בס"ד

AHAVAT ACHIM AT 50
קהלת אהבת אחים
Yovel
THE FAMILY SHUL

CANDLE LIGHTING 5:56 PM | 6 CHESHVAN | OCTOBER 17, 2026 | HAVDALA 6:58 PM

שבת פרשת נח
SHABBAT PARSHAT NOACH

Haftorah is Isaiah 54:1-55:5.

FRIDAY EVENING	
MINCHA	**6:00 PM**
SHKIA	6:14 PM
TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM	6:54 PM
SATURDAY	
HASHKAMA	**7:45 AM**
SHACHARIT	**9:00 AM**
POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR	≈9:30 AM
LAST KRIAT SHEMA	9:56 AM
FUNDAMENTALS SHIUR	≈11:30 AM
PRE-MINCHA SHIUR	5:05 PM
MINCHA	**5:45 PM**
SHKIA	6:13 PM
MAARIV	**6:58 PM**

BIRTHDAY & ANNIVERSARY KIDDUSH



Kiddush is sponsored to celebrate our October birthdays and anniversaries! **Happy birthday to** Michael Dworkis, Ron Dworkis, Bryan Goldberg, Tamar Gorelick, Yoni Hochbaum, Mitchell Kempin, Ahava Nudelman, William Plotnick, and Natan Santacruz.

SEUDAH SHLISHIT

Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by David & Lori Garfunkel in memory of their son, יונתן חיים בן משה דוד הכהן, Jonathan ע"ה, and Lori's mother, רחל ברוניא בת דוד, Tootsie Markovitz ע"ה, and by Brett Norton in memory of his mother, לאה בת מאיר, Lynne Norton ע"ה.

FALL INTO EARLY SHABBAT DINNER

Join us on Friday, November 6, after davening, for the first early Shabbat dinner of the year! We will kick off the season of early Shabbat dinners with a festive community meal. RSVP here: DINNER.

VETERANS KIDDUSH

Honor those who served in the US armed forces by adding a star to our board and donating in their name to our special Kiddush on Shabbat, November 14. Click here: VETERANS.

ORTHODOX UNION	SUNDAY 10/18	MONDAY 10/19	TUESDAY 10/20	WEDNESDAY 10/21	THURSDAY 10/22	FRIDAY 10/23
WEEKDAY MINYANIM AT AHAVAT ACHIM						
SHACHARIT	**8:00 AM**	**6:15 AM**	**6:25 AM**	**6:25 AM**	**6:15 AM**	**6:25 AM**
2ND SHACHARIT MINYON - YISHTABACH AT 7:40 AM		**7:25 AM**	**7:25 AM**	**7:25 AM**	**7:25 AM**	**7:25 AM**
MINCHA/MAARIV	**5:59 PM**	**5:58 PM**	**5:56 PM**	**5:55 PM**	**5:53 PM**	**5:50 PM**
ZMANIM						
Earliest Talit	6:15 AM	6:16 AM	6:17 AM	6:18 AM	6:19 AM	6:20 AM
Gedolah	1:09 PM	1:08 PM	1:08 PM	1:08 PM	1:08 PM	1:07 PM
Shkia	6:11 PM	6:10 PM	6:08 PM	6:07 PM	6:05 PM	
Tzait	6:51 PM	6:50 PM	6:48 PM	6:47 PM	6:45 PM	

Rabbi Ely Shestack

President Jay Herman

UPCOMING EVENTS

Nov. 1 - Chesed Day.
Nov. 6 - Fall Into Early Shabbat Friday Night Dinner, after davening. RSVP here: DINNER.
Nov. 14 - Veterans Kiddush. Add a star to our board in honor of those who served. Click here: VETERANS.
Nov. 26 - Thanksgiving Flag Football & Pie Donation. Start your Thanksgiving Day with community and gratitude! RSVP here: THANKSGIVING.
Dec. 2 - Chanukah Shiur w/ Dinner.
Dec. 11 - Shabbat Chanukah Dinner.

IN OUR FUTURE - KIDDUSH, SEUDAH SHLISHIT, & ETC.



Oct. 24 - Kiddush is sponsored by Lori & David Garfunkel celebrating Uri's Auf Ruf and upcoming wedding to Abby Elson.
Oct. 24 - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by Marty Reichardt in memory of Caryז"ל.
Nov. 7 - Birthday Kiddush.
Dec. 5 - Birthday Kiddush.

