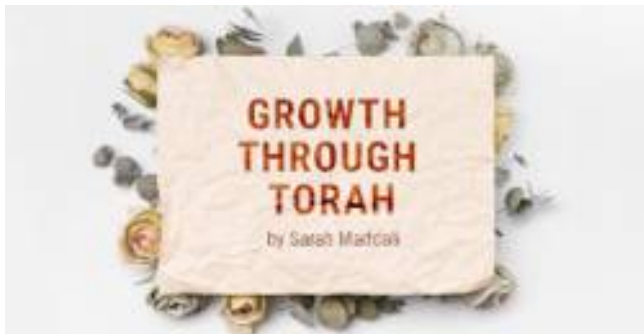


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Shabbat Is Our Ark

Mystical Jewish sources (*Sfas Emet*, Noah 5635) say that Noah and Shabbat are connected to the idea of *menucha*, rest, as they both share the same Hebrew root letters (*nun* and *chet* -- נח). As such, Noah's name is connected to Shabbat, as Shabbat is the quintessential day of rest and inextricably tied to rest. What is the deeper meaning behind this?

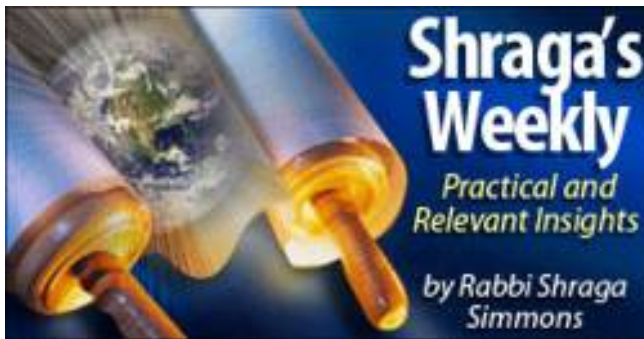
Lesson:

Noah and Shabbat are connected in that they both have the ability to rescue. Just as Noah rescued the animals and his family from the flood, ensuring the continuation of mankind, Shabbat has the ability to rescue us from the flood of the week. During the week, we are immersed in the mundane, toiling in the physical, trying to create and accomplish. We feel the physical limitations and pulls necessary to keep everything afloat. But on Shabbat, we stop. We stop accomplishing, creating, working and we allow the waves of rest to enter into our homes and our beings.

Even our mundane activities, such as eating and drinking are suddenly rescued and transformed into holy activities, through which we even sanctify Shabbat. We are rescued from the everyday pulls that gnaw on us, worry us, weigh us down as on Shabbat, we focus on making God the focus. As we remember that God created the entire universe in six days, surely God can help me with whatever I need. When we allow our focus to shift from one of worry to one of rest, we create an immediate and authentic rescue. And that is the ultimate rest.

Exercise: Do one thing this week to help in your *menucha*, your state of rest by making Shabbat extra special. Buy or make something extra special/savory, let the kids play while you read or take a nap. Try to carry the rest of Shabbat throughout the week.

Sources quoted and idea inspired from Short and Sweet on the Torah by Rabbi Bregman



Noah's Ark

We all know the story of this week's Parsha: God wants to send a flood to destroy the world, so He tells the righteous Noah to build an ark and bring in two of every animal. Then it rains for 40 days and 40 nights, God sends a rainbow, and Noah lives happily ever after. Right?

Well, at least it makes a good children's story. But given that the Torah is the driving force of the Jewish nation and the

eternal source of our collective wisdom, let's take a few minutes to uncover deeper layers of "Noah and the Ark"...

Big Boat

Our first question: What was the terrible sin of Noah's generation that God sought to destroy them? The Talmud (Sanhedrin 57a) tells us that the world was immersed in jealousy, greed, theft, violence, lying, intolerance, deception and fraud. The worst of all transgressions? Explain the great commentators Rashi and Ibn Ezra: People exploited each other sexually.

Before God sends the Flood, Noah spends 120 years building an Ark. (They lived long in those days.) This was no ordinary boat. It measured larger than a football field and contained over a million cubic feet of space! It was outfitted with three separate levels: The top for Noah and his family, the middle for the animals, and the bottom for the garbage.

