



Shabbat Noach/1 Cheshvan 5778
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An Ark of Words

One of the things I love about Torah study, and Jewish learning in general, is how meaning comes alive in the encounter. In some ways Torah study is the opposite of the factual learning we have to do for so many basic aspects of life. It is a purely interpretive encounter. The meaning is associative and contextual. There is not only room for the reader to respond, but the text demands it - and that's why we study so often in pairs and groups. So much holiness resides in the Torah, but it only comes alive in the encounter.

For example, in this week's Torah portion, God tells Noah to build an ark. Many Jews only read the story as children's lore. Well, as one of our wise Hebrew School students pointed out on Wednesday night, it's not really children's literature! We could stop there, as many do. But let's not.

The Ba'al Shem Tov, the grandfather of Hasidism, reads teivah, "ark", to mean "words". In Genesis 6:16, where it says, "make an opening for daylight (tzohar) in the ark", the Ba'al Shem Tov says this means that the teivah, the word, should shine.

What would you do with that metaphor? What would it mean for your words to shine, to be radiant?

When it's time to go, God says to Noah, "Come into the ark, you and all of your household" (Gen 7:1). This Shabbat, may we momentarily set down the weight of our week, and enter into the world of radiant words.

Shabbat shalom,
Debra

Rabbi Debra Rappaport

p.s. Two more courses start next week, Cultivating the Inner Qualities of Leadership and The Soul of Jewish Living!