

# Torah Weekly

October 27-November 2  
28 Tishrei- 4 Cheshvan,  
5780

Torah: Genesis 6:9 - 11:32  
Haftorah: Isaiah 54:1-10  
PARSHAT NOACH

## Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

## Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

## Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzah for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

Hyman & Martha Rogal Center  
5804 Beacon Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15217  
412-421-0111  
Fax: 412-521-5948  
www.alephne.org  
info@alephne.org



**ALEPH INSTITUTE**  
No One Alone,  
No One Forgotten.

## My Kind of Hero

The world loves a hero. Every season, Hollywood has to invent new heroes and superheroes to fill the box office coffers. And it works. Why? Well, that's for another sermon. Today, I choose to talk about Who is a Hero and, more specifically, Who is My Kind of Hero. Superheroes are fantastic. But you've got to admit, they're over the top, rather otherworldly and, realistically speaking, beyond our reach. We can fantasize about flying through the skies in our capes, climbing skyscrapers with our webs and rescuing damsels in distress, but at the end of the day, it is nothing more than wistful daydreaming. What bearing does it have on me and my life, me and my problems? The answer is, not much.

That's why Noah always appealed to me. He comes across as a real live hero, real in the sense of being human rather than superhuman and, therefore, realistically possible to emulate. Rashi describes Noah as a man of "small faith" who had doubts whether the flood would actually happen. In fact, according to the great commentator's understanding, he didn't enter the Ark until the rains actually started and the floodwaters pushed him in. That explains why many people look down on Noah, especially when they compare him to other Biblical superheroes, people of the stature of Abraham or Moses. Personally, this is precisely what makes Noah my kind of hero. He's real. He's human. He has doubts, just like you and me. I know we are supposed to say, "When will my actions match those of the

great patriarchs of old?" but I confess, for me that's a tall order. Noah, on the other hand, is a regular guy. He is plagued by doubts and struggles with his faith. But at the end of the day, Noah does the job. He builds the ark, shleps in all the animals, saves civilization and goes on to rebuild a shattered world. Doubts, shmouts, he did what had to be done.

There is an old Yiddish proverb, Fun a kasha shtarbt men nit-- "Nobody ever died of a question." It's not the end of the world if you didn't get an answer to all your questions. We can live with unanswered questions. The main thing is not to allow ourselves to become paralyzed by our doubts. We can still do what has to be done, despite our doubts. Of course, I'd love to be able to answer every question every single one of my congregants ever has. But the chances are that I will not be able to solve every single person's doubts and dilemmas. And, frankly speaking, I am less concerned about their doubts than about their deeds. From a question nobody ever died. It's how we behave that matters most. So Noah, the reluctant hero, reminds us that you don't have to be fearless to get involved. You don't have to be a tzaddik to do a mitzvah. You don't have to be holy to keep kosher, nor do you have to be a professor to come to a Torah class. Perhaps his faith was a bit wobbly in the knees, but he got the job done. My kind of hero. *By Rabbi Yossi Goldman*

## The Tower of Technology

In this week's Parsha we read

about the descendants of the survivors of the great flood who sought to unite by building a city with a great tower. The Torah relates: Now the entire earth was of one language and uniform words. And it came to pass when they traveled from the east, that they found a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and fire them thoroughly"; so the bricks were to them for stones, and the clay was to them for mortar. And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make ourselves a name, lest we be scattered upon the face of the entire earth." (Genesis 11:1-3) G-d is alarmed by their actions and steps in to foil their plan. He disrupts their unity and the project collapses. As G-d tells the angels: "Come, let us descend and confuse their language, so that one will not understand the language of his companion." And the L-rd scattered them from there upon the face of the entire earth, and they ceased building the city. (Genesis 11:7-8)

Why is building a city a terrible sin? What is wrong with building a tower? The story of the tower is relevant today, perhaps more than ever, for it is not a story about an ancient construction site, but about the development of cutting edge technology. The building of the Tower of Babel represents a dramatic leap in the development of industry. Up to that point, people had built homes out of stone. Stone is a divine creation. Places like

