



## What is the First Botanical Mentioned in the Torah?

### Noach – The Greatest Trauma Victim in the World Ever

*Parashat Noach* portrays not only the greatest global trauma ever, but it also alludes to how to come out of trauma and start a new chapter in our lives. Trauma is linked with darkness, and it is common for people who experienced trauma to be afraid of or overwhelmed by their own darkness. They often fear that they will enter deep, hidden spaces, and let out monsters they have learned to cage. During trauma work, we begin to search for light. Fortunately, light is most visible when we are in complete darkness. Lighting a candle in a dark cave creates a focal point of brightness. In the entire history of humanity, Noach is probably the person who went through the greatest trauma ever. “And it [the Flood] blotted out all beings that were upon the face of the earth, from man to animal to creeping thing and to the fowl of the heavens, and they were blotted out from the earth, and only Noach and those with him in the ark survived” (*Bereishit* 7:23). Imagine having to experience a worldwide flood wiping away every single lifeform from the face of the earth – relatives, neighbors, animals, trees and every green plant. Moreover, Noach also experienced the personal trauma of being attacked by a lion. “Because Noah once delayed feeding the lion, it bit him so severely, that he left the ark crippled, as it states, “Only Noach was left” (*Bereishit* 7:23). The word *אֶחָד/ach* – “only” indicates that his body was no longer whole. He became, thereby, unfit to bring sacrifices to the altar, and his son, Shem, had to do it in his stead” (*Midrash Tanchuma, Noach* 9). Emerging from the shadows of trauma is not easy and often, as in Noach’s case, PTSD leaves a lasting disability, whether physical, emotional and/or spiritual. Hashem sent Noach the light of healing, through the olive leaf in the mouth of the dove. When the dove brought Noach the olive leaf, he realized that the *mabul* (flood) had ceased. As a result, he and his family would be able to abandon the darkness of the ark and enter the light of the world. Why did Hashem choose specifically the olive branch to usher Noach and his family back into normal life? What makes the olive plant suitable for trauma work in general and for Noach specifically?

### The Freedom of Faith

ספר בראשית פרק ח פסוק יא וַתָּבֵא אֵלָיו הַיּוֹנָה לֵעֵת עֶרֶב וְהָיָה עָלֶיהָ זֵית טָרֶף בְּפִיהָ וַיֵּדַע נֹחַ כִּי קָלָו הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ:

“The dove came into him toward evening, with a freshly plucked olive leaf in her mouth. So Noach knew that the waters were abated from off the earth” (*Bereishit* 8:11).

While the dove is a symbol of peace and harmony with all creation, the olive is a symbol of freedom and direct connection with Hashem. *בְּפִיהָ/befiha* – “in her mouth” – is an expression of speech. She [the dove] said: Let my food be as bitter as an olive in the hands of the Holy One, blessed be He, and not as sweet as honey in the hands of flesh and blood [*Sanh.* 108b]; (Rashi, *Bereishit* 8:11). True freedom is to have complete faith in Hashem and complete healing is to allow His light to flow freely within us. In contrast to life in the ark, where the dove passively received its daily rations from the hands of people, she was now free to fly and establish her own direct relationship with the Creator. By allowing Hashem to guide her, she became independent to acquire her own food. The dove was bringing healing to the world by means of the “olive leaf plucked in her mouth.” This is supported by the fact that the Hebrew word for *טָרֶף/taraf* – ‘plucked,’ appears only one additional time in the Bible, with the same vowels: “Come and let us

return to Hashem, for He has torn (תָּרַף/*taraf*), and He will heal us" (*Hoshea* 6:1). The olive leaf was from the Garden of Eden, and the dove brought it in order to heal Noach from coughing blood, due to the battering physical demands of taking care of the animals in the ark (*Ateret Yehoshua, Parashat Noach*).

### Noach's Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

"The dove came into him toward evening..." What difference does it make that the dove returned toward evening? At nighttime, the ark would need light, and the dove, therefore, brought not only an olive leaf, but also olives to make oil for lighting (*Kli Yakar, Bereishit* 8:11).

"Just as the dove brought light to the world, so must you, who are compared to a dove, bring olive oil and kindle the light before Me, as it says, "I command you to bring olive oil." (*Midrash Tanchuma, Tetzaveh* 5). Noach was shown the light at the end of the dark tunnel of his trauma. We are like the olive. Sometimes, we need to be crushed to unlock our potential. Just as the olive brings light to the world through being crushed, so, too – despite the crushing trauma – it is possible to start anew and rebuild our lives, by becoming proactive in creating and growing. Olive leaves are evergreen and don't wither, thus being a potent metaphor for faith renewed in perpetual and persistent growth. Although Noach was shown a way out of his darkness, to renew his faith and become proactive in rebuilding the world, it seems that his nervous system became 'stuck.' He remained in psychological shock, unable to make sense of what happened or process his emotions. I venture to say that Noach suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Instead of entering the renewed world, as he emerged from the ark, he escaped into alcohol abuse and despair. "Then Noach began to be a master of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his tent" (*Bereishit* 9:20-21).

