generation? Certainly, we all have our limits. But we also have untold potential. May we all follow the path of Noah by achieving all that we are capable of, and the path of Christopher Reeve - seeing everything in our lives not as limitation or impediment, but as opportunity for triumph. Amen.