

A Weekly Byte... from Isralight

(Noach)

Small Tastings of Torah, Judaism and Spirituality

From Rav Binny

Has the world gone mad?

The Yazzidi people fleeing into the cold cruel mountains of Iraq to avoid massacre; hundreds of thousands of Kurds running across the borders into Turkey and Jordan to escape beheadings and mass rape in Syria; and hundreds of thousands of people on the move to stay one step ahead of the Islamist fundamentalists in Southern Sudan and the Nuba mountains all while Iran moves ever closer to joining North Korea in its quest for Nuclear weapons of mass destruction.

And where are the forces of good while all this mayhem is taking place? What is the West's response to the violence and terror in Syria, Iraq and Iran, Lebanon and Gaza, the Sudan and the Ukraine, Darfur and North Korea? All of Rome is fiddling, while the world burns. How can this be?

Where is America, the supposed leader of the free world for the past 75 years, the same country that fought Nazism all the way to Berlin, and brought the cruelty of Communism to a halt in Korea, and Russia? Where is Great Britain, whose forces fought the armies of tyranny to a standstill at the Somme in WWI, and whose Royal Air force , greatly outnumbered, fought off the might of the German Luftwaffe over the skies of Europe in WWII?

While tens of thousands die every month, and millions lie awake in fear for their futures, the British parliament is busy affirming a Palestinian State, the United nations establishes committee after dysfunctional committee, and the United States dialogues with Congress as to the merits of bombing a despotic government using chemical weapons against its own citizens, all the while afraid to get 'boots on the ground' and in continued meetings and discussions with Iran....

How could a United States presidency that began with so much hope have fallen so far?

This week's portion, the story of **Noach**, presents a fascinating insight on this topic.

Noach is the only individual ever described as a "*Tzaddik*", a righteous person, in the entire Torah ; he is the only person in the entire world deemed worthy of saving the world , and he is picked exclusively by G-d to build an ark that will allow humanity to survive.

And yet, there are two details that the Rabbis note, which suggest that while he is righteous, Noach is also righteously flawed.

First, from the moment Noach is told the world will be destroyed and commanded to build the ark, until he actually gets into the Ark, (a period of 120 years), Noach **does not utter a single word**; not one . When Avraham is presented with G-d by the decision to destroy those who dwell in the plains of Sodom and Gomorrah, he argues with G-d (Genesis 18) , beseeching Him to spare even the wicked people of Sodom. But not Noach; Noach says nothing.

And second, G-d has to **order** Noach to get into the Ark (See *Bereishit* (Genesis 7:1) even though it appears the rain has already begun to fall. And, even more incredibly, (Genesis 8:15) G-d has to order him to get out! Even after the Dove Noach sends out does not return (indicating it has found a place to land...); even when Noach has removed the Ark's cover (8:13) and **seen** dry land, still, he waits for G-d's command to actually step out on dry land! One would think a person cooped up in an Ark full of animals for a year would not be able to wait to set foot on dry land, and yet, Noach waits....

Indeed, this seems to be who Noach is: he never once speaks, throughout the entire story, until he finally curses his son for improper behavior. Perhaps a **Tzaddik** is a person in whom can be found no fault; no mistake; no moment of weakness leading him astray as he falls victim to the temptations of the physical world. And in truth, the only way to stay pure and pristine and righteous, is to avoid that world altogether. Thus, there is no mention of Noach having any interaction whatsoever with the wicked world in which he finds himself. Noach is a pure man of faith, retreating into the harmony of G-d's word, and away from any interaction with the evil and physical world in which he lives.

And perhaps Noach is such a man of faith, and has risen so far above the needs of a physical world, that he can stay in an Ark indefinitely, until G-d's word bids him come forth. He is a man of faith who dreams of a perfect world.

And yet, something goes terribly wrong, because almost immediately upon re-entering the world, he finds himself unable to deal with its physical reality, instead becoming drunk and eventually lying naked in his tent, perhaps even allowing himself into some sort of unwitting incestuous relationship with his own son. (Perhaps Noach himself has become the same product of S'dom Lot became when sleeping with his daughters after their escape from the evil of Sodom and Gomorrah? (See Genesis 19: 29-38) How did the tsaddik who could have saved the old world fall so low as to become the new world's embarrassment and greatest failure?

One wonders if that is the point of the entire story: Judaism does not believe we should be escaping the evil in the world; we are meant to confront it.

Abraham becomes the first Jew because he refuses to accept the destruction of a world, even a world as evil as S'dom. And Noach becomes a missed opportunity precisely because he is waiting for G-d to tell him what to do. We are not meant to wait for G-d, or G-d's miracles; we are meant to try and make them happen on our own.

Seventy years ago, in the shadows of Buchenwald, Auschwitz and Treblinka a small group of survivors finally got fed up waiting for G-d to bring us home and left Europe to build that home on their own. And in so doing, discovered that all this time we were waiting for G-d, G-d was really waiting for us.

While Franklin Roosevelt created the New Deal to rebuild America's economy, six million Jews were murdered. While Richard Nixon visited China, two million were murdered by the Khmer Rouge and while Bill Clinton sat in meetings, and attended briefings, 500,000 Rwandans died. Will the world ride it out in the Ark yet again? This week's portion contains a sobering message of what that might mean.

May we be privileged to recognize evil in the world, and find the courage to confront it.
And may we be blessed to experience the goodness in this world and find the fortitude to stand by it.

Shabbat Shalom,
Binny Freedman from Jerusalem