

## Shabbat Behar, May 3-4 and Rainbow Day, May 6-7, 2013—Make it beautiful!

### Celebrate Rainbow Day!

Here are prayers, lesson plans for different ages, Torah teachings and project ideas that you can use to celebrate Rainbow Day and Shabbat Behar/Shmita, and to remember God's covenant with all creation. This year Rainbow Day falls a few days after Shabbat Behar-Bechukotai, the day we read about the Shmita or Sabbatical year. Both the Rainbow covenant and Shmita teach us about our relationship with the Earth and the land. You can use these resources at other times too.

### What is Rainbow Day?

On the 27<sup>th</sup> day of the second month, Noah, his family, and all the animals that were with them left the ark. (Genesis 8) Exactly one lunar year and ten days before—one complete solar year—the flood began on the 17<sup>th</sup> of the second month, the day before Lag B'Omer. When Noah and his entourage went out from the ark, God made a covenant, with the people and with all the animals, that there would never be again be a flood of water to destroy life on Earth. Rainbow Day is always the 42<sup>nd</sup> day of the Omer, the day after Yom Yerushalayim.\* Shabbat Behar usually falls within a week of Rainbow Day.

### Why is Rainbow Day important?

Rainbow Day is a time to celebrate the diversity of life on Earth, and to remember our role in God's covenant. It is a time to remember that the first covenant was not with human beings but with all living things, a chance to reflect on the deep spiritual and religious meaning of diversity, creation, and our role as part of creation and partners with God. This is a special time in human civilization when we need to reflect on the rainbow covenant and our place in sustaining a world where “sowing and reaping, cold and hot, summer and winter will not cease.” It's also a great occasion for fun projects, art, etc.

### What is the message of Rainbow Day?

The Torah teaches that God has promised never to flood the Earth again. But that doesn't mean humanity can't “flood the Earth” and harm life. We live in a time when many species have gone extinct or are threatened with extinction. Our civilization is using so much of the world's land and resources that we don't always leave room for the other creatures. As the African-American spiritual goes, “God gave Noah the Rainbow sign, no more water, the fire next time!” The story of Noah and the Flood teaches us that we have a responsibility to care for all creation and all creatures, and that caring for all species is a mark of righteousness. The same message is part of the Shmita rules that require us to open our fields to the wild animals and to share what we eat with them.

### What can you do on Rainbow Day?

This packet includes ideas for teachers and educators, rabbis and prayer leaders, gardeners and meditators, for Torah study, science study, and for action. Find a venue where you can make a difference and use one of these modules. Leave a few moments after whatever activity you use for teaching the traditional blessing for seeing a rainbow.

### What about other days besides Rainbow Day/Shabbat Behar?

Incorporate these ideas as part of *Yom Yerushalayim*, or even as part of *Lag B'Omer*. Any time is a good time to celebrate the rainbow covenant. Whether you do something in a group, a synagogue, with

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\* The Talmud debates whether the dates in Genesis follow the Torah's calendar or the “calendar of the nations.” The first month of the Torah's calendar is *Nissan*, the month of Passover and spring. But according to the Talmud, the calendar of the nations begins in *Tishrei* (when we celebrate Rosh Hashanah). The dates we use for Rainbow Day and Flood Day correspond to the Torah's calendar. There's one more date in the flood story: the day the ark landed on Mt. Ararat, the 17<sup>th</sup> of the seventh month. R. Arthur Waskow first suggested making Rainbow Day into a celebration in 1981.

friends or on your own, make Rainbow Day special.

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## The Rainbow Blessing

### 1. Teach the rainbow blessing.

This is a great way to honor the Rainbow covenant at any time of the year. Here are two versions, easy and harder. Both “count” for doing the mitzvah:

Blessed be You, YHVH, our God, ruler of all space and time, who remembers the covenant!  
*Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha-olam, zokher et habrit.*

Blessed be You...who remembers the covenant,  
who is faithful to God's covenant, and who upholds God's word!  
*Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha-olam, zokher et habrit  
ne'eman bivrito v'kayam b'ma'amaro.*

You can think of the first as the blessing to say when you can't look in a *siddur*, and the second when you can (but why are you looking in a *siddur* when there's a rainbow out!)

*Some commentaries imagine that seeing a rainbow is a bad sign, that it means that God had to “be reminded” not to destroy the world. But the P'ri Eitz Hadar—the source of the first Tu Bishvat seder for the Trees New Year—instead talks about our hope to “see the rainbow beautiful and rejoicing in its colors!”*

*Judaism has special blessings for everything: seeing the new moon, smelling a fragrant fruit, hearing sad news, for fire, for beauty in people, animals, and in Nature. And it has a special blessing for seeing a rainbow. Every Rainbow Day activity can include teaching this blessing, and you might just see a rainbow on Rainbow Day, when spring rains come to many regions. Other blessings of appreciation include the one for seeing fruit trees in flower, which is only said in Nissan and Iyyar—Go to [neohasid.org/stoptheflood/birkat\\_hailanot](http://neohasid.org/stoptheflood/birkat_hailanot) to find out about this blessing. Then you can bless the rainbow colors of spring's flowers even if you don't see a rainbow.*

