

Torah Weekly

ת"ב

October 15 -21, 2023
30 Tishrei-1-6 Cheshvan
5784

Torah: Noach
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).

When Times Are Tough, Be Like Noah

Are you anxious? Are you constantly plagued with thoughts of, "What's going to be? How am I going to make enough money to cover my expenses this month? What will happen if my kids come home late from school and don't tell me? Will I ever be stable enough to hold down a job? Will my friends like what I'm wearing tomorrow? What will people think when they see my messy house?" And on, and on, and on. It's debilitating. According to the ADAA (Anxiety and Depression Association of America), anxiety disorders affect 40 million adults in the United States age 18 and older, or 18.1% of the population.¹ If you think about it, that's an incredibly high number, if not a tad bit frightening. So what should we do with all this anxiety? Of course—of course!—if the matter has reached clinical levels (and many times, even before that), a competent professional should be sought for guidance. Anxiety and depression are serious matters, and must be handled with extreme care and sensitivity. As a baseline, overall positive approach that can certainly help anyone, a great Chassidic master penned a seminal essay over 200 years ago that offers a shining beacon of light for the over-anxious. It's our luck that this essay is set in the storyline of our parshah. The Waters Lift the Ark: We all know the story, one of the most dramatic and earth-changing of all time. The world has gone entirely off the rails, people are utterly corrupt, and after tolerating their shenanigans for far too long, G-d decides He has had enough. He's fed up with this base and perverted world, so He's going to obliterate it with a giant flood. Out of the entire world population, there's really only one "good guy"—Noah (and his family). So G-d instructs

him to build a big boat, to pack it with a sampling of every animal under the sun, and use it as a rescue device to ride out the earth-cleansing flood. The skies open and heavy rainwater pummels the ground for 40 consecutive days, destroying everything underneath. As the water rises, the watertight ark lifts off the ground, floating above with its surviving crew. The Torah describes this part of the story: Now the Flood was forty days upon the earth, and the waters increased, and they lifted the ark, and it rose off the earth.

A conventional reading presents us with a pretty straightforward description: the waters lifted the ark off the ground. But in the Chassidic rendering, these words reveal much more; they speak of how raging waters, a monsoon of inner anxiety can, in fact, be something that not only doesn't cripple you, rather, it "lifts your ark off the earth." Ark = Words

Picture a flood, especially the one that wrecked planet Earth during Noah's times. Endless rain whipped by ferocious winds that tear up the landscape. And it doesn't relent. For over a month, it continuously hammers the terrain, always rising, offering no chance of reprieve. Is this not the internal state of a mind and heart eaten up with anxiety? The raging thoughts, the feeling of never knowing reprieve, and constantly being haunted by another torrent of concern that will pummel you as soon as you even try to put your foot on the ground. This is the "raging waters of Noah." It's the tormented, anxious mind. So what do you do? Do what Noah did. Build an ark. In Hebrew, the word for ark is "teivah" (תבה). Another translation for this word is, well, "word." And so, the Baal Shem Tov taught, when G-d told Noah "enter the teivah," an alternate translation of those words is, "enter the words"—the words of prayer. Noah had a rescue plan. It was the precious, serene, and calming words of prayer that

offered him solace, hope, and rescue. You, too, can take advantage of the same rescue plan. You, too, can "enter into the words of prayer," pour out your heart to G-d, and thereby find comfort and, more importantly, rescue. Uplifted Through Prayer

But the good news doesn't stop there. Referring back to the description in the verse, the raging waters "lift the ark off the earth." In other words, when escaping the internal monsoon of anxiety and finding refuge in the words of prayer, it's not just "refuge" or "escape" that you're netting; you're netting far more. Your prayer, your dedication, your connection to the Divine is now enhanced and enriched by the experience. You see, when a regular person prays to G-d, someone who isn't necessarily plagued with anxieties and concerns, their prayer is definitely worthy, but it lacks a certain intensity, a particular passion and yearning. After all, if life's all hunky dory and it's all a cakewalk, it's nice that you're praying, but you lack the life experience to give it that extra edge. But when an anguished and tormented soul turns to her Creator in prayer, the angels stop, the world stops, and G-d listens. It's a passionate, soulful, heart-rending experience. It is sincere and deep, a cry from a place of darkness that bares the entire self.

It is such prayers that G-d cherishes, and He's listening out for them. No one wishes to have "raging waters" in their life, but inevitably, they will come. They could very well crash over your mind and heart one day like a tsunami threatening to knock you entirely out of your senses. If and when they do, remember the powerful refuge you possess. Remember that the words of prayer offer a potent lifeboat that can carry you above those waters.

