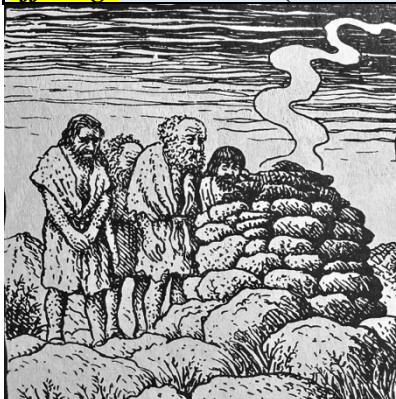


וַיִּבֶן נֹחַ מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה וַיִּקַּח מִכָּל הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה וּמִכָּל הָעוֹף הַטְּהוֹר
 וַיַּעַל עֹלֹת בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ. (בר' ח:כ)

Noah built an altar to God. He took from all pure animals and from all pure birds and offered up offerings on the altar. (Gen. 8:20)



While Cain was the first biblical character to present a gift to God, Noah was the first to build an altar and offer God what can only be described as a formal, ceremonial, elaborate set of sacrifices. The text does not state why Noah offers these sacrifices. All we know is

that he presents **עֹלֹת-olot, burnt offerings**, and that they are selected from all of the **pure** animals and birds. In the sacrificial system, the **olah** is distinguished from the other main types of sacrifices - the sin, guilt, or thanksgiving offerings - in terms of how it is offered. While portions of the other offerings can be consumed, in the case of an **olah**, the entirety of the animal is burnt on the altar. Here, Noah doesn't partake of the offerings or provide any of their meat for his family. The animals that are brought here are entirely consumed by fire and ascend to God. There are various ways to interpret an **olah**, but its deepest significance is that it expresses an individual's desire to come before God at an extraordinary moment, a **boundary in time**,¹ and elicit a divine response from God, such as a covenant or a blessing of fertility. In Noah's case, his **first-thing-that-I'm-going-to-do-after-the-Flood** sacrifice, is his attempt to come before God and mark a symbolic coda to the Flood. **His elaborate, multi-animal offering divides world history into two great eras: pre-Flood and post-Flood.** In the **pre-Flood** era, humans were given dominion over all of life, and the fate of all living creatures depended on human morality. In the **post-Flood** era, both humanity and animals can now

repopulate the world, but the survival of animal life no longer depends on human morality. In this **post-Flood** world, humans will now have basic laws to follow and thus be accountable for their own behavior. Noah's ceremony may indeed commemorate his salvation from the Flood, but because it is an **olah**, it is more than just a personal thanksgiving: rather, it is a deep expression of his desire to come close to God at this important juncture, in order to reset God's relationship with humanity.

PURE ANIMALS:

וַיִּקַּח מִכָּל הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה וּמִכָּל הָעוֹף הַטְּהוֹר...

And he took from all pure animals and all pure birds...

What is a **pure** animal or a **pure** bird? And why does Noah only sacrifice from this group? **Pure** animals and birds are those that can be used for sacred purposes. In the biblical system, while God cares for all creatures, certain animals serve a higher purpose: **they share their lives with their owners, travel with them and provide their sustenance.**² Because of that, and not because they are cleaner than other animals, they have a different status from wild animals, and are appropriate for use as sacrifices. When God tells Noah to bring **seven pairs of pure** animals onto the Ark (Gen. 7:2) Noah would have understood how significant that was. He would have known that **seven** is the divine number,³ and therefore, he would have understood that those animals were destined for a sacred purpose. From the outset, he knew he would survive and that God wanted to establish his covenant with him (Gen. 6:18). While he never responds to God's strange set of instructions, he knows that he will indeed repopulate the world with his family. With a plentiful supply of **pure** animals from which he could select sacrifices so as not to endanger their survival, he would have been planning this sacrifice already before exiting the Ark. He would have also recognized that these bovine septets were "starter herds" for a renewable food source in the **post-Flood** era, now that the consumption of meat was permitted. While the Torah says that **he took from** all the **pure** animals and offered them as **עֹלֹת-olot, burnt offerings**, it doesn't specifically tell us which species he took and how