BIRTHDAY & ANNIVERSARY KIDDUSH



To add a birthday/anniversary to upcoming lists (next Kiddush on Shabbat, November 7), click here: SIMCHA. Listings/ sponsorships are $36 per family per month. RSVP for the November birthday/ anniversary Kiddush by Sun. night, Nov. 1.

BOARD MEETINGS - 8:30 PM

- **Nov. 24**
- **Dec. 29, Jan. 26, Feb. 23, Mar. 30, May 11, June 29**

SHIURIM



- NEW FACETS ON THE PARSHA, Tuesdays at 1:00 PM, click here: Parsha.



- TORAH FOR YOUR COMMUTE, via Whatsapp, with 3-minute daily Halacha insights. To join email Rabbi Shestack at rabbishestack@gmail.com.
- POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR, analyzing Mishlei (Proverbs).
- FUNDAMENTALS OF JEWISH THOUGHT, after Kiddush, discussing fascinating halachic topics on Shabbat (weather permitting, at the playground tables through Thanksgiving weekend). This week: **"Ala Mode: Can You Put Ice Cream on Hot Cake/Pie on Shabbat?"**
  - Oct. 24: "Can You Return From a Hospital Visit On Shabbat"
  - Oct. 31: "Hanging and Adjusting Hammocks and Swings on Shabbat"
  - Nov. 7: "Watching Bar Mitzvahs Videoed on Shabbat"
  - Nov. 14: "Washing Dishes with Steel Wool on Shabbat"
  - Nov. 21: "Paying a Babysitter for Work on Shabbat"
- SHABBAT SHIUR, **SANHEDRIN CH. 1**, 40 minutes prior to mincha.
- TZURBA M'RABANAN w/ Zack Doberman, Wednesdays at 8:30 PM. In-person at the shul and via Zoom.
- SEDER ON THE SIDDUR, at Seudah Shlishit.
- BEGINNER CLASS ON HOW TO READ HEBREW, Monday nights, 8:45 PM, at the shul. To sign up, click here: Hebrew.

GITA COOPERWASSERז"ל YOUTH EVENTS

Nov. 14 - Parent/Child Learning.
Dec. 5 - Chanukah program with children's seudah shlishit, followed by musical havdalah.
Dec. 19 - Parent/Child Learning.
Jan. 2 - Parent/Child Learning.

GITA COOPERWASSERז"ל YOUTH LEADERS

3rd & Up:	BELANA & CASSANDRA
K-2nd:	ABBY & HAILEY
2 Yrs - Pre-K:	DANIELLE, JAYME & VICTORIA

GITA COOPERWASSERז"ל SHABBAT YOUTH INFO



- All groups start at 9:00 AM:
  – Tot Shabbat (new name for Parent & Me), birth-2 years old
  – 2 years old-Pre-K
  – K-2nd Grade
  – 3rd Grade and up
- Rabbi Meet & Greet, Friday night, kids can come over to the Rabbi after davening to receive a cup of grape juice and a ticket!
- Children earn tickets for coming to minyan (Friday night and/or Shabbat day), asking the rabbi questions or attending parent-child learning programs! Tickets can be redeemed for prizes.
- HIATUS UNTIL FALL - Children's corner at Seudah Shlishit, 1st to 5th graders will get 10 Torah questions in 10 minutes from Rabbi Shestack, with special snacks, tickets and more.

18-25 Saddle River Road
Fair Lawn, NJ 07410
201.797.0502
http://www.ahavatachim.org

