

Sfas Emes on Noach, in simple English. Studied on Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan, 5787 (October 11, 2026). Each segment has a plain translation ("What it says") and an explanation ("What it means").

Part 1: Noach Needed Support

The main idea: Noach is not the lesser tzaddik. He is the first stage that is needed. Every person grows in one order: first a guarded point, then middos, then Torah.

Segment 1: Why "Noach needed support" does not make Noach small

WHAT IT SAYS

Rashi says that Noach needed support. But the Sages would never make Noach look small, because the Torah calls him a righteous man. The world works in an order. First there had to be a tzaddik who needs support. After that came a tzaddik like Avraham, who did not need support. The world was not strong enough to receive Avraham's leadership right away. First it needed a tzaddik like Noach.

WHAT IT MEANS

- Rashi compares Noach, who walked *with* God, to Avraham, who walked *before* God. Rashi says Noach needed help to stand, and Avraham stood on his own.
- The Sfas Emes does not read this as a ranking. He reads it as an order. A person who needs support is not a failure. That person is at the right stage.
- Noach's support also came from the merits of other people and of future generations. He stood partly on things that were not yet his.
- *Example:* You cannot build the top floors of a house before the foundation is set. No one calls the foundation the small part of the house.

Segment 2: The same pattern for the world, the year, and the soul

WHAT IT SAYS

The same order in the Torah applies to every Jewish soul. The world, the year, and the soul follow the same pattern. At the start there is *tohu*, a state of being unformed, like a newborn child.

WHAT IT MEANS

- Sefer Yetzirah names three things: *olam* (world), *shanah* (year), and *nefesh* (soul). The Sfas Emes says they follow one pattern.
- *Tohu* is not evil. A newborn has every ability, but cannot use them yet. A soul starts the same way.

Segment 3: The guarded point, then middos, then Torah

WHAT IT SAYS

God protects one point inside every person. This is like how Noach was saved from everyone in his generation. From this point, a person's character grows. It spreads into middos (good character traits) like the middos of the Avos. After that, a person is ready to receive Torah. The Midrash says, "Derech eretz came before Torah." Derech eretz means the middos.

WHAT IT MEANS

- **Stage one, the point.** Even when a person is still unformed, God keeps one spark safe. The person did not build it. It is kept for them, the way Noach was kept safe in the Flood.
- **Stage two, the middos.** The point spreads. It grows into character, like the kindness of Avraham, the strength of Yitzchak, and the truth of Yaakov. (The Sfas Emes says "like the Avos." The three examples are the common reading.)
- **Stage three, Torah.** Torah settles into a person after the middos are built. Torah needs a vessel, and good middos are that vessel.
- The Sfas Emes does *not* say you must be perfect before you study. He describes the order in which Torah settles into a person.

THE MAIN LESSON

Needing help is not the mistake. Skipping stages is the mistake.

Questions to think about:

1. Where are you now? Do you see this stage as failure, or as a foundation?
2. What is the one point in you that stayed whole through a hard time you did not choose?
3. Where have you tried to reach Torah without good middos to hold it?