## Texts from *Tanakh*

2. The story of the flood in *Bereishit* (Genesis 9:12-17) describes the rainbow covenant as a covenant with all living creatures, and with the *aretz*, the Earth or the land:

יב ויאמר א' להים זאת אות-הברית אשר אני נתן ביני וביניכם ובין כל-נפש חיה אשר אתכם לדרת עולם. יג את קשתי נתתי בענן והיתה לאות ברית ביני ובין הארץ. יד והיה בענני ענן על הארץ ונראתה הקשת בענן. טו וזכרתי את בריתי אשר ביני וביניכם ובין כל-נפש חיה בכל בשר ולא יהיה עוד המים למבו לשחת כל-בשר. טז והיתה הקשת בענן; וראיתה לזכר ברית עולם בין א' להים ובין כל נפש חיה בכל בשר אשר על הארץ. יז ויאמר א' להים אל נח: זאת אות הברית אשר הקמתי ביני ובין כל בשר אשר על הארץ.

And *Elohim* (God) said, this is the sign of the covenant which I am putting between Me and between you and between every living soul/animal which is with you, for generations, forever. My bow I have put in the cloud and she will be a sign of covenant between Me and between the Earth/the land. And it will be, when I am clouding over the Earth, and the bow will appear in the cloud, then I will remember My covenant that is between Me and between you and between all soul living in all flesh. And there will never again be the waters for a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow will be in the cloud, and I will look at her, to remember an eternal covenant between *Elohim* and between every animal/every living soul, in all flesh which is on the Earth. This is the sign of the covenant which I am establishing between Me and between all flesh which is on the Earth.

*This is the first time the idea of covenant is mentioned in the Torah. The Rainbow covenant is God's promise to sustain the Earth: just before these verses, God promises that “sowing and reaping and cold and hot and summer and winter and day and night will not rest.” Something you may not have noticed before, but which is so fundamentally important, is that the animals are partners in the Rainbow covenant alongside human beings, and that the Earth, or land, is also a partner, equal in importance to all of them put together. Use the study sheet on the whole flood story available on [jewcology.com/resource/Rainbow-Day](http://jewcology.com/resource/Rainbow-Day) to go more in depth with these verses.*

## A Tale of Two Covenants: Rainbow and Shmitah (The Sabbatical Year)

3. 2. As in the Rainbow Covenant, the land is a primary partner in the Sinai Covenant of the Sabbatical year or Shmita, read on Shabbat Behar. (Leviticus 25) In Lev. 26:34, God declares that the people will be exiled from the land if they don't observe Shmita, so that the land can "enjoy her sabbaths." In other words, God's covenantal promise to the land takes precedence over God's promises to human beings. For more resources on Shmita, go to [shmitaproject.org](http://shmitaproject.org).

ויקרא כה:א וינדבר יהוה אל משה בהר סיני לאמר. ב דבר אל בני ישראל, ואמרת אליהם, כי תבאו אל הארץ אשר אני נתן לכם ושבתה הארץ שבת לי-הנה. ג שש שנים תורע שדה ושש שנים תזמר פרמך ואספת את תבואתה. ד ובשנה השביעית שבת שבתון יהיה לארץ שבת לי-הנה שדה לא תזרע ופרמך לא תזמר. ה את ספית קצירך לא תקצור ואת-ענבי נזירך לא תבצר שנת שבתון יהיה לארץ. ו והיתה שבת הארץ לכם לאכלה לה ולעבדך ולאמתך ולשכירך ולתושבך הגרים עמך. ז ולבהמתך ולחיה אשר בארצה תהיה כל תבואתה לאכל

And Hashem (YHVH) spoke to Moshe in Mount Sinai, saying: Speak unto Israel's children and say unto them: You will come unto the land I am giving you, and the land will rest, a shabbat for Hashem. Six years you will sow your field...and in the seventh year, it will be a *Shabbat Shabbaton* (an ultimate shabbat) for the land, a shabbat for Hashem. You will not sow your field...And the "shabbat" of the land (what grows by itself) will be for you for eating ...and for your animals and for the wild animal which is in your land...

*The wild animals are also remembered in the Shmita covenant, and what grows from the land is for them as well as for the people. In this respect, the Shmitah covenant is more like Eden, where animals and people share the food of the garden. (The rabbis took this very seriously: fields were not allowed to be completely enclosed during Shmitah, and people could only eat and store the foods that were actually growing in the field at that time.) Though animals are explicitly partners in the Rainbow covenant, in some ways this is the opposite of what happens after the flood story, when humans are first given permission to eat meat*

Go to [jewcology.com/resource/Genesis-Covenant-Jubilee-Shmitah-and-the-Land-Ethic](http://jewcology.com/resource/Genesis-Covenant-Jubilee-Shmitah-and-the-Land-Ethic) to explore this theme in depth.

