

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Noach

Genesis 6:9-11:32

Torah Reading for Week of October 26-November 1, 2003

Noah—the only righteous man in a corrupted world—is told by G-d: “The end of all flesh is come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence.” Therefore,

Make yourself an ark of gofer wood, and make rooms in the ark; and you shall pitch it within and without with pitch.

And this is the fashion of which you shall make it: the length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. A window shall you make for the ark, and to a cubit shall you taper it on top, and the door of the ark shall you set

in its side; with lower, second, and third stories shall you make it.

Behold, I will bring the flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under heaven; every thing that is on the earth shall die. But with you will I establish My covenant; and you shall come into the ark, you, and your sons, and your wife, and your sons' wives with you.

Noah is also commanded to bring into the ark two members of each animal species—a male and a female (seven members of all “pure” or kosher species), as well as food for himself, his family and the animals..

The Flood

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, on that same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken open, and the windows of heaven were opened.

And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty

Commentary

NOAH WAS A RIGHTEOUS MAN, PERFECT IN HIS GENERATIONS (GENESIS 6:9)

Among our sages, there are those who interpret this as being in praise of Noah: If he was righteous in his generation then certainly he would have been even more righteous if he would have been in a generation of righteous people. And there are those who interpret this as a condemnation: in relation to his generation he was righteous, but had he been in Abraham's generation, he wouldn't have been regarded as anything

(Rashi)

AND G-D SAID TO NOAH: “THE END OF ALL FLESH IS COME BEFORE ME, FOR THE EARTH IS FILLED WITH VIOLENCE THROUGH THEM” (6:13)

Why was the generation of the Flood utterly destroyed, but not the generation of the Tower? Because the generation of the Flood were consumed by robbery and violence, while amongst the generation of the Tower love prevailed.

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND G-D SAID TO NOAH... MAKE YOURSELF AN ARK (6:13-14)

G-d has many ways to save someone—why did he make Noah toil to build the ark? In order that the people of his generation should see him occupied with the task for 120 years, and they should ask him, “Why are you doing this?” and he would tell them that G-d is bringing a flood upon the world. Perhaps, this would cause them to repent..

(Rashi; Midrash Tanchuma)

When G-d said to Noah, “The end of all flesh is come before Me,” Noah said: “what will You do with me?” But he did not pray for mercy for the world, as Abraham would pray for the city of Sodom.. This is why the Flood is called “the waters of Noah” (Isaiah 54:9)—he is culpable for them,

because he did not appeal for mercy on the world's behalf..

(Zohar)

Noah tried to save his generation by calling on them to repent. But the fact that he did not pray for them implies that, ultimately, it did not matter to him what became of them. Had he truly cared, he would not have sufficed with “doing his best” but would have implored the Almighty to repeal His decree of destruction—just as a person who's own life is in danger would never say, “Well, I did my best to save myself,” and leave it at that, but would beseech G-d to help him.

In other words, Noah's involvement with others was limited to his sense of what *he* ought to do for them, as opposed to a true concern for their well-being. He understood the necessity to act for the sake of another, recognizing that to fail to do so is a defect in one's own character; but he fell short of transcending the self to care for others beyond the consideration of his own righteousness.

This also explains a curious aspect of Noah's efforts to reach out to his generation. When the Flood came, Noah and his family entered the ark—alone. His 120-year campaign yielded not a single *baal teshuvah* (repentant)! Perhaps public relations was never Noah's strong point, but how are we to explain the fact that, in all this time, he failed to win over a single individual?

But in order to influence others, one's motives must be pure; in the words of our sages, “Words that come from the heart, enter the heart.” Deep down, a person will always sense whether you truly have his interests at heart or you're filling a need of your own by seeking to change him. If your work to enlighten your fellow stems from a desire to “do the right thing” but without really caring about the result, your call will be met with scant response. The echo of personal motive, be it the most laudable of personal motives, will be sensed, if only subconsciously, by the object of your efforts, and will ultimately put him off.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

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nights... and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it was raised above the earth...And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high mountains, that were under the whole heaven, were covered...