Mishlei/Proverbs

Post-Hashkama Shiur 45 – Hashem Cares How You Conduct Yourself In Commerce

יאֶבֶן וָאֶבֶן אֵיפָה וְאֵיפָה תּוֹעֲבַת יְ֫ה–וָ֫ה גַּם־שְׁנֵיהֶם׃ יאגַּם בְּמַעֲלָלָיו יִתְנַכֶּר־נָעַר אִם־זַךְ וְאִם־יָשָׁר פָּעֳלוֹ׃ יבאֹזֶן שֹׁמַעַת וְעַיִן רֹאָה יְ֫ה–
וָ֫ה עָשָׂה גַּם־שְׁנֵיהֶם׃ יגאַל־תֶּאֱהַב שֵׁנָה פֶּן־תִּוָּרֵשׁ פְּקַח עֵינֶיךָ שְׂבַע־לָחֶם׃ ידרַע רַע יֹאמַר הַקּוֹנֶה וְאֹזֵל לוֹ אָז יִתְהַלָּל׃ טויֵשׁ זָהָב וְרָב־
פְּנִינִים וּכְלִי יְקָר שִׂפְתֵי־דָעַת׃ טזלְקַח־בִּגְדוֹ כִּי־עָרַב זָר וּבְעַד נָכְרִיָּה (כתיב נכרים) חַבְלֵהוּ׃ יזעָרֵב לָאִישׁ לֶחֶם שֶׁקֶר וְאַחַר יִמָּלֵא־פִיהוּ
חָצָץ׃ יחמַחֲשָׁבוֹת בְּעֵצָה תִכּוֹן וּבְתַחְבֻּלוֹת עֲשֵׂה מִלְחָמָה׃ יטגּוֹלֶה־סּוֹד הוֹלֵךְ רָכִיל וּלְפֹתֶה שְׂפָתָיו לֹא תִתְעָרָב׃ –

10Differing weights and differing measures, both are an abomination to the Lord. **11**Even a youth is known by his deeds, whether his conduct is pure or just. **12**The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord made them both. **13**Do not love sleep thereby avoiding impoverishment; [instead] keep your eyes open and you will have plenty of food. **14**"Bad, bad," says the buyer, but after he departs he boasts. **15**There is gold and an abundance of pearls, but lips of knowledge are a precious jewel. **16**Seize his garment because he provided surety for a stranger; or if [he provided surety] for a foreign woman take what he pledged. **17**Bread gained by falsehood may be tasty to a man, but afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel. **18**Plans established through counsel will be firm, and with good strategic advice wage war. **19**One who reveals secrets is a talebearer, do not mingle with one who entices with his lips.[1]

A. Ethics and approach to commerce, labor and dealings make up a significant focus of these 10 pasukim of chapter 20.

- V. 10 → Differing weights and differing measures, both are an abomination to the Lord.
  - Literally, a rock and a rock, an ephah and an ephah[2]. Presumably because of their being an "abomination", it is commonly accepted that the rock referred to is used as a counterbalance on a scale to determine the amount being sold, and the ephah refers to something akin to a measuring cup, used to measure something like flour.
  - False weights were discussed at Mishlei 11:1 – "Deceitful scales are an abomination of the Lord, but a perfect weight is His will," and will again be discussed at Mishlei 20:23 – "False weights are an abomination to Hashem; dishonest scales are not right."
  - The halacha is set forth at Vayikra 19:35-36 – "You shall not commit a perversion of justice with measures, weights, or liquid measures. You shall have true scales, true weights, a true ephah, and a true hin. . . ." And it was first referred to in the Torah as an abomination at Devarim 25:13-16 – "You shall not keep in your pouch two different weights, one large and one small. You shall not keep in your house two different ephah measures, one large and one small. . . . For whoever does these things, whoever perpetrates such injustice, is an abomination to the Lord, your God."
  - Hashem's repulsion for false weights, etc., is stated often in the Tanach, and here its Mishlei locations likely were chosen based on the surrounding themes.
- V. 13 → Do not love sleep thereby avoiding impoverishment; [instead] keep your eyes open and you will have plenty of food.
  - Torah tells us that "you shall not harden your heart" towards the needy.[3] Shlomo teaches us that a person should not be lazy and be the cause of his own impoverishment.
- V. 14 → "Bad, bad," says the buyer, but after he departs he boasts.
  - This statement would seem to be condemning gaslighting in commercial settings, distorting reality in negotiations, causing the seller to have self-doubt, all for material gains.
  - Malbim, etc., see this as buyer's rationalization, not wanting to feel bad after the purchase.

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[1] Mishlei Chapter 20.
[2] An ephah is a dry volume measure.
[3] Devarim 15:7.

