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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday November 1, 2024 ~ Parsha Noah

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

Rabbinic Wisdom For The Upcoming Election

The time has come for decision making. After months of campaigning, debates, and nonstop news reporting, Americans will go to the polls next Tuesday. What can our Rabbi's understanding of this week's Torah reading of Parshat Noah add to our awareness of the responsibilities that face us as voters?

Much is made in Jewish tradition of Noah's personal qualities as compared to those of Abraham. The Torah tells us that [Noah](#) was a righteous person "in his generation" and walked with God. There is no doubt that Noah was righteous. It makes no sense to me that the plain meaning of the Biblical verse could imply anything else. Yet the phrase "in his generation" which seems to somehow qualify the original statement attesting to Noah's righteousness, has often been understood as raising some doubt. Not that Noah wasn't great -- he certainly was. But for our Rabbis, the issue was whether his greatness was great compared only to the low standards of his generation. Would he have been considered so if he lived in a different era? The comparison is made to Abraham. The Rabbis conclude that had he been compared to one of Abraham's generation, he might not have stood out so.

Now what is the point of this Rabbinic exercise? Was this really a serious issue? Did they really spend their time trying to figure out who was better, more righteous, or more worthy? I don't think so. Their point was to use the inconsistency in the verse to try to inspire us to consider what it means to be moral and righteous not only compared with the standards of the day, but also measured against the timeless values that Judaism teaches.

What was the Rabbis' real concern with Noah? When God tells him to build an ark because He is about to destroy the world, and only Noah and his family would be saved, Noah builds the ark. He does what God tells him. But the *Midrash* criticizes Noah for not using the time to convince his neighbors to repent their evil ways. Noah was happy and content to save himself. [Abraham](#), when confronted with the news that God was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah reacted differently. He literally argued with God and challenged God to spare the city for the sake of even the few righteous people who live there. This episode showed an aspect of Abraham's

character and concern for others which was simply not present in the narrative about Noah.

With this approach, the Rabbis present to us a series of challenges: the challenge between meeting our own needs and our responsibility to the needs of others, the need to meet the concerns of this hour and simultaneously understand how decisions made today have a direct impact on what happens tomorrow. We must ask the same questions and accept the same challenges when we enter the voting booth this Tuesday (unless of course you voted early).

For a moment, let's stop being Democrats or Republicans, pro Kamala Harris, or pro Donald Trump and let's simply evaluate our choices as our Rabbi's might. Let's do our best to determine which candidate is capable of doing the right thing for our generation, and will also lead us in a direction that future generations will judge as honorable and righteous as well.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner