

Noah 2013

Delivered by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick on October 5, 2013

This Shabbos we are continuing our 3-part series entitled “Facing your Insecurities.” And as you may remember, I chose this topic for this season because the earliest stories of the Torah address this topic head on. And as I said last week, what makes these stories true is not that they are factually, historically, or scientifically accurate, but rather that they teach Timeless Truths. Adam sins by eating the forbidden fruit, and as a result of his insecurity and his unwillingness to take responsibility for his own life and his own choices what does he do? He gets defensive. He throws Eve under the bus. And then she does the same thing with the snake. And the Timeless Truth here is that we all have insecurities and fears that we carry around, insecurities that keep us on the defensive, push us away from the people we care about, and keep us from living the kind of life Gd really wants of us. Insecurities keep us from moving forward and living our best lives. And that’s why “Facing Our Insecurities” is really such a relevant and timeless topic.

So now that we know we’ve all got them, the question is – what do we do with them? How do we face our insecurities and work through them in a way that will make us feel like we are living good, healthy, productive lives; the kind of lives that make us proud of ourselves and make Gd proud of us? And I think this week’s Torah portion picks up where the last one left off with regard to facing insecurity. Noah is called by Gd. And I know, right off the bat, that some people might say, “Well, we’ve already crossed the line from reality to fantasy – No one today is called by Gd.” But that’s not true. We all have a vocation, and that’s YOUR calling. “Vocation” comes from the same root as “Vocal”. Your “vocation” is not your “job”. They can, ideally be the same, but your “vocation” is your calling, and you know your calling when the pieces of your life fit into place, when you feel like your talents and abilities and attributes and emotions are all in line, or at least moving in that direction. Your “calling” is that little voice inside of you that tells you that you are moving forward in a good and positive and meaningful direction. We all have the ability to find our “calling,” and in this week’s Torah portion Noah finds his. He’s called by Gd to build an ark, of course, and to move on in his life journey. And, interestingly, we are told exactly when his journey was to begin. It says, “In the midst of the day.” And that’s odd because the Torah doesn’t tell us the time of day unless it’s really important. And it turns out that this phrase, “In the midst of the day” (B’etzem Ha-Yom) is only used three times in the whole Torah. It’s used here. It’s used when the Jewish People leave Egypt, “In the midst of the day”. And, it is used when Moses takes his leave of the People – “in the midst of the day”, and ascends Mt. Nebo to die.

What do all of these have in common? In each case there were lots of people around to try to talk the person out of what it was he felt he was being called to do. In each case there was ample opportunity for their insecurities to get the best of them and not do something brave. That’s why the Torah goes out of its way to emphasize that they had to do it in the middle of the day – to show that popular opinion and the negative advice of others were not going to sway them from doing something meaningful and important.

The Midrash has us imagine that there were plenty of people crying to Moses “Don’t leave us!” And there were plenty of people saying, “If we leave Egypt we are going to die in the desert.” And there were likely many people who looked at Noah and said, “You’re nuts!” In fact I ask myself, if Noah was around today, (with so much access to public opinion) would he have followed through on his calling if he had Facebook and Instagram? Probably not!

So here’s the truth that I learn from this: If you are going to face your insecurities and work through them you need to do two things: #1 You need to have the courage to do it even if you are scared and afraid of change, and #2 You have to be willing to look past and disregard the negative advice of others.

Think of what would have happened to Noah if he had heeded the advice of those around him and given in to his securities, instead of doing what he knew in his heart was the right thing to do? It’s the story of our People: Think of what would have happened to us if Moses listened to the all the People who complained that life was better back in Egypt; to all those people who were afraid to go on with out him? They were willing to go back to slavery rather than face their own insecurities! And so I ask you: What slavery are you willing to go back to rather than move forward and take a risk? What ark won’t you build? Where won’t you journey because of fear and insecurity? What’s keeping you from moving closer to your own calling? I can’t answer that for you – no one can. Sometimes you have to have the courage to go out “in the midst of the day”, pull out of the social network and listen to the voice inside that is calling to you. You can sense when you are in better alignment, when you are living closer to your potential. This can’t be dictated by others and it can’t be based on what others think. I’m not talking about turning your back on friends and family; I’m talking about having the courage to define yourself through your own sense of calling, and not by what others think of you, say to you, or do to you. Your success is ultimately in your own hands. Maybe its time to step forward as a leader in your own life – B’etzem Ha-Yom – in the midst of a new day.