

Noah, the Ark and the Chaos After the Storm

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BH

We are drawing out some of the themes from our Torah portions and learning them ahead of their “reading dates” in synagogue to give you time to think about them. Last time, we thought about what happened right after the expulsion from Eden. This week, we look at the “echoing” event: what happens after Noah and his family leave the Ark.

When you think about it, the Ark is like the Garden. These are environments designed by God as small, orderly, life-sustaining microcosms. While humans are in them, no matter what rages outside, humans are protected. When they go outside them, humans don't do such a good job of regulating their behavior. And we won't find so orderly an environment in Torah until we get to the Mishkan, the “Tent of Meeting”. (I prefer calling it the “Rendezvous Tent” as this conveys more of its actual meaning: a place where we can meet for a deep connection with God.) Indeed, the Mishkan and the Ark have a great deal in common: both are God-designed, both have a boxes-within-boxes design and both of them move. (It raises an interesting question: did the Garden move?) What goes on in the Mishkan is orderly in the extreme, tranquil; like life in the Garden or on the Ark. This means that for the rest of the book of Genesis we are in the Wild West of human nature, outside the Garden/Ark/Mishkan.

What happens when we are outside the Garden or the Ark? Disorder, and then tension among brothers, ensues. Noah gets out of the Ark, grows grapes, makes wine and falls down drunk. Ham sees Noah, lying exposed in a drunken stupor within his tent and tells his brothers outside the tent...Stop. Tells them what? The text doesn't tell us. That's where our discussion questions begin:

Discussion Questions

1. Ham is the youngest son. Did he perhaps feel panic and simply not know what to do, appealing to his older brothers for help?
2. Ham doesn't know how to frame his father's behavior. Why do the older sons know what to do? Had they seen this behavior before they all boarded the ark? Did the older brothers shield the younger brothers from this sight previously?
3. Is Ham disgusted with his father's behavior?
4. Does he warn his brothers in order to keep them, and others, away from the tent?
5. Is he embarrassed by his father or for his father?
6. Any of these is a possibility. Ham solves the problem his way. His other brothers solve it their way, by covering Noah with a cloth. None of them seems to blame Noah for his behavior. Why *does* Noah get a free pass on this one? Shouldn't it be *he* who takes responsibility for getting drunk? Why blame Ham? Why curse Canaan, who plays no role in the incident at all? Why not curse Ham directly?

As always, looking forward to your insights!

P.S. Just think back to Hurricanes Ike, Rita, Katrina or Andrew if you need a visual/emotional frame for what happens after a storm and flooding.