

RESILIENCE IS KEY

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The parsha of Noach is a frightening one for it illustrates to us the possibility of human life, as we know it, to self-destruct. One need only think of the madmen controlling North Korea and Iran to realize that the apocalypse is not a figure of theory or imagination. Noach's world is destroyed before his very eyes. God's promise regarding floods and ice ages not recurring in such a cataclysmic fashion is, according to the rabbis, limited to only the destruction of the world by water. It does not address other forms of potential disaster.

Noach's world was one of greed, oppression, financial and physical corruption and unbridled sexual excess and licentiousness. Well, tragically and unfortunately, our world also resembles such a state of human affairs. Noach is apparently unable to cope with his world. He builds his protective ark and rides out the storm. But understandably he is traumatized by the event. Though he lives to see the world rebuilt, he is never able to forget the destruction that he witnessed.

Noach, so to speak, does not move on from the events of the flood. All of his previous years of effort in building the ark and obeying God's commandment are seemingly wasted because of his inability to capitalize on his miraculous survival. Though he survives, he is also a victim of that flood. This explains, in a way, his strange decision to plant a vineyard, harvest the grapes and then himself become drunk on the resultant wine. Rashi already comments on the foolishness of his decision to do so. But it is his inability to move past the trauma that drives him to behave thusly and like many another human being, he drowns his inner sorrows in alcohol and wine.

The test of life always is the ability to move on with life and not be destroyed by the traumatic events that we witness and experience. The rabbis of the Mishna compliment our father Avraham on his ability to do so ten times in his lifetime. Wallowing in drink to soothe past troubles has never been a Jewish characteristic. Perhaps that is why Jews begin their ancestry with Avraham and not with Noach.

Our generations have witnessed awful events and tragedies. The resilience of the Jewish people in rising from those events and experiences has been the hallmark of our survival throughout the ages. This resilience is based upon a pride in our special mission of being a unique people - a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Without this ingredient of pride, self-worth, and holiness of mission we would never have been able to survive and prosper as we have done over the ages.

Other peoples have suffered destruction and even genocide. But they have never recovered from

that trauma. Like Noach they could not restore themselves to their former position and greatness. Thus they became the true victims of the flood that engulfed them. In a strange way, the story of Noach repeats itself in all generations. It is Avraham's example that we are bidden to follow. To build and produce and be forward looking is the Jewish response to the waters of the floods that constantly threaten to engulf us.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com

Text Copyright © 2006 by [Rabbi Berel Wein](#) and **[Torah.org](#)**