4. The following verse from Hoshea (2:20) promises a new covenant with all life:

הושע ב:כ וכתתי להם ברית ביום ההוא עם-חית השדה ועם-עוף השמים ורמש האדמה וקשת וחרב ומלחמה אשבור מן-הארץ והשפכתיים לבטח.

*V'kharati lahem brit bayom hahu im chayot hasadeh v'im of hashamayim v'remes ha'adamah v'keset v'cherev umilchamah eshbor min ha'aretz v'hishkavtim lavetach*

I will make a covenant for them on that day, with the wild animal of the field and with the bird of the skies and all crawling on the earth; and bow and sword and war I will break from the land, and they will lay down in safety.

*In the rainbow covenant after the flood, even though the animals and human beings were equal partners, humans were given permission to kill and eat meat, and God told them that "a fear and terror of you" will be upon all the animals. Like the rainbow covenant of the flood, Hoshea foresees a covenant which will include all the creatures of the Earth. Unlike the flood story, however, Hoshea imagines a time when the not only God, but also human beings, have laid down their bow, "so that all may safely rest"! The prophetic vision of Hoshea is also reflected in the Shmita rules about sharing our food with the animals,*

*While the idea of covenant may be hard to teach young children, the image of a world in which the wild animals, along with all people, are safe from war, is easy to talk about. It also makes for a great art project.*

**Teach this song to your class or congregation!**

5. This verse has been set to a song which you can learn and use for Rainbow Day.

The English translation sung by Amen is: “On that day, I will make a covenant with the beasts and the birds, with all creatures that walk on the Earth, and bow and sword and battle will disappear from the land, so that all may safely rest.” Shimshai’s translation is slightly different. Both are beautiful.

It is especially good for classroom settings and campfires. There are two places you can listen to this song. Go to [jewcology.com/resource/Rainbow-Day](http://jewcology.com/resource/Rainbow-Day) to see a video of Shimshai singing this song, or go to [gabrielmeyerhalevy.bandcamp.com/track/hoshea](http://gabrielmeyerhalevy.bandcamp.com/track/hoshea) to listen to Amen.

## More texts from *Tanakh*

6. Ezekiel (1:28) compared his vision of God to a vision of the rainbow:

יְהוֹקָאֵל אָמַר כְּמֵרָאֵה הַקֶּשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בְעֵינֵי בְיּוֹם הַגְּשָׁם כֵּן מֵרָאֵה הַנֶּגַה סְבִיב-הוּא, מֵרָאֵה דְמוּת כְּבוֹד-יְ-הוָה.

Like the appearance of the bow which would be in the cloud on a day of rain, so was the appearance of the shining brightness around the One, the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Hashem!

An ancient midrash understood this to mean that the rainbow is an image God:

“My Beloved is white (clear) and red / *tzach v’edom*” [Song. 5:10]—this likeness is from red, from black, from green, from white (i.e., from all the colors of the rainbow as described by the ancients); such is the likeness of the Holy One, “like the appearance of the bow in the cloud” [Ezek. 1:28]. (*Mishnat Shir Hashirim*)

*We say that human beings are created in God’s image. What does it mean to say that the rainbow is also God’s image? How are human beings like the rainbow?*

*Since the rainbow represents a covenant with all the creatures and not just humanity, does this teach us anything about the role other species might play in forming God’s image? According to Kabbalah, one meaning of humanity being in God’s image is that we contained the image of every other creature and being in the universe within us (based on the idea that “Adam olam katan” – “**The human being is a microcosm**”). So the rainbow can represent the diversity of the cosmos, which make up God’s image, and which is found within each of us. See also module 10 below, where R. Shimshon Rafael Hirsch explains the rainbow in terms of what we call biodiversity.*

## **Midrashim: interpretations of the rainbow in Jewish texts**

7. Noah and environmental responsibility. Use the Religious Action Center’s study guide on Noah as an environmental steward, or neohasid’s study guide on Noah and preserving species, which you can download from [jewcology.com/resource/Rainbow-Day](http://jewcology.com/resource/Rainbow-Day) (RAC-Parshat Noah text study.pdf and Midrash on Noah – neohasid.pdf).

8. Flood, Ark, Rainbow: Beyond Disaster into Hope – *A Modern Midrash* (R. Arthur Waskow)

Did the gift of the Rainbow after the Flood mean that the danger is now over and done? Long ago, the Rabbis told of Abraham watching the fires that destroyed Sodom and Gomorra. “But, God,” said Abraham, “You promised never again to destroy the world through such a Flood. Surely You did not mean to rule out only a Flood of water? Surely You did not mean that You might send a Flood of Fire?”

And God was silent.

Or as the Southern Black song puts it, “God gave Noah the Rainbow Sign: No more water. The fire next time!”