And all flesh perished that moved upon the earth... there remained only Noah, and they that were with him in the ark.

The Flood lasted a full solar year —365 days. The 40 days of rain were followed by 150 days in which the water swelled and churned, after which "G-d remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark; and G-d made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters were assuaged" and began to subside. Sixteen days later the ark to rest upon "the mountains of Ararat," but it took another 44 days for the mountain peaks to become visible..

Noah waited another 40 days, and then, opening the ark's window, he sent a raven from the ark, to test the conditions in flooded world outside. The raven proved uncooperative, so, a week later, Noah sent a dove. The dove returned, finding no rest for her feet; so Noah waited another seven days. This time,

The dove came in to him in the evening, and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf plucked off; and Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth.

When Noah dispatches the dove a third time seven days later, it does not return to the ark at all. Still Noah remain in the ark. On "the first day of the first month"—307 days after the rains began—the water has completely drained, and Noah removes the covering of the ark; but it takes another 57 days for the surface of the earth to dry completely. Finally, on the 27th day of second month, comes the Divine command:d:

And G-d spoke to Noah, saying: "Go out of the ark, you, and your wife, and your sons, and your sons' wives with you. Every living thing that is with you, of all flesh, both of birds, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—bring out with you; that they may breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth."

The Vow

Commentary

AND G-D SAID TO NOAH... COME INTO THE ARK (7:1)

The Hebrew word for ark, *teivah*, also means "word". "Come into the word", says G-d, enter within the words of prayer and Torah study. Here you will find a sanctuary of wisdom, meaning and holiness amidst the raging floodwaters of life.

(Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov)

IN THE SIX HUNDREDTH YEAR OF NOAH'S LIFE... ALL THE FOUNTAINS OF THE GREAT DEEP BROKE OPEN, AND THE WINDOWS OF HEAVEN WERE OPENED (7:11)

[This alludes that] in the sixth century of the sixth millennium [from creation—1740-1840 in the secular calendar], the gates of supernal wisdom will be opened, as will the springs of earthly wisdom, preparing the world to be elevated in the seventh millennium..

(Zohar)

The chronology of events, as indicated by the dates and time periods given in the Torah's account and calculated by Rashi, was as follows:

Cheshvan 17: Noah enters ark; rains begin.

Kislev 27: Forty days of rain end; begin 150 days of water's swelling and churning, in which it reaches a height of 15 cubits above the mountain peaks..

Sivan 1: Water calms and begins to subside at the rate of one cubit each four

days.

Sivan 17: The bottom of ark, submerged 11 cubits beneath the surface, touches down on the top of Mount Ararat.

Av 1: The mountain peaks break the water's surface.

Elul 10: Noah open the ark's window and dispatches the Raven.

Elul 17: Noah sends the dove for the first time..

Elul 23: The dove is sent a second time, and returns with an olive branch in its beak.

Tishrei 1: Dove's third mission. Water completely drained.

Cheshvan 27: Ground fully dried. Noah exits ark.

Total time in ark: 365 days (one solar year; one year and 11 days on the lunar calendar)

AND G-D SPOKE TO NOAH, SAYING: "GO OUT OF THE ARK..." (8:16)

This, too, is a Divine command. G-d commands us to "enter into the ark," into the sanctums of spirituality we are to create in the material world. But then we must "Go out of the ark" to carry forth its sanctity to the ends of the earth.

(The Chassidic Masters)

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Noah builds an altar and brings offerings "of every pure beast and of every pure bird" (of which he had been commanded to bring additional members into the ark).

And G-d smelled the sweet savor, and G-d said in his heart: I will not again curse the earth any more because of man, for the impulse of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more everything living, as I have done.

Never again, vows G-d, shall the patterns of nature be so disrupted:

For as long as the earth remains, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.

Man and Animal

G-d then blesses Noah and his son that they "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" and issues a number of instructions regarding the new world they are to build.

