



LOUGHTON SHUL
MORE THAN A

INSPIRE

NOACH 6TH CHESHVAN -24 OCTOBER

MY KIND OF HERO



The world loves a hero. Every season, Hollywood has to invent new heroes and superheroes to fill the box office coffers. And it works. Why? Well, that's for another sermon. Today, I choose to talk about Who is a Hero and, more specifically, Who is My Kind of Hero.

Superheroes are fantastic. But you've got to admit, they're over the top, rather otherworldly and, realistically speaking, beyond our reach. We can fantasize about flying through the skies in our capes, climbing skyscrapers with our webs and rescuing damsels in distress, but at the end of the day, it is nothing more than wistful daydreaming. What bearing does it have on me and my life, me and my problems? The answer is, not much.

That's why Noah always appealed to me. He comes across as a real live hero, real in the sense of being human rather than superhuman and, therefore, realistically possible to emulate.

Rashi describes Noah as a man of "small faith" who had doubts whether the flood would actually happen. In fact, according to the great commentator's understanding, he didn't enter the Ark until the rains actually started and the floodwaters pushed him in. That explains why many people look down on Noah, especially when they compare him to other Biblical superheroes, people of the stature of Abraham or Moses.

Personally, this is precisely what makes Noah my kind of hero. He's real. He's human. He has doubts, just like you and me. I know we are supposed to say, "When will my actions match those of the great patriarchs of old?" but I confess, for me that's a tall order. Noah, on the other hand, is a regular guy. He is plagued by doubts and struggles with his faith. But at the end of the day, Noah does the job. He builds the ark, shleps in all the animals, saves civilization and goes on to rebuild a shattered world. Doubts, shmouts, he did what had to be done.

There is an old Yiddish proverb, Fun a kasha shtarbt men nit--"Nobody ever died of a question." It's not the end of the world if you didn't get an answer to all your questions. We can live with unanswered questions. The main thing is not to allow ourselves to become paralyzed by our doubts. We can still do what has to be done, despite our doubts.

Of course, I'd love to be able to answer every question every single one of my congregants ever has. But the chances are that I will not be able to solve every single person's doubts and dilemmas. And, frankly speaking, I am less concerned about their doubts than about their deeds. From a question nobody ever died. It's how we behave that matters most.

So Noah, the reluctant hero, reminds us that you don't have to be fearless to get involved. You don't have to be a tzaddik to do a mitzvah. You don't have to be holy to keep kosher, nor do you have to be a professor to come to a Torah class.

Perhaps his faith was a bit wobbly in the knees, but he got the job done. My kind of hero.

**Question:**

I am puzzled by the story of Noah and the Great Flood. Civilization was utterly corrupt, and G-d was greatly disappointed, to the extent that He wanted to destroy everything and start again with only Noah and his family. But is the world any better now than it was pre-Flood? Just look at the news!

Answer:

I will take your question a bit further. The Torah clearly states the cause for the corruption of the society at the time of the Flood: "Every imagination of his [humanity's] heart was only evil all the time."¹

G-d created human beings with an evil inclination, which gives us a selfish and self-serving perspective on life. The corruption of society is the expected outcome of this reality, a function of our very natures. And yet, although most of humanity was annihilated during the Flood, we retained a self-serving attitude that has led to further corruption. And so why, after the Flood, did G-d promise to never again bring such destruction upon the world? Given human nature, did He really trust that we would not deserve it again?

Our answer can be found in the rainbow, the symbol of G-d's covenant with humanity in the aftermath of the flood. As Noah emerged from the ark into a desolate world, he was plagued by doubt. "Am I to replenish the world's population only to have it obliterated yet again due to its perverse behavior?"

To allay Noah's fears, G-d showed him the first rainbow in history—the beautiful spectrum of colors refracted from the sunlight in the water droplets of the storm clouds. The rainbow's message was clear: The previous generation was so soiled with sin, it was incapable of reflecting even a vestige of divinity. The purifying waters of the Great Flood had refined our reality—physically and spiritually—to the point that, no matter the intensity of humanity's corruption going forward, there would always be redeeming factors.

From beneath the layers of negative media coverage, tales of selflessness and devotion emerge. It is for these reflections of divinity that G-d committed to preserve the world.

Rainbows are quite rare, but they define the sky following a storm. Let's work on creating more rainbows in our stormy world.

