WOULD YOU BE ON THE BOAT ON IN THE WATER?
Rabbi Dan Moskovitz
Temple Sholom, Vancouver BC
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First let me say that this week's parasha, parashat Noach is always very special for me. It's the portion I read on my Bar Mitzvah and I remember being so excited as a Bar Mitzvah boy that I had a torah portion that I actually knew when they assigned it to me.

Everybody knows the story of Noah, the ark, the flood, the animals two by two, the rain for 40 days and nights, the dove, the rainbow.

I remember as an almost 13 year old being truly excited that I didn't really need to study the portion, because I knew the story. Then of course I realized that I didn't know it in Hebrew, let alone how to chant it, and at some point, sitting with my rabbi I learned I really didn't know the story either, well not the whole story.

For example, do you know Noah ended up on the ark with all the animals but everyone else died in a horrible flood?

Yes they were wicked, bad people, but what was their great crime, what was so terrible that God decided (at least according to the legend) that all of humanity, save Noah and his family needed to wiped off the face of the earth?

The Torah records that before the flood waters began to rise God observed, "that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually; and God was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. (Gen 6:5-6)

It takes a little bit more digging to get to the bottom of what exactly human being were guilty of doing, beyond just being bad to the very core. If we look toward the end of the story about 3 chapters later, in Genesis 9, we find our answer.

There in Genesis chapter 9 Noah and his sons, all that survived on the ark are given 7 commandments, seven rules they must follow so that God will not once again destroy the earth. These seven commandments are called the Noahite Laws, and they are important for a number of reasons.

First, we can infer by deduction that if these are the seven things that God prohibits on the threat of once again destroying the earth then they must be the very things that people had done in the first place to bring about the original destruction.

Secondly, they are important because these seven laws unlike the later covenant with Abraham and Moses that contain the 10 commandments and indeed expand to all 613 commandments

in the Torah; these laws are not just for Jews, these laws are universal, they are required of all humanity.

So what are the seven basic laws of humanity that are so important that violation of them could bring down divine wrath and once again the destruction of nearly all human life on earth?

1. **Do not profane G-d's Oneness in any way.**
    - **a.** Acknowledge that there is a single G-d who cares about what we are doing and desires that we take care of the earth.
        - **i.** This is the law of being Shomrei HaAdamah, guardians of the earth. It's a commandment against destruction of our eco-system.

2. **Do not curse your Creator.**
    - **a.** No matter how angry you may be, do not take it out verbally against your Creator.
        - **i.** This is a law that commands that we do not attribute to God reason or action that was not God's doing. This is not to fight wars in God name, not to claim that God favour this political party or one race or religion over another, for all human beings are created in the image of God.

3. **Do not murder.**
    - **a.** The value of human life cannot be measured. To destroy a single human life is to destroy the entire world—because, for that person, the world has ceased to exist. It follows that by sustaining a single human life, you are sustaining an entire universe.

4. **Do not eat a limb of a living animal.**
    - **a.** Respect the life of all G-d's creatures. As intelligent beings, we have a duty not to cause undue pain to other creatures.
        - **i.** This not merely a law to take care of our pets, but to be good stewards and caretakers of all living creatures. Their lives are quite literally in our hands. It may seem trivial, but its an enormous responsibility and a complex one. Animals are explicitly given to human beings for food, but how we utilize that gift is not without limits and a reflection of our morality.

5. **Do not steal.**
    - **a.** Whatever benefits you receive in this world, make sure that none of them are at the unfair expense of someone else.

6. **Do not engage in illicit sexuality.**
    - **a.** Sexuality is the fountain of life and so nothing is more holy than the sexual act. So, too, when abused, nothing can be more debasing and destructive to the human being.

i. Sex is complicated and sexual norms and morality have changed and over time. What has remained constant since the times of Noah is that human beings are prohibited from using that powerful desire and excuse for abuse of power towards or over another human being.

7. **Establish courts of law and ensure justice in our world.**
    a. With every small act of injustice, with every violation of these six laws we slip back closer and closer to a time when God might destroy the world, thus human courts of justice must be established to restrain the human inclination toward evil and ultimately guide all society toward justice.

If these are the criteria which would determine whether or not we are deserving of a place on the ark, then when each of us examines his or her own life, what do we find?

Part of being a Jew and I would argue a moral person of any faith or even of no faith is ask ourselves the tough questions that go to the core of who we are as human beings.

So as you sit at home tonight, as we all do, warm in our homes, food in our bellies. As we each examine how we live up or fall down in the face of these 7 commandments would we be on the ark or in the water?

If we have honestly looked into our souls and have come to the realization that we might stand of chance of finding ourselves in the water rather than on the ark, what are we willing to do to change that fate?

Tough questions, but ones well worth asking. The answers lie within each of us. In the end, may we fashion our lives as to be worthy of our own place on the ark. It would suggest it is better to be strong of character than need to be a strong swimmer.