

Kol Rina  
*An Independent Minyan*  
Parashat Noach  
October 29, 2022 \*\*\* 4 Cheshvan, 5783

Noach in a Nutshell

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/3155/jewish/Noach-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3155/jewish/Noach-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

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 (and 7 of the "pure" 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 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.

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Isaiah 54:1-10.

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/578168/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/578168/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

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." *(Please note that this is a synopsis of the Haftarah read by the Chabad. Other communities may read more – including ours)*

### Food For Thought

#### The Courage to Live with Uncertainty by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/noach/the-courage-to-live-with-uncertainty/>

For each of us there are milestones on our spiritual journey that change the direction of our life and set us on a new path. For me one such moment came when I was a rabbinical student at Jews' College and thus had the privilege of studying with one of the great rabbinic scholars of our time, Rabbi Dr. Nachum Rabinovitch, zt"l.

He was a giant: one the most profound Maimonidean scholars of the modern age, equally at home with virtually every secular discipline as with the entire rabbinic literature, and one of the boldest and most independent of poskim, as his several published volumes of Responsa show. He also showed what it was to have spiritual and intellectual courage, and that in our time has proved, sadly, all too rare.

The occasion was not special. He was merely giving us one of his regular divrei Torah. The week was parshat Noach. But the Midrash he quoted to us was extraordinary. In fact, it is quite hard to find. It appears in the book known as Buber's Tanchuma, published in 1885 by Martin Buber's grandfather Shlomo from ancient manuscripts. It is a very early text – some say as early as the fifth century – and it has some overlap with an ancient Midrash of which we no longer have the full text known as Midrash Yelamdenu.

The text is in two parts, and it is a commentary on God's words to Noah: 'Then God said to Noah, "Come out of the Ark"' (Gen. 8:16). On this the Midrash says: Noah said to himself, "Since I only entered the Ark with permission (from God), shall I leave without permission?" The Holy One blessed be He said, to him: "Are you looking for permission? In that case I give you permission." Then God said to Noah, "Come out of the Ark."

The Midrash then adds:

Said Rabbi Judah bar Ilai, “If I had been there, I would have smashed down [the doors of] the Ark and taken myself out of it.”[1]

The moral Rabbi Rabinovitch drew – indeed the only one possible – was that when it comes to rebuilding a shattered world, you do not wait for permission. God gives us permission. He expects us to go on ahead.

This was, of course, part of an ancient tradition, mentioned by Rashi in his commentary (to Gen. 6:9), and central to the Sages’ understanding of why God began the Jewish people not with Noah but with Abraham. Noah, says the Torah, “walked with God” (6:9). But God said to Abraham, “Walk on ahead of Me” (Gen. 17:1). So the point was not new, but the drama and power of the Midrash were stunning.

Suddenly I understood that this is a significant part of what faith is in Judaism: to have the courage to pioneer, to do something new, to take the road less travelled, to venture out into the unknown. That is what Abraham and Sarah had done when they left their land, their home and their father’s house. It is what the Israelites did in the days of Moses when they journeyed forth into the wilderness, guided only by a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night.

Faith is precisely the courage to take a risk, knowing that “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me” (Ps. 23:4). It took faith to challenge the religions of the ancient world, especially when they were embodied in the greatest empires of their time. It took faith to stay Jewish in the Hellenistic age, when Jews and Judaism must have seemed small and parochial when set against the cosmopolitan culture of Ancient Greece and the Alexandrian Empire.

It took the faith of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Gamla to build, as early as the first century, the world’s first ever system of universal, compulsory education (Baba Batra 21a), and the faith of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai to realise that Judaism could survive the loss of independence, land and Temple, on the basis of an academy of scholars and a culture of scholarship.

In the modern age, even though many of Jewry’s most distinguished minds either lost or abandoned their faith, nonetheless that ancient reflex survived. How else are we to understand the phenomenon that a tiny minority in Europe and the United States was able to produce so many shapers of the modern mind, each of them a pioneer in his or her own way: Einstein in physics, Durkheim in sociology, Levi-Strauss in anthropology, Mahler and Schoenberg in music, and a whole string of innovative economists from David Ricardo (the law of comparative advantage) to John von Neumann (Game Theory) to Milton Friedman (monetary theory), to Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (behavioural economics).

