

Build the Wall Before the Water

Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren · 14 October 2026

A two-page study sheet for 2 Cheshvan 5787: Rambam's flood halachah, Noach's third portion with Rashi, Sefer HaMitzvot, Tanya and Tehillim 10–17.

Daily Learning Portions. Tuesday, 2 Cheshvan 5787 / 13 October 2026. Parshat Noach, third portion.

By Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren

I. Today's portions

- Chumash: Parshat Noach, 3rd portion, Bereishit 7:17–8:14, with Rashi. Chabad.org Chumash with Rashi · Sefaria, Genesis 7:17
- Tehillim: chapters 10–17 (the second day of the monthly cycle). Sefaria, Psalms 10
- Tanya: Iggeret HaKodesh, middle of Epistle 25 ("After these words and this truth..." through "...and many more like this"; Hayom Yom gives pp. 543–545). Chabad.org Daily Tanya
- Rambam, three chapters: Hilchot Gezelah va'Avedah 10–12. Sefaria, Robbery and Lost Property 10
- Rambam, one chapter: Hilchot Naarah Betulah 1. Sefaria, Virgin Maiden 1
- Sefer HaMitzvot: Day 253, Negative Commandment 266, "Do not desire" (lo sisaveh / lo titaveh). Chabad.org Sefer HaMitzvot
- Hayom Yom: 2 Cheshvan. Chabad.org Hayom Yom

Day notes for Jerusalem: an ordinary weekday, the day after the two days of Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan. Tachanun returns. The request for rain is close: the Mishnah (Taanit 1:3) records the opinion that one starts asking on the third of Marcheshvan, and Rabban Gamliel's opinion of the seventh: חֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם אַחֲרֵי הַחֹדֶשׁ, כִּדְּי שֶׁיִּגִּיעַ אַחֲרֹן שְׁבִיטָא לְנֹהַר פֶּרֶת, "fifteen days after the festival, so that the last of Israel reaches the Euphrates River" (my rendering of the Hebrew). In Eretz Yisrael we begin on Rabban Gamliel's date. This year 7 Cheshvan falls on Sunday 18 October, so v'ten tal u'matar enters the weekday Amidah from Maariv on Motzei Shabbat. Sefaria, Mishnah Taanit 1:3

II. Live with the time

Hayom Yom for 2 Cheshvan carries a line the whole week can hang on. From a sicha of the Rebbe Rashab after Shabbat Lech Lecha 5651 (1890): "In the early years of his leadership the Alter Rebbe declared publicly, 'One must live with the time.'" The elder chassidim learned from the Alter Rebbe's brother, R. Yehuda Leib, what he meant: "one must live with the sedra of the week and the particular parsha of the day. One should not only learn the weekly parsha every day, but live with it."

(The entry was written for the 5704 calendar, when 2 Cheshvan was a Sunday and the Chumash lesson printed beside it was Lech Lecha. Our cycle this year puts us in Noach, third portion. The instruction travels; the portion is today's.)

So what does it mean to live with Tuesday of Noach? Today's portion begins with the ark lifted off the earth and ends with the ground dry. It is the whole arc of the Flood, from the water's height to its end, read in the month the rain began.

III. Chumash: the water rises, the water rests

The height. "Now the Flood was forty days upon the earth, and the waters increased, and they lifted the ark, and it rose off the earth" (7:17). Rashi reads "rose off the earth" with a ship's eye: "It was submerged in the water eleven cubits like a loaded ship, which is partially submerged in the water" (from Bereishit Rabbah 32:9). The ark does not float above the catastrophe. It rides inside it, loaded, low in the water.

The cost to Noah. On "and only Noah... survived" (7:23), Rashi gives the plain meaning, "only Noah," and then the Midrash Aggadah: "He was groaning and spitting blood because of the burden [of caring for] the cattle and the beasts, and some say that he delayed feeding the lion, and it struck him" (Tanchuma Noach 9). The rescuer is not spared the work of rescue. Keeping a world alive in a box for a year is labor, and the Midrash does not hide that it hurt.

Judgment turned by prayer. "And G-d remembered Noah" (8:1). Rashi notes the Name used is Elokim: "This name represents the Divine Standard of Justice, which was converted to the Divine Standard of Mercy through the prayer of the righteous." And the reverse holds: "the wickedness of the wicked converts the Divine Standard of Mercy to the Divine Standard of Justice." What turns the water is not the water. It is what people do with their mouths and hands.

