

Torah Weekly

October 3-9, 2021
27 Tishrei - 3 Cheshvan, 5782

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 Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

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Where Bin Laden Went Wrong

It's a safe bet you've not traveled to Hadhramaut, never mind heard of the location. Yet it does exist, though it may not feature high on the list of places to visit before you die. Hadhramaut is an ancient region, located somewhere in the hardscrabble deserts of eastern Yemen. Its name, according to many linguistic scholars, stems from the Arabic words for "death has come." An old fable related to this name would suggest a locale with a morbid fascination with death.

I learned of all this, and a lot more, from a book I recently read. A book dedicated to tracing the origins of a well-known family that hails from this region: the Bin Ladens. A seemingly well-suited name for the native land of a person who has wreaked havoc and destruction and caused an untold number of deaths.

Interestingly, the Torah mentions a locale with a similar name, which may very well have been the inspiration for the name of this region or may even be the region's original name.

In describing Noah's offspring born after the flood, the Torah (Genesis 10:26) speaks of an individual named Chatzarmavet—or "Courtyard of Death."

It would seem to be very poor judgment on the part of parents to name their child "Courtyard of Death." Imagine the psychological effects on a child in a playground setting saddled with a name like this! What is even more curious about this narrative is that according to our tradition, the father of this child, Joktan, was a fine fellow, not to mention a humble and upstanding citizen!

Our sages address this question by teaching that Chatzarmavet was not the given name of Joktan's son, but the name of the location where he settled. And it is a testament to the profound effect this person had upon his community that he earned the accolade of having an entire region named for him.

The citizens of Chatzarmavet were known for their inclination to forgo the instant gratification of transitory consumerism that plagued the milieu they lived in—favoring instead a life of enduring value and infinite existence. These were a good, simple folk, unfazed by credit crunches, toxic debt, or loss of equity and monetary value. These people lived a simple and austere lifestyle, eschewing a life of glitz and glamour in favor of a thrifty but happy existence.

They personified the teaching of our sages (Talmud, Shabbat 153a), "Repent one day

before you die." Since we never know when that day will come, we must always be repenting... They always contemplated death—i.e., that since life is so fragile and temporary, it is foolish to waste time on acquiring, or worrying about, possessions that are of fleeting value. Instead, they chose to focus on permanent and lasting ideals, those that will be of enduring value long after the soul departs the body.

Thus, they were named "Courtyard of Death." They eschewed the temporal "life" that so many pursue.

But from Hadhramaut comes one who chose to be defined by the literal meaning of the name of his ancestral home; hence a 9/11 atrocity is conceived and executed, resulting in the wanton murder of thousands of innocent people.

From Chatzarmavet, however, comes an idea of personal responsibility, of an ethos that ensures the perpetuation of a people focused on values that reject temporal materialism and the flavored soundbites of mass consumerism—in favor of a more difficult, yet ultimately more rewarding task of spiritual and moral growth, ensuring that we will overcome Hadhramaut with Chatzarmavet.

By Rabbi Sholom Lew

The Flood Within

When I imagine the Torah portion of Noach, I picture something out of a Steven Spielberg adventure film, replete with special effects and an innocent protagonist who finds himself in extraordinarily wondrous and trying circumstances that transform his childlike wonder into an inner struggle for conquest and fulfillment.

Actually, from a Chassidic perspective at least, this isn't so far off.

This Torah portion famously relates how G-d resolves to wipe out the entire earth, which since the generation of Adam and Eve had spiraled into a society of pervasive corruption, "And G-d said to Noah: The end of all flesh has come before me, for the earth is filled with violence; behold, I shall destroy them." (Genesis 6:13)

As we all know, G-d tells Noah—the only righteous man of his generation—to build an ark as a safe haven for him, his family, and two of each animal (seven of each kosher animal). And then, for 40 days, the world is flooded with unrelenting waters, destroying all breathing life.

