

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Noach
October 25, 2025 *** 3 Cheshvan, 5786

Noach in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3155/jewish/Noach-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The Parshah is named "Noach" (Noah) after the protagonist of its major event: The Great Flood. It is found in Genesis 6:9.

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: 54: 1-10

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 *haftarah* 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."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

[True Morality: Noach by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l \(5770\)](https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/noach/true-morality/)
<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/noach/true-morality/>

Is there such a thing as an objective basis of morality? For some time, in secular circles, the idea has seemed absurd. Morality is what we choose it to be. We are free to do what we like so long as we don't harm others.

Moral judgments are not truths but choices. There is no way of getting from "is" to "ought", from description to prescription, from facts to values, from science to ethics. This was the received wisdom in philosophy for a century after Nietzsche had argued for the abandonment of morality – which he saw as the product of Judaism – in favour of the "will to power".

Recently, however, an entirely new scientific basis has been given to morality from two surprising directions: neo-Darwinism and the branch of mathematics known as Games Theory. As we will see, the discovery is intimately related to the story of Noach and the covenant made between God and humanity after the Flood.

Games theory was invented by one of the most brilliant minds of the 20th century, John von Neumann (1903-1957). He realised that the mathematical models used in economics were unrealistic and did not mirror the way decisions are made in the real world. Rational choice is not simply a matter

of weighing alternatives and deciding between them. The reason is that the outcome of our decision often depends on how other people react to it, and usually we cannot know this in advance. Games theory, von Neumann's invention in 1944, was an attempt to produce a mathematical representation of choice under conditions of uncertainty. Six years later, it yielded its most famous paradox, known as the Prisoner's Dilemma.

Imagine two people, arrested by the police under suspicion of committing a crime. There is insufficient evidence to convict them on a serious charge; there is only enough to convict them of a lesser offence. The police decide to encourage each to inform against the other. They separate them and make each the following proposal: if you testify against the other suspect, you will go free, and he will be imprisoned for ten years. If he testifies against you, and you stay silent, you will be sentenced to ten years in prison, and he will go free. If you both testify against one another, you will each receive a five-year sentence. If both of you stay silent, you will each be convicted of the lesser charge and face a one-year sentence.

It doesn't take long to work out that the optimal strategy for each is to inform against the other. The result is that each will be imprisoned for five years. The paradox is that the best outcome would be for both to remain silent. They would then only face one year in prison. The reason that neither will opt for this strategy is that it depends on collaboration. However, since each is unable to know what the other is doing – there is no communication between them – they cannot take the risk of staying silent. The Prisoner's Dilemma is remarkable because it shows that two people, both acting rationally, will produce a result that is bad for both of them. Eventually, a solution was discovered. The reason for the paradox is that

the two prisoners find themselves in this situation only once. If it happened repeatedly, they would eventually discover that the best thing to do is to trust one another and co-operate.

In the meantime, biologists were wrestling with a phenomenon that puzzled Darwin. The theory of natural selection – popularly known as the survival of the fittest – suggests that the most ruthless individuals in any population will survive and hand their genes on to the next generation. Yet almost every society ever observed values individuals who are altruistic: who sacrifice their own advantage to help others. There seems to be a direct contradiction between these two facts.

The Prisoner's Dilemma suggested an answer. Individual self-interest often produces bad results. Any group which learns to cooperate, instead of compete, will be at an advantage relative to others. But, as the Prisoner's Dilemma showed, this needs repeated encounters – the so-called "Iterated (= repeated) Prisoner's dilemma". In the late 1970s, a competition was announced to find the computer program that did best at playing the Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma against itself and other opponents.

The winning programme was devised by a Canadian, Anatole Rapoport, and was called Tit-for-Tat. It was dazzlingly simple: it began by co-operating, and then repeated the last move of its opponent. It worked on the rule of "What you did to me, I will do to you", or "measure for measure". This was the first time scientific proof had been given for any moral principle.

What is fascinating about this chain of discoveries is that it precisely mirrors the central principle of the covenant God made with Noah:

Whoever sheds the blood of man,
By man shall his blood be shed;

For in the image of God has God made man.

