



ADAM  
AND

THE  
GARDEN



# ADAM'S MISSION

PEOPLE SOMETIMES SHARE WITH ME how they feel their lives lack purpose, how they don't feel there's real meaning to what they're doing.

I tell them, "That's only because you're not in touch with the Creator's purpose. If you know what inspired God to create, you'll also know what will infuse your own actions with meaning."

Adam's (read: humanity's) Divine essence mirrors that of the Infinite One. What sparked the great act of Creation is the same force that fills us with a feeling of purpose and meaning. When we're consciously attuned to that purpose, we're naturally filled with vitality and energy.

It's about connection, compassion, and filling the empty space with revealed goodness and mercy. That apparently empty space that was the beginning of Creation isn't only the source of our free will, it's our room to work. The space allows us to live with the same purpose that animates all of Creation.

The main way to fill the space is through God-consciousness: when our thoughts, words, and actions are filled with awareness of God and His purpose for Creation. But it's not enough to develop this consciousness within ourselves. The greatest act of mercy and compassion is to share the light of this awareness with others, so that the empty space of Creation becomes filled with illuminated minds.

God didn't set up this beautiful universe as a pretty toy. He certainly didn't set it up to be a place of pain and lack. The space here is meant to be completely and absolutely filled with activated human minds and spirits, joyous and alive in a state of connection with their Source. The Creator blessed Adam, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" — I don't need My world filled with animalistic hu-

man beings. I want you to populate My Creation with fully actualized human hearts and minds.

The human being is a composite of the heavenly and the earthly — a fusion of soul and body. We have the potential — really, the mission — of joining the physicality of existence with its spiritual source. We weren't designed to be like other creatures; we were made to be partners with our Creator.

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That's what we can give, because only we can give it. It's our unique human nature — a material body fully of the earth, joined together with the absolutely spiritual "bit of God" that animates us — that makes it possible for us to partner with the Creator to carry into reality the original purpose of Creation. Only we are able to reveal Divine mercy to the fullest extent possible by expressing our soul's needs and purpose by way of material experience.

If we go back to the account of the Garden, we find that "there was no rain... because there was no man." (Genesis 2:5–6) What does rain have to do with Adam not yet being on the scene? Our tradition teaches that there was no rain because there wasn't yet a partner in the world to pray and arouse Divine mercy, which is the trigger for the descent of rain. The world was sustained until then by a "mist" — a steady and pervasive lifeline of minimal Divine loving-kindness. But the greater revelation of Divine mercy — rain — had to wait until a human being was there to draw it down.

We learn from this that God created the universe with built-in lacks — empty spaces — to provide us with purpose and to allow us to partner with its Creator.

That's Adam's mission statement...and if it was Adam's, it's ours, too.

# THE RIGHT FOUNDATION



FOR YEARS, I'VE BEEN WORKING with people who seek deeper meaning and purpose in their lives. And one thing I've discovered is that the most basic element of the work is often the most neglected: the nature of their relationship with God.

One of the most basic mitzvot is to love God. And a common question is: "Some people love more easily, and others have a harder time with it. Is it really fair to require us to come up with a feeling for the Creator?"

But — and this is a key point — if God instructs us to do something, that means we can do it.

We do have a natural reservoir of love for our Creator within us, and it's up to us to tap into it. The feelings are there because we have an innate bond with God, and we're constantly receiving a flow of goodness — life itself and everything we need — from the Creator. Gratitude and love go together, and both are natural to us when we're in a healthy spiritual state. That means paying attention to the good and allowing it to affect us emotionally.

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It's hard to feel grateful when you think that, no matter how much good the giver has shared, it was for ulterior motives, without genuine love and goodness directed toward you personally. That's the difference between emotionally healthy and happy people, and those who have a hard time getting out of bed in the morning. How do they feel about the circumstances of their lives, and about the One Who orchestrated them? Is the good (and there's always good) just something they take for granted, or do they feel the love and care invested in them by

the Creator?

