



ביס"ד

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Gems from the Tora

Tora V'Ahava of Florida Inc.

פרשת נח / Parashat Noach

Parashat Noach is the 2nd weekly Tora portion in the annual Jewish cycle of Tora reading. Tora Portion: Genesis 6:9-11:32

Noach ("Noach") begins as God decides to destroy mankind with a flood. At God's command, the righteous Noach builds an ark, where Noach, his family, and select animals survive the flood. Noach's children bear children, and several generations develop. God confounds the speech of people building the Tower of Babel.

What did we glean from Noach? In the start, unlike most of the weekly portions which begin with the letter Waw this week opens with the words Eh'leh usually, the letter WaW is present to show a new section in the reading. This week, however, begins without the Waw and with Eleh. Why? Because this week's

portion does not begin with Noah's introduction, it is a continuation of Bereishith (5:30-6:8). What about Noah was so special that he deserves two introductions and what lessons can we receive from this week's reading?

Verse 11 of chapter 6 makes a claim about the world that it is corrupt. Have you ever felt this way? Have you ever looked or wished that you could speak to someone about the corruption and violence you see in the world? Do you wish that they would do something about it? If yes, you are not alone. Thousands of years ago Noah was right there with you. What we don't always take into consideration is the one whom we are making our complaint to. In this case the Creator of the world was being told "Hey! Your world is corrupt and violent, and something must be done about it".

The Tora clearly states that when a matter cannot be handled in a smaller court it goes to larger courts to establish Justice. No different here. This small claim made its way all the way before God! Not only that, once it was brought before God more "evidence" was added, saying that the earth was filled with violence. Let's examine this passuk, the claim is "*and behold it was destroyed (corrupted)*" *Our rabbis explain this to mean ... on its own, even without (Divine) punishment the world was on its way to destruction therefore there is no point in saving it. - Sforno*

This claim not only failed to offer improvements, but the claim also delivered a message to the world that caused everyone to give up and lose hope! This we find is the opposite of what God saw; chapter 6:6 we read "*and God took comfort in the creation of humankind*". This statement is explained later in verse 14, there we find that God instructs Noah "*Make for yourself an [Ark of Gopher wood](#).*" In making this request God in turn said, "the future will be made of what is present. While destruction is imminent my creations will live on and rebuild." This is the meaning of "*and God took comfort in the creation of humankind.*"

Our Sages offer interesting commentaries in Sanhedrin 108b about the Mabul (Flood) they said that Hashem could have saved Noah without imposing the lengthy, difficult process of constructing an ark. Therefore, the real task was not that only Noah be saved but that this construction of something "new" in a "dying" world was to arouse the people around Noah to question and contemplate teshuvah. Thus far the opening of Noah is preparing us a lesson that when the world seems to be ending, we should hold on to hope. God wanted Noah to have hope in the world, in his generation.

The following verses go on to tell us about the construction of the Ark. On the surface, there is nothing noteworthy about these verses. They simply comprise a construction manual. However, if we think about it, there is actually something remarkable about these instructions. Of course, the ark needs waterproof materials, and a door through which to enter. But why does the ark need a window? What function could the window possibly serve? The thick covering of clouds that I can only imagine accompanies a 40-day long rainstorm must have meant there would be no sunlight coming through that window. The window's purpose, then, was not to see the outside world during the rain. Its purpose must have been to give Noah hope. *"I hope that there will be life after the flood. I hope that no matter how dark it gets, light will eventually return."*

Hope is also expressed in the ark's very cargo: loading at least two of each animal, one male and one female, carries with it a message of hope about the re-birth of creation after so much destruction.

Perhaps and most importantly, we find the message of hope in Noah's final few actions on the ark. After the storm has passed, after the waters begin to subside, Noah takes matters into his own hands and opens the window – that very same window that served as a ray of hope throughout the flood, and sends out a Orev, to see if it can find dry land. The Orev returns. There is no hope of leaving the ark yet. So, Noah waits, and then sends out a Yonah- but she too, returns.

At this point in the narrative, none of us could blame Noah for giving up hope. He was told that there would be a flood for 40 days, but after 40 days of rain, it was still unsafe to leave the boat, so Noah waited, and waited. The Tora tells us that Noah entered the ark in the second month of his 600th year (7:11) and did not leave it again until the first month of his 601st year (8:13), which means that by now, Noah has spent over 10 months in the ark. God promised to save Noah, but God never promised Noah that he would once again walk on dry land or that the ark would not be his new home. If ever there was a time to lose hope, to assume that the world had come to an end – this was it.

Noah does not lose hope. Rather, Noah waits one more week, and sends out the Yonah once again. This time, she returns with an olive branch in her mouth, proof that the waters have subsided enough to find a tree; proof that Noah and all that is with him will once again emerge on dry land, that the world has not ended after all.

While we may not be living through a devastating flood as Noah did, it can still be all too easy to lose hope. Climate change, political turmoil and the challenges

that each of us face in our own lives can make it feel as if the world as we know it might be ending.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that we read this parashah in the late fall, when the days are getting shorter, and the darkness seems to be overtaking the light. Perhaps our Tora reading cycle is a reminder to be like Noach: to create windows of hope through which light can shine even in the darkest of hours; to plan for the future; and perhaps most importantly, to continue to send out doves, to be persistent and unceasing in our search for signs of hope, never losing faith that there will always be a way to move forward.

Shavua Tov,