- V. 16 → Seize his garment because he provided surety for a stranger; or if [he provided surety] for a foreign woman take what he pledged.
    - Similar to condemning the lazy man for causing his own impoverishment, we come back to a theme Shlomo previously discussed,[4] the idiocy of guaranteeing the debts of a stranger or, even worse, a foreign woman.
    - Unlike the debtor himself, who is entitled by the Torah to have his collateral returned to him at different times,[5] this pasuk suggests that it is not a mitzvah to return collateral provided by such a surety at those same moments.
- V. 17 → Bread gained by falsehood may be tasty to a man, but afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel.
    - Falsehood in business dealings via weights and measures was declared an abomination. This acknowledges the motivation to deal falsely in the first place (tasty gains), but that in the end what will fill such a man's mouth will be gravel, presumptively a metaphor for suffering or perhaps even death (if gravel in the mouth suggests being buried).
    - Alternatively, Rashi sees the reference to "bread" as a euphemism for adultery.

B. Shlomo has identified what not to do in commerce, and now provides advice on how to stay away from bad influences who might seek to draw you in.

- V. 19 → One who reveals secrets is a talebearer, do not mingle with one who entices with his lips.
- V. 12 → The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord made them both.
    - Hashem created the entire body, including parts that a person may use to do evil (feet that run to do evil, etc.) The Midrash, Tanchuma Toldos 12, notes that hearing and seeing are from organs largely not affected by our will (we simply hear and – usually- see what there is to hear and see without directing our ears and eyes to do something), and those organs can be used to hear and see things that should be avoided.
- V. 11 → Even a youth is known by his deeds, whether his conduct is pure or just.
    - "Even" suggests that adults are certainly known by their deeds. So with one's hearing and sight, just mentioned, we can seek out a person's deeds to see whether or not they should be avoided.
- V. 15 → There is gold and an abundance of pearls, but lips of knowledge are a precious jewel.
    - The Chomat Anakh sees gold as a metaphor for oratory skills and pearls a metaphor for knowledge, but to know one who has knowledge and the ability to express his thoughts properly, what a precious jewel that is.
- V. 18 → Plans established through counsel will be firm, and with good strategic advice wage war.
    - Shlomo previously informed us that "without strategy the people fall, but with many counselors there is victory,"[6] and "plans are foiled for lack of counsel, but they are established through many advisers."[7]
    - Amidst the discussion of what not to do in business dealings and related matters, and setting forth the idea of avoiding people who are not establishing and following good commercial practices, we are again reminded of the importance of seeking wise counsel and advice, now in the context of dealings in commerce.

[4] Mishlei 6:1-5; 11:15.
[5] Devarim 24:12-13.
[6] Mishlei 11:14.
[7] Mishlei 15:22.

AHAVAT ACHIM

קהלת אהבת אחים

THE FAMILY SHUL

October

Simcha Kiddush Honorees

Happy Birthday to

Ron Dworkis
Michael Dworkis
Bryan Goldberg
Tamar Gorelick
Yoni Hochbaum
Mitchell Kempin
Ahavah Nudelman
William Plotnick

Natan Santacruz

AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL

FALL INTO EARLY SHABBAT WITH US!

RSVP by 11/1!

Join us for the first early Shabbat dinner of the year as we *fall* into the Shabbat spirit!

Friday, November 6th after davening (~5:30pm)

Early Bird Pricing before 10/22:	**Pricing after 10/23:**
ADULTS (12 YEARS OLD +) - $25	ADULTS (12 YEARS OLD +) - $30
CHILDREN AGES 6 - 11 - $10	CHILDREN AGES 6 - 11 - $13
CHILDREN AGES 3 - 5 - $3	CHILDREN AGES 3 - 5 - $5
FAMILY MAX - $70	FAMILY MAX - $85

tinyurl.com/AAFall2026

events@ahavatachim.org

CONGREGATION AHAVAT ACHIM

PRESENTS

VETERAN'S DAY KIDDUSH

WE INVITE YOU TO HONOR THOSE WHO SERVED IN THE US ARMED FORCES BY ADDING A STAR TO OUR BOARD AND DONATING IN THEIR NAME TO OUR SPECIAL KIDDUSH ON NOVEMBER 14TH.

Since 1926, November 11th has been a day to remember both living veterans and those who have passed on. Join us as we honor and celebrate the selfless service of millions of veterans who have defended our freedoms and way of life by sharing the names of those who have served. The names will be displayed at the Kiddush.

SUBMIT NAMES OF VETERANS OR SPONSORSHIPS HERE.
TINYURL.COM/AAVETERANS2026

AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL

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THE FAMILY SHUL

Start the day off with community and gratitude!