Man is given dominion over all life forms, and the fear of him is instilled in all animals. He is allowed to kill animals for food (Adam was only given license to eat plants), but is forbidden to eat meat or blood taken from an animal while it is still alive.

Human life is sacred, and murder is punishable by death—if a human court fails to punish the murderer, G-d himself will seek redress. "At the hand of every man's brother, will I demand the life of man. Who so sheds man's blood by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of G-d made He man."

Commentary

AND NOAH BUILT AN ALTAR TO G-D (8:20)

The location of the Altar [in the Holy Temple] is very exactly defined, and is never to be changed... It is a commonly-held tradition that the place where David and Solomon built the Altar on the threshing floor of Arona, is the very place where Abraham built an altar and bound Isaac upon it; this is where Noah built [an altar] when he came out from the ark; this is where Cain and Abel brought their offerings; this is where Adam the First Man offered a *korban* when he was created—and it is from [the earth of] this place that he was created. Thus the Sages have said: Man was formed from the place of his atonement.

(Maimonides)

I WILL DEMAND THE LIFE OF MAN... FOR IN THE IMAGE OF G-D MADE HE MAN (9:5-6)

How were the Ten Commandments given? Five on one tablet and five on a second tablet. This means that "Do not murder" corresponds to "I am G-d your G-d." The Torah is telling us that one who sheds blood it is as if he has reduced the image of the King.

What is this analogous to? To a king of flesh and blood who entered a country and put up portraits of himself, and made statues of himself, and minted coins with his image. After a while, the people of the country overturned his portraits, broke his statues and invalidated his coins, thereby reducing the image of the king. So, too, one who sheds blood reduces the image of the King, as it is written (Genesis 9:6): "One who spills a man's blood... for in the images of G-d He made man."

(Mechilta)

AND NOAH BEGAN TO BE A MAN OF THE EARTH, AND HE PLANTED A VINEYARD (9:20)

When Noah took to planting, Satan came and stood before him and said to

him: "What are you planting?" Said he: "A vineyard." Said Satan to him: "What is its nature?" Said he: "Its fruits are sweet, whether moist or dry, and one makes from them wine which brings joy to the heart." Said Satan to Noah: "Do you desire that we should plant it together, you and I?" Said Noah: "Yes."

What did Satan do? He brought a lamb and slaughtered it over the vine; then he brought a lion, and slaughtered it over it; then he brought a monkey, and slaughtered it over it; then he brought a swine, and slaughtered it over it; and he watered the vine with their blood. Thus he alluded to Noah: When a person drinks one cup, he is like a lamb, modest and meek. When drinks two cups, he becomes mighty as a lion and begins to speak with pride, saying: Who compares with me! As soon as he drinks three or four cups he becomes a monkey, dancing and frolicking and profaning his mouth, and knowing not what he does. When he becomes drunk, he becomes a pig, dirtied by mud and wallowing in filth.

(Midrash Tanchuma)

HAM SAW THE NAKEDNESS OF THEIR FATHER, AND TOLD HIS TWO BROTHERS OUTSIDE. AND SHEM AND JAPHETH TOOK THE GARMENT... AND COVERED THE NAKEDNESS OF THEIR FATHER... AND THEY SAW NOT THEIR FATHER'S SHAME (9:22-23)

One of the cornerstones of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov's teaching is the doctrine of *Hashgachah Peratit*, "specific Divine providence." *Hashgachah Peratit* means that nothing is by chance—every event in a person's life is purposeful, an integral part of his Divinely ordained mission in life.

From this principle arises another of the Baal Shem Tov's famous teachings. "Your fellow is your mirror," the Besht would say to his disciples. "If your own face is clean, the image you perceive will also be flawless. But should you look upon your fellow man and see a blemish, it is your own imperfection that you are encountering—you are being shown what it is that you must correct within yourself." Otherwise, to what purpose would G-d cause you to see your fellow's degradation?

