

The Flood, Baptism and the Mikveh

Genesis 8:16 - "Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee."

This recalls Jesus cry at the tomb of Lazarus "Lazarus, come forth!" (John 11:43)

Noah, preserved from destruction in the Ark, was stepping out into a new world like Adam. A new creation, as we do by being born again, or as Jonah (Matthew 12:39) or Lazarus, resurrected from the dead.

The flood and the Ark were a type of Christ's death and resurrection as displayed in baptism.

1 Peter 3:20-21 - "... when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

The Mikveh

The rabbis compared the flood (and also the original waters that covered the earth in Genesis 1:2) to the purifying effect of ritual immersion in a mikveh bath.

The Chassidic master, Rabbi Shneur Zalmen of Liadi, describes the flood as a cleansing process. The waters of the flood are like the waters of a ritualarium -- a mikveh -- where the waters spiritually cleanse the dross that accumulates in the course of our life's endeavors. The world received a spiritual cleansing, and this set the course of history on a course of hope and purpose. Just as a mikveh has to have 40 seah (an ancient measure of volume) of "living" waters, so did the rains of the flood last for forty days.

Chassidic teaching explains that the flood was not just a punishment, but also a purification for the world. It completely enveloped the earth, and its forty days and forty nights correspond to the measure of forty se'ah of water required to make a ritually fit mikveh. The waters of the flood cleansed the world by immersion in the same way one is purified by immersion in the waters of the mikveh.

To fulfill the commandment of mikveh, one must immerse completely, be entirely enveloped by the waters. This total immersion of self means losing one's independent existence, going out from oneself.

This is also reflected in the events on Pentecost, when the disciples were baptized in the Holy Spirit.

When describing the end of the flood, the Torah declares, "vayashoku hamayim" – the

waters subsided. The same word and root is also used in Megillas Esther, describing Achashveirosh's mood after Haman was hanged – “v'chamas hamelech shachacha” – the king's anger subsided.

Other instances:

Adam - After the Fall he repented, and underwent a terrible ordeal while fasting, praying, and bathing in the river for seven and forty days, according to the midrash Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer.

The Exodus - Israel passed through the sea on dry ground, while Pharaoh's army is destroyed by the waters. (Exodus 14 and 15) The children of Israel entered as individuals and members of different tribes, but they emerged as a new nation.

The new birth

Conversion to Judaism culminated in a baptism - immersion in a mikveh bath - that effects a change of status. The convert can then recite the benediction that says, “God of OUR father...” because he has become a Jew. The Talmud states: “As soon as a convert immerses and emerges, he is a Jew in every way.” A convert who embraces Judaism “is like a newborn child.”

In later Rabbinical Hebrew, the womb is often referred to as ‘kever’ a word which also means grave. The beginning and end points of the cycle of life, a place of non-breathing. The fetus is suspended in fluid, as in the flood.

Jesus said “You must be born again” which happens by identifying with the death of Jesus on the Cross, in a reflection of his death and resurrection.

Colossians 2:12 - “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.”

The altar

Genesis 8:21 - “And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD”

Before presenting a sacrifice in the Temple, the offerer was required to restore ritual purity by going through a mikveh bath immersion.

Noah had just undergone his “mikveh,” immersed in the destruction of the flood, protected in the Ark, and was ready to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving.