

**NOACH**  
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Last Thursday's *New York Times* included an article by Christine Haughney on a special bus, B-110, that runs between Williamsburg and Borough Park in New York City. It is operated by Private Transportation Corporation since 1973 and has special rules which, though unwritten, are adhered to by almost everyone. On this bus women sit in the back of the bus and men are seated in the front. The guidelines posted in the front and back of the bus state the following: "When boarding a crowded bus with standing passengers in the front, women should board the back door after paying the driver in the front" and that: "When the bus is crowded, passengers should stand in their designated areas." As one of the women who adheres to these rules stated: "It is such a normal thing for us that women and men are separate. Most of ladies go to the back."

While Noah and his family did not ride the bus, as the Ark was their mode of transportation, the separation between men and women was also observed. According to the Torah, this is a description as Noah and his family enter the Ark: "Noah and his sons and his sons' wives entered the Ark because of the waters of the flood."

Until it was safe for them to come into the land, they stayed on that Ark along with all the animals. When G-d commands Noah to exit the Ark after the flood, G-d states: "Go out from the Ark: You and your wife and your sons' wives with you." If you are sensitive to the nuances of the language, you will have heard that when Noah and his family entered the Ark husbands and wives are listed separately, when G-d asks them to leave the Ark husbands and wives are listed together.

Commenting on the separation on the men and women in Noah's family upon entering the Ark, Rashi states: "The men separately and the women separately: marital relations were prohibited during a time when the world was engulfed in sorrow and tragedy." It did not seem appropriate for Noah and his family to carry on with life, complete with the pleasure of intimate relations, at a time when destruction rained down upon the earth. When the flood waters had abated, G-d tells Noah that his family can resume life, husbands and wives no longer need be separate, intimating they should resume family relations and re-populate the world.

However, when Noah and his family do leave the Ark, the text reads as follows: "And Noah went out and his sons and his wife, and his sons' wives with him." In other words, if we are again sensitive to the biblical language, Noah did not follow G-d's dictate. He separated the sexes on their exit from the Ark just as he had done when they entered it.

What do these texts teach us and how should we understand Noah's reticence to follow G-d's command? It seems to me that in the routine order of life's events there is no need to separate the sexes as was done on the Ark. Gender separation isn't normal. The Ark was a special exception. In Brooklyn even husbands and wives sit separately on

the bus. Men may feel that being together with women may elicit too much temptation on their part, but frankly, that's their problem. In the world in which we live gender separation under normal circumstances is not necessary, not if we value the other person as an equal human being worthy of personal dignity. Over the years, our Conservative movement has recognized that truth as men and women not only sit together in worship experiences, but also participate in synagogue life and communal endeavors on a basic equivalent status. There are still nuances having to do with gender differences, there is, after all, a biological difference between a man and a woman, but we have learned that equal opportunities for both men and women in leadership is something that is a desideratum and not something upon which to look askance. Noah just didn't get it.

What then made Noah not adhere to G-d's command? Perhaps Noah was paralyzed by the scene that stood before him. As he looked out at the world he saw devastation and destruction. He had no trust in G-d or himself, he was immobilized by fear, and did not believe he could be successful in building a new world. He may have felt that if the creator of the world did not show compassion for his creatures, why should Noah attempt to create a new world by populating it and establishing his family as the first family of all humanity?

G-d encourages Noah to go forward by blessing him and offering him the promise that never again will a flood destroy the entire earth. Everything hinges now upon Noah and his family and their response. Is Noah up to the task or not? Will he be immobilized by fear and by paralysis, or will he move forward creating a family of nations?

Others, too, have been faced with the same dilemma. In the aftermath of WWII, survivors of the Shoah emerged, one by one from ghettos, concentration camps, forests and other places of hiding, to face a world similar to Noah's after the flood. These survivors had witnessed unspeakable cruelty and horror. Their world had been totally destroyed, their families murdered. They could have easily been paralyzed by fear, immobilized by what they saw.