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The Covenant

And G-d spoke to Noah, and to his sons with him, saying:

"Behold, I establish My covenant with you, and with your seed after you; and with every living creature that is with you... from all that came out of the ark... That never shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of the flood; neither shall there ever again be a flood to destroy the earth."

And G-d said: "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you and every living creature that is with you... I have set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between me and the earth.

"And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth...the rainbow shall be in the cloud. I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between G-d and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth."

The First Drunk

Noah began to be a man of the earth, and he planted a vineyard.

And he drank of the wine, and was drunk; and he was uncovered within his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside.

Commentary

One may ask: Perhaps I am being shown my fellow's deficiency not as a message concerning my own state, but so that I may assist him in its correction?

To answer this question, we must first take a closer look at the principle of "particular Divine providence." *Particular* Divine providence means that not only is every event purposeful, but also its every aspect and nuance.

For example, the same event can imply different things to different observers, depending on how much they know about the people involved and events that led up to it. Divine providence is "particular" in that it shows each observer precisely what is applicable to him. If you witness an event, everything about it, including the particular way in which it has affected you, serves a purpose crucial to your mission in life.

When you are confronted with a fellow's deficiency, there are two distinct elements in your awareness: a) the fact of that person's wrongdoing; b) his guilt, culpability and decadence. The former does not necessarily imply the latter: you may be aware of the fact that a fellow has done wrong, yet such knowledge can be accompanied with understanding, compassion and vindication.

In order to correct your fellow's wrongdoing, it is enough to know that the action is wrong. To also sense his guilt and lowliness is completely unnecessary; on the contrary, it only hinders your ability to reach out to him in a loving and tolerant manner. The only possible purpose that can serve is to impress upon you how despicable that thing—or something similar to it, if only in a most subtle way—is in yourself, and thereby compel you to correct it.

This is what the Torah is telling us when it says, "and they saw not their father's shame." Not only did Shem and Japheth not physically see their father's shameful state—this we already know from the (twice-repeated) fact that they turned "their faces were backward"—they also did not perceive his guilt or disgrace. Unlike Ham, whose own debasement was reflected in his vision of his father's, their entire reaction to their knowledge

of what had transpired lay in what they must now do to correct it. The *shame* of their father, however, they simply did not see.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

AND THEY SAID TO ONE ANOTHER: "...LET US BUILD FOR OURSELVES A CITY AND A TOWER WHOSE TOP SHALL REACH THE HEAVENS; AND WE SHALL MAKE FOR OURSELVES A NAME (11:4)

What was their sin? Their motives for building a city with a tower "whose top shall reach the heavens" seem quite understandable. Mankind was only just reconstructing itself after the Flood that had wiped out the entire human race save for Noah and his family. If fledgling humanity was to survive, unity and cooperation were of critical importance. So they set out to build a common city to knit them into a single community. At its heart, they planned a tower which would be visible for miles, a landmark to beckon to those who had strayed from the city and a monument to inspire commitment to their common goal—survival. All they wanted was to "make for ourselves a name"—to ensure the continuity of the human race..

And yet, their project to preserve humanity deteriorated into a rejection of all that humanity stands for and an open rebellion against their Creator and purpose. Their quest for unity resulted in the breakup of mankind into clans and factions and the onset of close to four thousand years of misunderstanding, xenophobia and bloodletting across the divisions of race, language and culture. Where did they go wrong?

But precisely that was their error: they saw survival as an end in itself. "Let us make a name for ourselves," they said; let us ensure that there will be future generations who will read of us in their history books. But *why* survive? For what purpose should humanity inhabit the earth? What is the *content* of the name and legacy they are laboring to preserve? Of this they said, thought, and did nothing. To them, life itself was an ideal, survival itself a virtue.

This was the beginning of the end. No physical system will long tolerate a vacuum, and this is true of spiritual realities as well: unless a soul or cause is filled with positive content, corruption will ultimately seep in. A hollow

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And Shem and Japheth took the garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's shame.

