

**Parshat Noach**  
**The Flood and the Whirlwind**  
**Kate Rozansky - Class of 2025**

---

When you tell a stranger that you are a rabbinical student, you have to prepare yourself for things to get weird. A year ago, I was gifted a massage for Mother's Day. While I was on the table, the woman asked me what I was doing with my life. When I told her I was studying to become a rabbi, she said, "I don't know how anyone could love a God who could kill all those Egyptian children, and drown all those babies in the Flood."

While I would not describe this woman's personal or professional boundaries as "excellent," the problem she posed (and the question behind it) was a good one. In fact, it has haunted me ever since. Obviously, this woman is not the first person to ask this question, nor the first to seriously doubt that God's justice and God's mercy are in perfect balance. In fact, she might as well have been quoting the book of Iyov (Job). Iyov, too, questions God's goodness. Iyov is a good person, but when God inflicts suffering upon him and his family, he cries out in horror and in anger, saying, "It is all one...[God] destroys the innocent and the wicked...he mocks as the innocent fall." (Iyov 9: 22-23). If Noach was watching as the flood waters rose above his neighbors, perhaps he thought the same thing.

In fact, the stories of Iyov and Noach are clearly linked. Noach is called a "*tzadik*" and "*tamim*," righteous and blameless, while Iyov is "*tam v'yashar*," blameless and upright. Both men are singled out by God for their exemplary character: Noach and his family are saved because of his righteousness, while Iyov's family is destroyed by his. Both stories prominently feature animals and a fateful storm. Both Noach and Iyov witness terrible loss and face the harrowing prospect of starting over, amidst their own despair and desolation.

The two men respond to this challenge in different ways. Noach's response is silence. God talks to Noach, tells him his plans, and Noach obeys, silently. When the flood occurs, Noah has nothing to say, but his actions tell a rather bleak story. After he finally - reluctantly - leaves the ark, God tells Noach and his family *twice* to be fruitful and multiply. Why twice? Perhaps because the first command was not persuasive. Instead, when Noach gets out of the Ark, he starts killing things, gets drunk, and passes out. The first words we hear him speak are curses.

Iyov's response, on the other hand, is to talk and talk. He curses the day he was born and cries out to God, accusing God of tyranny and iniquity. When Iyov talks to God, God talks back, giving Iyov a poetic tour of creation, nature in all its beauty and terror. God's reply to Iyov is framed as a series of questions: "Have you

penetrated to the sources of the sea/Have the gates of death been disclosed to you?...Do you know the season when the mountain goats give birth? Can you mark the time when the hinds calve?...Can you draw out the Leviathan by a fishhook? Can you press down his tongue by a rope?" (Iyov 38:16-40:25). This response is typically understood to mean: "Shut Up, Iyov. I can make the Leviathan, and you can't." That's how Iyov seems to take it: his response is to cover his mouth, and to pledge a Noahide silence.

But the novelist Dara Horn says that God's response to Iyov should be read more subtly; that it is not, "You're not as powerful as I am," but "You're not as creative as I am." This is different than simply highlighting God's infinite power, because now God is pointing human beings towards a capacity that human beings and God share. What if God's reply to Iyov was not a rebuff, but advice, advice that Noach and anyone else who lives in a world flooded with pain, might need to hear? In a way, this advice is almost the same as the command that God gives to Noach after the flood. "Be fruitful and multiply," need not only mean "have children." It could also be an invitation to become God's partner in the divine act of creation.

Both Noach and Iyov take up this invitation. They make their resilience visible through acts of creativity, acts clearly shaped by the losses that came before. Noach invents winemaking, while Iyov's creativity is more humble. In Iyov's first speech after his trials have ended, he gives his new daughters beautiful names: Yemima, Ketziah, and Keren-hapuch. Robert Alter translates them as "Dove," "Cinnamon," and "Horn of Eyeshade." Iyov also gives these daughters "an inheritance together with their brothers," creating what appears to be a new legal structure (Iyov 42:15).

Noach's technical creativity provides him with a way of increasing man's joy, but also his forgetting - an impressive feat with ambiguous results. Iyov's poetic and intellectual creativity is a way of loving and protecting the vulnerable people in his life, even after he is gone. Interestingly, at the end of their stories, Noach simply dies, but Iyov dies "old and contented" (Iyov 42:17). Perhaps the best or most enduring things that we create are those that are informed by what we have lost, or what we most fear losing.

This is, of course, not an answer to my masseuse's question, and I'm not sure that I have one. Chazzal were also disturbed by the idea of God drowning children in the flood. In fact, they insist that it did not happen. In Midrash Tanchuma, it says that when the flooding began, it came from both above and below. There was rain and also flooding from the springs and the wells. When the wells started overflowing, it says that the Generation of the Flood *threw their own children down the wells to try*



*and stop the water from coming up.* It also adds that if they had not done this, the Generation of the Flood could have survived ([Midrash Tanchuma Noach 7:3](#)).

This midrash is terrifying. And yet, perhaps we can discover in it some of that divine creativity that we see in the stories of Noach and Iyov. Through this Midrash, our Sages insist that God does not drown children; human beings do. They insist that the tragedy of the flood was not inevitable and that redemption is always possible – even when we must fish it out from the darkest depths ourselves, and nurture it with our own two hands. Shabbat Shalom.



*Kate Rozansky is the former director of the Maimonides Scholars Program, a Jewish thought and philosophy summer program for high school students. Previously she was a research analyst at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, a reporter, and a literary and theater critic. She is the editor (with Paul Wilford) of Athens, Arden, Jerusalem, a collection of essays on Greek poetry, Shakespeare, and the Torah. She has a bachelor's degree in Liberal Arts from St. John's College in Annapolis, MD. She lives in Washington D.C. with her husband, Jeremy, and her sons Sam and Boaz.*