However, for the betterment of the Jewish people and all humanity, in almost all cases, that was not their response. With unimaginable strength and indomitable spirit, these survivors rebuilt their worlds. They married, had children and grandchildren and rebuilt the Jewish people giving us hope for our future.

But we don't have to think in such grandiose heroic terms. Each day, there are people immobilized by fear, unable to move forward because they don't know what the next moment will be. Instead, they sink in quicksand and feel that they cannot move forward in a world of uncertainty.

Two farmers happened to meet at the fence that divided their fields. One was asked by his neighbor: "John, what are you going to plant this year? Corn?" John said, "Nope, scared of corn borers." Said the neighbor, "What about potatoes?" Again John

responded, “Nope, too much danger of potato bugs.” A third time the neighbor inquired, “What are you going to plant?” John answered, “Nothing, I am going to play it safe.”

If we don’t plant, then we won’t have any crop failures, but neither will we have any harvest. If we don’t try new ventures in business we will not have any losses, but neither will we have any profits. Unless you try and risk, you will never achieve anything. Thomas Edison had so many failures in his lab that his students were puzzled by his willingness to keep trying. He told them he had great results, 50,000 combinations that would not work. The next day he discovered the formula for the storage battery.

Sometimes it is difficult to move forward. We become immobilized by fear, concerned about failure and how we will handle it. It is sometimes easier not to take risks. However, if we are to succeed at anything we must take the chance, have faith in ourselves and in our ability to persevere.

Many of our congregants know that I am up very early in the morning before coming to Minyan here at the synagogue, to exercise in the basement of our home. While I do so, I read and watch the news on the television. One of the programs I watch is HLN News. The anchor is Robin Meade, who is always cheerful, with a smile on her face as she reports the news.

Robin Meade authored a book entitled “*Morning Sunshine*” in which she details her life’s journey to the position she now holds. She describes reporting the news in Cleveland and in Chicago before being chosen for this national stage. The purpose of her book is to offer some lessons from her own life. She describes having panic attacks before newscasts and how she almost gave up her dream of being a network newscaster. It is only when she meets Dr. Amelia Case, who is the Chief of Staff of the Universal Health Institute, here in Chicago, and a specialist in helping people change damaging thoughts and behaviors, that her life gets back to some sort of normalcy. The story of the book is how, together with Dr. Case, Robin Meade begins to build up her self-esteem, have a sense of confidence in her abilities and not be afraid of failure.

Who would have thought that this buoyant woman who seems so wide awake very early in the morning was a one-time candidate for depression and the loss of self-confidence? She now writes that she is comfortable in any situation on air, doesn’t mind voicing her opinions and has found her confidence. As she ends her book she writes: “If you have faith in yourself, you will also have faith in people around you and believe the world is a good place where you can thrive and contribute.”

This was not Noach. Noach was immobilized both by his lack of self-confidence and by his fear of the unknown. Where G-d wanted him to take the world in his hands, resume family relations, end the gender separation, Noach was not ready to do so. He might even have been willing to have stayed on the Ark for another lengthy period of time. Only later do he and his children re-populate the world once more.

The Torah is filled with lessons, sometimes through simple nuances. In the use of language concerning Noach and his family entering the Ark, being commanded by G-d to exit the Ark, and then actually leaving the Ark, we learn a great deal about Noach and his character as well as about G-d's wish for all humanity. If the people in Brooklyn feel comfortable on bus B-110, may they be blessed. I would never feel comfortable on such a bus and I don't think G-d, as I understand the Divine Presence, would feel welcome on that bus either.

And unlike Noach we must venture forth, accept our challenges, have faith in ourselves and in the future. By the end of the Torah portion, Noach is no longer important; it is Abram that now takes center stage. He will follow G-d's command to travel to a new land, accept challenges which are extremely difficult and be prepared to surmount them. And, it was together with his wife Sarai that he went forth to the land of his ancestors to the new Promised Land. Together they went forward as a couple.

May we follow their path and be successful in our endeavors.