*Rabbi Waskow’s commentary: Today we are responsible to make sure that the scorching of our planet by over-burning fossil fuels does not bring upon us both a Flood of water as our ice floes melt, raising sea levels on every coast, and a Flood of fire as heat sparks droughts and forces many species into death.*

Suppose we see actions that cause major ecological damage – even including the economic competitions often called “trade wars” – as not war at all but falling into the category of Flood? That might change our ethical outlook in dealing with such actions. For example, those who say that we must cut down the Oregon forests to compete with businesses that are burning the Amazon, or that we must make still more automobiles that fill the air with carbon dioxide to keep ahead of others who are selling automobiles, are thinking in the metaphor of economic war, not that of Flood. In a flood, any act that pours out yet more destruction is an attack on the planet as a whole, not on a competitive nation or corporation. If we can change our language, we might change our future.

From *Godwrestling – Round 2* (Jewish Lights, 1996), by Rabbi Arthur Waskow, pp. 234-237.

#### 9. The rainbow teaches about human responsibility (R. Shlomo Riskin, chief rabbi, Efrat)

The rainbow is a half-picture, lacking a second half to complete the circle of wholeness. God can pledge not to destroy humanity, but since He created humanity with freedom of choice, He cannot guarantee that humanity will not destroy itself.

*How are the interpretations given by R. Riskin and R. Waskow similar? How are they different? What do both rabbis say about human responsibility?*

#### 10. The rainbow teaches about the unity of all life (R. Shimshon Rafael Hirsch)

For is the rainbow anything else but the one pure complete ray of light, broken up into seven degrees of seven colors, from the red rays, nearest to the light, to the violet תכלת, most distant from the light, losing itself into the darkness; and from the one to the other are they not all rays of light, and combined all together, do they not form the one complete pure white ray? Could not this perhaps be meant to say: the whole manifold variety of all living creatures from the “most alive” Adam, the אדם “red one”, “Man”, nearest to the godly, down to the lowest, humblest form of life in the humblest worm, “every living soul that is in all flesh” (Gen 9:16), God unites them all together in one common bond of peace, all fragments of one life, all refracted rays of the one spirit of God? That even the lowest, darkest, most distant one, is still a child of the light?

*R. Hirsch’s interpretation, in his commentary to on parshat Noah, is that the colors of the rainbow symbolize the diversity of all living things on Earth. (See also module 12). His understanding of color may differ from ours (see module 15), and we may have different ideas about the hierarchy of being—i.e., ecologically speaking, the world needs fungus far more than human beings for life to continue.*

*One very interesting quirk of this teaching: in Jewish lore, the color תכלת is considered “closest” to God. As the midrash says, “T’cheilet תכלת resembles the sea, the sea resembles the sky, and the sky resembles God’s throne of glory.” So if we go by this model, and accept R. Hirsch’s identification of תכלת with violet, the “red one” would be further from the divine light. One way of reconciling this derives from a teaching of Kabbalah: “what is lower in this world descends from a higher place in the spiritual worlds”.*

*Here’s another thought from R. Hirsch about the rainbow:*

Its appearance is that of an arc joining the earth to heaven, accordingly a bond between heaven and earth. The phenomenon itself is woven of light and water. In the midst of overcast threatening clouds it announces the presence of light, [and] is accordingly a reminder that in the midst of God’s threatened wrath His preserving grace is still there.

#### 11. Rav Avraham Yitzhak Kook has a teaching about rainbows focusing on human moral development (not the environment), presented nicely on this web page: [shiratdevorah.blogspot.com/2010/10/rainbow-covenant.html](http://shiratdevorah.blogspot.com/2010/10/rainbow-covenant.html).

*Another Rav Kook teaching that is directly related to the environment and biodiversity is “The Fourfold Song”. The text in Hebrew and English, along with a lesson plan by [Noam Dolgin](http://NoamDolgin.com), can be found at [jewcology.com/resource/Fourfold-Song-Discussion-Art-Activity](http://jewcology.com/resource/Fourfold-Song-Discussion-Art-Activity). Noam does not write about the rainbow there, but one can easily connect the four levels of communion he describes to parts of a rainbow spectrum.*

## Biodiversity

### 12. Learn about biodiversity.

The rainbow covenant was a covenant with every living animal, not just with people. The rainbow itself is a great teacher of diversity, both within the human community and within all life on Earth (as R. Hirsch suggests in module 10). Go to: [coejl.org/resources/cosmology-and-biodiversity-the-divine-purpose-in-creating-many-species](http://coejl.org/resources/cosmology-and-biodiversity-the-divine-purpose-in-creating-many-species) for teachings on biodiversity and Judaism. You can also find the collection of “Midrash on Noah and the Preservation of Species” on [jewcology.com/resource/Rainbow-Day](http://jewcology.com/resource/Rainbow-Day).

### 13. Pick a rainbow!

We don't mean go out and pick all the wildflowers! But you can go out into the woods with a group and ask them to find objects, plants, bark, rocks, etc. of all the colors in the rainbow and make a rainbow with them. This activity is detailed in *Spirit in Nature: Teaching Judaism and Ecology on the Trail*, and in a lesson plan from the Teva Learning Center based on *Spirit in Nature* that you can download from [jewcology.com/resource/Rainbow-Day](http://jewcology.com/resource/Rainbow-Day).

