

Dear Chavraya,

The Torah portion this week is *Parashat No'ach*, the story of the flood, the ark, and the rainbow. For all of its warm familiarity, this portion raises profoundly important ethical questions, matters of abstract ethical principle and of our own behavior in the world. The questions raised are of universal importance. At this point in the Torah there is no Jewish people. Until chapter twelve of *B'reishit*/Genesis, we witness from the first breath of Creation the unfolding of nature and of the human family.

The *parasha* opens with an introduction, "These are the generations of No'ach, No'ach was righteous and wholehearted in his generations, No'ach walked with God." A short time later God says to No'ach, "I have seen you righteous before Me in this generation." In each case emphasis is given to No'ach's own context, to his own generation and time. How are we meant to read this? Does the text mean to suggest that No'ach was righteous only relative to his own times? The question of relative or absolute ethics is raised. Is there an ethical constant, or does the nature of right and wrong and the moral standard to which we are held vary with context and time? Facing Torah and our selves, if you will, the rabbis wrestled with this question. "What does in his generations mean? Rabbi Yochanan said, 'In his generations and not in other generations.' And Resh Lakish said, 'In his generations, therefore how much the more so in other generations.'"

From the school yard to the workplace, to the street corner and the market place, in the board rooms and in the halls of government, is it harder to be a lone voice for what is right, or to be one voice among many without flagging in commitment and leaving the task to others? Is it enough to remain morally pure and to ride out the flood, or is the greater good to cause others to change and avert the flood?

While God promised not to again destroy the earth, humanity has yet to make such a promise. Offering the rainbow covenant as a symbol of peace from Heaven to earth, God waits for us to reciprocate. Before the fires of nuclear conflagration and the floods of ice caps melting, we are called to be righteous in our own generations so that future generations shall come to be.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor