

Torah Weekly

PARSHAT NOACH

25 Tishrei - 1 Cheshvan 5785
27 October - 2 November
2024

Torah: Genesis 6:9 - 11:32
Mafkir: Numbers 28:9-15
Haftarah: Isaiah 66:1-24; 66:23

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalms 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

"If you go in my statutes... I will give your rains in their season..." - Leviticus 26:3-4.

Torah-study and Mitzvah observance are the wedding ring with which G-d betrothed Israel and obligated Himself to provide them with sustenance and livelihood.

Aleph Institute

Hyman & Martha Rogal Center

5804 Beacon Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15217

412-421-0111
Fax:412-521-5948

www.AlephNE.org
info@AlephNE.org



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No One Forgotten.

NOAH THE PESSIMIST

Who was the greatest financial genius in history?! The hero of this week's parshah, old Noah himself. That's right. He floated a company when the whole world was in liquidation!

There's much discussion about Noah in the commentaries. The Torah states explicitly that he was a Tzaddik, a noble distinction not attributed to many others. And yet, the Talmudic sages debate the extent of his righteousness. Was it objective or subjective? Absolute or relative? Was he only a Tzaddik compared to his corrupt generation, or would he have measured up to the Biblical giants like Abraham and Moses?

And then, when the Flood begins and Noah and his family enter the Ark, the Torah says they went in "because of the flood waters." This can be understood simply, or, as Rashi (the foremost Biblical commentator) interprets, that Noah was a man of "small faith." He struggled with his belief; he wasn't entirely convinced that there would really be a flood at all. It was only when the water started coming down in torrents that he was forced to concede and enter the Ark.

In the Haftarah, the prophet Isaiah describes the Flood as "the waters of Noah." The Sages explain that although he was the most righteous man of his generation, Noah bore some responsibility for the Flood. Why? Because he could have done more to persuade his contemporaries to repent and to give up their evil ways of immorality, robbery, and corruption. Noah wasn't into outreach. He just stood there building his Ark and answered questions he was asked directly, but he didn't really go out of his way to try and change the mindset of the people around him. Had he done so, he might well have changed the situation and saved the world.

So how do we reconcile the Torah itself describing Noah as a Tzaddik, a righteous man, and the Biblical commentaries telling us that Noah was, in fact, lacking in faith? Moreover, G-d spoke to Noah directly, which makes it even harder to understand!

Perhaps rather than lacking faith in G-d, Noah lacked faith in humanity. Would anybody really listen to him if he did go out and try to persuade them? A leopard never changes his spots. You can't teach an old dog new tricks. People don't change. There's no hope. It's a waste of time. Why bother? It's like the story of the two old Jews who would meet and sit on the park bench every afternoon. And they would usually argue. About what?

About everything. About the state of the world, about Israel, about politics. You know, the usual.

One fellow is the eternal optimist, and the other always the pessimist.

One day the pessimist looks at the optimist and says to him, "If you're such an optimist, how come you look so anxious today?"

His friend answers, "You think it's easy to be an optimist these days?!"

Noah was a pessimist. He saw the world was in such a mess, there was just no hope and no point in even trying. He had no faith in humanity.

But there's also a third interpretation of Noah's lack of faith.

It wasn't that he lacked faith in G-d, or in humanity, but according to Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, Noah lacked faith in himself!

He lacked the confidence in his own capacity to make a difference, to influence, inspire, and be an engine of change.

Noah thought too little of himself. He lacked self-confidence and faith in his own abilities.

In one of his first speeches at our shul, the late Chief Rabbi Harris (Chief Rabbi of South Africa from 1987 to 2004) told a story about when he was a Jewish prison chaplain in London.

One day he received an emergency call from the chief warden of the prison. A Jewish prisoner was being released that day. He had served his time and was being set free, but there was one problem: he didn't want to leave! "He doesn't want to go! Rabbi, please come down and talk to this guy!"

So, Rabbi Harris went to the prison and met the fellow, and asked him, "I don't understand. Don't you want to be free?!" And the man answered, "Rabbi, I know what's going to happen. I'll be OK for a while, and then I'll relapse and do it again, and they'll put me right back. I may as well just stay right here."

How sad.

If we don't have self-belief, we will never achieve anything meaningful in life.

Please G-d, we will all learn from Noah. To believe in G-d, to believe in humanity, and perhaps most important to our success in life, to believe in ourselves.

By Yossy Goldman

ARK SWEET ARK

A remarkable but often overlooked aspect of the story of the Flood is the living conditions within the Ark, and the "strange bedfellows" it created. For an entire year, this relatively small vessel housed at least two specimens of every living creature. This means that animals which in their native habitats are predatory lived in close quarters with

their natural prey – but no creature was harmed. Cooperation and harmony between all inhabitants of the Ark was key to their survival.