The sages compared this to the difference between a good guest and a bad one. The good guest says, “Everything my host has done, he did for my sake.” The house is clean, there’s food to eat, the people are pleasant...and not because the host would do these things anyway to make his life more pleasant. He did it for me. My host cares about me, and I naturally want to express that love right back.

The bad guest says, “Everything my host has done, he did for himself.” He needed to eat anyway — what’s an extra portion to him? He wants to live in an orderly space. Nobody did anything special to make me feel more at ease. I can’t feel personal and genuine gratitude unless I feel deep down that I personally have something to be grateful for.

We’ve all probably gotten a taste of both kinds of guests in our lives. The question is — which one would we rather be?

I mentioned earlier that the first words in the prayer book — the first thing we say even before washing our hands in the morning — is a simple prayer: “Modeh ani l’fanecha...” It’s usually translated as, “I give thanks before You...”

Every new day opens with a reflection on gratitude. This is the foundation of my day; it’s the basis of my relationship with my Creator and it’s how I stay in harmony with God.

Now, if we go back to Adam in the Garden, we can look at what unfolded there with fresh eyes. In the third chapter of Genesis, we’re introduced to the serpent. If we cut down the primordial serpent’s argument to its most basic elements, it’s that the Infinite One commanded you not to eat this fruit because He doesn’t love you.

The serpent hisses, “Isn’t it beautiful? And it’s going to make you so smart. Why would God keep you away from something so good? It must be because...God doesn’t really love you.”

Of course, this wasn’t only bad advice; it was also a lie. If you’ve been told not to eat from a particular tree, and the basis of your relationship is trust in God’s benevolence and gratitude, then it must be that staying away from that fruit is crucial for you.

Listening to the serpent’s voice changed Adam’s understanding of his relation-

ship with God. Instead of trust, there was now suspicion. Instead of love — competition. With his new serpent-view, Adam lost sight of the fact that the Divine rules are just good advice offered by a loving Creator. By acting on his now twisted perception, Adam created his own reality.

Adam lost touch with the basis of his relationship with God: that the Infinite One is good and only seeks our good.

This is really the point on which everything rests. How do we see the Creator? Do we see the Creator as kind, generous, loving, and merciful or — the exact opposite — out to get us? When we're confident of God's love — an inherent love, like the natural love a parent has for a child — then our whole world is built on the right foundation. Then, you wake up in the morning, open your eyes, and say, "What a wonderful world the Creator has made for me — *Modeh ani!*"



# IN THE GARDEN

OKAY, LET'S KEEP THIS SIMPLE. There is only you and God. You are Adam on the first day of your creation and God says to you: "Adam, here are some basic ground rules. I created you, I love you, I'll do everything so that you can reach your highest potential. You're free to follow these instructions or not — it's your choice. But I just want you to know...if you use your free will to carry out My Will, it's going to be really great for you."

Why does Adam have to be free to choose? Because that's the essence of his Divine nature. Just as the Creator is free, so too must man be free. Just as the Creator is a giver and not a taker, man needs to be provided with opportunities to give rather than just receive. Adam can only really develop a relationship with the Creator by emulating God's essential qualities.

The Torah teaches that after Adam's creation, "God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden." But in that second chapter of Genesis, we see that Adam was already in Eden. So from where was Adam taken so that he could be re-

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placed in the Garden?

The Zohar — the classic work of Jewish mysticism — teaches us that Adam was "taken from...the four elements." Each of the four basic modes — grounded like the earth; expansive like water; transcendent like air; and fiery hot with fervor — have positive and negative potential.

Adam is removed from the negative manifestations of his material nature, and then settled into Eden to align with the Divine Will. But he needed to remain in sync with this perfect world. During the first phase of existence, the Creator did the act of alignment for Adam, so he would be suited to the nature of Eden.

No one just lands in Eden — you have to actively synchronize yourself with it to be there.

But Adam wasn't created to be passively acted upon. He was placed here to actualize his Divine potential, and work to repair and perfect the world in which he'd been planted.

But what if, like Adam, you choose not to stay aligned?

