

Parashat Noach
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My Torah portion is about being good versus being bad. This is illustrated through two different stories, the story of Noah and the Tower of Babel.

Now, most of us know the story of Noah. You know there is the flood, the ark, the animals marching 2 by 2 and so on and so on. But while I was studying for my Bar Mitzvah, I discovered two things that I didn't know about the story. First, the story is told twice during the *parashah*, each slightly differently. Parts of each story are woven together to tell the story like one.

There are a couple of differences in the way that the two stories are told. One of the differences is in the reason why we are told that G-d destroys the world. In one version of the story, G-d is dissatisfied with the evil in the world and feels that it was a mistake to create people with hearts that could make evil choices. Basically, he doesn't like what he created and is going to destroy it and start over again. It is like a child that is unhappy with a picture that he drew and crumples it up and starts over again. I don't really like this reason for the flood because I have always been taught that making mistakes is a part of learning and that is important not to give up but rather, to learn from my mistakes in order to improve and get things right. In the second version of the story, on the other hand, G-d is going to destroy the world because of all of the violence that he sees in the world. I like this interpretation of the story better because when I imagine a world full of violence, it seems very chaotic. We all have seen in recent years what happens to the world when people choose violent alternatives and live their life that way. Though I am glad that G-d didn't destroy the world, I can understand wanting to avoid a world full of chaos.

The other difference between the two stories is the apparent moral that they are telling us. In one, the moral is that G-d discovered that people will always be both good and evil. While in the other, the moral is that violence is evil and should be punished.

The second thing that I learned about the story of Noah is that G-d actually makes a covenant or an agreement with Noah to never again destroy the world. The story begins when G-d notices that the people on the earth are behaving poorly. The world is starting to get filled with more and more lawlessness. G-d sees things to be so out of control that he decides to rid the world of all living flesh by making a flood. You know, erase it all and start over. But then, G-d notices one man who is different from all of the other people in this world. Instead of going in the wrong direction and becoming worse and worse he is going in the right direction and is clearly a better person than everyone else. G-d approaches Noah and agrees to spare the world because of Noah's goodness.

G-d warns Noah about the flood and tells Noah to build an ark 30 cubits high and 50 cubits wide. G-d tells Noah that he should enter the ark with his wife his sons and his son's wives. Then G-d tells him to take two of every kind of living animal one male and one female and bring it on the ark, and bring everything that is eaten by him, his family, and the animals and store it away. When this is done, G-d brings on the rain. Noah and his household get into the ark and they are spared. After the flood, G-d creates a beautiful rainbow as a sign of his covenant with him that he would never destroy the world. From then on, if Noah gets scared when he sees rain, G-d brings a rainbow to comfort his fear and assure him that the world is safe. In the Jewish religion, there is a prayer that is said upon seeing a rainbow, *Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, zocher habrit ve-ne-eman biv-rito, v-kayam b-ma-amaro*, Praise are you Adonai our G-d, who rules the universe, faithfully recalling the covenant by keeping the divine promise.

The second story that is told in my Torah parashah is the story of the Tower of Babel, which begins with a group of people coming together to build a tower. While building the tower, they become very arrogant and they decided that they wanted to build a tower so high that they could reach G-d. But G-d got very mad about this because of their arrogance in thinking that they could build such a tower, thereby being as powerful as G-d. This time however, G-d has learned his lesson from Noah and rather than destroy the world, G-d makes a small change to the equation. He makes it so that everyone speaks a different language and thus, can not complete the tower. In this story,

no one is hurt, but the point is made. G-d is still in charge. In the end, the people become scattered all over the earth, the final part of the creation. The moral of this story tells me that, you should never work together to do something bad, although it is good to work together to do something good.

This makes me think of my Bar Mitzvah project, the Pan Mass Challenge bike ride. As many of you know, in June, I road in a 27-mile bike ride to raise money to find a cure for cancer. This bike ride is a smaller version of a 200-mile adult bike ride to also raise money for cancer research. The Pan Mass Challenge raises money for cancer research in an attempt to find a cure for this horrible disease. Nearly 100% of all the money raised goes to finding a cure for cancer. Since 1980 the Pan Mass Challenge has donated more than 239 million dollars to cancer research. Thanks to all of the generous donations that I received, I collected over \$1500.00 to help find a cure for cancer. The PMC is definitely an example of people from all over, working together for good. Another example of this, occurred during the ride.

I rode the ride with two friends from West Hartford. All of the other kids in the ride were kids we didn't know from Cape Cod. Talk about speaking a different language but working together for a good purpose. Unfortunately, the ride was poorly marked and the three of us got lost. However, we received help from one of these other kids who had brought a cell phone and found the rest of the group. This is yet another example of people from all over working together. Unfortunately for us however, our 27 mile ride became a couple of miles longer!

I want to thank Rabbi Small, Cantor Cohn, Mr. Pinchover, Mrs. Fox and all of my teachers at the Emanuel Religious School for all of their help and support in becoming a Bar Mitzvah.