(Which, by the way, shows the Torah's unique concern for the environment: Even while the world was being destroyed, they wouldn't throw the garbage overboard!)

But there are obviously many ways by which God could have saved Noah. So

why did Noah have to bother building an ark? And why did it take him 120 years?!

The Midrash says that God specifically wanted Noah to undertake a strange and unusual project, to arouse people's curiosity. God accentuated the oddity of it all by having Noah construct this huge boat — not at the sea shore — but on a mountain-top! This way people would ask Noah — "What the heck are you doing?!" — and Noah could engage them in discussion about the global crisis, and how catastrophe could be avoided if people would change their ways.

Well, 120 years is a long time, and you would think that Noah would have convinced a lot of people to get back on track. But alas, instead of reaching out to influence others, Noah saw the Ark as his own ticket to survival — a chance to build a big wall and insulate himself from the evils of society.

One Big World

In one sense it is true that we have to protect ourselves and our families. Maimonides warns us about the danger of living next to neighbors who don't share our system of values. Where there's corruption, the good frequently get swept

up with the bad. And we have to guard against this.

It's like the story of the community where everyone was employed as chimney-sweeps. Each day they went to work and got very dirty. But they had one rule: One person from the group had to stay at home each day — so that when the others would return and see his clean face, they'd be able to gauge how dirty they'd become.

In a spiritual sense as well, a home has to stand as a safe haven, to rejuvenate and clean oneself up.

But there's a second side to this. The "Ark" cannot be completely insulated; it must be porous as well. We have to reach out and try to make a difference in the world. The Chasidic writings compare this to a wealthy person who needs to warm himself in the winter. He could build a fire, in which case everyone in the room would benefit. But imagine instead that he warms only himself with a heavy coat and blankets. In both cases he's warmed; the only question is to what degree he's concerned about others.

Even if we aren't willing to fix things out of altruistic love for others, then at least we should do so for ourselves. Because the reality is that no matter how hard we try,

some "bad" does seep in. And in the end it will get us as well.

It's like the story of two guys on a boat, and one of them is drilling a hole in the bottom. "What are you doing?!" his friend shouts. "Oh, don't worry," replies the other, "I'm only drilling under my OWN seat."

The hole in the ozone layer does not discriminate. Drugs and theft and violence have no boundaries. Ignoring this reality was Noah's tragic mistake. He believed that he could lock himself inside the Ark, and escape from it all.

Noah's Painful Lesson

After the Flood ended, Noah re-emerged with his family onto dry land. The Torah records what happened next:

"Noah, the man of the earth, debased himself and planted a vineyard. He became drunk and uncovered himself in his tent. [His son] Cham saw his father's nakedness..." (Genesis 9:20-22)

When Noah emerged from the Ark and saw devastation heaped upon the world, he knew deep down that he had selfishly stood by and watched it all happen. Depressed and disappointed, he got drunk. Then "Cham saw his father's nakedness,"

meaning that Noah's son either sodomized or castrated him (Talmud — Sanhedrin 70a).

It was a painful lesson for Noah, yet in a sense it was fitting justice. While Noah's generation sexually exploited each other, Noah thought he could ensconce himself in the Ark and escape. But it had penetrated inside.

The Jewish Fight

Every Jew recognizes that all the Jewish people are bound together. When there is a terrorist attack in Israel, we all feel it. The Talmud (Shevuot 39a) says *"Kol Yisrael areivim zeh ba-zeh"* — every Jew is responsible one for another.

I once heard Rabbi Motty Berger of Aish HaTorah speaking to a group of Holocaust survivors. What he said impacted me for the rest of my life. He told them: "When I was a child, I would look at my grandparents and wonder, what were they doing during the Holocaust? The fact that millions of Jews were being placed into ovens was no secret; these horrors were reported regularly on the front page of the New York Times. So I wondered... were my grandparents out raising money to help ransom Jews? Were they organizing secret rescue efforts? Were they demanding

media attention and marching on Washington?"