And to sweeten the deal, you will then appreciate the fact that it is your prayers—not the rabbi's, the rebbetzin's, or even the cantor's—that G-d cherishes

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No One Alone,
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The Forty-Day Mikveh

A nation's stories reveal its national psyche. What distinguishes the ancient Jewish spiritual tradition is its complete negation of fiction. With the rare exception of a small section of the ethical literature and one branch of Hassidic literature, the story is not a story — it is a statement of reality, and truth is stranger than fiction. Take the story of Noah and the global flood. A man hears a Divine instruction from Above and spends decades constructing a huge ferry that carries the species of the world across time into a new future. A mere story? Some will say so. Yet it is a curious fact that the account of the flood is contained in so many of the ancient pathways. But the mystics of the Torah never doubted the veracity of the story. There was indeed a huge tidal destruction of the inhabited world. Why? Was it an act of cosmic wrath? Not really. Kabbalah teaches that the foremost energy that guides the cosmos is that of chessed — goodness and compassion. Wrath is incompatible with this spiritual posture. There is clearly something much more sublime in the account of the flood. Anyone who has been involved in renovating their house will recall those moments of self-doubt: I should have started right from scratch rather than tinkered with a bit here and bit there. But starting from scratch also destroys the memories and the emotions that are the fabric of our context and consciousness. What we would desire is the best of both worlds: a house with clean aesthetic lines and function, while retaining the warmth and hominess of its antecedent. We want to clean it up. Something went wrong — not with creation, but with the "wild card" — the joker of the pack — the human being. The cosmic house had to be renovated. Noah was chosen as builder-foreman. That is why the Chassidic master, Rabbi Shneur Zalmen of Liadi, describes the flood as a cleansing process. The waters of the flood are like the waters of a ritualarium — a mikveh — where the waters spiritually cleanse the dross that accumulates in the course of our life's endeavors. The world received a spiritual cleansing, and this set the course of history on a course of hope and purpose. Noah's is not a story. It is an account of spiritual redirection. Noah's very name reflects the positive nature of the events. The name "Noah" is etymologically connected to the word for inner peace and tranquility. This describes the mind and heart of the world after the "clean-up" of the flood. Just as a mikveh has to have 40 seah (an ancient measure of volume) of "living" waters, so did the rains of the flood last for forty days. In all seeming adversity there is both opportunity and positivity. It may not always be apparent — even if we look for it. But it is there. But that is only true of true stories. The fiction that derives from a finite human mind cannot contain the code for eternal truths. Hence the bias against fiction. **MASTERY:** Every moment and place has a doorway for our entry. But we may not have the agility to enter with ease or elegance. Our clothes may become soiled. Our thoughts may become confused. Our feelings may be inappropriate. How many words do we say that later we would like to retract? How many thoughts do we think that we would like to recant? Therefore be pure in the spiritual clothes you wear. Be spiritually agile. Move elegantly through the trappings of life.

MEDITATION: Sit silently and recall your last meaningful conversation. What door did this episode open? Replay your words in your mind and determine what legacy they left — both for you and the other. What feelings did that conversation awaken in you? Are these optimal? Could they be spiritually refined, even now, long after the conversation has ended? Every week, perhaps on Shabbat, enter your ark and rise above the turbulent waters of everyday affairs. Enter your spiritual spa and purify both body and soul. Follow-up resources: The

T.N. JEWISH HISTORY

Monday, October 16, 2023-1 Cheshvan, 5784

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 18, 2023-3 Cheshvan, 5784

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.

Passing of R. Ovadia Yosef (2013)

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, a leader of Sephardic Jewry and chief rabbi of Israel, passed away on 3 Cheshvan, 5774 (2013), at the age of 93. A widely published author on Jewish law, Rabbi Yosef was considered by scholars of all backgrounds to be a rabbinical authority with a rare grasp of nearly every area of Torah scholarship. He was known for his encyclopedic knowledge of a wide swath of halachic texts, ranging from the well-known to the most obscure. In his halachic rulings, he would often list dozens of previous rulings and then decide in accordance with what he perceived to be the majority opinion.

Thursday, October 19, 2023-4 Cheshvan, 5784

"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 21, 2023-6 Cheshvan, 5784

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.])

Healing Light (audio) and Relax and Breathe (audio) available at Rabbi Wolf's Website (see link below)

By Laibl Wolf