Our sages explain that the Ark was pervaded by a Messianic spirit which produced a miraculously harmonious atmosphere. "A wolf shall live with a lamb... and a lion, like cattle, shall eat straw" - Isaiah 11:6-7. The Messianic "new world order" described in the books of the prophets was temporarily realized in the confines of the small Ark.

What lesson can we derive from the Messianic aura which pervaded the Ark during the dark days of the Flood? While the Flood's torrential rains ended more than 4000 years ago, in a spiritual/emotional sense, many - if not all - of us wake up every day to face a "flood" of worries, predicaments and responsibilities. These metaphoric "raging waters" threaten to drown us - financially, emotionally, and perhaps most importantly, spiritually.

Many think that if they tread water for long enough the skies will brighten and the storm will pass. Wishful thinking... Instead, the Torah gives us the best solution: Enough of the "dead-man's float." Enter the Ark!

We all have the ability to transform our own homes into miniature Arks, Messianic microcosms, insulated cocoons where we can escape the storm together with our families. How? The Messianic Age is characterized as an era when "all physical delights will be as plentiful - and as valued - as the dust of the earth," because "knowledge of G-d will be the pursuit of the entire world." By adjusting our perspective and adopting a "messianic mentality," a state of mind which prioritizes Torah, mitzvot, prayer and the pursuit of spirituality, we create a semblance of this "future world" in our present-day lives. When our priorities are in order, all the storms in the world cannot faze us, and inner tranquility prevails.

This transformation starts with a mental priority-shift; it expresses itself practically by the steady addition of another mitzvah, another Torah class, and yet another section of the prayers recited with proper concentration.

"For behold, darkness may cover the earth, and a thick cloud the kingdoms, but upon you G-d shall shine" - Isaiah 60:2

By Naftali Silberberg

NOACH IN A NUTSHELL

The Parshah is named "Noach" (Noah) after the protagonist of its major

event: The Great Flood. It is found in Genesis 6:9. G-d instructs Noah—the only righteous man in a world consumed by violence and corruption—to build a large wooden Teivah (“ark”), coated within and without with pitch. A great deluge, says G-d, will wipe out all life from the face of the earth; but the ark will float upon the water, sheltering Noah and his family, and two members (male and female) of each animal species (and 7 of the “pure” species).

Rain falls for 40 days and nights, and the waters churn for 150 days more before calming and beginning to recede. The ark settles on Mount Ararat, and Noah dispatches a raven, and then a series of doves, “to see if the waters were abated from the face of the earth.” When the ground dries

completely—exactly one solar year (365 days) after the onset of the Flood—G-d commands Noah to exit the Teivah and repopulate the earth.

Noah builds an altar and offers sacrifices to G-d. G-d swears never again to destroy all of mankind because of their deeds, and sets the rainbow as a testimony of His new covenant with man. G-d also commands Noah regarding the sacredness of life: murder is deemed a capital offense, and while man is permitted to eat the meat of animals, he is forbidden to eat flesh or blood taken from a living animal.

Noah plants a vineyard and becomes drunk on its produce. Two of Noah’s sons, Shem and Japheth, are blessed for covering up their father’s

nakedness, while his third son, Ham, is punished for taking advantage of his debasement.

The descendants of Noah remain a single people, with a single language and culture, for ten generations. Then they defy their Creator by building a great tower to symbolize their own invincibility; G-d confuses their language so that “one does not comprehend the tongue of the other,” causing them to abandon their project and disperse across the face of the earth, splitting into seventy nations.

The Parshah of Noah concludes with a chronology of the ten generations from Noah to Abram (later Abraham), and the latter’s journey from his birthplace of Ur Casdim to Charan, on the way to the land of Canaan.

SHIMON HATZADIK (SIMEON THE JUST) (4TH CENTURY BCE)

In 3448, the Jewish people entered a time of great turbulence, both in the spiritual and material realms. Prophecy had come to a close, and Alexander the Great was conquering the known world. Fortunately, a great leader, Shimon HaTzadik, deftly steered the people through uncharted waters. As Kohen Gadol (High Priest) and head of the Sanhedrin, he embodied both religious and political power. (In the absence of the monarchy, the Kohen Gadol represented the nation to the outside world. Previously, it was a purely religious office.) Indeed, he was so fair, just, and beloved that Shimon was one of very few people to receive the title “HaTzadik” - the Righteous - after his name.

