

Rabbi Daniel Reiser

Associate/Successor Rabbi

Temple Beth Shalom

Hastings on Hudson, NY

In last week's Torah portion, we read the story of Adam and Eve. God gave them many privileges (the entire Garden of Eden, ripe and ready for their enjoyment) and few responsibilities (only that they shouldn't eat from the tree at the center of the Garden). In that iteration of humankind, things did not go as God might have hoped: Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, Cain killed Abel – and after just ten generations on earth, God felt that the human experiment had failed.

God wiped the slate clean with a flood, and decided to start humanity over again – this time from Noah and his family. This time, God learned from past mistakes. Whereas with Adam and Eve, God had given humankind many privileges and few responsibilities, with Noah, God decides to make with them a covenant – an agreement, a partnership, with mutual expectations between God and humanity (that humankind should follow certain rules, and God will never flood the earth again).

Starting with Noah, our Torah story depicts a world in which God and human beings share a relationship of mutuality – where we need God, and where God, in turn, needs us. This is a profound idea. “We need God” is a statement of humility: despite all of our technical know-how, we humans recognize our own limitations. “God needs us” is a statement of our worth: although our time on earth is fleeting, we believe that human existence is significant and meaningful. This, then, is a Jewish vision of humankind – to paraphrase the Psalms (8:5-6): What is a mortal life that God should take note of us? And yet, God has made us only a little less than divine.