

OHRNET

NOACH, 6 CHESHVAN 5787, OCTOBER 17, 2026

• VOL 34 NO. 2

TORAH WEEKLY

Parashat Noach

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

PARSHA INSIGHTS

All in the Same Boat

"And Hashem said to Noach, 'Come into the ark, you and all your household.'" (Bereishis 7:1)

One of the great achievements of modern civilization is the ability to avoid other people.

We have noise-cancelling headphones so we don't have to hear others; online shopping so we don't have to meet them. Self-service checkouts so we don't have to talk to them.

And, of course, social media so we can have thousands of friends without the inconvenience of actually knowing any of them.

Never have so many people been so connected. Or so alone.

In this week's Torah portion, Hashem commands Noach to build an enormous ark to save himself, his family, and the animal kingdom from the approaching Flood.

For an entire year, Noach and his family lived in what must have been the world's most uncomfortable floating zoo.

Imagine the noise. The smell. The feeding schedules. The elephants wanting breakfast, the lions demanding dinner, and the mosquitoes presumably looking for something between meals.

Not exactly a luxury cruise.

Hashem wanted to save Noach, and surely could have done so without all this inconvenience. A miracle could have protected Noach on a mountaintop. Why imprison him for an entire year with thousands of creatures needing constant attention? Noach and his sons were occupied day and night, says the Midrash, feeding the animals. Each

creature required its food at precisely the right time. When Noah once delayed feeding the lion, the animal struck him.

What kind of salvation was this?

The answer, perhaps, lies in understanding what destroyed the generation of the Flood:

“The earth was filled with chamas — robbery and violence”

The essence of robbery is the belief that the world exists for me. Your possessions, your comfort, your needs are irrelevant when they interfere with what I want.

The generation of the Flood had turned selfishness into a civilization.

The ark was its exact opposite.

For an entire year, Noah could not think about himself. His survival depended on caring for others. From the largest elephant to the smallest insect, every creature had a claim on his attention.

The ark was no mere lifeboat. It was a school.

Hashem was teaching Noah not just how to survive the old world, but how to build a new one.

And that, perhaps, is the greatest irony of our connected age: We've invented a thousand ways to make life more convenient, but the purpose of life was never convenience.

Sometimes the only way to save the world is to feed somebody else's elephant.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

It is now ten generations since the creation of the first man. Adam's descendants have corrupted the world with immorality, idolatry and robbery, and Hashem resolves to bring a flood which will destroy all the earth's inhabitants, except for the righteous Noah, his family and sufficient animals to re-populate the world. Hashem instructs Noah to build an ark in which to escape the flood. After forty days and nights, the flood covers the entire earth, over the tops of the highest mountains. After 150 days the water begins to recede. On the 17th day of the 7th month, this ark comes to rest on Mount Ararat. Noah sends forth a raven and then a dove to ascertain if the waters have abated. The dove returns. A week later, Noah again sends the dove, which returns the same evening with an olive leaf in its beak. Seven days later Noah once again sends the dove, never to return. Hashem tells Noah and family to leave the ark. Noah brings offerings to Hashem from the animals which were carried in the ark for this purpose. Hashem vows never again to flood the entire world, giving the rainbow

as a sign of this covenant.

Noach and his descendants are now permitted to kill animals and eat meat, unlike Adam. Hashem commands the Seven Universal Laws: The prohibitions against idolatry, adultery, murder, theft, blasphemy, and eating the meat of a living animal, plus the obligation to set up a legal system. The world's climate is established as we know it today.

Noach plants a vineyard and becomes intoxicated from its produce. Ham, one of Noach's sons, delights in seeing his father drunk and uncovered. Holding a garment and walking backwards, Shem and Yefet manage to cover their father without looking at his nakedness. For this incident, Shem and Yefet receive blessings, while Canaan, son of Ham, is cursed to be a menial slave. The Torah lists the seventy offspring of Noach's three sons from whom the seventy nations of the world are descended.

A few centuries after the flood, Mankind regroups against Hashem in building the Tower of Babel, resulting in Hashem fragmenting humanity into dozens of languages and the dispersal of the nations throughout the world. The Torah portion concludes with the genealogy from Noach to Avraham.

