

# Torah Weekly

October 18-24, 2020  
30 Tishrei - 6 Cheshvan, 5781

Torah reading:  
Noach: Genesis 6:9 - 11:32  
Haftarah: 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



## The Problem With Preaching

Do sermons really work? Can the words of any one individual really have an effect on the way people live their lives? Is anyone out there actually listening? (Reading?)

Rabbis are probably unrealistic when they anticipate dramatic results from their sermons. The late Rabbi Sydney Katz of Pretoria once compared the chances of a sermon succeeding to the odds of a man standing on top of the Empire State Building and throwing down an aspirin which would be caught by a man on the street below who just happened to have a headache at the time!

But we still try.

The Prophet Isaiah called the great flood of this week's *parshah* "waters of Noah." According to our sages, this is because Noah bore a degree of responsibility for the devastating deluge. But why was it his fault? Wasn't he the righteous man of his time? Apparently, because Noah may not have tried hard enough to turn around the corrupt lifestyle of his generation, the waters are named after him. Yes, he built his ark, but did he reach out to those who never saw his ark? Did he shout out to his contemporaries that doomsday was really coming?

Ever since Noah, this is the mission of anyone charged with the task of spiritual leader.

What is a rabbi? A religious functionary, an "official" to preside over our rites of passage? Sure, that is a very important part of the job, but is that all it is? The essence of a rabbi is to be a teacher, a guide for life, a moral barometer and the conscience of the community. The word *rabbi* means "my teacher." The rabbi's job is to

teach Torah and to teach right from wrong based on the G-dly value system enshrined in the Torah.

So occasionally it becomes necessary for rabbi to play preacher and point out the error of a community's ways. That's why the Talmud states, "When you see a rabbi who is beloved by the *entire* community, it is not because he is so good but rather because he does not rebuke them in matters of faith" (Talmud, Ketubot 105).

Speaking for myself, I am not a loner. I'm not anti-social. I like people and would love to be loved by everyone without exception. But there are times when one cannot shirk the moral responsibility to say what is right—and, sometimes, what is wrong.

Which brings us back to Noah. The sages are divided on the extent of Noah's righteousness. Yes, the Bible calls him a *tzaddik*, a righteous man. But the title is qualified when it adds the word "in his generations." Was he objectively righteous or only in comparison to his evil generation? How would he have rated when compared to a really saintly man like Abraham?

As always, both these perspectives are Torah, and therefore true. The full picture can only be ascertained when we look at a thing with both eyes. Are we products of our environment? Is it impossible to resist societal pressures? If so, then any good we manage to do is an incredible achievement and deserving of praise. Or, do we have the power to triumph over any and every obstacle in our paths? Look at Abraham who came from a pagan family, discovered G-d, and changed the world. Judged by that standard, anything less than

greatness is a failure. Which perspective will it be?

I am not unmindful of the wonderful growth in our community and, indeed, in my congregation. Who knows better than me of the inspiring new commitments made by so many, especially over the High Holidays. Hundreds of good resolutions for mitzvahs—resolutions to increase in *shul* attendance, putting on *tefillin*, putting up a *mezuzah*, keeping Shabbat and kosher, Torah study, giving charity, doing acts of kindness, and more. In a world gone mad, we are doing fantastic.

But from time to time we need to look from the other perspective as well. How are we doing compared to Abraham? Compared to what we *could* be?

The philosopher Herman Cohen was once asked why his lectures were so deep and over the heads of most of his audience. He answered, "I aim where their heads *should* be." Well, I aim where your *hearts* should be, where your *souls* should be. I fully appreciate where my people are at, but I refuse to lose sight of where they should be going. That is my purpose, my sacred responsibility and my dream. I dream about the *neshamah*, the G-dly soul within each of you.

You say, "Rabbi, we are ordinary guys." I say no Jew is ordinary. Every Jew is special. I know what you are doing and I am proud of you for it. But I also know what you are capable of. Don't sell yourself short.

Please, don't shatter my dream. If we stop dreaming we stop hoping and we stop living. I love you all. You are all wonderful, good Jews. But for me the definition of a good Jew has always been "one who is

trying to be a better Jew." As good as we may be, let us try to be better still. G-d Bless you. *By Rabbi Yossi 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 Rabbi Naftali Silberberg*

### Monday, October 19, 2020 --- 1 Cheshvan, 5781

#### **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.

### Wednesday, October 21, 2020 ---3 Cheshvan, 5781

#### **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.

### Thursday, October 22, 2020 --- 4 Cheshvan, 5781

#### **"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 4 MarCheshvan as a "minor Purim," omitting the penitential Tachanun prayers and partaking of festive meals (*Zeh Hashulchan* pp. 96-97).

### Shabbat, October 24, 2020 --- 6 Cheshvan, 5781

#### **Maimonides Visits Jerusalem ((1165))**

After leaving Morocco and before settling in Egypt, Maimonides visited Jerusalem and prayed at the site of the Holy Temple. Three days later, on 9 MarCheshvan, he visited Hebron and prayed at the Cave of Machpelah. Maimonides resolved to keep these two days—6 and 9 MarCheshvan—as a personal holiday (*Charedim* ch. 65 [5744 ed.]).