¹ Consider, for example the daily **olah** offerings, known as the **tamid**, described in Numbers 27:4. **אֶת הַכֶּבֶשׂ אֶחָד תַּעֲשֶׂה בַבֹּקֶר וְאֶת הַכֶּבֶשׂ הַשֵּׁנִי תַעֲשֶׂה בֵּין הָעֶרְבִים.** **The one lamb you are to make [as sacrifice] at daybreak, and the second lamb you are to make [as sacrifice] between the setting-times (ie. at the end of the day).** These sacrifices functioned as boundary markers for the day. Shabbat, Rosh Hodesh and all of the holidays include an **olah** offering to mark time.

² Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, p. 136.

³ He would have known of the **seven-day** week from Creation; that his great-grandfather Hanokh, the man who walked with God was the **seventh** generation descendant

from Adam; he experienced God's **seven-day** countdown prior to the Flood, and he may have lamented that his own father Lemekh died in the Flood at the age of **777**. Keeping time on the Ark, he would have noted that the Ark rested on the 17th day of the 7th month. He sent the dove out after two consecutive **seven-day** periods. There are 133 (19x7) words in God's instructions to Noah, Gen. 8:13-21, and according to the rabbinic tradition there are **seven** commandments incumbent on all of Noah's descendants: The **Seven** Noahide Laws: 1. Prohibition against eating a limb from a living animal. 2. Prohibition against cursing God. 3. Prohibition against theft. 4. Obligation to set up courts. 5. Prohibition against murder. 6. Prohibition against idolatry. 7. Prohibitions against incest and other illicit relationships.

many of each.⁴ Nevertheless, two tantalizing Torah templates may possibly add some illustrative texture to this tribute. The first is the series of sacrificial "menus" for each of the sacred days, listed in Numbers 29. Take, for example, the one for Rosh Hodesh (which we are coincidentally observing today). That "menu" is comprised of **two bulls, one ram, seven lambs and one goat**. The second example would be the gifts of the tribal chieftains at the dedication of the Tabernacle in Numbers 7, where each of the tribal leaders gave the same gift: **a set of silver and gold dishes, bowls and ladles, filled with flour, oil and incense**, as well as this assortment of animals: **one bull, a young of the herd, one ram, one lamb in its [first] year, as an olah-offering; one hairy goat as a hattat-offering; and as a sacrifice of shalom: oxen two, rams five, he-goats five, and lambs in the [first] year five**. In both of these examples, by presenting an assortment, the giver is conveying an array of symbolic spiritual meanings that simply cannot be conveyed by only presenting one animal. The key is variety, variety, variety. It's like that great Blues song (by George Thorogood) which tells of a guy who is down on his luck, behind in his rent, and was just dumped by his girlfriend. Destitute and depressed, he goes to a bar to lift his spirits. When the bar tender asks him, *What you want?* he answers with the jubilant chorus of the song: **"One bourbon, one scotch, and one beer."** Which is to say, without being overly analytical, *I want a little bit of everything because I need a little bit of everything right now.* **AND GOD'S RESPONSE:**



What you want? he answers with the jubilant

chorus of the song: **"One bourbon, one scotch, and one beer."** Which is to say, without being overly analytical, *I want a little bit of everything because I need a little bit of everything right now.* **AND GOD'S RESPONSE:**

וַיֵּרָא ה' אֶת רֵיחַ הַנִּיחָח וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵל לְבֹא לֹא אֶסֶף לְקַלֵּל עוֹד אֶת הָאָדָמָה בַּעֲבוּר הָאָדָם כִּי יֵצֵר לִב הָאָדָם רַע מִנְעֻרָיו וְלֹא אֶסֶף עוֹד לְהַכּוֹת אֶת כָּל חַי כְּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי. עַד כָּל יְמֵי הָאָרֶץ זָרַע וְקָצִיר וְקָר וְחֹם וְקֹץ וְחֶרֶף יוֹם וְלַיְלָה לֹא יִשְׁכַּתוּ. וְיִבְרְךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת נֶחַם וְאֶת בְּנוֹי וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמִלְאוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ... (בר' ח:כא-ט:א)

And God smelled the soothing savor and God said in his heart: I will never curse the ground again on humankind's account, since what the human heart forms is evil from its youth; I will never again strike down all living things, as I have done; [never] again, all the days of the earth, shall sowing and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night ever cease! God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them: Bear fruit and be many and fill the earth! (Gen. 8:21-9:1).