### 14. Study endangered species. Here are some resources about frogs.

*There are many endangered or at-risk species that will appeal to kids of any age, like panda bears, Siberian tigers, koalas, etc. We tend to focus on furry mammals because of a natural human propensity to identify with them—environmentalists call these species “charismatic”. There are also endangered species we eat like blue fin tuna that we can do something about by changing our diets. Often the effort to save one species requires saving a whole ecosystem, including other species that are less well-known but equally endangered. You can also help species more directly by finding out what local species are endangered and why.*

*FROGS! Here are a few suggestions for studying frogs, which are endangered world-wide, in a way that connects to the spirit of Rainbow Day.*

1) Find out what people are doing or can do to “create an ark” for a particular species. Check out Amphibian Ark and especially their curricular materials and ideas for K-12 at: [amphibianark.org/education/links-to-curriculum-materials](http://amphibianark.org/education/links-to-curriculum-materials).

2) One way to learn about the diversity of frogs is to look for pictures on the internet for a rainbow of frogs in different colors (frogs have extraordinarily diverse coloring) – supplement this with learning about what's happening to frogs around the world.

3) There are many special things about frogs, but one of the most amazing is that they may have been the first kind of animal in the history of the Earth to sing songs! Listen to recordings of frog songs (you can find these at [allaboutfrogs.org/weird/general/songs.html](http://allaboutfrogs.org/weird/general/songs.html)). Imitating different frog songs is a fun thing to do with little kids.

*Help frogs and other aquatic life by never using anti-bacterial products containing triclosan! See module 25.*

## Science and Culture

### 15. The miracle of the color wheel: How many colors are in a rainbow?

We always think of seven colors in a rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet is the standard list. But Newton first came up with a different list of seven colors. And the Kabbalists thought about four elements of color that mixed together to create all the colors: red, green (or green-yellow), black (which violet was considered a part of), and white. And nowadays we think of generating all the colors from the three primary colors: red, blue, yellow. But true violet is literally off the chart of red to blue, at a higher frequency than both. It can't even be shown on a computer screen, which uses phosphors made of red, green and blue. It's a kind of miracle that even though the colors move in a line from red (the lowest frequency we can see) to violet (the highest frequency we can see), when we perceive these colors, we see them forming a circle, “a color wheel,” that seems whole and complete. This is truly wondrous.

## 16. Do other animals see colors the way we do?

Human beings, among mammals, have the finest color vision. Only a few primates and marsupials have three kinds of cone cells to see color like we do. Dogs are not color-blind, but they can only see blue, green, and yellow, not orange and red. The same goes for cats and farm animals. We may have developed our vision to find fruit, as evolutionary biology imagines, but our color vision is also something we need to see the kinds of detail that let us make our inventions and our art. But among all the living creatures, many other species can see colors that we cannot, in ranges of the spectrum that are completely dark to us. Many birds and reptiles have four cone cell types; some reptiles have five. Bees have only three; they can't see red like we can, but they do see ultraviolet. There are some shellfish that have as many as 12 types of color receptors!

*Do other animals see rainbows? What do you think a rainbow would look like to some of these other animals?*

## 17. Colors and dyes

For this project, you will need to do a little research: what plants, minerals, and other natural sources can be used for dyeing and coloring in the place where you live? This is a great project for older kids and adults, and it might include plant identification, learning something about chemistry, and more. And of course it should involve going out into the field to try to find these dyes, if possible.

For younger kids, it's a great project to go out and collect one of the plants or minerals that can be used for dyeing in the place where you live.

*Until recent times all the dyes we used came from nature. Artists sometimes had secret formulas for different colors. And we could only color things using the colors we could get from those specific dyes. This is part of what made t'cheilet, the dye used for tzitzit, so special. One of the very few times people could see all the colors is when they saw a rainbow. Imagine what a treat that was!*

## 18. The science of rainbows

Here are three web pages that have lessons about how rainbows work. The first is for the youngest kids, the second for teaching basic science about light, and the third is advanced.

[first-school.ws/activities/science/rainbow-experiment.htm](http://first-school.ws/activities/science/rainbow-experiment.htm)

[istp.gsfc.nasa.gov/stargaze/Lsun4spe.htm](http://istp.gsfc.nasa.gov/stargaze/Lsun4spe.htm)

[istp.gsfc.nasa.gov/stargaze/Sun4spec.htm](http://istp.gsfc.nasa.gov/stargaze/Sun4spec.htm)

*You can also incorporate using prisms, round jars of water (which can also refract light in a rainbow, just like a drop of water), and diffraction gratings.*

*Do you know which color is on the outside of a rainbow?*

*It's **RED**.*



## Art and Writing

### 19. There's no limit to the kinds of projects you can do with art on rainbows!

Use paints, or see-through tissue papers, to create color wheels; find objects or pictures with the right colors to make a rainbow collage; do cut paper projects; color water with food dye and arrange it in the right order. Many art projects about rainbows can incorporate the science of light and color. One idea for the youngest kids is to use a prism to cast a rainbow on large piece of paper (perhaps on the floor using sunlight), and then paint have the children paint in the colors.