They dominated the fields of psychiatry, psychotherapy, and psychoanalysis, from Freud and his circle to Viktor Frankl (Logotherapy), Aaron T. Beck (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) and Martin Seligman (Positive Psychology). The pioneers of

Hollywood and film were almost all Jewish. Even in popular music the achievement is stunning, from Irving Berlin and George Gershwin, masters of the American musical, to Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen, the two supreme poets of popular music in the twentieth century.

In many cases – such is the fate of innovators – the people concerned had to face a barrage of criticism, disdain, opposition, or disregard. You have to be prepared to be lonely, at best misunderstood, at worst vilified and defamed. As Einstein said, “If my theory of relativity is proven successful, Germany will claim me as a German and France will declare me a citizen of the world. Should my theory prove untrue, France will say that I am a German, and Germany will declare that I am a Jew.” To be a pioneer – as Jews know from our history – you have to be prepared to spend a long time in the wilderness.

That was the faith of the early Zionists. They knew early on, some from the 1860s, others after the pogroms of the 1880s, Herzl after the Dreyfus trial, that European Enlightenment and Emancipation had failed, that despite its immense scientific and political achievements, mainland Europe still had no place for the Jews. Some Zionists were religious, others were secular, but most importantly they all knew what the Midrash Tanchuma made so clear: when it comes to rebuilding a shattered world or a broken dream, you don't wait for permission from Heaven. Heaven is telling you to go ahead.

That is not *carte blanche* to do whatever we like. Not all innovation is constructive. Some can be very destructive indeed. But this principle of “Walk on ahead”, the idea that the Creator wants us, His greatest creation, to be creative, is what makes Judaism unique in the high value it places on the human person and the human condition.

Faith is the courage to take a risk for the sake of God or the Jewish people; to begin a journey to a distant destination knowing that there will be hazards along the way, but knowing also that God is with us, giving us strength if we align our will with His. Faith is not certainty, but the courage to live with uncertainty. [1] *The Midrash seems to be based on the fact that this is the first verse in the Torah where the verb d-b-r (to speak) is used. The root a-m-r (to say) has a similar meaning but there is a slight difference between them. D-b-r usually implies speaking harshly, judgmentally. See also Ibn Ezra ad loc., who senses from the text that Noah was reluctant to leave the Ark.*

Closing the Doors of Our Ark to Immigrants by Rabbi Megan GoldMarche  
<https://truah.org/resources/parshat-noach-megan-goldmarche-moraltorah/>

“Noah was a righteous man; he was blameless in his age; Noah walked with God.”  
— [Genesis 6:9](#)

Every time I read this line, I think: No matter how awful his neighbors were by comparison, there is no way Noah was completely righteous or unblemished. Here is a guy who learned that the world was ending, and he didn't try to save

anyone other than himself and his family (and a lot of animals). Yes, he was following God's orders, but if he was the cream of the crop, then shouldn't he at least have invited a few other families into the ark? Or warned his neighbors and encouraged them to build their own arks?

I do my best to be sympathetic to Noah. He lived in a time of lawlessness. Who knows what awful events may have defined his youth? Perhaps he was terrified for his children. Perhaps he and his wife buried countless children before they ended up with three adult sons. Perhaps he was so terrified of the world that when God gave him explicit instructions for survival all he could do was follow.

I can imagine a situation where Noah's gut instinct was to just follow God, but I cannot fathom how he just sat there as the rain started to fall and didn't do anything to try to save anyone.

I often try to bring this same sympathy to folks I do not understand politically. Folks who have been told their whole life that immigrants are to blame for their family's poverty. People who were raised on fear and hate. And yet, no matter how much I try to sympathize, I know using this fear as an excuse for policy is wrong. Just as I know that, no matter how much I can almost buy that Noah could be righteous for his generation, there is no way he walked with God — at least not my God.

Because my God is not the God of this parshah. My God doesn't wipe out humanity because we are a hot mess. And I have to hope that if I was in Noah's shoes, I would have spoken up. But I was not around then, and I am here now, so now is my chance to walk with the God I want to see in the world, the God of [Psalm 146](#) who guards the "*ger*" (immigrant), sustains the orphan and the widow, and blocks the path of the wicked. This is my God, and no matter how much fear surrounds us, we as Jewish leaders need to stand with those who most need God's protection and say we will make more room in the ark.