This is measure for measure [in Hebrew, middah keneged middah], or retributive justice: As you do, so shall you be done to. In fact, at this point the Torah does something very subtle. The six words in which the principle is stated are a mirror image of one another: [1] Who sheds [2] the blood [3] of man, [3a] by man [2a] shall his blood [1a] be shed. This is a perfect example of style reflecting substance: what is done to us is a mirror image of what we do. The extraordinary fact is that the first moral principle set out in the Torah is also the first moral principle ever to be scientifically demonstrated. Tit-for-Tat is the computer equivalent of (retributive) justice:

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.

The story has a sequel. In 1989, the Polish mathematician Martin Nowak produced a programme that beats Tit-for-Tat. He called it Generous. It overcame one weakness of Tit-for-Tat, namely that when you meet a particularly nasty opponent, you get drawn into a potentially endless and destructive cycle of retaliation, which is bad for both sides. Generous avoided this by randomly but periodically forgetting the last move of its opponent, thus allowing the relationship to begin again. What Nowak had produced, in fact, was a computer simulation of forgiveness.

Once again, the connection with the story of Noach and the Flood is direct. After the Flood, God vowed: "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done." This is the principle of Divine forgiveness.

Thus the two great principles of the Noachide covenant are also the first two principles to have been established by computer simulation. There is an objective basis for morality after all. It rests on two key ideas: **justice and forgiveness, or what the Sages called middat ha-din and middat rachamim. Without these, no group can survive in the long run.**

In one of the first great works of Jewish philosophy – Sefer Emunot ve-Deot (The Book of Beliefs and Opinions) – R. Saadia Gaon (882-942) explained that the truths of the Torah could be established by reason. Why then was revelation necessary? Because it takes humanity time to arrive at truth, and there are many slips and pitfalls along the way.

It took more than a thousand years after R. Saadia Gaon for humanity to demonstrate the fundamental moral truths that lie at the basis of God's covenant with humankind: that co-operation is as necessary as competition, that co-operation depends on trust, that trust requires justice, and that justice itself is incomplete without forgiveness. Morality is not simply what we choose it to be. It is part of the basic fabric of the universe, revealed to us by the universe's Creator, long ago.

[Species Purity and The Great Flood by Daniel Nevins \(2014\)](https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/species-purity-and-the-great-flood-2/)

<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/species-purity-and-the-great-flood-2/>

Omnicide is a dramatic move, on that we can all agree. But what causes the Creator to grow violently disgusted with the creatures that had just recently been praised as “good” and blessed with fertility? JTS Bible Professor Emeritus Alan Cooper has suggested that it was interspecies breeding of human women with divine creatures that angered God, and that it was Noah's pure genealogy (“perfect in his generations”) that set him apart for salvation. The ancient

Rabbis had a similar idea—it was crossbreeding between species that angered God and caused God to reboot with specimens that were still arranged “according to their families” (Gen. 8:19; see Midrash Tanhuma, Buber ed., Noah 11).

In the Talmud (BT Sanhedrin 108a), Rabbi Yohanan teaches that animals prior to the flood were mating not only across species but also across genera, and that humans were mating with “everyone.” This interspecies orgy was the “**corruption of all flesh**” (Gen. 6:12) that caused the Creator to destroy life on earth. The Torah’s orderly procession of animals into the ark “two by two,” emphasizes species differentiation, which the Bible apparently believes to be a priority of the Creator.

God is not alone in valuing species distinction. From early childhood a favorite learning activity for our children is to recognize types of animals, whether at the zoo, in picture books, or with dolls. I believe my daughter’s first “word,” in response to the question, “What does the bee say?” was an emphatic “Bzzz!” Just as God creates the world through a series of differentiations (between light and dark, land and sea, plants and animals, etc.), so too do our minds develop through exercises in differentiation. By sorting through stimuli and noticing patterns, the brain develops into an analytic powerhouse for life.

In its legal sections, the Torah depends upon the physical characteristics of various species to declare some pure, and others impure, with implications for the Israelite diet and sacrificial system. Moreover, Leviticus 19:19 prohibits “mingling” (kilayim) of different species of plants and animals. Nahmanides observes that in creating artificial hybrids, humans undermine the natural order and impute deficiency in

the Creator. Rabbinic law applies this ban to the grafting of one plant onto the rootstalk of another, and to the breeding of different animal species together. Mystical texts such as the Zohar see the blending of species as severing a link between heaven and earth, with potentially disastrous results (III: 86b).