God doesn't need to punish anyone for that — Creation itself, all of its four elements, rises up against the person who introduces division into the Garden. When a person chooses to leave the world of unity and seek out separation, the natural result is bitterness. As we saw in the story of the House of the Blind, all the things created to help us carry out our highest purpose — marriage, children, wealth, our own bodies — instead become the instruments of our unhappiness.

Adam could only live in Eden if he was aligned with its perfection. So when Adam damaged his refined nature, he was naturally ejected from the Garden. He didn't really need to be exiled. He was out of sync with the place and no longer fit.

Anyone can make “working and guarding the Garden” the center of his life. Working means acting as a partner with God's Will. Guarding means refraining from anything that would interrupt that connection.

When what's essential is at the center, everything good naturally flows out from that source. For each of us, life has the potential to be like a taste of Eden — abundant, joyous, and flowing with blessing. But, just like Adam, to achieve that, we're going to have to work for it.

# TWO TREES

IN THE GARDEN, THERE WERE all kinds of beautiful and wondrous trees, but in the very center of the garden there were two that were unique: the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Although

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We all have something to accomplish in the wider world of action. That external purpose is our “Tree of Knowledge.”

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both trees sprang from the same root, they didn’t bear the same kind of fruit. According to Kabbalistic tradition, those two

trees represent many different concepts. One of these concepts sheds light on our everyday experience, and I want to share it with you.

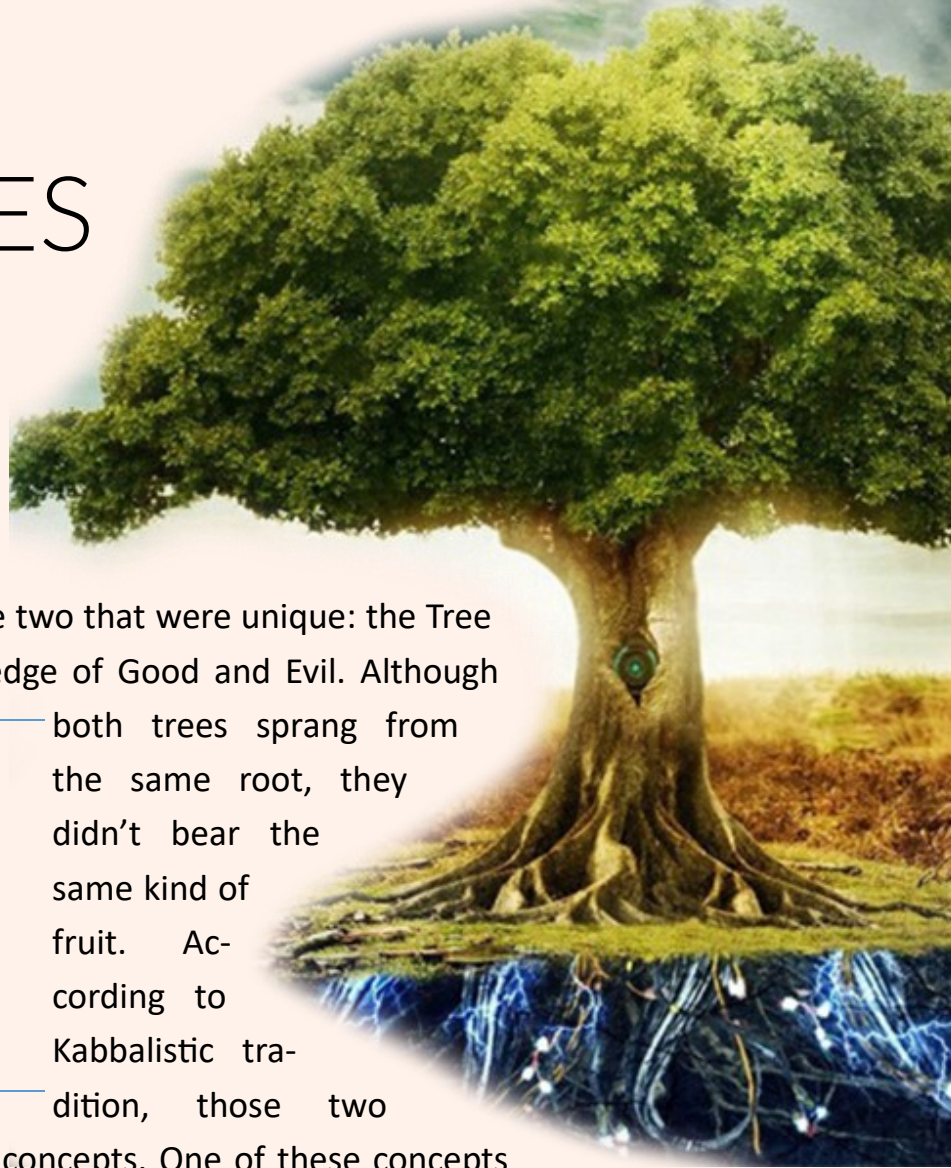
Everyone has two essential parts to his life.