To get a bit more specific, let's look at a current anti-asylum policy in the U.S. called Title 42. Title 42 was invoked by the Trump administration in 2020 to ban migrants and asylum seekers under the guise of "protecting public health." Title 42 — this opaquely titled policy — is a public health statute originally meant to prohibit migrants from entering the country if it is determined that doing so could prevent the spread of contagious diseases.

In March 2020, perhaps one could have sympathy for the desire to invoke such a policy, even if it would have been immoral and unjust, but today there is no evidence that this policy is protecting anyone in the U.S. from COVID-19, and there are mountains of evidence showing the brutal, inhumane effects of blocking access to asylum in our country. Today it is our duty to repeal Title 42 completely. Seeking asylum is a protected, fundamental human right. With Title 42 in place, the U.S. has closed the doors to our ark completely as the waters rise. President Biden, who previously expressed support for asylum seekers and for repealing Title 42, has faltered, [expanding the enforcement of Title 42](#) to placate an anti-

asylum voting bloc. It's up to us to remind him, and all elected officials, of the righteous path.

We are allowed to feel compassion for Noah, even perhaps to see him as without blemish, but we are his descendants, given the task of walking with God today, and if you want to be righteous in 5783 you cannot just look for easy answers. **Join T'ruah in telling your elected officials that Title 42 is unjust and must be repealed.**

*(Rabbi Megan GoldMarche is the Executive Director of Tribe 12, an organization that builds Jewish community for folks in their 20s and 30s in the Philadelphia area. She is a member of the T'ruah immigration working group and was ordained at JTS in 2014.)*

[After the Flood by Alisa Braun](https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/after-the-flood/)

<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/after-the-flood/>

As I write this, catastrophic flash floods are overwhelming regions of Nigeria and Australia. Closer to home, residents of Puerto Rico and Florida's Gulf Coast continue to recover from destructive hurricanes, while in Pakistan the 30 million displaced by floods earlier this year face significant food and medicine shortages. While not all extreme weather events can be attributed to human-driven climate change, scientists understand that the extremes of heat and rainfall which have become commonplace are caused by a warming planet and having devastating effects: creating climate refugees and putting lives at risk, particularly affecting children, the elderly, and communities of color.

Human beings have changed the Earth in such profound and dramatic ways that some geologists say we have entered a new epoch—the Anthropocene. While debate exists on when this new era began, there is strong support for the theory that the catalyst was industrialization and the introduction of a fossil-fuel economy in the eighteenth century. The ability of human activity to cause major geological and ecological change is, in this sense, uniquely modern.

Today it's common to find divrei torah that use Parashat Noah to raise awareness about our impact on the environment. Yet I recently discovered a voice from the first stirrings of modernity that seemed to already intuit, within a theological framework, the devastating impact of humans on the global environment. For Obadiah Sforno (1475–1550), the “lawlessness” during the days of Noah did not just cause God to flood to earth. It was a force capable of ruining the climate and planet, and thereby shaping the course of human history ever after.

It is perhaps no surprise that the Italian biblical commentator was preoccupied with the interrelated fates of humans and the planet. A scholar, physician, and philosopher, well-versed in Jewish and secular knowledge, Sforno was active at the height of the Renaissance, a time of renewed engagement in the study of astronomy, anatomy, geography, and natural philosophy. This was, after all, the era of Copernicus and Galileo.

As the biblical text offers only few clues about specific causes and effects of the flood, the commentators step in to fill in the gaps. What was the source of human “lawlessness”? What did it mean for God to call for the destruction of all creation “et ha’aretz,” which could mean both “from” or “with” the earth” ([Gen. 6:13](#))? Sforno understands God’s words as follows:

*I will destroy the climate which could support life on earth by interfering with the sun’s orbit and rearranging it from the beginning of the deluge for the entire future . . . This accounts for the lifespan of man having been drastically reduced after the deluge. The climate of the earth changed, there were greater extremes of heat and cold, the produce of the earth was considerably less capable of supporting a long lifespan. As a by-product of this deterioration in the quality of the vegetable products, man was allowed to eat meat as a compensation.*

Elsewhere Sforno explains that after the flood, the sun’s orbit of the Earth was no longer circular, but elliptical. (He has not fully integrated heliocentrism into his account.) Thus a climate that was once “an eternal spring” for the planet’s populated regions was now characterized by uneven temperatures during different parts of the year: “Seedtime and harvest, Cold and heat, Summer and winter, Day and night” ([Gen. 8:22](#)). Sforno argues that these “rapid changes of climate have a deleterious effect on human health,” accounting for the decline in longevity. That’s why humans now live for mere decades instead of centuries. The flood takes us another step further away from the Edenic ideal. Only in the time of the messiah, as alluded to in the book of Isaiah, would the earth be restored.