S P E C I A L S

Taamei Hamitzvos - The Noachide Mitzvos and the Rainbow

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

The generation of the Flood committed several severe sins, including theft, promiscuity, and idolatry, and even the animals engaged in cross-mating between species (*Rashi* to *Bereishis* 6:11-12 and *Sanhedrin* 108a). These acts, which were forbidden to Adam and his descendants, corrupt the natural order and negate the purpose of Creation. Theft negates the concept of private property, promiscuity undermines the concept of marriage, cross-mating blurs the concept of species, and idolatry eliminates the recognition of the Creator. Hashem preserved His world by bringing a Flood that destroyed all but Noach, Noach's immediate family, and animal life that had not been corrupted by cross-mating but rather had clung to their own species.

By flooding the world, Hashem essentially returned it to its state at the beginning of Creation, when water covered the land.

Upon leaving the Ark, Noach and his family were commanded an additional prohibition against eating the limb of a living animal, bringing the number of Noachide Mitzvos to seven (*Rambam, Melachim* ch. 9 and 10:6). Although one's eating habits do not harm society, such a cruel and savage act desensitizes a person entirely, which will

invariably worsen his relationships with people.

Eating the flesh of a living animal is not only savage but animalistic: Carnivorous animals such as lions prefer fresh meat, and meat is freshest when the victim is still alive. Since a human being is a soul combined with an animalistic body, we have inherent animalistic desires, and the Torah commands us to control these. Acting like an animal leads to animalism and the rejection of the Torah.

The Torah terms eating a living animal “eating the soul together with the flesh” (*Devarim* 12:23). Based on this verse, *Radvaz* (*Metzudas David* §189) explains that the Torah prohibits eating a living animal because it is like eating its soul. One must first slaughter the animal in order to separate the soul from the body.

Hashem showed Noach’s family a rainbow and designated it as a sign that never again would He destroy the world. As *Ramban* explains, a rainbow resembles an archer’s bow pointing heavenward. Just as an archer holding a reversed bow, pointing at himself, is a sign of peaceful intentions, a rainbow pointing heavenward is a sign that Hashem has no intention of flooding the world again.

We suggest that the rainbow “facing” Hashem indicates that destroying the world more than once would be dishonorable to Him, because it would seem as though there were something wrong with the world He created, G-d forbid. As an analogy, if a single student fails, it seems that the student is at fault, but if an entire class fails, it is dishonorable to the teacher.

In truth, as Moshe Rabbeinu emphasizes at the beginning of Parashas Haazinu, Hashem’s work is perfect, and it is people alone who are blameworthy.

A rainbow is an expression of Hashem’s glory in nature (*Yechezkel* 1:28). It is forbidden to gaze excessively at a rainbow, because it is a slight to the Creator’s honor (*Chagigah* 16a and *Orach Chaim* 229:1). Hashem showed the sign of the rainbow specifically at the time when He completed the seven Noachide Mitzvos because the two are related: Just as the Noachide Mitzvos ensure the world’s basic function, the sign of the rainbow guarantees the world’s continuity. Thus, the word *bris* (covenant) appears seven times in the passage of the rainbow, corresponding to the seven Noachide Mitzvos (R’ Yitzchak Isaac Chaver in *Afikei Yam*, *Avodah Zarah* 2b). A rainbow is said to have seven colors, which is perhaps a further allusion to this idea. When mankind fulfills its seven basic moral obligations with all their details, the result is a world as beautiful as a rainbow, which reflects the glory of its Creator.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

Birkat Hachama - The Blessing of the Sun (Part 11)

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

"I believe in the sun even when it is not shining."

Written on a cellar wall by an anonymous Jewish inmate in the Cologne Concentration Camp during the Holocaust

Afterword

Birkat HaChama is a truly wondrous moment! As we learned in the first article of this series, "*Birkat HaChama*" is the rarest Brachah in the Jewish cycle. Recited only once every twenty-eight years, it is looked forward to with the most incredible sense of anticipation. The last time it was recited was Erev Pesach 5769 (2009), and the next time will be immediately after Pesach on the 23rd of Nissan 5797 (April 8, 2037)!