Today, the Jewish people are fighting wars on many fronts. The very existence of the State of Israel is being questioned in world forums. Anti-Semitic acts around the world are mindful of 1938. And there is the cancer of assimilation, where every year, 50,000 Jews between the ages of 20-29 opt out of the Jewish people, lost to us forever.

So what are we going to do about it? Because one day, our own grandchildren will look at us and wonder...

Taking Responsibility

The Kabbalists explain that "*taiva*," the Hebrew word for "ark," also means "word." For they are two sides of the same coin. Each of us wants to build an ARK — the best life possible for ourselves and our family. Yet at the same time we are obligated to use the power of WORDS to reach out and influence others. Noah was given 120 years to build his "*taiva*." So too, we are given 120 years — a full lifetime — to do the same.

What can we do? We can speak out against garbage in our rivers and garbage on TV. We can attend a Torah class and teach over

what we've learned to others. We can understand clearly why humanity must refuse to tolerate gossip and infidelity. We can organize a community campaign to demand objectivity in the media.

Noah's failure to try and influence his generation is why the Flood is called "the waters of Noah" (Isaiah 54:9). Don't think the problem isn't affecting you. Because it is.

Let's commit to taking responsibility — for ourselves, our family, our community, our world.



Ark Rehab

The *parashah* tells us: "These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a *man*, righteous and pure in his generation." [1] The Hebrew word for *man* is "*ish*," for which the Yiddish equivalent is "*mentsch*." The Torah teaches us that first and foremost, each of us must try to be a

mentsch. The word *mentsch* connotes integrity, respect, kindness – goals toward which we must all strive. The first questions that Jewish parents traditionally ask regarding a potential spouse for their daughter is, "Is he a *mentsch*? Does he have fine character traits?"

DO WE SEE OURSELVES AS GOD SEES US?

A famous Midrash based on this week's *parashah* asks, "If there are so many ways through which God could have saved Noah, then why did He make him go through the difficult, arduous task of building an Ark that took 120 years to complete?"

The Midrash answers that Hashem, in His infinite mercy, did not want to bring the Flood upon the world. God desires to preserve life, not destroy it. Even as a father yearns for his estranged children, so too, God was hoping that His errant sons and daughters would heed His call, abandon their evil ways, and return to Him. Thus, if Noah were seen to be busily building his Ark day in and day out, people would ask him what he was doing. Then he would inform them about the impending Flood and tell them that they

could cancel the evil decree through repentance. It was all in their hands.

But this Midrash begs yet another question: Why couldn't Noah speak to the people directly? Why did he need the Ark as a prop? Why couldn't he inspire the people to mend their ways? The answer to this question can be found in the beginning of the *parashah*: "Now the earth had become corrupt *before God*,"[2] teaching us that it was **only in the sight of God** that the earth was corrupt; man saw nothing wrong with his lifestyle. How does it happen that man can be so blind to his own faults and corruption?

The generation of the Flood was obsessed with hedonism and the pursuit of pleasure; in such a climate, the laws of God, which require discipline, are eclipsed. In a society without Torah guidelines, even the most depraved acts become acceptable. So Noah had no one with whom to talk; no one was willing to listen, for they all saw themselves as "righteous people," and it never occurred to any of them to ask **how God viewed them**.

Rabbi Yisroel Salanter, the founder of the Mussar movement, explains the process that brings about this moral blindness: The first time a man commits a wrong, he feels

guilty, but if he repeats that act often enough, his conscience will no longer bother him and eventually he will even see himself as a paragon of virtue. So it is that immorality, decadence, and degeneracy become the accepted way of life and are no longer considered sinful.

This lesson is of special significance to our generation, for ours is also a hedonistic society that does not recognize boundaries or discipline. We regard self-gratification as an end in itself and delude ourselves into believing that as long as we are *happy* with ourselves that is all that God requires of us. We never ask ourselves the all-important question, "*How does God see us?*"

How can we overcome this spiritual blindness?

Ongoing Torah study is the most effective remedy. When we study God's Word we hear His voice, and we come to realize how far we have departed from His path. We can then take steps to come closer to Him.