What, however, if species distinction is just a crude and inaccurate attempt at freezing a fluid and dynamic reality? What is a species, anyway? That question, so obvious and clear to a child, turns out to be quite complicated for biologists, philosophers, and at least this rabbi. We may say that species are comprised of individuals that can reproduce together in nature, but as Darwin notes in the *Origin of Species*, hybrids occur naturally among plants and animals of different species. Despite persistent beliefs that hybrids are infertile, Darwin reports that this is just not true. Speciation is not a once and forever demarcation among the “kinds” of animals, but is rather a fluid and constant process of differentiation among organisms. Animals grow apart in their generations, and sometimes they blend back together, as has been observed with the mingling populations of gray wolves and eastern coyotes. Still, the overall effect has been a proliferation of diversity in life and a constant churning as some species grow extinct and others are established.

In the past decade, biologists have rapidly developed the field of epigenetics, studying the role of environment and experience on the development of individuals. DNA essentialism has been exposed as an inaccurate oversimplification. You are not your genes, alone. To define species solely in terms of genetic inheritance is to miss the vast significance of nutrition, nurturing, and general experience in the essence of what makes each “type” of animal distinct. Such experiences affect not only the

psychology of individuals, but also some of their physical attributes, and some such modifications may be inherited by the next generation.

Differentiation between species is often a useful exercise, and it is integral to the practice of mitzvot such as the lulav (with its “four species”), and kashrut. The Torah provides “signs” (simanim) for kosher creatures of the land and the sea, and these can be observed whether or not species themselves are a stable and universal phenomenon. The Bible’s recognition of specific species, and its prohibition of hybridization, may reflect a deep concern with the maintenance of order.

Still, there can be too much of a good thing. The Tower of Babel story (Gen. 11:1–9) may be a parable about the dark side of order. When humans all speak the same language, and cooperate perfectly as a united species, God grows concerned. The Torah doesn’t spell out why, but with our understanding of totalitarianism, we can appreciate the dangers of Babel. Large groups of people who speak with “one language” and prize their solidarity above other values may come to prey upon outsiders in order to validate their communal value. Perhaps this is why the Torah makes such a point of protecting “the stranger in your midst.” And perhaps this is why in our portion, the Creator decides that it is best for the humans to disperse and diversify. Instead of keeping the human species distinct in one location with one language, God varies their language and scatters them across the earth.

Parashat Noah is the Bible’s story about how civilization developed from a simple society to one that is complex, and from a centralized human settlement to a global presence. While the Creator initially favors order and simplicity, the blessing to “be fruitful and multiply” ultimately requires

complexity. For contemporary people too, simplicity can be seductive, but an honest and successful engagement with the world requires exploring it in all of its baffling and beautiful diversity. *(Daniel Nevins is a JTS Alum, Former Pearl Resnick Dean of the Rabbinical School and The Division of Religious Leadership.)*

[Noach: Who Is Righteous? By Rabbi Hannah Orden](https://truah.org/resources/hannah-orden-noach-moraltorah_2025/)

https://truah.org/resources/hannah-orden-noach-moraltorah_2025/

“Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation.”
(Genesis 6:9)

What are we to do with these words of Torah? Is Noah being praised or condemned? After all, the other people in his generation were so evil and corrupt that God decided to destroy the entire world. You might say that being righteous in that generation was a very low bar.

When I brought this up with a rabbi friend, she said, “There are many opinions in the Torah commentaries, but I think Noah was righteous. The Torah tells us he walked with God.”

I am unconvinced. The Torah is short on details. What does it mean to be righteous or blameless? What does it mean to “walk with God”? We only know that God spoke to Noah, and he obeyed. In a time of rampant corruption and injustice, surely this was not enough. Surely, the times called for more than being a good person and quietly following God’s ways.

Many biblical commentators compare Noah with Abraham. When God tells Abraham he wants to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham argues: What if there are fifty innocent people within the city? Will you then wipe out the place and not forgive it for the sake of the innocent fifty who are in it? Shall not the judge of all the earth deal justly? What if there

are forty-five? Thirty? Twenty? Ten? (Genesis 18:23-32)
Abraham does not give up easily.

Noah does not plead for humanity. Noah does not warn others that a flood is coming so they can repent. Noah is silent.