And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him. And he said: "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brethren." And he said: "Blessed be G-d, G-d of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. G-d shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant."

And Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years. And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died.

The Dispersion

The Torah now lists the seventy nations that formed when the descendents of Shem, Ham and Japheth (Noah's three sons) dispersed across the earth. It then tells the story of how this dispersion came about.

At first, the descendents of Noah formed a single community, sharing "one language and mutual words." Migrating westward, they settled in the valley of Shin'ar (Babylon).

And they said: "Come, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach to heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."

And G-d came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men were building.

And G-d said: "Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do; and now nothing will be withheld from them, which they have schemed to do. Come, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."

So G-d scattered them abroad from there upon the face of all the earth: and they ceased to build the city.

Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because G-d did there confound (balal) the language of all the earth, and from thence did G-d scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

Abram's First Years

Noah's son, Shem, had a son named Achparshad. Achparshad fathered Shelach; Shelach's son was Eber (one of the sources of the appellation "Hebrew"); Eber fathered Peleg ("division"—it was in the year of Peleg's death that the division of humanity into nations occurred in wake of the sin of the Tower); Peleg's son was Reu; Reu's son was Serug; Serug begot Nachor; and Nachor was the father of Terah..

Terah had three sons: Haran, who died in his father's lifetime, Nachor, and Abram. Haran had a son, Lot, and two daughter: Milkah, who became the wife of her uncle Nachor, and Sarai (also called Yiskah), who also wed a younger brother of her father's, Abraham. Sarai was barren, having no children.

The Parshah of Noach concludes by telling how the entire family set out from their hometown, Ur Casdim, to journey to the Land of Canaan. They stopped, however, at Charan, where Terah dies at the age of 205.

Commentary

name and shrine soon becomes a tower of Babel.

Never has the lesson of the Tower of Babel been more pertinent to our people than it is today. We, too, are a generation struggling to recoup after a holocaust of destruction that threatened to erase us from the face of the earth. Reconstruction and survival are uppermost in our minds, and together, with G-d's help, we are succeeding.

At a time like this, it is extremely important that we not repeat the error of the builders of Babel. Rebuild we must, but the objective must be more than a more enduring name, a greater city, a taller tower. If we are to survive, we must give import to our survival, reiterate the "why" of our existence. We must fill our name with value, our city with significance, and crown the

tower of our resurgence with the higher purpose for which we were created.

(Based on an address by the Lubavitcher Rebbe in 1959)

AND G-D DESCENDED TO SEE THE CITY AND THE TOWER WHICH THE SONS OF MAN HAD BUILT (11:5)

Obviously, G-d did not need to "come down" in order to see their crime; but He wished to teach all future judges that one must not judge the accused until they see and appreciate.

(Rashi)

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FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

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THE MEMORY OF WATER

Your earliest self-knowledge is of a being immersed in water.

You were one with your environment: you were mother and mother was you, you were the universe and the universe was yourself. There was no I, she, it or that, for all being was one.

Then came the day when you were thrust out from the enveloping waters. Distinctiveness and identity were conferred upon you, and your oneness with your source became a vestige of a memory. You now revel in your apartness, your ego a shield, wresting sustenance and purpose from an environment that is distinct of yourself and which you share and compete over with like-armored others.

But the memory remains. And when the strangeness of your world becomes too much to bear, and the loneliness of your battle too heavy to carry, you seek solace in your watery past. The memory of the womb comforts you, reassuring you that you are not truly alone, that underneath it all you are one with the universe, with your creator.

On the face of it, the Torah's account of Noah's Flood tells the tragic tale of a corrupt generation eradicated from the face of the earth. But an axiom of Chassidic teaching — particularly as expressed in the writings and talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe — is that every word of Torah, at its core, is a gem of unadulterated goodness. Our world is a place where negativity and even outright evil may occur, and the Torah, which addresses and describes our world, reflects this. But as our Sages tell us, the Torah precedes the world, precedes creation; in its quintessential state, the Torah's every story and law has a positive meaning.