THANKSGIVING DAY FOOTBALL & PIE DONATION

November 26, 2026

9:30am – 11:30am:
Flag Football

12:00pm – 1:00pm:
Pie Donation to Police and Volunteer Ambulance Corp

TINYURL.COM/AATHXGIVING2026

EVENTS@AHAVATACHIM.ORG

Covenant & Conversation

FROM THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

With thanks to the Schimmel Family for their generous sponsorship of Covenant & Conversation, dedicated in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel.

Noach

WRITTEN BY RABBI SACKS IN 5768 (2007–2008)

A Story of Heaven and Earth

Set between the pre-history of humanity as a whole and the particular covenant with Abraham, the story of the Tower of Babel is one of the turning points of the biblical narrative, central to its vision of what can go wrong in civilisations and societies.

The story itself – told in a mere *nine verses* – is a compact masterpiece of literary and philosophical virtuosity. The first thing to note is that its historical background is exceptionally precise. The tower – or ziggurat – was the great symbol of the ancient Mesopotamian city states of the lower Tigris-Euphrates valley, the cradle of civilisation. It was here that human beings first settled, established agriculture, and built cities.

As the Torah makes clear with unusual attention to what seems like a peripheral fact, one of the great discoveries of Mesopotamia (along with the wheel, the arch, and the calendar) was the ability to manufacture building materials, especially bricks, made by pouring clay into moulds, drying them in the sun, and eventually firing them in kilns. This made possible the construction of buildings on a larger scale, and reaching greater heights than hitherto. From this came the ziggurat, a stepped building of many stories, which came to have a profound religious significance.

Essentially these ancient towers – of which the remains of at least thirty have been discovered – were man-made "holy mountains," the mountain being the place where heaven and earth most visibly met. Inscriptions on several of these buildings, decoded by archeologists, refer, as does the Torah, to the idea that their top "reaches heaven." The largest – the great ziggurat of Babylon to which the Torah refers – was a structure of seven stories, 300 feet high, on a base of roughly the same dimensions (further details can be found in Nahum Sarna, Understanding Genesis).

Not only is the story of Babel historically precise, it is also shot through with literary devices: inversions, word plays, ironies, and puns. One of the most masterly is that the two key words, *l-v-n*, "brick," and *n-v-l*, "confuse", are precise inversions of one another. As so often in the Torah, literary technique is closely related to the moral or spiritual message the Torah wishes to convey. In this case it is the phenomenon of inversion itself. The results of human behaviour are often the opposite of what was intended. The builders wanted to concentrate humanity in one place ("Let us build a city . . . and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth"). The result was that they were dispersed ("from there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth"). They wanted to "make a name" for themselves, and they did, but the name they made – Babel – became an eternal symbol of confusion.

Their pride lay in their newfound technological ability to construct buildings of unprecedented grandeur. They did not realise (the message signalled

in the opening verses of the Torah) that the greatest creative power is language ("And God said . . . and there was"). It was not a technical problem that caused them to abandon the project but the loss of the ability to communicate. What is holy for the Torah is not power but the use to which we put it, and this is intrinsically linked to language – the medium in which we frame our ideals, construct imaginative possibilities, and call others to join us in realising them. The word is prior to the work.

What, though, was the builders' sin? The narrative signals this, again, by a series of verbal cues. The first is the phrase with which the episode both begins and ends, *kol ha-aretz*, "the whole earth." It begins, "The whole world spoke the same language" (Gen. 11:1), and ends, "From there the Lord scattered them all across the face of the earth" (Gen. 11:9). The phrase *kol ha-aretz* appears five times in the nine verses: all three-, five- and especially seven-fold repetitions in a biblical passage signal the presence of a key theme. A framing device of this kind is highly significant.

The second is the phoneme (a basic unit of sound) *sh-m*, either as *sham*, "there", or *shem*, "name". This appears seven times in the passage. It is clearly linked to the word *shamayim*, "heaven" – the place the builders attempted to reach in building the tower. The thematic elements of the narrative are thus clear. This is a story about heaven and earth – but in what way? To understand the point at issue we must return to the opening chapter of Bereishit and its description of creation.

