



Around the Shabbat Table

**Noah 5766
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Shalom!

Introduction

The story of Noah is one of the most beloved children stories but, paradoxically, one of the most terrifying. Once it makes it into the beautifully illustrated children's books it has lost most of its original intention.

The *parasha* goes like this: the world has become so corrupt and humanity's actions so irreparably evil that God finds no recourse but to destroy the world. But there is one man, Noah, who God finds righteous. Noah follows God's precise instructions and builds a huge ark. He then proceeds to place in the ark animal pairs (male and female)—except for clean animals required for sacrifices of which Noah places seven pairs. The ark can take a maximum of eight family members: Noah, his wife, three sons and three daughters in law. After seven days the floodgates of heaven open, creation is undone and the world returns to chaos. The rains fall and the waters of the deep surge for 40 days and nights, but the Flood remained at its highest for an additional 150 days. God "remembered" Noah and all with him in the ark, and the waters began to recede. The ark settles on Mt. Ararat and 40 days later Noah opens the "window" of the ark and sends out a raven. Then he sends out a dove, and finally after 365 days, the earth is ready to receive its new inhabitants.

Noah sacrifices animals to God and God forgives humanity, promising that he will never again bring total destruction upon the world. As a sign he sends a rainbow. To this day, this miraculous sight deserves our blessing in memory of God's promise. Some time after leaving the ark, Noah becomes a tiller of the soil and a grape grower. One day he becomes drunk and acts inappropriately. Noah's son, Ham, behaves immorally with his father in his drunken state

but Ham's brothers Shem and Jafet behave admirably in the situation. When Noah realizes what has happened he curses Ham and his son Canaan, and blesses Shem and Yafet. God also favored these two sons because of their behavior. Noah lives 350 years after the Flood, and dies at the age of 950.

The last part of the *parasha* is another beloved story, that of the Tower of Babel. It turns out that all of humanity used to speak one language. But they got together and plotted to construct the tallest tower in order to build a name for themselves. The tower would be so tall that its peak would reach heaven. This made God angry and he destroyed the tower, scattered humanity all over the earth and confounded their speech so they could not understand one another.



Texts to Wrestle With

I. Genesis 6:9

It states in the text that “*Noach ish Tzaddik Tamim hayah bedorotav*” (Noah was a righteous and blameless man in his generation). These verse, has been subject of exegesis and discussion since the ancient sages. The verse underscores that Noah was the most righteous in his generation. This qualifier –“in his generation” can have one of two meanings:

1. to his detriment: that had Noah lived in a different generation where people weren't so evil he would not have been seen to be so righteous
2. to his credit: that despite the fact that Noah's generation was so evil, he still remained righteous. In fact, had Noah lived in a less evil generation, he would have been far greater.

- Opinions are divided in this issue. What do you think? How do you think someone else, for instance Abraham, would have reacted to the news of the flood? Is it fair to compare?

II. Genesis 9:3-6

After the flood God gives humanity permission to eat flesh of animals but man has to contain any impulse to commit acts of savagery. Therefore man is not allowed to eat the flesh of a live animal. God also forbids murder and reminds Noah's family that all of humanity will be their descendants and therefore they will be not only created 'in God's image' but will be brothers and sisters. Punishment for homicide will be harsh.

- Since these directives were given to Noah, who do they apply to?
- Do they apply only to the Jewish people or to all humanity?
- Do you think it is better to be a vegetarian?
- Why do you think God allowed man to eat meat?

Questions for your Family's Discussion

1. One of Noah's sons reacted badly to his father's inappropriate behavior. This son, Ham was punished because of it and the other sons rewarded for protecting their father. We know how hard it is to behave appropriately when we feel embarrassed by our parents and we sometimes act foolishly to save face. Can you remember a time when this happened? What can we do to avoid these situations?
2. The rabbis thought that it is good to build a name for ourselves. Is there a bad side to building a name for oneself? Is it good or bad to be famous? Is being arrogant part of being famous? What do you think made God angry about the tower of Babel?



Towards an Action Agenda

Saving our world

At the time where we have witnessed so much suffering in the world due to natural disasters such as the Tsunami in Asia, a destructive earthquake in India and Katrina in our own back yard, this week's parasha can serve as an inspiration to look at Noah as the first conservationist. Perhaps God is trying to tell us that we must be more proactive and look for ways to help our planet. Your parents and teachers are good sources of inspiration. To start you may look at these sites:

www.epa.gov/water/kids.html

www.wcs.org

www.coejl.org

Shabbat Shalom

Please join together in learning with other families by sharing your family's discussions and ideas by posting them on our web site. Simply respond with your thoughts and ideas to RavADS@bjeny.org

Around the Shabbat Table is a project of the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York Nassau/Queens Center. If there is any way we can be of service, please contact Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan at the BJE Nassau Queens Center, 516-876-6535, or see our web site:
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