We have our “Tree of Life” — our inner purpose, our center, our connection to the Divine, a connection nourished through prayer, meditation, and study.

And then we all have something to accomplish in the wider world of action. That external purpose is our “Tree of Knowledge.”

When we look at the verses in Genesis, we tend to zero in on the Divine directive to avoiding eating the “forbidden fruit.” Most of us fail to see that Adam was first told: “You shall surely eat freely of all the trees of the Garden” (Genesis 2:16). That’s a recommendation, a piece of important advice from God: “Go ahead and partake of your Tree of Life — of the sources of nourishment that feed your bond with your Creator. Enjoy!”

Had Adam eaten first from the Tree of Life — had he first nourished his spiritual



essence — he could have eaten from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil afterward without suffering. It's only when we go out into the world of action in a state of disconnection from our Source that we find ourselves in a state of spiritual confusion. It's only when we're not conscious of the Infinite One at the root of our varied experience that the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is spiritual poison.

A centered and aligned person — a unified person — can go out into the physical world of multiplicity without suffering. So start your day by centering yourself with Divine wisdom and meditative prayer; then you can go out into the world of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and stay connected to the

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“You may eat freely of all the trees of the Garden” — The fruit of knowledge isn't the problem...the problem is disconnection.

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Source. When you're connected inside, everything you do outside becomes bound up with that lifeline and unified. And if you feel yourself losing your unified focus during the day, just stop and reorient yourself. Study something that feeds your soul; take five minutes to focus on conscious contact with God.

Do whatever you need to do to get back in touch with the Tree of Life. It's the fruit that makes Adam leave his paradise and go out into the world of multiplicity — a fractured universe he created with his own perceptions. But it's also by getting out there that Adam has the chance to undo the damage. By discovering unity and alignment in the place of multiplicity and concealment, Adam has a chance at getting back to the Garden.

The Torah teaches that after Adam's departure, God placed a particular obstacle at the gates of Eden to prevent exactly that return: an angel grasping a “flashing, revolving sword.” These images from the Torah aren't just colorful, descriptive parts of an ancient story; they're symbols that describe our reality right now.

The “flash of the revolving sword” is a part of my everyday life — it's a state of confusion that keeps me from getting back to the Garden. Again, the revolving sword isn't some kind of punishment; it's simply the consequence of Adam's choice. This sword that turns every which way represents a state of internal conflict and confusion. It's like you're standing at the fork in the road and not only do the signposts point in different directions that all seem equally attractive, but the

signs themselves flash like neon lights that just stupefy you.

Most of us live in doubt about what our next move should be, what direction we should take. I call this the “functional dysfunctional mind.” Our thoughts race, and we’re deafened by the internal chatter and static. We’re so used to this chaos that we think it’s totally normal, but if this noise was amplified we’d be mortified at how crazy it sounds. Our thoughts ricochet back and forth constantly, sapping our vital energy.

