

Shabbat Parashat No'ah

Bring an End to *Sinat Hinam*/Senseless Hatred between Fellow People

This week, our Torah portion contains the well-known story of Noah and the flood. We begin the tale by learning that all moral, ethical, and respectful behavior have been abandoned by humanity (rabbinic commentary and *midrashim* teach us that all manner of illicit activities had been undertaken by people, including murder, theft, and senseless hatred between fellow people, among many others) and that God has decided that the only solution to the problem is to flood the world. "Creation" would occur again through Noah's family, his offspring, and the animals and plants which they will preserve on an ark. After the rainfall and the waiting out of the receding waters from upon the face of the earth for several months, those dwelling on the ark are able to disembark and to begin their lives again. God creates a covenant never to destroy the world in such a way again and offers humanity the opportunity to eat meat in hopes that this would assuage some of our violent and hurtful tendencies. It was a chance for a new beginning and to learn from the generations of humanity who had lost their way in their treatment of each other and their awareness of God's presence in themselves and the world.

As we have come to learn by looking at the course of human history, the lessons we were intended to learn from the flood regularly elude us, both on a grand human scale and in relations between individuals. Unfortunately, our species is not a stranger to war and people either suffer or become aware of senseless hatred between fellow humans on a daily basis, a most tragic occurrence of such a reality coming to the forefront of our experience just this past week. Over the past several days, news has traveled far and wide of the incomprehensible suicide of Amanda Todd, a 15-year old girl from Port Coquitlam. In her now well-known YouTube video, she tells her story of being stalked, victimized by bullies and her resulting anxiety, depression and desire to take her own life. So many questions have arisen as a result of this tragedy, some about the specifics of her experience and others about the essence and nature of the human being: How could it happen that a person could feel so alone as to be driven to take her own life? How could it be that people could consider it acceptable to harass, stalk, and emotionally torture another person to death? While the answers to these questions are complex, Amanda Todd's legacy must be that we will be reminded of the devastating effects that losing our sense of respect, losing our moral and ethical compasses and engaging in senseless hatred for our fellow human beings can have. It is as if we are reliving and repeating the mistakes that the generation of Noah and his family first made.

In the Mishna, we are taught that saving one life is like saving an entire world. The reverse also holds true: to lose one life is to lose the potential for an entire world. The transgressions and consequences for the generation of Noah and the events surrounding the death of Amanda Todd are eerily similar: senseless hatred leading to destruction of life. It is incumbent upon all of us to do what we can, each and every one of us, to focus on eliminating senseless hatred between fellow human beings from our world and to search for the goodness and divine spark embedded in

each person. To do otherwise would be to learn nothing from Amanda Todd's death and to stand idly by as other may be suffering as she so horrifically did. If we act in this way, we will achieve the best guarantee at living meaningful and fulfilled lives in this world while making it a better and happier place in which no one feels abandoned, lost, or alone.

Shabbat Shalom!