PARSHA SUMMARY

G-d instructs Noah—the only righteous man in a world consumed by violence and corruption—to build a large wooden teivah (“ark”), coated within and without with pitch. A great deluge, says G-d, will wipe out all life from the face of the earth; but the ark will float upon the water, sheltering Noah and his family, and two members (male and female) of each animal species. Rain falls for 40 days and nights, and the waters churn for 150 days more before calming and beginning to recede. The ark settles on Mount Ararat, and from its window Noah dispatches a raven, and then a series of doves, “to see if the waters were abated from the face of the earth.” When the ground dries completely—exactly one solar year (365 days) after the onset of the Flood—G-d commands Noah to exit the teivah and repopulate the earth. Noah builds an altar and offers sacrifices to G-d. G-d swears never again to destroy all of mankind because of their deeds, and sets the rainbow as a testimony of His new covenant with man. G-d also commands Noah regarding the sacredness of life: murder is deemed a capital offense, and while man is permitted to eat the meat of animals, he is forbidden to eat flesh or blood taken from a living animal. Noah plants a vineyard and becomes drunk on its produce. Two of Noah’s sons, Shem and Japheth, are blessed for covering up their father’s nakedness, while his third son, Ham, is punished for taking advantage of his debasement. The descendants of Noah remain a single people, with a single language and culture, for ten generations. Then they defy their Creator by building a great tower to symbolize their own invincibility; G-d confuses their language so that “one does not comprehend the tongue of the other,” causing them to abandon their project and disperse across the face of the earth, splitting into seventy nations. The Parshah of Noach concludes with a chronology of the ten generations from Noah to Abram (later Abraham), and the latter’s journey from his birthplace of Ur Casdim to Charan, on the way to the land of Canaan.

HAFTORAH SUMMARY

Isaiah 54:1-10. Forsaken Jerusalem is likened to a barren woman devoid of children. G-d enjoins her to rejoice, for the time will soon come when the Jewish nation will return and proliferate, repopulating Israel's once desolate cities. The prophet assures the Jewish people that G-d has not forsaken them. Although He has momentarily hid His countenance from them, He will gather them from their exiles with great mercy. The haftorah compares the final Redemption to the pact G-d made with Noah in this week's Torah reading. Just as G-d promised to never bring a flood over the entire earth, so too He will never again be angry at the Jewish people. "For the mountains may move and the hills might collapse, but My kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of My peace collapse."

WISHING ALL THOSE WITH YARTZEIT THIS WEEK CHAIM ARUCHIM

Michaels Marilyn Father Yisrael ben Yisrael 6 Cheshvan

Cohen Lois Father Yissachar ben Zev Ha'Cohen 7 Cheshvan

Wiseman Clive Brother Baruch Yaacov Shlomo ben Yeshaya Meir 8 Cheshvan

Ward Madalyn Mother Faigal Raisal bas Yehuda H'Levi 10 Cheshvan

Tancer Janice Father 11 Cheshvan

Posner Karen Mother Yiska bas Chaim 12 Cheshvan

JEWISH HUMOUR

Little Rivki Shulman had misbehaved so much all week that her mother decided to give her the worst kind of punishment: she told her she couldn't go to the shul picnic on Sunday. When the day came, Rivki's mother felt like she had been a little too harsh and changed her mind. When she told Rivki she could go to the picnic, Rivki's reaction was not what she had expected. She was all doom and gloom. "What's the matter?" Rivki's mother asked. "I thought you'd be glad to go to the picnic." "It's too late!" Rivki said. "I already davened for rain."

RIDDLE OF THE WEEK

I am black when you buy me, red when you use me. When I turn white, you know it's time to throw me away. What am I?

Answer by Harvey Berg
D is nephew or niece of A.