*Send in pictures to with the subject heading "Rainbow Art" and we'll post them.*

## 20. Poetry!

Here's a poem written for children by Christina Rossetti (British, 19<sup>th</sup> century) called "The Rainbow":

Boats sail on the rivers,  
And ships sail on the seas;  
But clouds that sail across the sky  
Are prettier than these.

There are bridges on the rivers,  
As pretty as you please;  
But the bow that bridges heaven,  
And overtops the trees,  
And builds a road from earth to sky,  
Is prettier far than these.

You can use a poem like this as a model to help children write their own poems about the rainbow. Some ideas about teaching the poem can be found here: [annhartterlessons.blogspot.com/2008/12/rainbow-christina-rossetti.html](http://annhartterlessons.blogspot.com/2008/12/rainbow-christina-rossetti.html).

## Liturgies and Prayers

Rainbow Day is also part of counting the Omer, and the cycle of the grain harvest, which has many prayers and Kabbalistic meditations associated with it. See module 35.

21. Go to [neohasid.org/stoptheflood/earthprayer](http://neohasid.org/stoptheflood/earthprayer) to download a prayer for creation that talks about the rainbow, or use this short version of the prayer:

*This prayer uses a passage about the promise of the rainbow that comes from the 17<sup>th</sup> century book P'ri Eitz Hadar, which you can read here: [neohasid.org/torah/bleasing\\_for\\_tubi](http://neohasid.org/torah/bleasing_for_tubi)*

אֵל מְלֵא רַחֲמִים, זְכוֹר לָנוּ  
בְּרִיתְךָ עִם כָּל הַחַיִּים, בְּרִית מִי נֹחַ,  
וּפְרוּשׁ סֶכֶת רַחֲמִים וְשָׁלוֹם  
עַל כָּל מִינֵי הַחַיִּים וְעַלֵינוּ,  
הַקִּיף כָּלֵם יוֹחֲסִינוּ בְּזֵיו הַשְׂכִּינָה  
בְּנַחַל עַדְנִיךָ תִשְׁקֵם בְּכָל מוֹשְׁבוֹתֵיהֶם  
וְאִז נִרְאֶתָה הַקֶּשֶׁת בַּעֲנָן  
שֶׁשׁ וּמִתְפָּאֵר בְּגוֹנֵן,  
וְיָשׁוּב עֵץ הַחַיִּים לְאֵיתָנוּ הָרֵאשׁוֹן  
וּתְזַכְּנוּ, אֲנַחְנוּ וְצֶאֱצֵאֵינוּ,  
לְיִשָּׁב יָמִים רַבִּים עַל הָאָדָמָה  
כְּיָמֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם עַל הָאָרֶץ

God full of compassion, remember  
Your covenant with all life,  
the covenant of the waters of Noah.  
Spread a *Sukkah* of compassion and  
peace over us, over all Life's species;  
Surround all our relations,  
with *Shekhinah's* radiance;  
Water them with Your river of delights  
in all of their habitats.  
Then 'the bow will appear in the cloud',  
joyful and beautified with its colors,  
and the Tree of Life will return to its  
original strength,  
so that we and our descendants  
may merit to live many days on Earth,  
like days of the Skies over the Land.

בְּרוּךְ חַי הָעוֹלָמִים!

Blessed be the Life of the worlds!

Based on the P'ri Eitz Hadar (17th c.), Birkat  
Hachodesh, Sefardi liturgy for Sukkot, and Mal 4,  
Gn 9:14; Ps 36, 78, 146; Dt 32:11, 11:12.

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Please contribute to neohasid for group use.

And on that day I will answer, swears YHVH, I will answer the Skies,  
and they will answer the Land. *Hosea 2:23*

22. Between the Fires: A Litany of Grief & Hope (recommended also for Lag B'Omer)  
by Rabbi Arthur Waskow.

*ALL:*

We are the generations that stand  
between the fires:  
Behind us the flame and smoke  
that rose from Auschwitz, from Hiroshima,  
and from the burning forests of the Amazon.  
Before us the nightmare of a Flood of Fire,  
The flame and smoke that could consume all earth.

It is our task to make from fire not an all-consuming blaze  
But the light in which we see each other fully.  
All of us different, All of us bearing  
One Spark.

[Pause to light sage, incense, or candle]

*ALL:*

We light these fires to see more clearly  
That the earth and all who live as part of it  
Are not for burning.  
We light these fires to see more clearly  
The rainbow in our many-colored faces.

Blessed is the One within the many.  
Blessed are the many who make One.

23. Hold a “Council of All Beings”, a great ritual for older kids or adults.

Everyone takes on the identity of a species, habitat or element in Nature—they may make a mask for the part. Then all the participants gather “in council” to speak for the part of creation they are representing about what is happening to the Earth and about what they can do to reach out to the human beings. This is also a great ritual around a fire. Download directions from [neohasid.org/stoptheflood/council](http://neohasid.org/stoptheflood/council).