ARK REHAB

Still, you might ask why Noah had to enter the Ark. Why couldn't God have saved him in a different manner? The answer is that

God wanted to make certain that when Noah and his family emerged from the Ark and undertook the task of rebuilding the world, they would be fortified with righteous deeds. In the Ark they had to care for all the animals that God had commanded them to gather; backbreaking labor consumed them day and night. Yet through that labor they learned the meaning of *chesed* – reaching out with *gemilus chassadim* (acts of loving-kindness) – one of the pillars on which God built His world.

It is in this light that we can understand the Midrash that relates that on one occasion, when Noah was slow to feed the lion, the lion injured him. Noah cried out in pain, and a Heavenly voice declared, "If only you had cried out in pain when the future of mankind was at stake!"

GOD'S INFINITE PATIENCE – HIS HAND IN OUR DAILY LIVES

Noah was involved in the construction of the Ark for *120 years*. We ask ourselves why it took so very long for Noah to complete God's command. Surely, he could have completed his task in much less time, especially since Hashem gave him specific instructions on what materials

to use and told him the exact dimensions of the Ark.

Once again, we behold God's compassion and infinite patience. Although He foresees the future, He nevertheless hopes for our repentance and gives us time – even 120 years – to mend our ways. Tragically, people mistook His *love* for His *absence*, but the lesson of the Ark continues to speak to us and demands that we see God's Hand in our daily lives, even if it is not always readily apparent.

Another lesson that we can learn is patience. Even as the Almighty was patient with that generation, so should we try to be patient with the members of our family and our fellow man.

THE ARK – THE HOLY TABERNACLE – THE JEWISH HOME

In the Torah we find that God commanded the construction of two edifices: Noah's Ark, and centuries later, after our forefathers left Egypt, the *Mishkan* (the Holy Tabernacle).

While these two structures were built light-years apart, for different reasons, and under different circumstances, they do share a common denominator: they serve as role models for the ideal Jewish home.

The Ark represents security, protection, a safe place ... which every home should embody, while the Tabernacle reflects a spiritual haven – a *Bayis Ne'eman*, a home that is a true bastion of faith ... a place where husband, wife, and children live in peace and harmony; a place where the sacred light of Shabbos banishes all darkness; a place where loving-kindness and Torah wisdom prevail; a place where the *Shechinah* (the presence of God) dwells.

If ever there was a time when we needed such a dual-purpose home, with a fusion of the physical and the spiritual, it is today. Let us strive for it.

FEEL THE PAIN OF YOUR PEOPLE

God tells Noah to build an Ark in order to save his family and all the different animal species. Then God issues the somewhat puzzling command that Noah make a *tzohar* for the Ark.[3] There is a question as to what this light really meant. Our Sages explain that *tzohar* can mean "a window" or "a brilliant jewel that sheds light." But these definitions are problematic. What possible reason could God have for placing a window in the Ark? After all, how much light could enter as a fierce storm raged outside for forty

days and forty nights? And what is the meaning of "a precious jewel"? Could a precious stone actually illuminate the entire Ark?

God wished to impress upon Noah his responsibility to humankind, for although Noah and his family were spared, he had an obligation to create *windows* through which he could see others and be sensitive to their pain and suffering. If he did, he would emerge from that painful tragedy kinder, wiser, and more caring. Thus, his windows would be converted into *jewels* that would illuminate his soul and enable him to better understand his obligation to his fellow man.

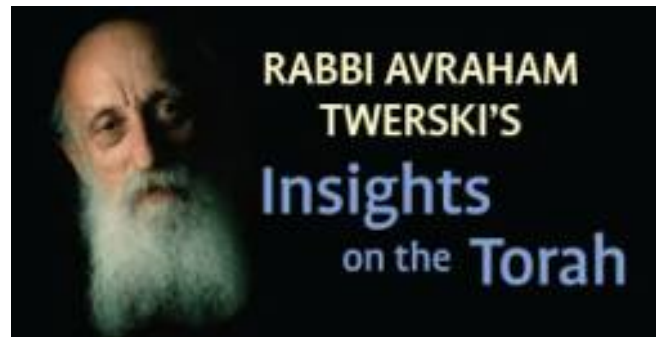
During the 120 years that Noah constructed the Ark, he didn't quite get that message. In contrast to the actions of Abraham, who pleaded with God to save the evil inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, and Moses, who put himself on the line to save his people after the fashioning of the Golden Calf, Noah remained silent and was content to merely construct the Ark. As a result of this lack of compassion, Noah is not reckoned among our Patriarchs or Sages.

