

NOACH (GENESIS 6:9-11:32)

Quoth the Raven . . .

2003 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

I hate ‘em!

My garbage pail gets knocked over by the wind, and before you know it, these big black, ugly birds are ripping open the trash bags, spreading the wealth all over my driveway!

Noah hated ‘em too.

It was devastating. G-d had warned the world, through Noah, that the End was near. Noah’s neighbors got a good laugh, watching him daily as he built his Ark.

Now they were gone. It was just Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives. Oh yes, there was also a boat full of animals!

After almost ten months in the Ark, Noah wanted to find out if the earth was ready to be re-inhabited. He needed a messenger to find out. It would have to be a bird. Which bird should he send?

Life on the Ark was unbearable. It was also miraculous. (Let us consider, for example, the dimensions of the Ark. It was 300 cubits long, and 50 cubits wide. A cubit is the distance between the elbow and the end of the outstretched hand, one-and-a-half to two feet. Even at two feet per cubit, we end up with trying to fit two of every non-kosher animal and seven or fourteen (depending upon the commentary) of every kosher animal onto a floor area of 600 feet by 100 feet. That’s about two football fields. That’s the world’s smallest zoo with the world’s largest zoo population! It could not have been done without a miracle.)

There was a divine spirit of cooperation on the Ark. The animals were, for the most part, patient about being fed. (The lion, however, didn’t take kindly to a late feeding, resulting in Noah walking with a limp.)

One of the rules in the Ark was a requirement of “Zero Population Growth.” It was considered insensitive for people and animals to reproduce during a time that the rest of the world was suffering. There would be plenty of time to repopulate the earth after the end of the Flood.

Three species violated this commandment: The ravens, the dogs, and Noah's son Ham and his wife ignored the plight of the rest of the world.

Noah didn't like the raven. It was a cruel and selfish bird. In fact, Noah didn't mind endangering that miserable creature by sending it out of the Ark. He didn't understand what value there was in even allowing the raven back into the Ark. He saw the raven as an unnecessary member of the animal kingdom. It was cruel to its own children. It was inedible. It could not be used as a sacrifice. AND, it was despicable.

He sent out the raven; it went back and forth until the water dried out from the earth. (Genesis, 8:7)

The *Midrash* interprets the above verse beyond its literal meaning. G-d was responding to Noah's question as to the value of ravens. He explained to Noah there would be a day in the future, when "*the water dried out from the earth*" -- Elijah the Prophet would pray to G-d to bring a drought. Elijah's food would be delivered to him from the king's table. And who was the delivery service? . . . *the **ravens brought him meat and bread. (1Kings 17:6)*

The raven HAD to survive the Flood. It was absolutely essential. Some day, its descendants would save Elijah the Prophet.

Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin points out how much preparation went into feeding Elijah. First, G-d created the ravens. He allowed them to survive until the Flood. He told Noah to take two of them into the Ark. After the Flood, the world refilled with millions of ravens all over the world. Millions of ravens. Millions of WORTHLESS, trash bag-tearing ravens. All so that at just the right time, there would be a few of those guys around to deliver breakfast and supper to Elijah the Prophet!

I see three important lessons here.

1. Never underestimate anybody. Every person is created in G-d's image, with a Divine mission. That mission may be to save your life!
2. You know that paycheck your boss gave you the other day? It comes every payday, like clockwork, right? Or, if you are self-employed, that sale you made the other day really came in handy. You had better stop to appreciate it. G-d decided on Rosh Hashanah how much you were going to earn. He has been causing customers to want and need your product. He has supported your boss's business so you can afford to send your kids to Yeshiva.
3. Look at all those ravens. Millions of them! To Noah, they were unimportant. To us, they are annoying. But every generation of ravens was essential. If that raven in the Ark had died without leaving offspring, Elijah would have gone hungry. If that raven's son had died without leaving

offspring, Elijah would still have gone hungry. Every one of those ravens had a mission; if only to keep on keeping on until Elijah needed them.

You and I are who we are because of the lessons we learned from our parents and grandparents. And they learned from THEIR parents and grandparents. If any single generation of our ancestors had "opted out" of Judaism, we would be on the outside looking in.

Our ancestors remained committed to Judaism. Every single generation of them. That's why we're here as Jews today. Don't we owe the same commitment to OUR children and grandchildren?

How long will this commitment need to continue?

To misquote the Raven: **"Forever More!"**

Have a great Shabbos.

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