



Noach – Leaving the Ark

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

*And God spoke to Noah saying: "Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons, and your sons' wives with you."
(Bereishis 8:15-16)*

The flood waters receded, the land had dried, and it was time for Noah to begin his sacred task of rebuilding. God tells Noah, "*Tzei min ha'teyva* -Go out (leave) the ark." The commentaries point out that "*Tzei*" is a command. God commands Noah to leave the ark, almost as if to tell us that Noah was reticent and unsure about leaving. But how could this be? After having spent all of this time cooped up with animals of all types and stripes, I would have imagined Noah throwing open the door and getting out of the ark as quickly as possible. Yet, the commentaries sense a pause in his reaction. Noah isn't ready to leave; he does not yet want to disembark. Therefore, God must order him off the ark. How are we to understand Noah's behavior? Was it fear of change? Perhaps Noah had grown accustomed to his new life and was unwilling to start all over again. Or was it something else?

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810) provides an incredible insight. The *Teyva* (ark) was a spiritual cocoon. Noah packed up whatever provisions he could fit but had to place his complete faith in God. The Torah goes through an incredible amount of detail when discussing the construction of the ark. Yet, there seems to be one important feature missing – there is no rudder, there are no oars. There is no way to steer the ark. This was by design. The ark was not to be steered by man; it was to be directionally oriented by God. The ark was a microcosm of what the world was supposed to be, man and animal placing their collective faith in the Master of the Universe. The ark gave Noah the opportunity to work on his relationship with God and his fellow man and to focus on his spiritual growth and self-actualization. But then the flood ends, the waters subside, and it is time to leave the confines of the ark. And Noah doesn't want to. "*Why should I leave this little perfect world? God is my skipper, I have everything I need and that which I lack God will provide.*" To which God responds, "*Get out! I don't want you to live in the ark. The cocoon, the spiritual womb in which you spent the last number of days was an accommodation, not an aspiration. I don't want you to live life in an ark, I want you to go out and build a new world.*"

Thus, explains the Rebbe was the tension between Noah and God. Noah wants to live in the spiritual utopia of the ark and God wants him to get into the earthly mud and build.

The Rebbe continues and explains that we face this same tension. We often think that holiness can only be found by retreating into the ark. It is true that we must bolster ourselves with the strength of *teffilah* and *chesed* from our Shuls, *Torah* learning from our *Batei Midrash* (study halls) and *kedusha* (holiness) from our homes. Our job is not to live in the ark, but to go out, build and repair the world. We take all we have received from our spiritual cocoons and we bring it to bear in the world around us. When we see something or someone who is broken, we take our ark holiness and we try to fix the situation. The *Ribbono Shel Olam* (Master of the Universe) wants us to make a difference in His world. He invites us to partner with Him and in building and fixing creation. We must fight the urge to remain in the ark.

Noah ultimately leaves the ark and plants a vineyard. Rashi quotes the Midrash which finds fault in Noah's decision. He should have planted something more life-sustaining and necessary in his first act of working the soil. Perhaps, Noah was accepting the message of God. Wine is used in all stages of life. A cup of wine is used at a *bris milah* (circumcision) and in the times of the Talmud, a large glass of wine was given to mourners immediately following the burial (*kos shel tanchumin*). Wine is used on *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*. Wine is used to celebrate the creation of a new home as we recite the *berachos* of marriage under the *chuppah*. Noah planted the one thing we use all of the time, in happiness and sadness, during life and death. Perhaps, Noah was saying, "*My beloved Creator, I now understand. I have left the ark and will remain committed to building your world during times of joy and sorrow in my youth and as I age.*"

May we appreciate our ark moments of inspiration and may we find the strength to use them in building our world and ourselves.