

# Meshech Chochma

## - Jacob Solomon

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*Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (Daugavpils, Latvia) (1843-1926) was the Rabbi of non-Hasidic community of that town for nearly 40 years. (The Jews made up nearly half of the population of Dvinsk at that time.) His most famous works are the Ohr Same'ach on the Rambam's Mishneh Torah and, published after his death by his student Menachem Mendel Zaks, the Meshech Chochma on the Torah. Meshech is an acronym of the writer's name: Meir Simcha haKohen. (Remember that in the Litvish pronunciation the letter SIN is pronounced SHIN, though the curious should check Iyov 28:18). Though he warmly supported the religious settlement of Israel, he refused an offer of a premium rabbinical position in Jerusalem in 1906 due to the entreaties of his community begging him to stay.*

*His approach to Torah study within the Meshech Chochma tends to synthesize Torah, Tanach, Talmud, and later sources into a single entity, which in his hands, matures into original, deep insights into Torah thinking and practice.*

*(After the flood) No'ach built an altar for G-d... he offered burnt offerings on the altar. G-d smelt the burnt offerings, saying to Himself: "... I will never again destroy all living things" (6:20-21).*

This is the first time No'ach showed significant initiative. Up until now, he "walked with G-d" (6:9) - he did what G-d told him. Obedient, yes: No'ach did exactly as G-d instructed him (6:22). So far: no more, no less. But having survived the Flood and out of thanks of being saved, he took upon himself to do that major act of worshiping G-d on his own initiative, by building a place of service to G-d. He took part in starting the Creation anew, directing the Creation to its source, to the Creator. In doing so, he was "walking before G-d" (as Avraham would, c.f. 25:40), rather than merely "walking with G-d".

And G-d responded positively. He recognized the spiritual struggles in Mankind, and He resolved that nothing He would ever do in the future would destroy life in totality.

Yet the story of No'ach finishes on a rather sour note. The final act shows him compromising himself in getting drunk from wine made out of his very own grapes from his very own vineyard. As the text recounts:

**VAYACHEL NO'ACH, No'ach became, ISH ADAMA, a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. He drank from the wine and he became intoxicated, and he was naked... Cham, K'na'an's father, saw his father's nakedness, and told his two brothers outside (9:20-22).**

**Rashi comments on VAYACHEL NO'ACH in saying that it can also mean that No'ach debased himself, which he did by going into farming by planting a vineyard. He could have grown other things that would not produce intoxicating drink.**

**The Meshech Chochma, however, pays special attention to the words ISH ADAMA, a man of the land, a farmer. At the beginning of the Parsha, No'ach was an ISH TZADIK, a righteous man. Since then, he experienced G-d at first hand when communicated His plans, and experienced His favor when He saved his life, together with those of his family and the animals. No'ach rose to the occasion: he followed G-d's instructions and he played his part in setting the world in order to follow a better path, making a good start by an act of HAKARAT HATOV, gratitude to G-d, in building an altar and bringing offerings, which gained G-d's approval. But so far and no further. He did not go put among the people and spread G-d's ideals as Avraham**

**Avinu would (Rashi to 12:5). He'd done his bit and just wanted to settle down to normal life. Like Harry Potter aged 18, at the finish of his adventures: "I've had enough trouble for a lifetime."**

**The Meshech Chochma contrasts No'ach's progress with Moshe Rabbeinu's. We hear of No'ach as first as an ISH TZADIK (6:9), someone special, and then moving to ISH ADAMA, a working man, nothing more. Towards being just ordinary. Moshe, however, was the opposite: he started off as an ISH MITZRI (Sh'mot 2:19), an Egyptian man, and yet he was to bring a whole nation closer to G-d than anyone before or since, progressing stage by stage to the highest title of all: ISH HA-ELOKIM, a man of G-d (D'varim 33:1). Indeed, it is Moshe, rather than No'ach is held up as the ideal to Am Yisrael. He got to his peak at the end of his life: in contrast to No'ach, Moshe didn't sign off half way.**

**That is the message: the time we have in our lives is the time we have to use as best as possible to progress, each person according to his or her unique abilities. All of it. As best as possible. All the way to the end. Not pulling out using age as a mere excuse. T**