Today, this lesson speaks to us anew. We have a responsibility to gaze through our

windows, empathize with our brethren, and do everything within our power to alleviate their suffering. Every challenge in life, every difficulty, becomes more bearable if you know that there is someone to share it with you and feel your pain.

So when we hear of hardships and when others around us are suffering, let's learn from the lessons of the *parashah*: let us make windows and create jewels.

1. Gen. 6:9.
2. *Ibid* 6:11.
3. *Ibid*. 6:16.



Conflicted Belief

Noah with his sons, his wife and his son's wives with him, went into the Ark because of the waters of the flood (Genesis, 7:7).

Rashi comments on the phrase "because of the waters of the flood" that Noah did not enter the Ark until the rising waters of the

flood forced him to do so. Why? Because Noah was of diminished faith. He believed yet did not believe that there would be a flood.

The Torah commentaries struggle with Rashi's statement. The Torah describes Noah as being "a perfect *tzaddik*." How can a perfect *tzaddik* be lacking in faith? Furthermore, just what is meant by "he believed yet did not believe?" This statement appears to be an internal contradiction.

The Steipler Gaon provides us with an important psychological insight. Knowledge of something can be of two types: There can be an *intellectual* knowledge and an *emotional* knowledge. For example, a person may have a desire for something, and is told to avoid going after it because there is excessive radiation in that area and the exposure is dangerous. If his desire for the object is intense, he may risk the exposure. However, if the object is in a building that is aflame, even an intense desire will not make him risk his life. Why the difference? Because a person does not *see* radiation. One can *understand* that radiation can be dangerous and even lethal, but this is an *intellectual* awareness, which can be overcome by an intense desire. The danger of fire,

however, is grasped *emotionally*, and is strong enough to override temptation.

Rashi is not critical of Noah, who was indeed a perfect *tzaddik* and had a complete intellectual faith in the word of God that there would be a flood. Rashi does not say that Noah was *lacking* in faith. Indeed, his faith was complete, but was of a lesser quality because it was only intellectual. This is what is meant by the phrase, "He believed yet did not believe." Noah believed intellectually, but not emotionally. Perhaps Noah was simply incapable of having an emotional awareness, and this limitation was not his fault.

The Steipler Gaon's explanation is of great practical value. I see this regularly in my work treating alcoholics, who typically do not accept treatment to stop their destructive drinking until they hit rock-bottom, i.e., until they experience a severe crisis which forces them to acknowledge their problem. In my book, *Substance Abusing High Achievers*, I cite cases of people of the highest intellect who *know* that their drinking is destructive, yet are unable to stop. One physician who was the director of a treatment center for alcoholics and who regularly saw the ruination caused by alcohol was himself a

heavy drinker. His intellectual awareness of the dangers of drinking was not enough to make him stop.

Billions of dollars have been spent to prevent young people from using drugs. None of the many prevention programs has proven effective. This is because regardless of how much we impress youngsters with the dangers of drugs, they achieve only an intellectual awareness, which is not sufficient to overcome the emotional desire to get “high.”

Distraught parents whose child wishes to intermarry desperately try to discourage this move in every possible way. They have the rabbi talk to their child and they may take him or her to a psychologist. Rarely are these efforts successful. The child may *understand* why he should not intermarry, but this intellectual knowledge does not change his mind.

What can be done to prevent young people from self-destructive behavior?

Unfortunately, very often nothing can be done. Parents agonize over their powerlessness to prevent their child from harming himself. They can only hope and pray that the child will come to his senses, and this may occur only when the child

eventually experiences the harmful consequences of his actions.

Even Noah, “a perfect *tzaddik*” believed yet did not believe.

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