

Date: 4 Cheshvan 5787 (October 15, 2026)

Torah Portion: Noah

Topic: Walking in Hashem's Way

The Midrash describes the extraordinary burden that Noah and his sons carried while caring for the animals aboard the Ark. For twelve months, they were responsible for feeding and sustaining every living creature entrusted to them. Each animal had its own needs and feeding schedule, requiring constant attention throughout the day and night. According to the Sages, Noah and his sons scarcely had an opportunity to sleep. On one occasion, when Noah was late in feeding the lion, the animal injured his leg, leaving him lame. The Midrash further describes how the constant strain weakened Noah to the point that he became ill and coughed up blood (Sanhedrin 108b; Midrash Tanchuma, Noah).

This raises an important question. Why did Noah have to endure such hardship in feeding the animals when Hashem had already performed numerous miracles to help him prepare for the Flood?

Consider the enormous preparations required before entering the Ark. Noah had to gather representatives of the various species, provide sufficient space for them, and store enough food to sustain them throughout the Flood. Yet Hashem provided miraculous assistance. Noah did not have to search the forests and deserts for the animals; they came to him on their own, as Scripture states, "Two by two they came to Noah into the Ark" (Gen. 7:9). According to the Midrash, the Ark itself distinguished between animals fit to enter and those corrupted by their generation. Even the limited space within the Ark was sufficient to accommodate the many creatures through Divine providence.

If Hashem had already provided such extraordinary assistance, why did He not also arrange for the animals to be fed miraculously? Why were Noah and his sons required to labor day and night, sacrificing their rest and health?

The answer lies in the spiritual purpose of their service. Hashem had commanded Noah to gather food for himself and the animals (Gen. 6:21), but the responsibility of feeding them presented a deeper opportunity: to walk in the ways of Hashem by imitating His attributes of compassion and kindness. Just as Hashem sustains every living creature, from the greatest animal to the smallest insect, Noah was given the responsibility of providing for the creatures under his care. As Scripture declares, "He gives food to all flesh, for His loving-kindness is everlasting" (Ps. 136:25). Hashem performed the miracles that human beings could not accomplish, but He entrusted Noah with the work through which his character could be refined.

The significance of this service becomes clearer through a remarkable teaching of the Sages. The Talmud relates that Avraham once asked Shem, the son of Noah, what merit enabled his family to survive the Flood. Shem answered that their survival was connected to the acts of kindness they had performed toward the animals. Because some animals ate during the day and others at night, Noah and his sons were constantly occupied with providing each creature its food at the proper time (Sanhedrin 108b).

This reveals a profound principle. The world outside the Ark had been destroyed because of widespread corruption, violence, and selfishness. Inside the Ark, however, Hashem established an entirely different way of life. Rather than allowing Noah and his family to concentrate solely on their own survival, He required them to devote themselves to the needs of others. While the generation of the Flood had been characterized by taking from others, Noah and his sons were taught to live by giving. Thus, the Ark became more than a place of physical refuge; it became a place of spiritual refinement, preparing its inhabitants to establish a new world founded upon compassion and responsibility.

We may never face the extraordinary circumstances that confronted Noah, but the lesson remains directly relevant to our lives. Every day presents opportunities to imitate Hashem through acts of kindness, patience, generosity, and responsibility. The Torah commands us to walk in His ways (Deut. 28:9), and the Sages explain that this means following His attributes of mercy and compassion (Sotah 14a).

Ultimately, Noah's experience teaches us that spiritual greatness is not measured solely by knowledge, faith, or personal righteousness, but also by our willingness to serve others, even when doing so requires effort and sacrifice. The Ark preserved Noah and his family from the destruction of the old world, but their acts of kindness prepared them to build a new one. Through their service, they demonstrated that the foundation of a righteous world is not merely the absence of evil, but the active presence of compassion. Shalom.