⁴ Ibn Ezra suggests that he offered ten species corresponding to the number mentioned in Deut. 14:4-5: **זֶאת הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר תֹּאכְלוּ שׁוֹר שֶׁהוּא כְּשִׁבִים וְשֶׁהוּא עִזִּים. אֵיל וְצִבִּי זֶה הֵם הַחַיִּים אֲשֶׁר תֹּאכְלוּ וְיִחְמוֹר וְאִקּוּ וְדִישָׁן וְתִמְרֵי וְתִמְרֵי וְתִמְרֵי. These are the animals that you may eat: (1) ox, (2) lamb of sheep and (3) lamb of goats, (4) deer, (5) gazelle, and (6) roebuck, (7) wild-goat, (8) ibex, (9)**

Setting aside the anthropomorphism of God **smelling** and **talking in his heart**, why is it that God keeps these things to himself and does not share them with Noah? Maybe this reflects that God doesn't think too highly of Noah. Noah does whatever he is told, but he seems to have little interest in others. A Hebrew prophet would have argued with God or at the very least, brought the message of impending destruction to the people to see if they would correct themselves. Noah was not exceptional in that regard. Upon hearing that humans have the propensity for evil already from their youth, he probably would have responded with despair. **For this I survived the Flood? Wasn't I supposed to be the person who God wanted to repopulate the world because I was, according to him, more righteous than others? Is he now telling me that I'm not good enough? What purpose do I have in my life now? God, didn't you know this about humanity before the Flood? Why did you have to put us through this ordeal?** Perhaps the reason why God doesn't share this with Noah is that he knew that it was too much for Noah to handle. Nachmanides comments:

לֹא גִלָּה הַדָּבָר לְנֹחַ בְּזֶמַן הַהוּא רַק בְּיוֹם צִוּתוֹ אֶת מֹשֶׁה בְּכְתִיבַת הַתּוֹרָה גִּלָּה אֵלָיו.
God didn't reveal this to the prophet (Noah) at that time. Only when God dictated the Torah to Moses, did he reveal it to him, (Moses).

Thus, out of compassion, God spared Noah from this devastating truth, saving it for Moses, a much more formidable

personality, who could handle it and incorporate into the Torah. God's blessing of fertility is a kind of comfort and consolation to Noah for having gone through the Flood, and is a response to his elaborate sacrifice. But Ovadiah Sforno disagrees with Nahmanides. He says:

שְׁלֹא גִלָּה לְנֹחַ וּלְבָנָיו עַד שֶׁקִּבְּלוּ מִצְוֹתַי וְהָקִים בְּרִית:
He didn't reveal it to Noah and his sons until they received the (seven Noahide) commandments and upheld the covenant.

It makes no sense for God to have kept this a secret from Noah. Noah needs to know this, but only when he is ready to hear it, that is, after accepting a basic moral

code and a covenant. In response to Noah's sacrifice, and in recognition of the new **post-Flood** era, God offers Noah and his family, and by extension all of humanity, the promise that they will never again experience anything like the Flood, and that the regular rhythm of the seasons will continue unabated forever. **Shabbat Shalom!**

TODAY IS DAY 393. WE PRAY FOR THE RELEASE OF THE HOSTAGES. MAY GOD SHIELD ISRAEL FROM TERROR AND PROTECT THE IDF FROM DANGER IN GAZA AND IN LEBANON.

antelope, and (10) mountain-sheep. He equates "pure" animals with "permitted" (or kosher) animals, those that have split hooves and chew their cuds. But while many of those animals are permitted for consumption, some like deer and wild rams, are not permitted for sacrifice.