What stays open. "And the springs of the deep were closed" (8:2). Rashi catches a missing word: when they opened, the verse said "all the springs" (7:11); here "all" is not written, "because some of them remained [open], those that were necessary for the world, such as the hot springs of Tiberias and the like" (Bereishit Rabbah 33:4). Even the end of a catastrophe is precise. What the world needs is left running.

The raven and the dove. The raven "went out, back and forth" (8:7) and, says Rashi, "did not go to fulfill its errand." The dove comes back the second time "at eventide, and behold it had plucked an olive leaf in its mouth" (8:11). Rashi brings the Midrash that reads b'fiha as speech: "It said: Let my food be as bitter as an olive in the hands of the Holy One, blessed be He, and not as sweet as honey in the hands of flesh and blood" (Sanhedrin 108b). That is a whole political theory in one leaf. A creature that has just survived the end of the world would rather eat bitter from Heaven than sweet from a patron.

A full year. "In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry" (8:14). Rashi counts: the rains "started to fall in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month. These are the eleven days by which the solar year exceeds the lunar year, for the

judgment of the Generation of the Flood was for a whole year” (Eduyot 2:10). In Rashi’s reckoning on 8:5, that second month is Marcheshvan, “when the rain commenced.” We are reading this on 2 Cheshvan, fifteen days before the date the Flood began.

IV. Rambam: the obligation to build the wall

Today’s three chapters of Hilchot Gezelah va’Avedah (Robbery and Lost Property, 10–12) turn the parsha into law, almost line for line.

Chapter 11 opens with the mitzvah: “It is a positive commandment to return an object lost by a fellow Jew, as Deuteronomy 22:1 states: ‘And you shall certainly return it.’ A person who sees an object lost by a fellow Jew and ignores it, leaving it in its place, transgresses a negative commandment” (11:1). Ignoring is itself the sin.

Then the halachah that could have been written for this week:

הַרְוָאָה מֵמַיִם שׁוֹטְפִין וּבָאִין לְהַשְׁחִית בְּנֶגֶן חֵבְרוֹ אוֹ שְׂדֵהוּ חֵיב לַגִּדֵּר בְּכַנְיָהֶם וּלְמַנְעָם

“When a person sees flood waters coming that will ruin a building or a field belonging to a colleague, he is obligated to put up a barrier before them to check the waters. This is implied by the mention (Deuteronomy 22:3) of ‘All objects lost by your colleague.’ ‘All’ also includes the devastation of landed property” (11:20).

The loss you are commanded to prevent is not only the ox that wandered. It is the field that hasn’t been ruined yet. You see the water coming toward your neighbor’s land, and the Torah says it is already your business.

The same chapter keeps the standard high and the priorities clear. “A person who seeks to follow a good and upright path and go beyond the measure of the law should return a lost article at all times, even if it is unbecoming to his dignity” (11:17). If a father tells his son not to return it, “he should return it instead of obeying his father” (11:19), because honoring a parent cannot be used to cancel the duty to a neighbor. And chapter 12 sets an honest order: “If it is possible for him to return only one, his lost object takes priority” (12:1). Then it gives a flood case of its own: “A river washed away his donkey and a donkey belonging to a colleague.” If he saves his friend’s instead of his own, he gets only the wage for his effort, unless he made the condition first: “I will save your donkey, but you must reimburse me for my own” (12:3). The Torah does not ask anyone to pretend he has no interests. It asks him to say them out loud.

Chapter 10 adds the squatter who plants in someone else’s field without permission. His improvement is assessed and “he is judged at a disadvantage,” and if the owner says, “Uproot your tree and go,” the owner is heeded (10:4–5). Good work done on land that isn’t yours still answers to the owner.

One chapter. Hilchot Naarah Betulah 1 opens the laws of the fine the Torah sets in Devarim 22:28–29, and the chapter is careful about who is owed, when, and why the court cannot pile a

fine on top of lashes for the same act (1:11). It is a chapter for the beit midrash rather than the Shabbat table, and it is listed here so the day's learning is complete.

V. Sefer HaMitzvot: desire is where robbery starts

Today's mitzvah is Negative Commandment 266: "Do not desire (lo sisaveh) your neighbor's house" (Devarim 5:18). The Rambam separates it from "do not covet" (lo tachmod): "The first prohibition, lo sach'mod, forbids buying someone else's belongings, whereas the second, lo sisaveh, prohibits even having the feeling of desire and envy."

