

# An Ark for Our Anger

Parshat Noach  
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In the work *Mei Hashiloach*, R. Mordechai Yosef of Ishbitza offers a profound psychological reading of God's instructions for Noah to build the ark. The Ishbitzer explains that God's advice is everlasting, and that these instructions were meant for any person living through "days of wrath" and that they offer "protection from all the evil that unsettles the world" (*Mei HaShiloach*, Parshat Noach). I'd like to share a few powerful examples.

God commands Noah, "Make yourself an ark of gopher wood" (Genesis 6:14). *Mei Hashiloach* points out that the word for gopher (*gaphrit*) also means anger. The verse can therefore be read as an instruction for Noah to seal up his anger by making a structure that will contain his inner rage.

Regarding the ark, God commands Noah to also "Make rooms in [it]" (ibid.). The Ishbitzer uses this verse as further instruction concerning one's own emotional and intellectual disposition. He notes that one "who has many rooms must have a sense of order to know the location of each one and its function" (*Mei HaShiloach*, Parshat Noach). Through this verse a person is guided to have a settled mind, to create order in one's consciousness, and to work on placing one's feelings, each in their proper place.

God tells Noah to "Seal [the ark] with pitch" (Genesis 6:14). In Hebrew, sealing (*ve'chaparta*) is comprised of the same letters as atonement (*capara*). In the process of confronting one's anger, a person must engage in the deep work of atonement. For *Mei Hashiloach* this means that a person should strive to forgive his or her fellow so as to get rid of any residue of anger that might reside in one's heart.

Another important teaching from the Ishbitzer is found in his explanation of God's command to "Make a skylight for the ark" (ibid. 6:16). The Ishbitzer notes that working through one's anger is a process that requires clarity and enlightenment. For *Mei Hashiloach* this mainly means cultivating an appreciation that everything ultimately comes from God and that everything is in God's hands. The skylight in the ark is a reminder to let go and let God be.

We are living through a stormy period and through our own days of wrath and rage. Like Noah, we also seek shelter from the storm. The Ishbitzer's commentary reminds us that we should not only seek refuge from external threats, but that we must also learn to navigate the storms that rage within each of us. Social distancing and masks will hopefully protect us from the coronavirus, they won't however protect us from our own anger and frustration. Tuning out this or that political rally or muting this or that political debate might protect us from the vitriol that currently dominates our public space, but these actions might not shield us from the bitterness that has taken root in our own hearts.

During this time, let us truly build an ark inside our hearts, an orderly consciousness, a disposition that affords atonement, and allows us to let go (when it is right do so). May God's light guide us as we make our way through these stormy times and days of rage.