I vividly remember the increasing excitement throughout Yerushalayim in 2009 as the day drew closer. With each approaching day, an inescapable feeling grew stronger and stronger that we were all going to be participating in an historic moment.

Just before dawn on that unforgettable Wednesday, it seemed like the entire neighborhood was making its way to the same spot so that we could all recite the Brachah together. I remember thinking that this is what going to the Holy Temple must have felt like, with thousands of people all streaming together with one purpose – to fulfill the Will of Hashem. There was no pushing, no attempting to get ahead of everyone else. There was simply one unified purpose, that together we all fulfill our obligation to recite the Brachah together, "*B'rov am hadrat melech – With a multitude of people is a king's glory*" (*Mishlei* 14:28).

Until today I recall the whole experience with such a feeling of wonder: what an extraordinary "feat", to merit reciting a blessing said just once in twenty-eight years! And each time I remember, I am filled with an enormous longing to be able to experience it again.

A few years afterward, I read a story about Rabbi Moshe Feinstein and *Birkat HaChama* that is a lesson in how seriously we must relate to every single Mitzvah – not just to the rare ones.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986) was the acknowledged authority in Jewish Law of his generation. He was a spiritual titan, revered for his encyclopedic knowledge, his

piety and – perhaps most of all – his gentleness, sincerity and empathy toward anyone in need. Slight in build, he carried the spiritual needs of the Orthodox Jewish world on his broad shoulders; assuredly ruling on every facet of Jewish Law whilst never failing to show incredible warmth and concern for each and every individual who approached him, cloaked in an aura of simplicity and humbleness.

When the day arrived for *Birkat HaChama* people streamed to the Lower East Side of New York to be able to recite the Brachah together with Rabbi Feinstein outside his apartment building. Shortly before the earliest time for reciting *Birkat HaChama*, a father used the opportunity to take his young son to Rabbi Feinstein's apartment so that Rabbi Feinstein could bless him with success in all his spiritual endeavors. Rabbi Feinstein greeted them warmly but then, after a few moments, he seemed to be uncharacteristically distracted about something. Finally, he told the father, "I am sure your son would like to have a candy but I can't remember where the *Rebbetzin* put them."

He started opening and closing kitchen cupboards trying to locate the candy. Meanwhile, the ever-growing crowd waited for Rabbi Feinstein to appear so that they could begin. And yet Rabbi Feinstein kept looking for the all-elusive candy for the child. Despite the enormous significance of reciting *Birkat HaChama*, Rabbi Feinstein was focused on one thing – bringing happiness to a young Jewish child. Finally, he found a candy, gave it to the child, and lovingly blessed him. Only then did he hurry downstairs to fulfill the once-in-twenty-eight-year opportunity to recite *Birkat HaChama*.

What an extraordinary lesson! I am sure that, just like me, everyone would assume that reciting *Birkat HaChama* takes precedence over almost any other Mitzvah; certainly over finding a candy for a little boy! Reciting the rarest Brachah of all at the very first opportunity is something that so many people aspire to. For Rabbi Feinstein, however, the Mitzvah of "*V'ahavta l'reaicha kamocha – Love your fellow as yourself*" (*Vayikra* 19:18) was equally important. As far as Rabbi Feinstein was concerned, every Mitzvah needs to be approached with the utmost seriousness and performed with enthusiasm and joy, not just the mitzvahs that occur rarely. Because that is what Hashem's desires from us.

May it be Hashem's Will that we all merit to partake in the sublime Mitzvah of *Birkat HaChama* in 2037 in good health and, in the meantime, that we all merit to perform each one of Hashem's Mitzvot with zest and joy!