A recent documentary about the Israeli author Amos Oz provides a contrast with Noah. In 1967, during the Six Day War, Oz was fighting in the Sinai. When the war ended, he went straight to East Jerusalem still in his uniform, carrying a sub-machine gun. Because Jerusalem had loomed so large in Jewish imagination as a symbol, Oz was shocked to discover that people lived there. He found homes and shops and street signs. And he understood immediately the danger of occupation, both for the occupied and the occupiers. At a time when the entire country and the Jewish world were euphoric about the military victory, the conquering of the land, and the unification of Jerusalem, he began to speak and write, warning of the consequences if the country continued down this path. He openly criticized the Defense Minister; he shared his opinions with the members of the kibbutz where he lived. He became very unpopular.

Fifteen years later, Oz spent Shabbat at a religious settlement in the West Bank and wrote about the voices he heard from the people living there. At the time, these voices were in the shadows, but again, he foresaw the danger and shared their words widely. He wanted to tell everyone what he had heard, so that when those voices became the voices of those in power, no one could say that they did not know.

Amos Oz wrote column after column with titles like: "The Battle for Zionism's Soul," "Any Occupation is Corrupt," "Idolatry in Kippot." In the documentary, another author asserts: "He was a secular prophet, someone who was a

moral voice.”

Noah did not act like a prophet. He did not protest on behalf of the innocent; he did not try to show people the evil of their ways. Noah obeyed God and saved himself and his family.

As we watch human rights being denied and democracy destroyed in our country, many people wonder, “How did this happen here?” We grumble that “this is not my country.” But can we really say we didn’t know? Did we choose to ignore the voices of white nationalists when those voices were in the shadows? Did we shake our heads and feel superior to the people who were trying to turn diversity, equity, and inclusion into dirty words?

Like Noah, we are living in a world filled with evil, hatred, and corruption. Destruction is all around us. Will we be like Noah and quietly save ourselves? Or will we be like Abraham and raise our voices in protest, demanding justice?

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[Thinking About Floods, Languages, Anger and Love: Noah](#)
[by Rabbi Anat Katzir](#)

<https://ajr.edu/parashat-noah-5786/>

As I am writing this D’var, I am feeling flooded. Flooded with so much emotion. Flooded with feelings that I have been accumulating over two years and some that were building even longer.

Hearing the story of Noah and the flood as a child seemed

magical, a miraculous tale of survival. But a flood of such proportions seemed unrelatable, unreal, a legend. Something so scary, powerful, non-discriminatory in its destruction, that it could only be a myth. Then two years ago, in one day, the idea of such a flood became all too real as I woke up at 4 a.m. to the updates on the TV as Israeli news was in the background. That part wasn't uncommon. Falling asleep to the news of Israel continuously playing on the TV. But that morning the headlines were different; they started ominous, concerned and soon turned horrific as the day continued and I stayed glued to the screen unable to move, process or breathe. This barbaric attack was named by Hamas: "Operation Al-Aqsa Flood."

The question soon followed. How? How could this happen? How, in God's name, was this possible? How in humanity's name was this possible?

There was so much pain and as time passed and war proceeded at extreme costs, as war tends to proceed, the pain and grief were joined by despair and anger for many.

Anger seems to me very prominent in Parashat Noah. While the story of Noah and the flood is very rich and full of imagery, the sense of such anger that God must have felt towards God's creations, towards humans specifically, was so intense and destructive that God was ready to wipe out almost the entire existence of earth. Almost...

This makes me wonder. In this story we have an all-powerful God, creator and destroyer at will. Why, then, not start over entirely? Why save Noah?

Our sages found the answer to that in the verse: **נח איש צדיק** "... Noah was a wholly righteous man in his generation..." (Bereishit 6:9). Some interpreted as Noah being beyond reproach, a perfect Tzadik, but that

doesn't seem to fit in with our Torah's idea of humanity. Rashi had a similar inclination. As he responded to Midrash Rabbah and the story of Noah forgetting to feed the Lion on the ark, therefore proving Noah was not perfect, Rashi explains that the statement of Noah's righteousness can be explained in two ways. As a perfect model, or relative to his generation. These interpretations also change our expectation, and perhaps our disappointment, even our anger with Noah as his story continues after the flood. Noah was the best of his generation to allow for humanity to resume. Humanity continued, but the disappointment, the anger, the punishments, did not end. Humanity's challenge of righteous behavior continues even within the parashah.