Two words in that account are decisive. The first is *tov*, "good", which appears seven times. God says, "Let there be", there is, and God sees "that it is good". Creation in Bereishit 1 is not primarily about the power of God but about the goodness of God and the universe He made. In historical context, this is an extraordinary statement. For the most part, the ancients saw the world as a dangerous and threatening place, full of dangers, disasters, famines and floods. There was no overarching meaning to any of this. It was the result of clashing powers, personified as conflicts between the Gods. Religion was either an attempt to assert human power over the elements through magic and myth, or a mystical escape from the world into a private nirvana of the soul. Against this, Judaism made the astonishing assertion that the world is good. It is intelligible. It is the result not of blind collisions and random mutations but of a single creative will. This alone is enough to set Judaism apart as the most hopeful of the world's faiths.

There is however another key word, the root *b-d-l*, to "separate", "distinguish", "divide". This appears five times in Bereishit 1. The goodness of the universe is itself a matter of order, boundaries and distinctions. God separates the different domains (day 1, light and dark; day 2, upper and lower waters; day 3, land and sea) and fills each with its appropriate objects or life-forms (day 4, sun and moon; day 5, birds and fish; day 6, land animals and mankind). So important was this idea to Judaism that we have a special ceremony, *havdallah*, to mark the end of Shabbat and the beginning of each cycle of "the six days of creation." Like God, we begin creation by *havdallah*: making, noting and consecrating distinctions.

This too is fundamental to the Judaic world view. Goodness is order; evil is disorder, an act or person or entity in the wrong place. The word *chet*, sin, comes from a verb meaning "to miss the target." The word *averah*, like its English equivalent "transgression", means to stray across a border, to enter forbidden territory. Many of the *chukim* or "statutes" of Judaism are about inculcating respect for the inherent orderliness of the universe – and thus not mixing milk (life) and meat (death), wool (an animal product) and linen (a vegetable product) or sowing a field with "mixed kinds" of seed.

Creation itself is seen as the slow emergence of order from chaos. This, as the physicist Gerald Schroeder points out (in *Genesis and the Big Bang*) is implicit in the Hebrew words *erev* and *boker*, "And it was evening (*erev*) and it was morning (*boker*)." *Erev* in Hebrew means an undifferentiated mixture of elements. *Boker* comes from a root meaning "to reflect, contemplate, seek clarity." Much recent work in physics, biology and cosmology has converged on the discovery that the birth of stars, planets and life itself is a matter of the slow emergence of ever more complex systems of order swimming, as it were, against the tide of entropy.

An ordered universe is a peaceable universe in which every form of being, inanimate, animate and human, has its proper place. Violence, injustice and conflict are forms of disorder – a failure to respect the integrity of each life-form or (in the case of humanity, where "every life is like a universe") each person. That was the state of the universe before the Flood, when "all flesh had corrupted its way on earth."

This was not an abstract idea. The world of myth, against which Judaism is a sustained protest, was one in which boundaries were not observed. There were human beings who were like Gods and Gods who were like human beings. There were strange mythological hybrids – like the sphinx, half human, half animal. Religious ecstasy was often accompanied by a ceremonial breaking of boundaries in various ways. To the Judaic mind this is paganism, and it is never morally neutral. God creates order; man creates chaos; and the result is inevitably destructive.

The most fundamental boundary is stated in the Torah's first sentence – that between "heaven" and "earth". Never before or since (except among religions or cultures influenced by Judaism) has God been conceived in so radically transcendent a way. God is not to be identified with anything on earth. "The heavens are the heavens of the Lord", says the Psalmist, "but the earth He has given to man." This ontological divide is fundamental. God is God; humanity is humanity. There can be no blurring of the boundaries.

That was the sin of the builders of the tower. Their aspiration (to "reach heaven") was laughable, and indeed the Torah makes a joke of it. They think that their construction – three hundred feet high – has reached heaven, whereas God has to "come down" to look at it (in general, the one thing that makes God laugh in the Torah is the pretensions of human beings when they think of themselves as like the Gods). However, it was worse than laughable. The Netziv (R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, 1817-1893), writing in Czarist Russia and prophetically foreseeing the worst excesses of communism, sees Babel as the world's first totalitarianism, in which to preserve the masses as a single entity, all freedom of expression is suppressed (that, for him, is the meaning of "the whole world had one language and a unified speech"). Intoxicated by their technological prowess, the builders of Babel believe they had become like Gods and could now construct their own cosmopolis, their man-made miniature universe. Not content with earth, they wanted to build an abode in heaven. It is a mistake many civilisations have made, and the result is catastrophe.