### Olive Leaf – The First Botanical Mentioned in the Torah and its Health Benefits

I found it interesting that scientific studies indicate that olive leaf may alleviate PTSD – a stress-related mental disorder caused by traumatic experiences. Oleuropein (OLE), a major compound in olive leaves, reportedly possesses several pharmacological properties, including anti-cancer, anti-diabetic, and anti-atherosclerotic and neuropsychiatric activities. The findings in a study that used several behavioral tests to examine the effects of OLE on symptoms of anxiety in rats after a single prolonged stress (SPS) suggest that OLE has anxiolytic-like effects on behavioral and biochemical symptoms similar to those observed in patients with PTSD. [Oleuropein reduces anxiety-like responses by activating of serotonergic and neuropeptide Y \(NPY\)-ergic systems in a rat model of post-traumatic stress disorder](#) Olive leaf is antispasmodic, vasodilating, astringent. It lowers blood-pressure and relieves insomnia. Oleuropein, the bitter substance in olive leaves, has powerful antibacterial effects. Olive leaf, sold as an extract, counteracts a variety of viral conditions including flu, colds, herpes, and fungal infections. It also improves blood flow to the heart, and helps cure diabetes, arthritis, allergies, various skin conditions and chronic fatigue syndrome. Olive leaf also provides an infusion of energy for healthy people. People who lead stressful lives or are particularly susceptible to colds and viruses may benefit from long-term use of olive leaf extract as a preventive agent. Although olive leaf extract has only been used clinically since 1995, it was recorded in the mid-19th century as being used to cure English men from infectious diseases contracted in tropical colonies. Daniel Hanbury writes in the *Pharmaceutical Journal, England, 1854*: "To cure tropical diseases administer the liquid in the amount of a wineglass every three or four hours until the fever is cured."

Today olive leaf extract and its primary active constituent oleuropein are known primarily for their antimicrobial properties including activity against a vast array of highly pathogenic bacteria and viruses

## Noach is Rectified Through His Reincarnation as Moshe Rabbeinu

Despite receiving olive leaves, Noach was unable to pick himself up after his trauma. Yet, 17 generations later, Hashem gave him a second chance. Noach's soul, which was the incarnation of the soul of Shet, the son of Adam, was reincarnated in no other than Moshe Rabbeinu. This is alluded to in the word שֶׁמֶן/*shemen*, which is an acronym for שֶׁת מֶשֶׁה נֹחַ. G-d told Moshe, "You shall command the children of Israel, and they shall take to you pure olive oil (שֶׁמֶן/*shemen*), crushed for lighting, to kindle the lamps continually" (*Shemot* 27:20). The phrase "pure olive oil," here, indicates that Moshe was able to refine and purify Noach's soul ([Rabbi Pinches Friedman, Parshas Tetzaveh 5779 Translation by Dr. Baruch Fox](#)). The fact that this rectification took place 17 generations later is alluded to in the following verse:

**ספר בראשית פרק ז פסוק א וַיֹּאמֶר ה'שָׁם לְנֹחַ בֹּא אַתָּה וְכָל בֵּיתְךָ אֶל הַתֶּבֶה כִּי אֶתְךָ רָאִיתִי צַדִּיק לְפָנַי בְּדוֹר הַזֶּה:**

"Hashem said to Noach, 'Come into the ark, you and all your household, for it is you that I have seen as a righteous man before Me in this generation'" (*Bereishit* 7:1).

The word הַזֶּה/*haze* – "this" has the numerical value of 17, thus you can read it as "the 17<sup>th</sup> generation." Scripture hints that Hashem had seen Noach's righteousness as it will be incarnated into Moshe 17 generations later. Arizal furthermore explains that Hashem delayed the flood for 120 years, and thus gave the wicked people in Noach's generation 120 years to repent in the merit of Moshe, who lived for 120 years (*Sha'ar HaPesukim, Bereishit* 4). This is based on "Hashem said, '...and his days shall be a hundred and twenty years' (*Bereishit* 5:3). "Until a hundred and twenty years I will delay My wrath towards them, but if they do not repent, I will bring a flood upon them" (Rashi Ibid).

## Moshe's Prayer Made Amends for Noach's Fatal Flaw

In which way did Moshe rectify Noach? Moshe Rabbeinu corrected Noach's flaw of failing to pray on behalf of the people of his generation. By praying to save the Israelites from extermination after the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe afforded Noach's soul its *tikkun* (rectification). Therefore, Moshe said מְחַנֵּי/*mecheni* – "erase me" (*Shemot* 32:32), using the same letters as מַי נֹחַ/*mei Noach* – "the waters of Noach" (*Yesha'yahu* 54:9). The fact that the flood was called in Noach's name, indicated that Noach was responsible for the flood through a lack of selfless concern, and sufficient prayer for his generation. He, furthermore, neglected to go out of himself to teach others to return to the ways of Hashem (Arizal, *Sha'ar HaPesukim Bereishit* 4). "The dove returned to him in the evening, and behold, an olive leaf was in her mouth." After the dove saw that the water had receded from the surface of the earth, she wanted to alert Noach to the necessary *tikkun*, he was obliged to perform. Therefore, she brought him an olive leaf, hinting to him that he resembled an olive. He was keeping his oil confined and trapped within himself. The name, Noach, means 'comfort.' Noach's challenge and downfall was his inability to leave his comfort zone on behalf of his generation. This caused him to turn even more inwardly, into the comfort of alcohol, which afforded him an escape from reality, and thus prevented him from going out of himself to rebuild the world. However, Moshe made amends for Noach's fatal flaw by his willingness to sacrifice his life on behalf of the Israelites.