The story of the flood thus explains both the spiritual and physical decline of humanity. Human sin causes natural disaster; natural disaster changes major aspects of the Earth’s climate, the sun’s orbit, the quality of its vegetation—and this in turn has disastrous consequences for humans. The moral decline of humanity and the physical deterioration of natural world (from vegetation to human bodies) are intertwined, part of the same tragic trajectory.

Sforno brings together religious and scientific thought to suggest that the flood’s drastic alterations to the planet caused significant changes to human bodies, lives, and history that could only be rectified in some future time. The new extremes of weather and seasonality were a well-deserved punishment, given that our sins had sparked the flood in the first place.

There are clearly vast differences in how Sforno and we today understand the human contribution to a global climate catastrophe. And we are not content to imagine a return to Eden in some future utopian era, dependent on Divine rather than our own agency. Voices from today’s Jewish and secular environmental movements call on us to do what we can to create a safe, stable world for all creation and to take discrete actions to create a sustainable economy and society. Yet I read his interpretation of the flood narrative as a profound expression of the idea that humans have the power to transform nature on a global scale and are, in

turn, vulnerable to the consequences of those changes to the natural world. His commentary calls on us to see the world as a unified, interconnected whole and to act within it with this awareness in mind. (*Alisa Braun is the Academic Director of Community Engagement at JTS*)

### Noah by Shaul Rosenblatt

<https://mailchi.mp/tikun/weekly-davar-noach-2022?e=e0f2ca6c0d>

There is no one in all of Torah who is introduced to us with such glowing accolades as Noah. He is righteous; he is the purest of his generation and he walks with God. Three separate times during the chapter of the flood, the Torah tells us that Noah did ‘exactly as God told him to do’.

And yet, who is Noah? He disappears into history as quickly as he came. He is not an Abraham to whom the Bible devotes four portions, nor certainly a Moses to whom the Bible devotes most of its chapters. Midway through the portion we are told that he lived for three hundred and fifty years after the flood and that’s that.

Goodbye Noah. He isn’t heard from again.

What differentiates him from a man like Abraham?

I believe the answer lies precisely in the phrase that Noah did ‘exactly as God told him’. God comes to him and tells him that he is about to destroy all of humanity and so Noah should build an ark to save himself. How does Noah respond? He doesn’t flinch. Yes, sir. One ark coming right up. Exactly as God told him.

Notice something strange? God tells him he is about to destroy the world and Noah simply goes out and builds an ark for his extended cruise while everyone is dying?

Let’s contrast this with a similar story with Abraham in a couple of weeks. Abraham is told that God is about to destroy Sodom and Gemorrah, evil and debaucherous cities. He doesn’t tell God he’ll be sure to avoid the Sodom’s supermalls on that day, rather he fights tooth and nail for them – arguing with God and insisting that God save them. God did not tell him to fight, but God did not need to. Abraham made his own judgment as to what he felt was right and stood up for his fellow human beings – even when that meant arguing with God Himself.

Noah was a righteous man, yes. He did everything that was asked of him. He went by the book. But that’s not enough. Noah was subservient to God, but Abraham was a partner with God. Noah abdicated responsibility for the world to God, whereas Abraham grasped it with both hands. Whilst Noah was a righteous man, Abraham was a great man. There was nothing per se wrong with Noah. You couldn’t fault him. But he wasn’t great. The word ‘Noah’ in Hebrew means ‘rest’, as though he didn’t want to trouble himself too much.

The Torah doesn’t criticize him, but equally, it doesn’t remember him. Because it is great human beings who are remembered, those who stand up and take

responsibility for the world around them. Noah ticked all the boxes, but watched passively as all of humanity was destroyed.