STORY TIME

Rabbi Chanina bar Chama was one of the first generation of great Talmudic Sages who followed the redaction of the Mishna by Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi [Rabbi Judah the Prince]. By the time he came from his native Babylonia, to study under Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi, Rabbi Chanina was already a very accomplished scholar and was received with great warmth and friendship. He developed strong ties with his teacher and many of his fellow disciples, particularly with Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi. During those turbulent and dangerous times, it was often necessary to send Jewish dignitaries to plead with the Roman government on behalf of the Jewish people. Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Chanina were often chosen to appear before the Roman emperor. When one of the emperor's advisors asked him why he would rise in honor of these Jews, he replied, "They have the appearance of angels." Rabbi Yehuda passed away and was succeeded by his son, Rabban Gamliel, who, according to his father's instructions, seated Rabbi Chanina in the place of greatest honor at the academy. However, Rabbi Chanina's tremendous modesty prevented him from taking that place. Only when the elderly sage, Rabbi Efes passed away did Rabbi Chanina occupy it. According to the teaching of our Sages that we should not make the Torah "an ax with which to dig," Rabbi Chanina went into business dealing in honey. When he succeeded, he opened and supported a Torah academy in his town of Tzippori. He never ceased trying to bring the people closer to G-d and would often reprimand them; this, of course, caused some resentment. Once, there was a severe drought in the northern part of Israel where Tzippori was situated. At the same time, in the southern part, where Rabbi Yehoshua lived, ample rain fell as soon as Rabbi Yehoshua prayed. The people of Tzippori complained, saying that the drought continued only because Rabbi Chanina didn't pray for them enough. In response, Rabbi Chanina sent for Rabbi Yehoshua. When he arrived, a public fast was declared and prayers were said for rain. When no rain fell, the people finally understood that the fault was not Rabbi Chanina's, but their own, and they resolved to correct their behavior. Rabbi Chanina was known as a gifted healer who was well-versed in the use of various kinds of herbs and also the antidotes to snake poisons. He frequently advised people to be careful not to catch colds and to take care of themselves and not neglect treating any disorder. His Torah teachings and the example of his mitzva observance had a profound influence on his generation. He observed the Sabbath in a manner which showed his love and devotion to the mitzva and when the Shabbat departed he marked it with a Melave Malka - a feast for the departing out the Sabbath Queen. Once, Rabbi Yonatan came to visit Rabbi Chanina. They went for a walk in Rabbi Chanina's garden. Beautiful fruit trees and lovely flowers grew in the garden, and ripe figs could be seen among the large leaves of the fig tree. The two wise men walked around slowly, discussing the teachings of the Torah. When Rabbi Yonatan grew tired, Rabbi Chanina told him to sit and rest in the shade, while he went to pick some ripe, sweet figs to refresh his guest. Later, when Rabbi Yonatan was ready to leave, Rabbi Chanina escorted him to the gate. But on the way, Rabbi Chanina saw a fig tree which was different from the other fig trees. This tree was more beautiful, and its fruit was larger and of a lighter color than ordinary figs. Rabbi Yonatan was surprised. He asked his host, "I know that you treated me generously and gave me your figs willingly, and I'm sure there is a good reason why you didn't offer me any of these figs, even though they are better than the others. Can you tell me what your reason is? I would like to learn from your deeds." Rabbi Chanina answered, "This is not my tree. It belongs to my son. I'm sure he would have been happy to give you some of his figs, but since he is not home, I could not ask him. Therefore I was not permitted to take fruit from his tree." From here Rabbi Yonatan learned how careful Rabbi Chanina was. Even in something as seemingly small as picking a few ripe figs from a tree that belonged to his own son, he was careful not to take something which did not belong to him. Although he lived through very difficult and trying times, he accepted all his suffering - losing a son and a daughter - with love of G-d and an abiding faith. He lived a long life and even when he was very old he was unusually fit. It is said that at the age of 80, he was able to put on his shoes while standing on one foot. When asked to what he ascribed his good health, he replied that he was always careful to show respect to Torah scholars as well as for the elderly. Before Rabbi Chanina passed away, Rabbi Yochanan, his disciple, (who compiled the Jerusalem Talmud) went to visit him. On the way, word reached him that his master had died and he tore his clothes in mourning. Rabbi Chanina was so loved and respected among the Jews of his time that he was given the honorary title, "Rabbi Chanina the Great."

FOOD 4 THE SOUL

Our world is a world where a rainbow could be. At first, there was a world that only received and returned no dividends. Its inhabitants took no ownership. They lived with their Creator's benevolence, they did what they did with no need for excuses, and eventually died as they died. And that was it. With the Flood, this world was recreated. The earth was cleansed, the atmosphere purified. It became a world that could take the sunshine that poured in from above and refract it into many colors. It became a world where a created being could be born, take the soul, body, share of the world and all the sustenance its Maker gave to it, use that, do something with that - and then return it, saying, "See what I have done with that which You gave me!" And so, G-d vowed to never destroy the world again. For, if the inhabitants would go wrong, they might always turn around and clean up their own mess.