In essence, Noah's Flood is the earth's immersion in the *mikvah* of divine knowledge, in the womb of primordial oneness. And though the earth eventually emerged from the Flood's waters, the memory remains in its soil and stones, in its trees and clouds, and in every living being that crawls or walks upon it. Never is our world too distant, too apart, too alienated, to draw on this memory of total submersion within in the all-embracing totality of its Creator.

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe,

THE 40-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 homeliness 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 accumulate in our life's endeavours. 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

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nature of the events. The name “Noah” is etymologically connected to the word for inner peace and tranquillity. 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 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 of a sentient universe — that which we call “reality”. 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 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 trapings 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 Healing Light* (audio) and *Relax and Breathe* (audio) available at Rabbi Wolf’s Website (see link below)

Based on Torah Ohr, a collection of discourses by Chassidic master Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812); adaptation by Laibl Wolf. Rabbi Wolf, a renowned mystic, author and speaker, lives in Australia and lectures worldwide on Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism. His daily meditations and weekly essays can be viewed on his website, www.laiblwolf.com.

THE WINDOW

It happened before: a world drowning in violence awaited redemption. Waited for Divine action, because man had done all that was in his power and the rest was up to G-d.

Man waited in a sealed ark, but the ark had a window. And from the window a dove was dispatched to circle the skies, to agitate the heavens with its restless reconnaissance. For the next four thousand years its spread wings and the olive leaf clutched in its beak would symbolize humanity’s quest for harmony and peace.

No, waiting is not a passive endeavor. On the threshold of redemption, we must open windows through which to look upon a harmonious tomorrow, and through which to dispatch winged emissaries to hasten the divine response from on high.

The Book of Genesis (chapters 6-8) relates the story of the great deluge which swept the earth in the dawn of human history.

Outside the ark Noah had built and populated by divine command, the Flood raged, the violent culmination of a violent world. Within, Noah presided over a miniature universe: his family; and — as G-d had instructed him — “of all living things, two of each kind, a male and a female; and specimens of every food that is to be eaten ... to keep seed alive on the face of the earth.”

For forty days and nights the rains fell, followed by five months in which the waters swelled and churned, cleansing the earth for the promise of a new beginning contained in the floating ark. Finally, the waters calmed and began to recede.

Noah then opened the window in the sealed ark and sent out a raven “to see if the waters had subsided from the surface of the earth.” The raven which refused the mission, was followed by three doves: the first returned immediately, indicating that the Flood’s waters still engulfed the earth; the second came back in the evening, clutching “a plucked olive leaf” and the promise of a new life for earth. The third did not return at all, informing the Ark’s inhabitants that the earth was ready for habitation.

Why did Noah dispatch these winged emissaries? Obviously, he was eager to rebuild, to replace the mayhem of the Flood with a new, harmonious world. However, it would seem that Noah would have had little use for whatever information these “reconnaissance flights” might provide him. In fact, even after he was convinced that the Flood was over, Noah could not act on his own assessment that the earth was ready for a new

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beginning to take root. Noah had first entered the ark by the explicit command of G-d, and as long as he did not receive further instructions to the contrary, the divine injunction “Come into the ark” remained in force. Only upon being commanded to “Go out from the ark” and “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” — commands which came several weeks after the third dove’s mission — could he begin settling and developing the world outside the ark.

Hence the question: for what purpose did Noah dispatch the raven and the doves?

Contemporary Arks

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov explains the relevance of the divine instruction to Noah, “Come into the ark” to our daily lives. The Hebrew word for ark, *teivah*, also means “word.” Come into the word, says the Almighty to each and every one of us; enter within the words of prayer and Torah study. Here you will find a haven of wisdom, meaning and sanctity amidst the raging floodwaters of life.

The word that the Torah uses for the Flood is *mabul*, which means disorder and confusion. Our world is a *mabul* of moral disarray and distorted priorities. But even as the chaos of a still-unperfected world churns about us, we have the ability to create, as did Noah, an island of tranquillity and perfection, sheltered by the protective words (*teivot*) of Torah and prayer.