This isn’t our natural state; it’s not how we ought to be living. It’s just a result of Adam eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. This is the work of the revolving sword in our lives. So we go right back to the beginning and repair the situation by doing for ourselves what Adam failed to do — connect with our Tree of Life first, and only then go out into the world of multiplicity and confusion. Starting our day spiritually connected helps us stay centered so we can function sanely in a crazy world. The world is full of choices whose lights flash in our eyes, dazzle us, and make it even harder to make decisions. The goal is to be able to interact with the vast world of options without losing our way; to find clarity in the midst of confusion, unity in the place of multiplicity, and peace and quiet in place of internal chaos. That’s how we can walk the path back to Eden.



# STARTING FRESH

IF WE WANT TO BE able to take the road back to the Garden, it's important to take a look at two forces within us that keep us from taking those first steps in the right direction: guilt and shame.

The first recorded moment of guilt and shame was immediately after Adam and Eve ate from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam chose to pursue the ego-agenda rather than the Divine directive — and he fell out of alignment with the Divine Will. His connection with the vitality and soul of the universe was disrupted; it needed immediate repair.

*God wants us to stay connected and aligned, but guilt keeps us separate. Shame over the past keeps us from reconnecting with our Source.*

Directly following Adam's error, the Creator made an opening for him, issuing an invitation to come forward and reestablish contact. "The voice of God was traveling through the garden... And God called out to him, 'Where are you?'" (Genesis 3:8–9). But Adam's instinctive response — driven by a sense of guilt and shame — was to avoid the voice of the Infinite One (as if that were really possible). And so, initially, Adam chose to hide rather than face his Creator.

Adam's sin had long-lasting repercussions; in fact, we're still feeling them today. Try to put yourself in his position. You've just made an error that's going to impact the rest of human history. We have a hard enough time picking our-

selves up off the floor after making a minor mistake — imagine how devastated Adam must have felt! Adam very much wanted to correct his error. But we see that the obstacles of guilt and shame didn't bring him closer to correcting his mistake.

Our tradition teaches us that after leaving Eden, Adam spent 130 years in a state of deep repentance. He changed his life and changed himself, investing all of his energy in trying to repair the damage he'd caused. The great lesson we learn from Adam is that although it seemed like it was too late, he did not give up. He did not give in to the natural human tendency to allow guilt and shame to keep him from trying to repair whatever he could.

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The roots of redemption lie in refusing to despair, and believing in ourselves and in the possibility of repair.

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By the way, there's a big difference between guilt and repentance. Guilt — because the offense seems so great, so unfixable — leads to paralysis. It's how our past can swallow up our future.

But repentance, teshuvah — which really means to return and restore — is all about taking responsibility in the present for mistakes made in the past, so the future opens clearly before us.

Teshuvah is a way of clearing out all the chaotic “revolving sword” thinking, so we can start fresh.

Clearing out that space is a reflection of that initial space-making of Creation. Again, we're doing the basic steps of the Divine dance.

Adam spent a whole lifetime in this process of return, and for this he's called a chassid by the ancient sages — a pious man. Not because he managed to completely clean up his mess, but because he didn't give up, and devoted his life to doing what he could to repair the damage he'd caused.

And what about us? Sometimes we're so overwhelmed by all the damage we see in our lives, we can hardly think where to begin.

Look at the mess we've made of our own private worlds — our marriages, our children, our communities.

Look into your own heart — at the pain that lies within each and every one of

us.

And then, paralyzed, we give up.

Now wait just a minute!

That sense of accountability you feel? That deep regret? That yearning for something better?

What you're feeling is the essence of returning, the essence of teshuvah.



The difference is that we feel all of that — and also refuse to despair. When we realize how unequal we are to the task of restoring everything that was lost, it's exactly then that we can open up the channels of assistance from Above. The great masters taught, "It is not incumbent upon you to complete the work, but you are not free to leave off from it either!" (Avot 2:16). Like Adam, we begin by doing whatever we can — and we trust that the Creator will complete the work, even if it takes generations.

*Even if it takes the rest of human history.*

After those 130 years of teshuvah, Adam had a son, Seth, who eventually had a son named Shem, the forefather of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Shem is the source of the entire future of the Jewish people and of the Messiah, who will eventually come to repair the world. Let's stop for a moment and think about that.