24. A mikveh meditation

Carol Rose in her “Introduction to Kavvanot for the Mikveh” (*Worlds of Jewish Prayer*, 1993) describes a meditation that includes, “Breathe out and go under the water again. Imagine yourself surrounded by the colors of the rainbow—the *Brit*—the sign of the covenant. See yourself entering each color of the rainbow as you submerge yourself...” The full text of this meditation is available on [jewcology.com/resource/Rainbow-Day](http://jewcology.com/resource/Rainbow-Day).

## Current Issues and Advocacy

25. Climate Change

One could write volumes about climate change. How do we interpret climate change (or global climate disruption) in relation to a world where, according to the Torah, “cold and hot and summer and winter...will not stop” sustaining life, as the Noah story says? Does this mean that the Torah guarantees that disastrous climate change will not happen? See modules 7–9, which interpret God’s promise in the flood story to mean that God would destroy the world again, but that we could still destroy the world. As Ecclesiastes Rabbah teaches:

In the time that the Holy One created the first human, he took him to all the trees of Gan Eden and said to him, “See my works, how lovely and praiseworthy they are, and all that I created, for your sake I created it. Put your mind [to this], so you won’t ruin or destroy my world, for if you do ruin, there are none who will repair after you.

*Since the flood story is fundamentally a story about weather, any teaching about climate change and what it means can fit with Rainbow Day. See the Religious Action Center's call to action at [action.rac.org/p/dia/action/public/?action\\_KEY=953](http://action.rac.org/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=953)*

## 26. Hydrofracking

Hydrofracking is the practice of pumping huge amounts of water and chemicals into rock formations in order to crack them so petroleum or methane will flow out more quickly and profitably. The image of fracking is frighteningly similar to the flood story (Genesis 7:10-12)

It was at seven days and the waters of the flood were on the land. In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month on day seventeen of the month, this very day, all the sources of the great abyss were cracked open, and the expanse of the skies was opened. And there was rain on the land forty days and forty nights.

Go to [jewsagainsthdrofracking.org](http://jewsagainsthdrofracking.org) to get your community organized.

*Fracking has been associated with polluting and poisoning aquifers, and New York City has been fighting a proposal to "frack" a major rock formation near the sources of its drinking water. Oil and gas service companies have injected over 32 million gallons of diesel fuel or hydraulic fracturing fluids containing diesel fuel in wells in 19 states between 2005 and 2009 as part of fracking operations, according to members of the Congressional Committee on Energy and Commerce, even though that practice is prohibited. Diesel fuel is just an additive to the water used, so many times more gallons of fresh water were taken out of aquifers and made unusable forever by fracking. Other chemicals which the oil companies will not reveal are also used in order to create higher pressure and flow than water can create alone. But the oil companies say fracking is necessary in order to get enough petroleum products to sustain our needs.*

*Another image: a thin film of petroleum on water is enough to poison it. But it also makes beautiful twisted rainbow colors. Is it possible to twist, bend, destroy the rainbow?*

Watch "Finding Their Way" on youtube ([youtube.com/watch?v=QeRekFE29Fc](http://youtube.com/watch?v=QeRekFE29Fc)) or watch the movie "Gasland" and discuss it. Find out if fracking is taking place near where you live.

## 27. Fracking in Israel, and "Energy Security" in the US

The Green Zionist Alliance has led a coalition including JNF-KKL in the fight to stop fracking in Israel. Go to [greenzionism.org/greenisrael/antifracking](http://greenzionism.org/greenisrael/antifracking) to find out more. Read [jta.org/news/article/2013/03/28/3123196](http://jta.org/news/article/2013/03/28/3123196) to find out about why extracting more natural gas is not the solution.

## 28. Keystone XL Pipeline

The largest rally on climate in the history of the United States happened in February, and it was directed against the Keystone XL Pipeline. The pipeline will bring tar sands oil to market—a source of oil that is especially dangerous for the climate. The problem with tar sands oil is not just the amount of it, which is vast. It's also that it takes quite a bit of energy to extract it, meaning each barrel has a greater impact than an average barrel of oil, anywhere from 15% (the lowest estimate) to 2-4 times more – and that's not including the impact of "petroleum coke"—this is a waste product of the "refining" process (which refines the bitumen to be usable as fuel) and it gets used like coal but is dirtier than the dirtiest coal. That will raise the impact of tar sands oil several times, and it's not part of the current calculations used by the government and industry to assess environmental impact. This really is not just a political issue but ultimately a pikuach nefesh issue. Here one article you can read: [scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=tar-sands-and-keystone-xl-pipeline-impact-on-global-warming](http://scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=tar-sands-and-keystone-xl-pipeline-impact-on-global-warming).

## 29. Get informed about the Farm Bill.

The Farm Bill, passed once every 5–7 years, affects every aspect of our food system, from crop subsidies to anti-hunger programs to alternative energy. The Farm Bill of 2012 is finally coming up for discussion in 2013. To learn about Jewish perspectives on the Farm Bill go to: [coejl.org/resources/coejls-2012-farm-bill-priorities/](http://coejl.org/resources/coejls-2012-farm-bill-priorities/).