Furthermore, the personal havens we create are not confined to the interior world of our minds and hearts. As was the case with Noah’s *teivah*, we also bring “specimens” from the outside world into the sanctity of our “ark.” Through our observance of the mitzvot, we employ a great variety of the creatures and elements to fulfill G-d’s will: the animal hide that is made into *tefillin*, the wool spun into *tzitzit*, the food which provides the energy to pray, the money given to charity. These are all “brought into the *teivah*” — made part of a personal universe that is wholly devoted to good and G-dly pursuits.

But our personal arks are not ends in themselves. It is not sufficient to bring “samples” from the outside into the insulated havens of Torah and prayer and content ourselves with these pockets of perfection adrift in a strife-torn world. Our “arks” must also serve as the seeds from which a new world, embrac-

ing the entirety of creation, will grow. Our mission in life is to create a world free of greed, jealousy and hate, a world suffused with the wisdom and goodness of its Creator; to translate the G-dly perfection of our personal *teivot* into the divinely perfect world of Moshiach.

The directive, “Come into the ark,” which characterizes our task during the *mabul*-years of history, is but a prelude to the “Go out from the ark” era of Moshiach, when the holiness and perfection of a Torah-defined existence will extend to all of creation.

Awaiting Word

As with Noah, we must await the word. It is not for us to decide that the era of Moshiach has begun. It is by G-d’s command that we entered the “ark,” and it is He who will send Moshiach to herald the new dawn.

This may lead to the belief that we must passively wait for the redemption. Therein lies the lesson of Noah’s winged emissaries: well before he was commanded to “Go out from the ark,” Noah opened a window to the outside world. As soon as he sensed signs of the Flood’s abatement, he dispatched messengers to “test the waters” and confirm the fact that the world was ready for rebirth. Noah did not content himself with developing the inner world of the *teivah* while allowing history to take its course, but did everything in his power to establish the world’s readiness, thereby hastening the divine empowerment to make his ark a universal reality.

Today, we find ourselves at the same crossroads that Noah faced forty-one centuries ago. All around us, we detect signs of a world that is bettering and perfecting itself, beating its nuclear swords into the plowshares of aid to the hungry and accepting the principles of freedom, justice and compassion as universal givens. Amidst this calming and abatement of the *mabul*’s waters, we cannot, and must not, closet ourselves in our insulated arks, concerning ourselves only with the perfection of our individual lives and communities, waiting for G-d to send Moshiach. We must throw open the windows of our “arks” and reach out to a world that is shedding the turmoil of its *mabul* past. Our continued efforts to establish that the world is indeed ready for redemption will hasten the divine word from on high, instructing us that the era of universal peace is upon us.

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, www.therebbe.org; adapted by Yanki Tauber, editor@chabadonline.com

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THE RAINBOW

And G-d spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying: "... This shall be the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all generations.

My rainbow I have set in the cloud.... When the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud, I shall remember My covenant.... Never again shall the waters become a flood to destroy all flesh."

Genesis 9:8-15

The rainbow, of course, is a natural phenomenon. Rays of sunlight pass through water droplets suspended in the atmosphere; the clear, crystal-like droplets refract the light, unleashing the spectrum of colors it contains and displaying them in an arc across the misty skies.

Yet before the Flood, this natural occurrence did not occur. There was something about the interaction between the moisture in the earth's atmosphere and the light emanating from the sun that failed to produce a rainbow. It was only after the Flood that the dynamics that create a rainbow were set in place by the Creator as a sign of His newly-formed covenant with His creation.

The spiritual and the physical are two faces of the same reality. This change in the physical nature of the interaction between water and light reflects a deeper, spiritual difference between the pre- and post-Flood worlds, and the resultant difference in G-d's manner of dealing with a corrupted world.

Contrary Differences

An examination of the Torah's account of the first twenty generations of history reveals two primary differences between the world before the Flood and the post-Flood era.