*Repairing the world.*

*Redemption.*

Our ultimate future is rooted in Adam's refusal to fall into despair, and his persistence in starting again. And that's true for us no less than it was for Adam — we need to believe in ourselves, in our ability to repair the world if we'll only begin the process.

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov taught: "If you believe that you can ruin something... believe that you can fix it!"

On the surface, this simple-seeming quote sounds nice and easy, but try to visualize what it really means. Imagine a very expensive vase on the dining room table and my ten-year-old — after being told endless times not to play ball in the house — breaks the vase. Will I then turn to him and say, "Don't worry,

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"If you believe that  
you can ruin  
something...  
believe that  
you can fix it!"

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sweetheart, if you can break it you can also fix it”?

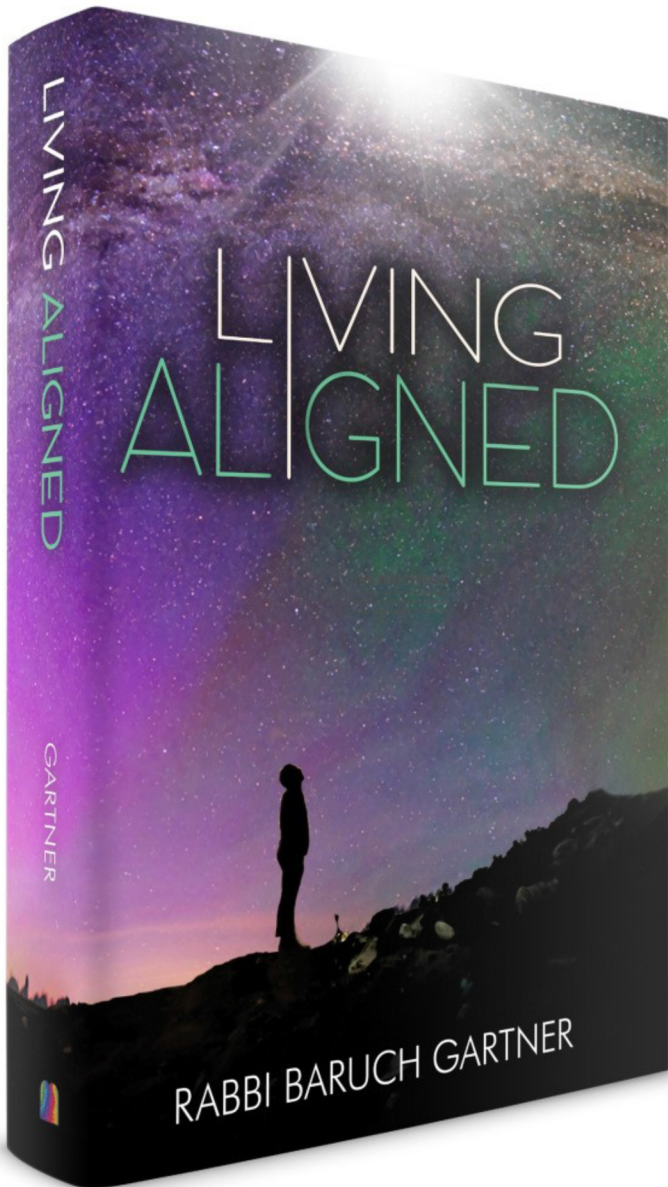
No. Because in an instant of carelessness, my son broke a valuable object, and all the superglue in the world won't help.

So what does Rebbe Nachman really mean? I suggest that, instead of emphasizing the “ruin” and “fix” lines, the focus should really be on the word believe.

If you believe your actions have spiritual ramifications, that things count, and after having made your mistake you're really out of alignment with your Creator, you can also activate that power of belief to empower your repair. Belief in fixing is what gets you back out there, looking for opportunities to make any amends you can. It's the belief in the process of repair that catalyzes it.

Our very first tzaddik is Adam — yes, Adam! He might have made a mistake, a huge mistake, but he also laid the groundwork for all the repair that would happen throughout the generations. Like all the great souls that came after him, he moved the progression of the revelation of God's mercy forward until the next tzaddik came along to take up the work.

That tzaddik was Noah.



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