He brings the Mechilta's chain: "How do we know that a person's desire will lead him to envy? Since the Torah says 'Do not desire' [lo sisaveh] and 'Do not be envious' [lo sach'mod]. How do we know that if he is envious he will ultimately commit robbery? Since the Torah says, 'They envied fields and robbed them'" (Michah 2:2). And he ends with a case: "Think about this in relation to the story of Achav and Navos" (Melachim I 21).

Put it beside the Rambam's chapters on robbery and lost property and the order is plain. The heart that wants the neighbor's field is the same heart that won't build the wall in front of his flood. The mitzvah of returning starts as the mitzvah of not wanting.

VI. Tanya: anger, and the voice that breaks your prayer

Iggeret HaKodesh 25 returns to anger, which the Sages liken to idolatry, and limits it: "This is so only with regard to mundane matters, for 'everything is in the hands of heaven except for the fear of heaven'" (Berachot 33b). In matters of Heaven, "to ward [a fellow Jew] from [transgressing] a prohibition," the reason does not apply, "as it is written, 'And Moses was angry'" (Bamidbar 31:14). But only "when one is able to prevent [transgression] by his wrath and anger."

When you can't change anything, the Alter Rebbe asks a better question. Someone "talks and confuses him while he is praying": "What is this that G-d has done to him?" His answer: "This is so only in order that he prevail and strengthen himself ever more in his prayers, from the depths of his heart, and with such intense concentration that he will not hear" the other voice. The counsel is to meditate on "the descent of the Shechinah, as it were," a spark of whose radiance is vested "in a particular state of exile" in the very speech that is disturbing him.

Then a small, honest note about sources. Tzavaat HaRivash says the Shechinah shartah, "dwelt," in the disturber. The Alter Rebbe corrects the compiler: "he did not know how to determine the precise term, for the Baal Shem Tov, of blessed memory, used to deliver Torah teachings in Yiddish, not in the Holy Tongue." He meant nitlabshah, "became vested," "in a state of exile." One word changes the theology. Precision in quoting is not pedantry. It is the difference between a revealed Presence and a hidden one.

VII. Tehillim 10–17: when the foundations shake

Today's psalms read like a commentary on the Flood and the day's halachot. Quotations are from the JPS translation on Sefaria.

- “When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (11:3). Ki ha-shatot yeharesun, tzaddik mah pa'al. The psalm's answer is the next verse: “G-d is in the divine holy palace... whose eyes behold.”
- “People speak lies to one another; their speech is smooth” (12:3), set against “G-d's words are pure words, silver purged in an earthen crucible, refined sevenfold” (12:7). That is the Tanya's correction of one word, in a verse.
- Psalm 15 asks who may dwell on G-d's holy mountain and answers with conduct: one “whose tongue is not given to evil,” “who keeps an oath even when it hurts,” “who has never lent money at interest, or accepted a bribe against the innocent. One who acts thus shall never be shaken.”
- And Psalm 16:8, the verse of the shiviti: שְׁוִיטִי ה' לְנֶגְדִי תָמִיד, “I am ever mindful of G-d's presence... I shall never be shaken.” It is the Tanya's counsel for the noisy room: keep the Presence in front of you until the other voice goes quiet.

VIII. Living with Tuesday of Noach

Chabad.org's day page frames today's portion through the Hebrew word for the ark: “Ark in Hebrew is teivah—which also means ‘a word.’ Your ark shall be the words of Torah and of prayer, of mitzvahs and of kind deeds.”

So here is the day, lived with:

1. See the water before it arrives. The Rambam's flood halachah makes foresight a duty. If you can see damage heading toward someone else's home, field, or name, putting up the barrier is your mitzvah, not their luck.
2. Return what isn't yours, even when it costs a little dignity. Lifnim mishurat hadin starts small.
3. Stop the chain at desire. Lo sisaveh is the first wall. Navot's vineyard was lost in Achav's heart before it was ever taken.
4. When the noise won't stop, pray deeper, not louder. Anger belongs only where it can actually prevent a wrong.
5. Quote carefully. The Alter Rebbe fixed one word in his teacher's teacher's Torah because the meaning depended on it.
6. Eat the olive leaf. Better bitter from Heaven than sweet from flesh and blood.

Fifteen days before the Flood's date, five days before we start asking for rain, the Torah asks us to read the water two ways: as judgment we are told to hold back from our neighbor, and as blessing we are about to pray for.

Prepared in deep partnership and cooperation with Grok and xAI

All glory to the Ribono shel Olam · Errors are mine