The pre-Flood generations enjoyed long lives—we find people living into their 8th, 9th and 10th cen-

turies (Noah's grandfather, Methuselah, lived 969 years; his father, Lemech, 777 years; Noah himself, 950 years). The Zohar explains that this was an era of divine benevolence, in which life, health and prosperity flowed freely and indiscriminately from Above.

Following the Flood, we see a steady decline in the human lifespan. Within ten generations, Abraham is "old" at the age of 100.

The second difference is one that seems at odds with, and even contradictory to, the first: after the Flood, the world gained a stability and permanence it did not enjoy in the pre-Flood era. Before the Flood, the world's very existence was contingent upon its moral state. When humanity disintegrated into corruption and violence, G-d said to Noah:

The end of all flesh is come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I shall destroy them and the earth.

Following the Flood, G-d vowed:

I will not again curse the earth because of man.... neither will I again smite everything living, as I have done. For all days of the earth, [the seasons for] seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.

No longer would the cycles of life and nature totter on the verge of extinction whenever man strays from his G-d. The post-Flood world is a world whose existence is assured, a world that is desired by its Creator regardless of its present state of conformity to His will.

And the guarantor of this assurance, the symbol of this new stability, is the rainbow.

An Opaque World

Before the Flood, man's role in creation lay primarily in *reacting* to G-d's involvement in the world. The flow of divine vitality into the world was plentiful and uninhibited, enabling man to attain great material and spiritual heights; but these achievements were merely man's acceptance of what was being bestowed upon him from Above, rather than the fruits of his own initiative.

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The pre-Flood world was like a brilliant pupil who grasps the most profound teachings of his master, but who lacks the ability to conceive of a single original thought of his own. So once corrupted—once it had distanced itself from its Master and disavowed its relationship with Him—it lost the basis for its existence. When man ceased to respond, the world held no further use for the Creator.

After the Flood, G-d imbued the world with a new potential—the potential to create. He granted it the ability to take what it receives from Above and develop it, extend it, and expand upon it. The world was now like a disciple who had been trained by his master to think on his own, to take the ideas which he learns and apply them to new areas. Man was now able not only to absorb the divine input into his life but also to unleash its potential in new, unprecedented ways.

Such a world is in many ways a “weaker” world than one that is wholly sustained by divine grace. It is more independent, and thus more subject to the limitations and mortality of the human state. Hence the shorter lifespan of the post-Flood generations. But in the final analysis, such a world is more enduring: even when it loses sight of its origin and purpose, it retains the ability to rehabilitate itself and restore its relationship with its Creator. Because it possesses an independent potential for self-renewal, it can always reawaken this potential, even after it has been suppressed and lain dormant for generations.

Rising Mist

The rainbow is the natural event that exemplifies the new post-Flood order. Moisture rises from the earth to form clouds and raindrops, which catch the light of the sun. A less refined substance would merely absorb the light; but the purity and translucency of these droplets allows them to focus and channel the rays they capture in such a way that reveals the many colors implicit within each ray of sunlight.

The pre-Flood world lacked the rainbow. There was nothing in or about it that could rise from below to interact with and develop what it received

from Above. Such was its spiritual nature; as a result, the conditions for a physical rainbow also failed to develop—the mist it raised could only absorb, but not refract, the light of the sun.

Lacking a creative potential of its own, the pre-Flood world was left without reason and right for existence when it ceased to receive the divine effluence from Above. Then came the Flood. The rains that destroyed a corrupted world also cleansed it and purified it, leaving in their wake a new world with a new nature: a world that rises to meet and transform what is bestowed upon it; a world with the “translucency” and refinement to develop the gifts it receives into new, unprecedented vistas of color and light.

When this world goes astray, G-d sees its rainbow, and the sight causes Him to desist from destroying it. For the rainbow attests to the world’s new maturity—its ability to ultimately rise above its present lapse and rebuild its relationship with its Creator.

*Based on an address by the Lubavitcher Rebbe
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