In modern times, the re-enactment of Babel is most clearly associated with the name of Nietzsche (1844-1890). For the last ten years of his life, he was clinically insane, but shortly before his final breakdown he had a nightmare vision which has become justly famous:

> Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the marketplace, and cried incessantly, "I seek God! I seek God!". . . Whither is God?" he cried. "I shall tell you. We have killed him – you and I. All of us are his murderers. . . God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, comfort ourselves? What was holiest and most powerful of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives. Who will wipe this blood off us?. . . Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we not ourselves become Gods simply to seem worthy of it?"

As George Steiner pointed out (in his *In Bluebeard's Castle*) there was less than three-quarters of a century between Nietzsche and the Holocaust, between his vision of the murder of God and the deliberate, systematic attempt to murder the "people of God" (Hitler called conscience "a Jewish invention").

When human beings try to become more than human, they quickly become less than human. As Lord Acton pointed out, even the great city-state of Athens which produced Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, self-destructed when "the possession of unlimited power, which corrodes the conscience, hardens the heart, and confounds the understanding of monarchs, exercised its demoralising influence." What went wrong in Athens, he writes, was the belief that "there is no law superior to that of the State – the lawgiver is above the law."

Only when God is God can man be man. That means

keeping heaven and earth distinct, organising the latter only under the conscious sovereignty of the former. Without this there is little to prevent human beings from sacrificing the many for the sake of the few, or the few for the sake of the many. Only a respect for the integrity of creation stops human beings destroying themselves. Humility in the presence of Divine order is our last – best – safeguard against humankind arrogating to itself power without restraint, might without right. Babel was the first civilisation, but sadly not the last, to begin with a dream of utopia and end in a nightmare of hell. A world of *tov*, good, is a world of *havdallah*, boundaries and limits. Those who cross those boundaries and transgress these limits make a name for themselves, but the name they make is Babel, meaning chaos, confusion and the loss of that order which is a precondition of both nature (the world God creates) and culture (the world we create).

Around the Shabbat Table



- Is there a totalitarianism in your world, with groups of people trying to impose one way of thinking on everyone?
- How is this story an antidote to that totalitarianism?



Covenant & Conversation

FAMILY EDITION

INSPIRED BY THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

Noach: Taking a Stand

DEVELOPED BY RABBI COBI EBRAHIMOFF

parsha recap

The parsha describes Noach as a righteous man 'in his generation'. He does whatever God tells him to do. He builds the Ark, gathers the animals, and brings in supplies. The Torah tells us three times that Noach did all that God commanded him. He is also the only person in the entire Tanach who is described as a tzaddik (righteous).

- Why do you think the Torah states that Noach was righteous 'in his generation'?
- What do we learn from these words? Is it a compliment?

a closer look

נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו

"Noach was a righteous man, a person of integrity in his generation." (BEREISHIT 6:9)

RABBI SACKS TEACHES US:

Throughout the whole of the narrative - the warning of the Flood, the building of the Ark, the gathering of animals, the beginning of the rain - Noach says nothing... he has no impact on his contemporaries. He does not engage with them, rebuke them, or urge them to mend their ways. Nor does he pray for them, or question the justice of the Flood... [Noach] fails to show collective responsibility.

RABBI SACKS FURTHER EXPLAINS...

The Torah sets a high standard for the moral life. It is not enough to be righteous if that means turning our backs on a society that is guilty of wrongdoing. We must take a stand. We must protest... even if the likelihood of changing minds is small. That is because the moral life is a life we share with others. We are, in some sense, responsible for the society of which we are a part. It is not enough to be good. We must encourage others to be good. There are times when each of us must lead.

moral matters

LET'S DISCUSS:

- Is it more impressive to stand out for being righteous when living **amongst good people** who can have a good influence on you, or to be a good person when **those around you are corrupt and a bad influence**?
- Why do you think Noach stayed **silent** while everyone else was behaving badly?
- When is it **important to speak up**, despite feeling scared, or doubtful it will help?
- Do you think **being good is enough** if the people around you are doing the wrong thing? What small action could you take that might **make a positive difference** in your school or community?

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