The parashah continues with the story of the Tower of Babel, which tells us of a time and a world that we could only imagine. A time of shared language. But what was it that they chose to do with this gift of communication? To make a name for themselves by building a Tower. Growing up I was told a version of the story in which the people's tower was an attempt to reach God in the heavens. To take their place next to God by proving their abilities. In looking at God's response, it doesn't seem the tower itself was the issue, but that the tool of a single language would allow for a world of people that act on what they want to do without being stopped. Why does the idea of one language seem to threaten the moral behavior of humanity? In a world where Google Translate can bridge over any language divide, how are we still not finding a way to communicate? Perhaps because it isn't about the spoken language; it is about not having different expressions, not having a different emotional and moral language that would balance out and prevent bad ideas and actions from taking place. If everyone agreed on everything, there would be no

one to question their actions.

Over the last two years the world seems to be spiraling into more anger and gaps in our ability to speak to each other about a shared existence. In any language. Questioning ourselves and each other has turned from challenge and rebuke for the sake of humanity, into hatred and calls to eliminate other voices. It seems like we are losing our path towards respecting and loving our fellow humankind.

One of my favorite teachings in recent years has been the concept of The Five Love Languages, developed by Gary Chapman. It opens the conversation about the way we express a similar emotion in different ways. It helps us understand and communicate better with those who have different expressions around us. This concept opened my eyes to the fact that even in the same linguistic realm, we have a lot to overcome in our communications.

As I look at the main challenges and tensions around our community, I realize that it is not just different expressions of love that cause us to misunderstand each other, but that we are very strongly challenged by the ability to express disagreement and anger. In so many homes, communities, countries, the inability to overcome these tensions is causing a tear between people. A disconnect that is leaving us more and more scattered.

In an article for Psychology Today, psychological first responder Mike Verano writes about [“The Five Anger Languages in Relationships.”](#) Their typical expressions are as follows:

1. [Righteous](#): I’m right, you’re wrong. Driven by a sense of superiority, this language can easily escalate to the point where all past episodes of being wrong are thrown into the

mix. Entire countries have gone to war over this language.

2. Indignation: How could you? Often softened by a tone of disbelief, the underlying message is that the “victim” did not deserve whatever they received. This is a classic turning-the-tables technique that most often puts both parties on the defensive.

3. Retribution: You’ll pay for that! Often expressed as, “I don’t forgive, and I don’t forget,” or the classic, “an eye for an eye.” One of the more infectious of the anger languages, this expression can be dormant for long periods of time and then served up as the cold dish of revenge.

4. Distraction: What about that time when...? This is the art of deflection and is used to avoid taking responsibility and put the other person on the defensive. It’s the adult version of getting caught with one’s hand in the cookie jar and then getting mad that the cookies inside are stale.

5. Justification: You had it coming. Typically invoked as “karma is a b****” only in this case karma has been given a massive push by someone now sitting as judge and jury.

Verano notes two main things for the readers. First, when anger languages are combined, they tend to lead to rage. This is what brings on a flood. God was right, righteous, and humans were wrong. How **could** they turn their back on God like that? They needed to pay for it. God has given humans everything they needed to be good. By choosing these corrupt behaviors- they had it coming.

The second message in the article is that all of these expressions of anger come from a different emotion- fear.

Fear is interesting; it can explain all the languages of anger, but it can also be attributed to the languages of love, of loss,

of faith. Fear is also translated in our faith as **יראה – awe**.

So perhaps we can dig into our past existences, to believe that there still is a way to overcome this confoundment of speech that divides us. We don't need to speak one language, but to honor each other's expressions. To build together, but to keep questioning ourselves, each other, our values, from a place of awe, for fear of going astray, without pushing each other to anger.

While I find myself in a time of hope, encouraged by the hope for rebuilding and renewing. I recognize the long road ahead of rebuilding our language. And hope that we all, as leaders of our communities, will be the "Google Translate" of the language of healing.

And thank you God, for allowing humanity to continue and allowing the living hostages to be returned to us, to their loved ones. May all the murdered hostages be returned to find their final resting place in hope it allows some healing to their bereaved loved ones. *(Rabbi Anat Katzir is the Director of the Religious School of Kol Dorot in Oradell, NJ. Rabbi Anat graduated from TAU Law School and HUC School of Jewish Education. She was ordained by the pluralistic seminary Academy for Jewish Religion)*

Yahrtzeits

Treasure and Rich Cohen remember their grandson Andrew Morris Levy on Mon. Oct. 27.

Mike Schatzberg remembers his father Joseph Schatzberg on Wed. Oct. 29

Blossom Primer remembers her sister Rhoda Rappaport on Fri. Oct. 31