Since we all know the story so well, it's easy at first glance not to realize how utterly bizarre it is. Not to mention disturbing. First, doesn't destroying the entire world due to the corruption of its individuals seem a bit... over the top? And second of all, if G-d is all-powerful, why couldn't He just—

Boom!—strike down all of these violent, base, degenerate human beings roaming the planet, sparing Noah and the rest of the ark-niks? It would have been a much simpler, much cleaner solution. There wouldn't be a need for Noah to spend 120 tedious years building an ark. We could sidestep the sewage problems. At the very least, it would save a rainforest or two.

There are so many ways to wipe out a civilization. Did G-d really choose to flood the world just for the dramatic effect?

According to Jewish mysticism, by bringing the flood, G-d was dunking the world into a giant *mikveh* (ritual bath). The 40 days of the flood hint to the 40 *se'ah*-measures of water required for a *mikveh* to be kosher according to Jewish law. The flood, then, was not a punishment, but a purification process that the world needed to undergo in order to be cleansed and reborn. Welcome to World 2.0. In this new reality, the knowledge of G-dliness not only affected, but actually saturated (pun intended) the earth and every being upon it. Spirituality became so entrenched, so deeply rooted in the essence of existence that every human being could now access it within themselves. It became an awareness that penetrated and ingrained and was expressed in the very fibers of the universe.

But the message of the flood goes even deeper. The flood represents all of our issues—namely, the ones that plague us from without. The demands that incessantly crash like waves around us, thrusting us into an insular, inflexible mindset in which there is time only for doing and none for being, in which we must constantly strive and compete to make something of ourselves (e.g., “I must get good grades, so I can go to a good college, so I can get a good job, in order to make lots of money, so I can go on vacation—and spend more time thinking about how my worth is directly proportional to how high I stand on the corporate ladder, or the numbers of zeroes on my bank statements”).

The flood is all those things that threaten to smother the G-dly spark that lies within us, which is crying and yearning to express itself, but feels it's being drowned by the overwhelming anxieties and pressures of life.

But the beautiful thing is that we have an ark. A part of us that is pure, unaffected by the painful anxieties of the material world, a part of us whose relationship with G-d is natural and deep, whose essence is uncontaminated by the flood of physical and material concerns. And no matter how ferociously the storm of problems and worries thrashes upon us, that part of us remains unaffected, in a tranquil state of oneness with G-d. (In fact, the name “Noah” shares a root with the Hebrew word *nechamah*, “comfort.”) In the expressive words of Song of Songs (8:7), “Many waters cannot extinguish the love, nor can rivers flood it . . .”

And yet, despite its violent and threatening nature, the flood is not just an enemy to be overcome or obliterated. It's the very vehicle that pushes and elevates the ark to greater heights. A foundational axiom of Judaism is that our material world is not the enemy of spirituality. In fact, the opposite is true. They are made for each other, like hand and glove. It is one of those ironic paradoxes of life: only when one is immersed in the material world, and forced to wrestle with it, can one's relationship with G-d become something potent and real.

When we struggle and overcome anxieties that threaten to drown us in a life void of meaning and purpose, when we fight our obsessive and selfish pursuits of materiality and superficial quests for self-worth—these challenges bring out the best in us. They allow us to feel the anguishing pain of distance from our true selves, the part of us that is totally in sync with G-d. They empower us with new resolve to redirect our lives toward

Sunday, October 3, 2021 - 27 Tishrei, 5782

Passing of R. Yitzchak of Dampierre (C. 1190)

R. Yitzchak was a great-grandson of R. Shlomo Yitzchaki, the seminal Biblical and Talmudic commentator commonly known as Rashi. R. Yitzchak and his three uncles—R. Shmuel (Rashbam), R. Yaakov (Rabbeinu Tam), and R. 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.

Monday, October 4, 2021 - 28 Tishrei, 5782

Arrest of R. DovBer of Lubavitch (1826)

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).

Tuesday, October 5, 2021 - 29 Tishrei, 5782

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).

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.

a higher meaning and purpose.

Do not allow the floods to drown you into oblivion. First, find solace inside the ark. Then grab hold of the helm.

The above is based on a chassidic discourse of the Alter Rebbe.

By Chava Shapiro