

## *Noah 2016*

Delivered By Rabbi Aaron Krupnick November 5, 2016

Almost everyone, it seems, knows the story of Noah in some way. We all remember that he and his wife and his family, and they alone, took the animals two by two onto the ark. It floated for 40 days and then landed with all of the rest of humanity and the animal kingdom wiped away. And, for many, the story ends there. But it doesn't...What happens next is one of the most dramatic declines in all of literature, certainly biblical literature. Noah plants a vineyard and in the very next scene gets so appallingly drunk that his own children have to keep him from public humiliation. What happened? Why did someone so righteous as to be the savior of humanity fall so far so quickly? And, more importantly, what can we learn from this story that can help us to live better lives today? What is this part of the story trying to tell us?

Well, my entire understanding of the story changed when I found out about the Harvard Study of Adult Development. It is a one of a kind experiment that has lasted 75 years. Seventy-five years ago, researchers at Harvard began a study of 724 men in their teens. Half of them were Harvard sophomores, and the other half were teens living in some of Boston's poorest areas - many in tenements. For the next 75 years they tracked the mental and physical health of all of these men. They did not just send the men surveys. They went into their homes and interviewed them. They interviewed their families annually, too. They did physical exams and drew blood. They did CAT scans when the technology became available. Research like this, in such great detail over this long a period of time is extremely rare. But it is still on-going. Today 60 of the men are still alive, all in their 90's. One of them, by the way is George H.W. Bush.

After assessing all the data over time the researchers have reached some important conclusions as to what has most contributed to the health and happiness of these men. And the number one finding, the most universal truth to come from their research is that the greatest indication of health and happiness over time is...good relationships. More than any other single factor, those people with the best, most meaningful interpersonal relationships were the healthiest mentally and physically. The people most satisfied with their relationships in their 50's were also the healthiest in their 80's. This is an important finding for us for we live in a country where 20% of the American population reports that they are lonely. The study showed that people who felt isolated and alone lived shorter lives than those who had good, healthy, on-going relationships.

But it was not the number of friends that a person had, per se, but rather the quality of the relationships that mattered most. And it did not seem to matter much if the relationships were always smooth. People could argue, even bicker in the relationships. What mattered most was that the people who were found to be happiest and healthiest were those who knew they had other people they could count on; people they could rely upon; people they could trust to be there for them. That was what made the biggest difference.

So now we can understand what happened to Noah a little better. He was an army of one. There was no one else he could rely on except his own family. He came from an environment where you could trust next to no one. Society was so mutually suspicious and unkind to one another than Gd wiped them out. Noah was alone. And even if he did have his family, the sense of isolation he felt must have been unbearable. And that's why he gets drunk, to escape. With no potential for new relationships he turns inward and self-destructive. We don't really hear from him ever again...

My friends, we live in a world of quick fixes. We want a diet, an exercise plan, a pill that will make us more happy and healthy. Here is a way, scientifically proven, to have that. So why isn't the information from this amazing, truly unique survey more widely known? Because relationship building is not fast, nor easy. We want quick fixes and this is not one of them. We live in a world where we are told that we need to really get into work, which we need to lean into productivity... But what this research shows is that the people who fared the best over time were those who leaned into relationships. They fared better than people who leaned into work.

So what might it look like, in practical terms for you to lean into relationship? Where might a little more reaching out be of benefit for you? At every stage of life in this long survey, those who fared the best were those who put in the time and effort to patiently build good and lasting relationships and it is never, ever too late to lean in that direction. But it takes time, and effort, and a little courage, too, to reach out, to reach across the divide and to not be a Noah, but to be an Abraham whose tent was open on all sides, ever ready to greet others with a full heart.