Shabbat Shalom

### Why Recreate the World by Bex Stern-Rosenblatt

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FwDRDRdH7jXhyzdWtfG5wSwY4hXq6VNZ/view>

Unsurprisingly, God is pretty good at what God does. When God sets out to “put an end to all flesh... to destroy them with the earth,” God does it and does it well. The language of the destruction in the flood story mirrors the language of the creation in last week’s parashah. The destruction of the flood is presented as the undoing of creation, a return to a state without creation. Where God had once looked and seen good in all of God’s creations, God now looks and sees bad. Where God had once gathered all the water from under the heavens in order to expose land, the water now rises higher than the highest mountains under the heavens. We return to a pre-creation state of *Tehom*, the watery depths. The creatures which God had created God now destroys. God created with a breath of life. We read now that “All that has a breath of life in it will now breathe its last” as a result of the flood. This applies to all the categories of created beings from Genesis 1 - the livestock, the creepy crawly things, and the birds. Most of all, humans “which [God] created,” will be wiped off the face of the earth.

God does exactly what God says. Almost. In nearly the same breath that God explains that God is destroying all of creation, God creates an escape clause. God has Noah build the ark and ensure survival and ensure continuity from the first created world to the second. It is a particular quirk of God, promising total destruction and not quite delivering. God’s calling card is to leave a remnant behind, someone to recount the tale of (near) total destruction.

The language of what happens to Noah after the flood also mirrors the language from the first creation story. We read, as translated by Robert Alter, “And God sent a wind over the earth and the waters subsided. And the wellsprings of the deep were dammed up, and the casements of the heavens, the rain from the heavens held back. And the waters receded from the earth little by little, and the waters ebbed.” We meet the wind, the water, and the deep, the *Tehom*, of Genesis 1. Once again, land emerges from the water. Once again, time is established; Alter translates, “seedtime and harvest and cold and heat and summer and winter and day and night shall not cease.” Those very livestock, creepy crawly things, and birds which had been explicitly killed in the flood are brought back for a second attempt. Humans are told what and how they can eat and given something that they are not allowed to eat. The tiller of the land becomes the planter of vineyards. Most strikingly, God gives us a nearly identical blessing to the blessing we had

received in Bereshit. We to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the land.” The idea of filling the land stands out because the story of the flood begins with the land being full of the violence of humans. Nonetheless, we are once again not just permitted but also blessed to fill the land.

But when God looks after this recreation, God sees that humanity is still bad. So why bother? Why recreate, following the formula of the first failed creation? Has God put safeguards in to prevent us from going off the rails this time? The biggest difference between the two creations is who is responsible for maintaining order in each. After the flood, we get the chilling verse, “one who spills the blood of a human, by a human will his blood be spilt.” God says these words just after God has spilled the blood of countless humans. But now God removes Godself as the police of the world. As God says, humans are evil from their youth. When God holds us to God’s standard of good and bad, we inevitably come out bad. So in order for this new creation to survive, we need to become our own executors. Here at the beginning of Genesis, it’s just the start of a system of humans managing human affairs. We’ve got a long way to go and a lot to learn about how to do it. God will help us to figure out better systems along the way. But after all of God’s exact work in destruction, God decides to be a creator after all and let humans serve as our own destroyers. (*Bex is the Mid-Atlantic Faculty-in-Residence for The Conservative Yeshiva. Bex holds a B.A. in History and German from Williams College and an M.A. in Hebrew Bible from Bar Ilan University.*)

### [Glancing at the Rainbow by Dr. Joshua Kulp](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FwDRDrDh7jXhyzdWtfG5wSwY4hXq6VNZ/view)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FwDRDrDh7jXhyzdWtfG5wSwY4hXq6VNZ/view>

The story of Noah and the Flood concludes by God giving humanity the rainbow in the clouds as a sign of God’s covenant never to destroy the world again through a flood (Genesis 9:12-17).

Rainbows are one, if not the most, beautiful of all the heavenly phenomena and certainly the most photographable. Today, when a rainbow appears in the sky, most of us will rush out with our cameras and try to take as many pictures as possible. We quickly send them off to our friends, bragging, “We saw a rainbow.” Here I want to note that halakhah is somewhat ambiguous about our desire to look at the rainbow and what we should do when we encounter one.

