

This Week In Torah *Noach*

There is a rule in my house—no news after 9 pm. When I do watch news later than that, the anxiety/tension will affect my sleep pattern—I will toss and turn, perhaps getting agitated as I replay the segments in my head. That is why when I came across a teaching from the Slonimer Rebbe I just had to share it.

Who is the Slonimer? He is Shalom Noach Berezovsky, who lived from 1911 until 2000. He was the leader of a Chasidic sect with 2 yeshivot—one in Jerusalem and one in B'nei Berek. Known for his push back against modernity and secularism, his teachings can be used outside of his community to better achieve balance and reestablish personal priorities. For me, I gravitate towards his teachings as a way of preventing myself from succumbing to outside pressures that can cause me to respond inappropriately and with hurtful intentions.

Look at what I gleaned from one of his teachings from this week's *parasha*. He looks at the story of Noah and the ark in a unique way--- he wrote that the ark can be seen as an allegory, a metaphor of sorts. The ark was built not as a historic occurrence but rather as a symbol for us. The ark is a sanctuary within us that helps us navigate the storms that exist in life. The ark serves as a sanctuary from the corrupting blows of human cruelty, selfishness and conflict—all the things that caused the flood in the first place—none of those poor behaviors have been eradicated. The ark therefore offers respite from the existential difficulties of loss, illness, death and pain. It serves as a refuge from the seemingly relentless storms we face day in and day out. In our internal ark, we can reengage our moral compass and our spiritual grounding. But note—this interpretation of the ark does not mean it is a place to hide or escape, but rather gain perspective as one attempts to center the self with what is truly important.

How do we do this? We take in a “sacred pause”—we sit, breathe, grow quiet, stop the heart from racing, calm the mind in order to let down the defenses that drive us to combat rather than embrace the challenges. With that calm spirit, we don't own assaults against us; we are not the news we are watching. We don't internalize but acknowledge these forces' presence in our life. The Slonimer Rebbe would have us observe our limitations and meet the forces beyond our control instead of fighting against them. For

the Slonimer Rebbe, the truest acceptance of the storms was the building of the altar afterwards--- it wasn't done for mere survival of the ordeal, but accepting the humanness of the soul that can grow and transform to meet the painful forces that would've destroyed Noah and his family.

What does this mean for us? Well—It means making a deliberate effort and practicing building an ark within one's self. Taking the time to turn off electronics and breathing, pray, study and/or be. Remember weather life's storms is not about battling the elements but pulling close the resources to be and not conquer.

For me, such practice is not watching the news late into the night, but spending more time with the woman I love..... maybe a little ESPN!