

NOACH (GENESIS 6:9-11:32)

All Aboard! — But With Different Tickets

2026 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

The world was evil, and it was going to be destroyed.

G-d spared eight humans and two of each animal through which he would repopulate the planet after the Flood.

Well... Not always two:

“Of every clean animal take seven pairs, a male with its mate, and of the animal that is not clean, two, a male with its mate...to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth.” (Genesis, 7:2)

Why seven pairs? If you only need one lion and one lioness, one tiger and one tigress, etc. to refill the earth, why do you need fourteen cows and goats and giraffes?

The Torah hadn't been given yet; Noah didn't need to keep Kosher, so why all those Kosher animals?

Noah figured it out.

Noah built an altar to G-d and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. (Ibid. 8:20)

Rashi quotes the Midrash that tells us that Noah reasoned that the purpose of those extra animals was to serve as offerings to G-d.

And it's a good thing he did.

G-d smelled the pleasing aroma, and He said in His heart, “I will not continue to curse again the ground because of man... nor will I again continue to smite every living being, as I have done. (Ibid. v.21)

Noah's offering to G-d brought about that promise from G-d, and as a result, saved countless lives throughout the history of the world.

Let's look back at those animals. They didn't all arrive at the Ark the same way:

Two by two they came to Noah into the Ark, male and female, as G-d had commanded Noah. (ibid. 7:9)

They came on their own -- lions and tigers and bears -- two by two. But what about the “Sevens”? Did the cows and chickens and antelopes volunteer for the cruise? Or did they have to be coaxed in?

“Of every clean animal take seven pairs...”

TAKE seven pairs. Noah had to go get them!

Rabbeinu Bechaya writes, “ G-d... the Merciful Father, didn’t want to decree that they should come on their own as a sacrifice to be slaughtered. Rather, He said, ‘*Take seven for yourself...*’, that he should make the effort to pursue them and busy himself with a Mitzvah. But those that were to keep seed alive, the two by two, He decreed that they should come on their own.”

The animals that were going to survive and build families in the post-Flood world were “programed” to come on their own. Why not? We’re are going to be saved! So we’re in!! Let’s go!

But the “Sacrifice” animals? To have them come of their own accord would be lacking in compassion. So, as an act of mercy on the animals, G-d didn’t cause them to come on their own to their eventual deaths.

Rav A.H. Leibowitz, of Blessed Memory, pointed out that it shouldn’t make a difference. The animals don’t know why they are going in the ark. They’re animals! They don’t know the difference! So let them volunteer too! There’s no cruelty to an animal who doesn’t know the difference!

Yet, observed Rav Leibowitz, it may not make a difference to the cow, but it should make a difference to Noah!

G-d’s compassion is so great and so sensitive that even though the animals don’t detect any form of cruelty, still, in an extremely subtle way, there is a lack of sensitivity on the part of the human who subjects the animal to this behavior.

When I first began learning how to slaughter chickens, my teacher, Rabbi Yisrael Landsman ZTZL insisted that we hold the knife in such a way that the chicken doesn’t see it.

Does it matter? Does the chicken know what the knife is for? I doubt it. But I know what it’s for; so let me treat this chicken with some respect!

At first glance this may seem to be nitpicking. Who cares about the feelings of an animal that has no feelings? This is NOT about cruelty to animals; they don’t know the difference.

This is not about the animals. It’s about US. When we avoid anything that even suggests cruelty, it makes us kinder.

G-d is Merciful and Kind. We are obligated to walk in His Ways and emulate his Mercy and Kindness.

If we learn to go to the nth degree of Mercy and Kindness to G-d’s creatures of two feet and four, hopefully we will be found worthy of receiving His unending kindness as well.

Have a great Shabbos.

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