In Tractate Berakhot (59a), Rabbi Alexandri, citing Ezekiel 1:28, rules that “One who sees a rainbow in a cloud must fall upon his face.” The rainbow in Ezekiel has become not just a sign of God’s covenant, but the “likeness of the Glory of God” and therefore an object of worship. However, the Talmud immediately notes that Rabbi Alexandri’s ruling is not universally accepted—in the West (the Land of Israel) they forbid this practice for it looks like one is mistaking a physical phenomenon for an ineffable God.

Ambiguity is also echoed later in the 14th century halakhic compendium written by R. Ya'akov bar Asher, the Tur. In Orach Hayyim 229 the Tur writes, "One who sees a rainbow must say, 'Blessed are you...Who remembers the covenant, and is faithful to the Covenant and who upholds His Words.' But it is forbidden to look [at the rainbow] for a long time." The ambiguity is palpable—we are commanded to bless God upon seeing God's sign, but we are forbidden to look at that sign for too long. These two halakhot are a combination of two different Talmudic passages. The blessing is found in the passage from Berakhot above. While the rabbis of the West do not allow one to bow down to the rainbow, which is a sign of mistaking the rainbow for God, they do mandate the recitation of a blessing, a more intellectual reminder of what the rainbow symbolizes. We do not worship anything in the world as if it was God, but we can bless many things in the world for they remind us of God's goodness.

The second halakhah, the prohibition of looking at the rainbow for too long, is taken from Hagigah 16a: "Whoever has no concern for the honor of his Maker deserves to have never come to the world: What is lack of concern for the honor of one's Maker? Rabbi Abba said: This is one who looks at a rainbow." Later in the passage the Talmud goes on to say the eyes of one who looks at the rainbow will be dimmed. Unlike the passage in Berakhot, this passage seems to absolutely forbid even looking at the rainbow.

R. Asher (the Rosh, the Tur's father) as quoted by R. Yosef Karo in his commentary on the Tur (the Bet Yosef), notes the obvious practical problem—how can one recite a blessing upon seeing the rainbow when one should not even look at a rainbow! The Rosh resolves the conundrum by ruling that one should look at a rainbow, but not for too long. One who looks for too long, explains the Rosh, is questioning the authenticity of God's promise.

We want to have faith in the rainbow as a sign of God's everlasting covenant not to destroy the world. This is especially true in our world, for we who live with the fear that destructive floods will return to our precious planet. I might even argue that we need to look at the rainbow, to bless it in confidence that God will keep God's words. But we shouldn't look at it for too long, for as the Rosh said, when one looks at something for a long time, one can begin to question it. We need to have confidence in God's blessing in order to continue with our day to day lives here on Earth. And in a more modern take on this, I might add that overconfidence, also a potential result of looking at the rainbow, a sign of God's eternal promise, might "dim our eyes" to the harsh fact that if the world is destroyed again through a flood, this one is on us. The halakhah reminds us that the rainbow is a positive sign of God's love, but that human beings need to figure out how we act in response to this love. *(Dr. Joshua Kulp has been teaching rabbinic literature at the Conservative Yeshiva for twenty years. He received his PhD in Talmud from Bar Ilan University.)*

## Yahrtzeits

Treasure and Rich Cohen remember their grandson Andrew Morris Levy on Sun. Oct. 30. (Cheshvan 5).

Mike Schatzberg remembers his father Joseph Schatzberg on Tue. Nov. 1 (Cheshvan 7).

Blossom Primer remembers her sister Rhoda Rappaport on Thurs. Nov. 3 (Cheshvan 9).

## Coming up at Kol Rina

### Brunch & Learn

**Sunday 11/6, 10:30 am via Zoom**

**Jewish Tradition's Nuanced Approach to Abortion.**

Presented by **Dr. Adena Berkowitz**, scholar in residence at Kol HaNeshama in New York City. Her talk will be an expansion of the article she wrote for the July/August 2022 edition of *Hadassah Magazine*.

**Sundays: 12/4 and 12/11, 10:30 am via Zoom**

**Spotlight on Jewish Artists.**

Presented by **Janet Mandel**, acclaimed local art educator. **12/4:** Amedeo Modigliani **12/11:** Chaim Soutine.

*Registration for all of the Brunch and Learn offerings will be via Eventbrite. The link for each program will be provided closer to the date of the program. Mark your calendar and watch your email for further details.*