

MORASHAH
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Parashat HaShavuah Series

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The image of Noah, together with his family and all the animals, enclosed in the ark as the flood raged around them, evokes thoughts of other times in history and in our lives when we seek the safety of an ark to protect us from the tumult and chaos that threatens to destroy our world. According to the Rabbis, the entire world of Noah's generation engaged in stealing from one another. The corruption of humans even contaminated the animals and the earth itself. Some commentators take Noah to task for shutting himself in and for not trying to save the rest of society. It is possible, however, to see the narrative in a different light.

We are told that Noah was a righteous man "in his generations." Perhaps he was truly righteous. Perhaps he was seen by God as someone who may not have been fully righteous, but as a person with the capacity to see his errors and to change his ways. In any event, Noah built the ark and led a remnant of humanity and a remnant of the animals to safety in the ark. Once the ark was sealed and the flood began, the inhabitants of the ark were forced to live with each other. The 12 months they lived in the ark were to be a learning experience. They needed to share with each other. They needed to accept boundaries. Violence or stealing would have quickly led to strife and, perhaps, to the end of life on earth. The humans on the ark repented and turned back to God. They came to understand the value of deeds of kindness. The inhabitants of the ark became ready to create a new world, based on caring and kindness. The Torah does not record any prayer by Noah before the flood. His first act when leaving the ark, however, was to offer sacrifices of thanksgiving to God.

In our day, we are threatened by the storms of violence and terrorism in the world, economic uncertainty, and personal crises of many kinds. We can shut out the world and try to save ourselves, or we can practice kindness to others who are trying to weather the storms along with us. May we be blessed like Noah to emerge in safety from the chaos that often seems overwhelming. May our deeds of kindness help to build a society and a world that will endure.

The above d'var Torah is based on sources quoted in Oznam

Latorah.

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Beigel, a member of Morashah, is a chaplain at health care and jail facilities in Syracuse, New York.

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