

Who was Noah?

After the Flood, as Noah begins the process of replanting the earth, the Torah tells us that he is a farmer. In *Bereishit* (Genesis) 9:20, he is called *ish ha'adamah*, a tiller of the soil or literally a man of the earth. In the rebirth of the world after the Flood, a farmer is certainly a useful person to have around, but how does this connect with what we already know about Noah?

In the Midrash, the rabbis consider Noah to be the inventor of the plow – a farm tool that made it easier and faster to plant more and feed more people – and the initiator of effective agriculture. The Torah connects the meaning of Noah's name to "rest" and "relief," and Noah indeed brought people "relief" and "rest" by allowing them to move beyond subsistence living. Upon naming him, Noah's father Lamech even says (5:29): "This one will provide us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands."

But Noah's designation as *ish ha'adamah* also illuminates another aspect of Noah. The Torah teaches us that Noah was also *ish tzaddik tamim* (6:9), a righteous man in his generation, but does not tell us why, other than that he walked with G-d. I think that he was an *ish tzaddik* in part because he was an *ish ha'adamah*: in a generation of selfishness, violence, and hatred, Noah learned how to provide for others. Once there was a surplus of food, people didn't just have to think about providing for their own needs, but would have enough to care for the less fortunate among them. Unfortunately, Noah was the only one who understood that times of blessing and plenty were to be shared. People like his father Lamech could only see that they would have less work to do. Noah's desire to feed the world made him the righteous one in his generation. May we be inspired by Noah to be *tzaddikim* (righteous people) and share the blessings we have received, in our generation and every one to come.

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