PARSHA Q&A

Parashat Noach

Questions

1. Which particular sin sealed the fate of the flood generation?
2. Why did Hashem tell Noach to build an ark, as opposed to saving him via some other method?
3. The ark had three levels. What function did each level serve?
4. What indication do we have that Noach was familiar with the Torah?
5. Why did Hashem postpone bringing the flood for seven days?
6. Why did the first water of the flood come down as light rain?
7. What did people say that threatened Noach, and what did Hashem do to protect him?
8. What grouping of creatures escaped the punishment of the flood?
9. How deeply was the ark submerged in the water?
10. What did the olive branch symbolize?
11. How long did the punishment of the flood last?
12. A solar year is how many days longer than a lunar year?
13. When did humans receive permission to eat meat?
14. What prohibition was given along with the permission to eat meat?
15. Why does the command to “be fruitful and multiply” directly follow the prohibition of murder?
16. Name two generations in which the rainbow never appeared
17. Why did Noach curse Canaan specifically? Give two reasons.
18. Why does the Torah call Nimrod a mighty hunter?
19. The sin of the generation of the dispersion was greater than the sin of the generation of the flood. Why was the punishment of the former less severe?
20. Why was Sarah also called Yiscah?

Answers

1. Which particular sin sealed the fate of the flood generation?
6:13 - Robbery.

2. Why did Hashem tell Noach to build an ark, as opposed to saving him via some other method?

6:14 - So that people would see Noach building the ark and ask him what he was doing. When Noach would answer, "Hashem is bringing a flood," it might encourage some people to repent.

3. The ark had three levels. What function did each level serve?

6:16 - The top level housed the people, the middle level housed the animals, and the bottom level, the refuse.

4. What indication do we have that Noach was familiar with the Torah?

7:2 - Hashem told him to take into the ark seven of each kosher-type animal, and two of each non-kosher type. "Kosher" and "non-kosher" are Torah concepts.

5. Why did Hashem postpone bringing the flood for seven days?

7:4 - To allow seven days to mourn the death of Metushelach.

6. Why did the first water of the flood come down as light rain?

7:12 - To give the generation a chance to repent.

7. What did people say that threatened Noach, and what did Hashem do to protect him?

7:13,15 - People said, "If we see him going into the ark, we'll smash it!" Hashem surrounded it with bears and lions to kill any attackers.

8. What grouping of creatures escaped the punishment of the flood?

7:22 - The fish.

9. How deeply was the ark submerged in the water?

8:4 - Eleven amot.

10. What did the olive branch symbolize?

8:11 - Nothing. It was a leaf, not a branch. (The olive leaf symbolized that it is better to eat food "bitter like an olive" but which comes directly from Hashem, rather than sweet food provided by humans.)

11. How long did the punishment of the flood last?

8:14 - A full solar year.

12. A solar year is how many days longer than a lunar year?

8:14 - Eleven days.

13. When did humans receive permission to eat meat?

9:3 - After the flood.

14.What prohibition was given along with the permission to eat meat?

9:4 - The prohibition of eating a limb cut from a living animal.

15.Why does the command to “be fruitful and multiply” directly follow the prohibition of murder?

9:7 - To equate one who purposely abstains from having children to one who commits murder.

16.Name two generations in which the rainbow never appeared

9:12 - The generation of King Chizkiyahu and the generation of Shimon bar Yochai.

17.Why did Noach curse Canaan specifically? Give two reasons.

9:22,24 - Because Canaan is the one who revealed Noach’s disgrace to Cham. And because Cham stopped Noach from fathering a fourth son. Thus, Noach cursed Cham's fourth son, Canaan.

18.Why does the Torah call Nimrod a mighty hunter?

10:9 - He used words to ensnare the minds of people, persuading them to rebel against Hashem.

19.The sin of the generation of the dispersion was greater than the sin of the generation of the flood. Why was the punishment of the former less severe?

11:9 - They lived together peacefully.

20.Why was Sarah also called Yiscah?

11:29 - The word “Yiscah” is related to the Hebrew word “to see.” Sarah was called Yiscah because she could see the future via prophecy. Also, because of her beauty, everyone would gaze at her.

BONUS QUESTION:

Which two people in Parashas Noach have the same name?

Send your answer to the Bonus Question to Webmaster@ohr.edu

Ohrnet Magazine is a weekly Torah magazine published by Ohr Somayach Institutions, POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel +972-2-581-0315 • Email: webmaster@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

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