

## Shabbat Shalom With A Side of Torah - Noah

There is a new deli in town. They advertise that their meats are flown in from New York and are authentic "Jewish Deli" meats. It was with great excitement that a friend took me to experience this culinary oasis. I looked at the menu and saw their special -- a pastrami reuben. You know that is what I ordered. I was excited -- it was coming on real Jewish Rye bread!! The sandwich came and it was stacked just like a New York Deli sandwich. This was exciting! Well, the sauerkraut ended up being sweet coleslaw, and the pastrami was dry. The rye bread was good, though. Despite the signs affirming its authenticity, it was not what we expected. Now, it was probably good as compared to much of the Lexington Deli market, but ... being one of the best delis a town has to offer is only meaningful if the town has lots of good deli. And for the many blessings (culinary and otherwise) that Lexington offers, good New York Deli is not one of them.

Our Torah portion teaches that Noah was a man righteous in his generation. In the same sense that the deli may be one of the best in town, Noah was the best his generation had to offer. Given that his generation deserved the flood, we cannot say much for Noah's righteousness. The prophet Isaiah refers to the flood waters as "Mae Noakh -- the waters of Noah." When God told Noah to build the ark, he never suggested that God was being extreme. He never argued for anyone else, in fact, according to the Zohar (mystical book of Kabbalah), "When God said to Noah, 'The end of all flesh is come before Me,' Noah said: 'What will You do with me?' But he did not pray for the world, as Abraham would pray for the city of Sodom. This is why the Flood is called 'the waters of Noah' (Isaiah 54:9) -- he is culpable for them, because he did not appeal for mercy on the world's behalf." Whether he was a righteous man tainted by a horrible world or whether he was simply the least bad of his generation has been debated for thousands of years. What we know, in the end, is that Noah got on the ark with his wife and children (and their spouses), leaving everyone, including Grandfather Methuselah behind. Yet, despite this very difficult story, somehow, when we talk with children, Noah becomes a hero bigger than life.

In truth, this is the modern day story of the people we call heroes. If you look at sports figures today, we may idolize their talents on the field, but their behavior is an entirely different question. Last week, when a quarterback went down with a concussion, the defensive player involved in the collision pointed and laughed at him, as he lay unconscious on the grass. Nostalgically, we think of Babe Ruth as a sports hero, yet his alcoholism is almost as famous as his home run totals. And of course, this dualism is not unique to the sports world. Charles Lindbergh was a flying ace and an avid Anti-Semite. Resident John Kennedy is remembered as a Civil Rights hero, yet his wife had to be paid a fortune just to stay with him because of his unfaithfulness. And this list could go on, but regularly we find ourselves caught in the dilemma of admiring someone for his/her work and yet feeling disdain for the other life choices. And in many cases, the dualism is dramatic. There is the former Mouseketeer Brittany Spears, child star Lindsay Lohan, and the host of other teen idols and celebrities that spend as much time in rehab as they do performing. We have Michael Vick who may be one of the best all around athletes to ever play football, yet he is also one of the most inhumane, except maybe for his little brother. Noah built the ark and saved his family, but let the rest of the world die in the flood. There is something about our society, though, that seems to be able to separate the person's dark side from celebrity status, almost as if we are willing to accept the garbage because of the thrill we receive from the activity that initially brought him

attention. And while it is true, as with the debate over Noah, that some of these heroes have dark sides because of the pressures of society, our bottom line is that ... Noah still let the earth flood without argument. Putting his picture and his ark all over a nursery ignores the story's own teaching that not one baby got on the ark.

I have a radical thought. Perhaps we need to rethink this hero stuff. Maybe we should line our nurseries with pictures of the real heroes – the teachers who help prepare us for the world, the nurses who help save lives, the safety officers who protect us and save us from disasters. And what of the unsung athletes who, without fanfare or flash play by the rules and help teams grow and succeed. Every good running back was made great by his front line. We all know O.J. Simpson, but who can name the lineman who let him become the NFL's first 2000 yard man? And yes every profession has their "weak links," but we need to let our children know that life is not lived in front of cameras and fan filled stadiums. Most of our children will never appear in the tabloids or even in the news. When we help our children learn to set goals, they need to be ones that keep them grounded and progressive ... and productive. And, even if they become famous, they will remain grounded and progressive ... and productive. We need to show them heroes that exist in their classrooms, in their communities, in their families, and who are tangible and knowable ... and who are still themselves committed to learning and growing. And, as difficult as this will be for every child to hear, Noah was not such a person.

May we learn to appreciate the real blessings in our lives and become real blessings in the lives of others. And, in making these commitments, may we find the heroes who can help mold our lives and our life choices so that we may become partners in healing the world. Shabbat Shalom.