PARASHA OF THE WEEK / 01

Noach

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What we leave in others

17 October 2026 · 6 Cheshvan 5787 · Genesis 6:9–11:32

We usually think of a legacy as something we leave behind. Noach asks us to notice what we are already leaving in the people around us: a way of speaking, a response to embarrassment, an example of how to begin again. The parsha opens with a small interruption that changes how we understand a life.

THE JOURNEY THROUGH THE PARSHA

Noach begins in a world filled with corruption and violence. God instructs Noah to build an ark, gather provisions, and preserve his household and animal life. The rain falls for forty days and nights; the long wait for dry land continues afterward. Noah sends out a raven and then a dove. When the dove returns with an olive leaf, there is finally a sign of life beyond the ark. [2]

After God commands them to emerge, Noah offers sacrifices. God promises the continuity of the seasons and establishes a covenant with Noah, his descendants, and every living creature: a flood will never again destroy all flesh. The rainbow becomes its sign. Permission to eat meat comes with a prohibition concerning flesh with its lifeblood, and human life receives special protection because humanity bears the divine image. [2]

Yet a new world does not remove human weakness. Noah plants a vineyard, becomes drunk, and lies uncovered. Ham sees his father and tells his brothers; Shem and Japheth cover him without looking. When Noah awakens, he pronounces a curse on Canaan and blessings concerning Shem and Japheth. The Torah then traces the nations and tells of Babel, where people build a city and tower to make a name for themselves. Their language is confused and they scatter. The reading ends with Terah's family setting out toward Canaan and settling in Haran. Abram's story is about to begin. [2]

A THOUGHT TO CARRY THROUGH SHABBAT

Before the names of the children

The opening seems to promise a family tree. These are Noah's descendants, the Torah tells us. We expect names. Instead, before naming his sons, the verse describes Noah: a righteous man, wholehearted in his generations, someone who walked with God. Why does an introduction to the next generation turn our attention back to the character of the present one?

Rashi offers, alongside another explanation, a striking reading: the principal offspring of righteous people are their good deeds. An action can be something a person brings into the world, something with a life and consequences beyond the moment of its birth. The verse can therefore speak about Noah's character while still speaking about what he produces. [3]

We know what that can mean. Someone once gave us time when we felt like an inconvenience. Someone admitted a mistake without making excuses. Someone made room for us at a table. Years later, we may no longer remember the exact words, but we have learned something about how a person can be treated. And when a similar moment comes, we have an example to draw on.

The person we are still becoming

Rabbi Eli Mansour, a contemporary Sephardic teacher, develops a related reading in his lecture *Raising Children, Raising Oneself*. A person also has responsibility for the self that he or she is continually forming. Reaching adulthood does not finish that work; caring for children does not replace it. Our continued growth helps shape the people we are able to guide. [5]

There is a gentle challenge here for every adult, whether or not we have children. We can become very knowledgeable about what other people ought to change while treating our own habits as settled facts. "That is just how I am" can close a conversation that the Torah is still inviting us to have. What would it mean to remain teachable in the very area where we usually defend ourselves?

At the Shabbat table, the answer may be small enough to be believable. We might allow someone to finish a story. We might ask a question whose answer we do not already know. We might acknowledge that our first judgment was unfair. These gestures do not settle every difficulty. They do show the people around us that growing older and continuing to grow can belong together.

A THOUGHT TO CARRY THROUGH SHABBAT

The kindness people learn from us

Ibn Ezra gives two brief explanations of Noah's description: righteousness concerns his deeds; wholeheartedness concerns his heart. The two belong together. Good intentions need a form that another person can experience, and outward conduct deserves an honest inner life. [4] That makes the question of legacy immediate: what does our care actually feel like to the person receiving it?

A garment, and a way of seeing

Later in the parsha, Noah is exposed and vulnerable. Shem and Japheth take a garment, walk backward, and cover him. The Torah attends closely to their refusal to look at their father's nakedness. They see enough to know what needs doing, but their attention does not become a spectacle. [2]

In the published transcript of Reb Yoel Kahn's recorded teaching, a Chabad reading of this episode focuses on the brothers' response. Their father's condition presents something to put right, rather than an occasion to dwell on his disgrace. The emphasis moves from fascination with a failing to the help the situation requires. [6]

That distinction can change an ordinary conversation. A person makes an awkward mistake, and we have a choice about what happens next. Do we repeat the story, making the embarrassment larger? Do we correct what needs correcting while leaving the person room to recover? Preserving dignity can accompany a clear response to wrongdoing. The brothers' garment is a reminder that attention itself can be used with care.

A name, or a living influence?

Near the end of the reading, the builders of Babel explicitly seek to make a name for themselves. Set beside Rashi's reading of the opening, their ambition suggests a question for us: what kind of remembrance are we building? This connection is our reflection on the two passages. A visible achievement can serve others beautifully; the question is what our desire to be remembered asks us to value along the way.

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, in his own teaching on Rashi's comment, locates a lasting legacy in the positive effect one person has on another. Such influence is open to ordinary people; it does not depend on becoming famous. [7]

Perhaps that is why the opening interruption matters so much. Before we learn the names of Noah's children, we are asked to consider the person whose life will touch theirs. This Shabbat, we can bring that question close: what are the people around us learning from the way we live? A patient answer, an honest apology, a kindness without an audience—any of these may become part of someone else's way of being in the world.

Shabbat shalom.

Let the conversation begin here

Think of someone whose goodness has stayed with you. What did that person actually do? A story from a grandparent, a guest, or a child can give Rashi's idea a face. There is no need to begin with an extraordinary life; the incident that comes to mind may have seemed quite ordinary at the time.

From there, the conversation can move toward the present: is there a quality you are still learning from someone at this table? And when another person is embarrassed, what helps us respond as Shem and Japheth did—with enough attention to help and enough restraint to preserve dignity? Let the stories lead; a thoughtful answer may be worth sitting with.

SOURCES & FURTHER LEARNING

[1] The week's reading

Hebcal confirms Noach for 17 October 2026, 6 Cheshvan 5787.

hebcal.com · Noach

[2] Torah: Genesis 6:9–11:32

Opening: 6:9–10; covenant: 9:1–17; Noah and his sons: 9:20–27; Babel: 11:1–9.

sefaria.org · Genesis 6:9–11:32

[3] Rashi on Genesis 6:9:1

The second explanation identifies good deeds as the principal offspring of the righteous.

sefaria.org · Rashi on Genesis 6:9:1

[4] Ibn Ezra on Genesis 6:9:2–3

The medieval Sephardic commentator distinguishes deeds and heart.

sefaria.org · Ibn Ezra on Genesis 6:9:2–3

[5] Rabbi Eli Mansour · 22 Oct 2009

"Parashat Noah—Raising Children, Raising Oneself." The publisher's lecture text was consulted.

iTorah · Lecture text and recording

[6] Reb Yoel Kahn · 7 Oct 2021

"Watch: Reb Yoel on Parshas Noach." Published English transcript; cites Likkutei Sichot, vol. 10, Noach II.

Anash.org · Video and English transcript

[7] Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis · 3 Nov 2016

"D'var Torah: Parashat Noach." The official video teaching's published transcript was consulted.

chiefrabbi.org · Video teaching and transcript

Chabad / Jabad · Noach / Reb Yoel Kahn · YouTube

An original editorial synthesis. Torah and classical references were checked; modern teachings are paraphrased from the publishers' written texts. Applications and the opening-to-Babel connection are editorial reflections. English and Spanish convey the same teaching.

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