Alexander the Great

In 3448 (312 BCE), Alexander the Great marched through the land of Israel, bringing Persian rule to an end. Filled with trepidation, the Jews sent a delegation of Kohanim (priests) led by Shimon HaTzadik, all dressed in their priestly raiment. Upon approaching Alexander, they were astounded when the great conqueror prostrated himself before Shimon! When asked the reason for such inexplicable behavior, Alexander replied that before his battles a vision of Shimon appeared to him promising victory. After arising, Alexander promised to treat the Jews benignly. In appreciation, the Jewish people honored Alexander in two very special ways. First, all male Kohanim (according to some opinions, all male Jews) born that year would be

named Alexander. Second, a new dating system for documents would be instituted, one based on Alexander’s rule. This system was known as *Minyan Shtaros* and lasted more than 1,000 years.

Division of Jewish Powers

Shimon HaTzadik held absolute power over the Jewish people. Unfortunately, his descendants were not of sufficient stature to be similarly entrusted with the reins of government. In addition, after the death of Alexander, his surviving generals jockeyed for power, and conditions became unstable in Eretz Israel. For a vast payment, Joseph ben Tuvia, a highly corrupt man, obtained the taxation franchise from the ruler. Predictably, his exorbitant taxes bled the people dry. Eventually, even the exalted position of Kohen Gadol was turned into a purely political office, one entirely devoid of spirituality, and was sold to the highest bidder. In response to these deteriorating conditions, the Sanhedrin (the Jewish High Court) established two leadership positions: the Nasi, or President of the Sanhedrin, who represented the Sanhedrin in political affairs; and the Av Bais Din, or Dean of the Sanhedrin, who was its leading Halachic spokesman (Halacha is Jewish law). The holders of these two offices were known as *Zugos*, pairs. The Mishnah in *Avos* lists five generations of *Zugos*, beginning with Jose ben Joezer and Jose ben Jochanan, and continuing through Shammai and Hillel, representing a span of some 200 years.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, 25 Tishrei 5785 - 27 October 2024

Passing of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (1809)

The great Chassidic leader and advocate for the Jewish people, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, passed away on 25 Tishrei of 1809. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was a close disciple of the second leader of the Chassidic movement, Rabbi DovBer, the Maggid of Mezritch. He is best known for his love for every Jew and his impassioned words of advocacy on their behalf before the Almighty.

Passing of Chatam Sofer (1839)

Tishrei 25th is the *Yahrtzeit* (date of passing) of Rabbi Moshe Sofer of Pressburg (1762-1839), known as “Chatam Sofer” after his work of Rabbinic responsa. Rabbi Moshe was an outstanding Halachic authority and community leader and was at the forefront of the battle to preserve the integrity of traditional Judaism in the face of the various “reformist” movements of his time.

Tuesday, 27 Tishrei 5785 - 29 October 2024

Passing of Rabbi Yitzchak of Dampierre (C. 1190)

R. Yitzchak was a great-grandson of Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, the seminal Biblical and Talmudic commentator commonly known as Rashi. Rabbi Yitzchak and his three uncles - Rabbi Shmuel (Rashbam), Rabbi Yaakov (Rabbeinu Tam), and Rabbi Yitzchak (Rivam) - are among the earliest and most well-known Tosafists. Their comments and explanations, which appear on the outer margin of all classical prints of the Talmud, are vital to any serious student who wishes to properly understand the Talmud.

Thursday, 29 Tishrei 5785 - 31 October 2024

Passing of Rabbi Don Isaac Abravanel (1508)

29 Tishrei is the *Yahrtzeit* (anniversary of the passing) of Rabbi Don Isaac Abravanel (1437-1508), one of the leaders of Spanish Jewry at the time of the Spanish expulsion. A minister in the king’s court (after having served as treasurer to the king of Portugal), he chose to join his brethren in their exile. He began writing his extensive and highly regarded commentary on the Torah in 1503 in Venice (where it was published in 1579).

Passing of Shimon the Righteous (Shimon HaTzadik) (313 BCE)

Shimon the Righteous was the spiritual and political leader of the Jewish nation during a turbulent time in history - when Alexander the Great conquered and dominated the entire civilized world. Known as “the righteous” due to his saintly character, Simeon was the last member of the Men of the Great Assembly (Anshei Knesses Hagdolah), a 120-member panel of prophets and sages who guided the Jews at the onset of the Second Temple era.

Shabbat, 1 Cheshvan 5785 - 2 November 2024

Holy Temple Completed (827 BCE)

The Holy Temple, which took seven years to build, was completed by King Solomon during the month of Cheshvan, although not necessarily on this exact day. (Its dedication, however, was postponed until Tishrei of the following year). The First Temple served as the epicenter of Jewish national and spiritual life for 410 years, until its destruction by the Babylonians in 423 BCE.