Babylonia, where there were no mountains and thus no stones, were considered inhospitable to the building of cities. Human ingenuity, however, created a new technology—the brick. The people said to each other: "Come, let us make bricks and fire them thoroughly"; so the bricks were to them for stones, and the clay was to them for mortar. (Genesis 11:3)

Fascinated by their ability to create a man-made stone, they sought to demonstrate that the brick was far superior to the stone created by G-d. They wanted to show that the brick, not the stone, was the material of choice in building the tallest tower in the world, within the greatest city in the world. The Torah does not state clearly that they rebelled against G-d, lest we mistakenly think that developing technology is a sin. What then was the problem? The Midrash relates that during construction of the tower, when a person fell off the tower and died nobody cared. However, if a brick fell and cracked, they all stopped to mourn the lost brick. (Pirkei D'Rabi Eliezer, 24.) This is a powerful Midrash. It teaches us that a single-minded drive to achieve power and independence, with no higher purpose, can lead to totalitarianism where human life is devalued. The message of the story is relevant, now more than ever. The past century has witnessed the "floods" of the most devastating wars in the history of humankind, as well as the explosion of human scientific knowledge and technological advances. The message of the tower of Babel is that the towers and cities we create must have a higher purpose. Advancements in technology do not necessarily mean advances in human rights, and certainly do not automatically lead to us being better people with a closer relationship with G-d. Each and every one of us can choose how to approach the ever increasing technologies introduced into our lives. We can become the builders of the tower of Babel, or we can emulate Abraham.

The Midrash tells us that Abraham watched the building of the tower, and he saw the lack of deeper meaning. He understood that a building with no higher purpose is dangerous. He realized that humanity's purpose cannot merely be to make a name for itself, to achieve material success.

In next week's Torah portion we read how in contrast to the builders of the tower, whose only purpose was to make a name for themselves, Abraham made it his life's mission to proclaim the name of G-d. He made it his goal and purpose to teach anyone who would listen, that all human achievement should just be a tool for a higher, more spiritual, purpose. (*Inspired by the teachings of the Rebbe, Lekutei Sichot, Noach Vol 3*)

**October 27, 2019- 28 Tishrei, 5780**

**Passing of R. Yaakov Yosef of Polonye (1781)**

R. DovBer of Lubavitch was arrested due to trumped-up charges fabricated by a jealous relative. Among his alleged "crimes" was that he was sending money to the Turkish sultan, who was at war with Russia at the time. R. DovBer was released six weeks later (see calendar entry for 10 Kislev).

**October 28, 2019- 29 Tishrei, 5780**

**Passing of Rabbi Don Isaac Abravanel (1508)**

Today 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 1492 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).

**October 28, 2019- 29 Tishrei, 5780**

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

Simeon 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.

**October 29, 2019- 1 Cheshvan 5780**

**Holy Temple Completed (827 BCE)**

The Holy Temple, which took seven years to build, was completed by King Solomon during the month of MarCheshvan (I Kings 6:38), although not necessarily on this exact day. (Its dedication, however, was postponed until Tishrei of the following year—see calendar entry for 8 Tishrei). 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.

**November 1, 2019- 3 Cheshvan 5780**

**Passing of R. Israel of Ruzhin (1850)**

The 3rd of Cheshvan is the yahrtzeit (anniversary of the passing) of the famed Chassidic master Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin (1797-1850), known as "The Holy Ruzhiner."

Rabbi Israel was a great-grandson of Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch; a close friendship existed between the Ruzhiner Rebbe and the 3rd Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch.

**November 2, 2019- 4 Cheshvan 5780**

**"Purim Algiers" (1541)**

In 1541, Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and ruler of Spain, led a fleet in an attempted attack against Algiers. Miraculously, a storm capsized many of the attacking boats, resulting in the expedition's failure and rescuing the city's Jewish community from Spanish anti-Semitic rule. In commemoration of the miracle, the local community marked the 4<sup>th</sup> of MarCheshvan as a "minor Purim," omitting the penitential Tachanun prayers and partaking of festive meals (*Zeh Hashulchan* pp. 96-97).