The Farm Bill also affects foreign food aid. Obama's 2014 budget advocates a new approach to foreign food aid that is supported by Jewish and other religious organizations. Learn more at:

[bread.org/media/releases/international-aid-groups.html](http://bread.org/media/releases/international-aid-groups.html) and at [opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/04/24/when-food-isnt-the-answer-to-hunger/?hp](http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/04/24/when-food-isnt-the-answer-to-hunger/?hp).

30. Don't use or buy antibacterial soaps, toothpastes, or other consumer products containing triclosan!

Triclosan is an endocrine disruptor that causes grave damage to some forms of aquatic life and may be contributing to the loss of frogs. Its use as an antibacterial in consumer products may help to create antibiotic-resistant bacteria, and its effects on human beings are unknown. It is not more effective than soap in household applications. To get the low down, go to: [thesmartmama.com/ii-35](http://thesmartmama.com/ii-35). For a review of the science go to: [ewg.org/news/testimony-official-correspondence/fda-needs-protect-people-and-environment-triclosan](http://ewg.org/news/testimony-official-correspondence/fda-needs-protect-people-and-environment-triclosan) and get a simple guide at: [ewg.org/enviroblog/2008/07/cheatsheet-triclosan](http://ewg.org/enviroblog/2008/07/cheatsheet-triclosan). Here's one of the earliest articles to raise the issue, from 2006: [treehugger.com/files/2006/11/theres\\_a\\_frog\\_d\\_1.php](http://treehugger.com/files/2006/11/theres_a_frog_d_1.php).

*Most importantly: DO NOT USE TRICLOSAN-containing products in schools.* Alcohol-containing products provide an anti-bacterial that is safe if you need one.

31. *Tzedakah* and justice.

Drastic climate events have had tragic and enormous consequences of late. Tornadoes, floods, etc.—every event has tremendous human and environmental consequences that we can help ameliorate. One idea, from Deborah Bromberg Seltzer, head of Judaic studies for the Schechter School in Northampton MA, is to ask children to make rainbow cards and then sell them to raise money for *tzedakah* in response to one of these disasters.

## Seed-Saving, Harvests and Gardens

32. Seed-Saving and Na'amah, Noah's Wife

Seed saving is the ancient practice of saving the seed from the best of last year's crops to plant for next year. It was a way to improve crops, to breed crops that were uniquely suited to a particular region and climate, and to preserve biological diversity. All of this has fallen by the wayside in modern industrial agriculture, where a generic variety of seed for many climates is produced and shipped all over the world. Not only is seed saving good for the planet, preserving seed that is best for each ecosystem, requiring less pesticides and providing superior nutrition, but seed saving was also part of the Noah story, as implied by the verses:

*From all the living beings from all flesh, two from all will you bring into the ark to live with you. They will be male and female...And you, take for you from everything edible that is eaten. You will gather it unto you, and it will be for you and for them for eating.* Genesis 6:19-21

Midrash teaches that Noah's wife's name was Naamah נַעֲמָה, and that she was called Naamah because her deeds were pleasant נֹעַם. A modern midrash teaches that one of the things Naamah did that expressed her righteousness was that she gathered seed from around the world to replant after the flood.

*Here are four more ideas or lessons you can use for teaching about seed saving:*

33. For younger children, read Sandy Eisenberg Sasso's book, *Noah's wife: The Story of Naamah*. Here's a brief description of the book:

Noah's wife is named Naamah, a play on the Hebrew word *pleasing*, because her deeds are pleasing to G-d. When G-d tells Noah to bring the animals of the world onto the ark, God also calls on Naamah, Noah's wife, to save each plant on Earth. Entrusted with this task, Naamah sets off to every corner of the world, discovering a fabulous array of growing things, and gathering seeds, bulbs, cuttings, spores, and roots. She fills a room on the ark with every type of plant—from amaryllis, soybeans, and wheat to lilies, moss, and even dandelions. Then, after 40 long days and nights on the ark, the most important part of Naamah's work begins. Sasso helps children understand the responsibility that people have to be stewards of the earth.

You can purchase this book through [jewcology.com/resource/Rainbow-Day](http://jewcology.com/resource/Rainbow-Day) for a 20% discount. There's a board book version for younger kids and a version for slightly older kids. R. Sasso reported to me that one group of children after reading the story sewed a pocketed apron and filled the pockets with seeds!

#### 34. For schools and gardens, plant a “rainbow”!

Plant a “rainbow” biodiversity sanctuary with rare Eretz Israeli grain varieties collected by Eli Rogosa in cooperation with the Israel Genebank. The kit includes the five grain species grown in Ancient Israel: *Shippon*: einkorn eaten by Abraham and Sarah, *Kusemet*: emmer used in the original matzah, *Seorah*: barley used for the Omer in Ancient Israel and *Chittim*: the variety of durum wheat found at Masada by Yigal Yadin, collected by Eli Rogosa in Wadi Fukin near Bethlehem. An \$18 kit with a seed-saving curriculum and the seeds are available for purchase on: [growseed.org/seed.html](http://growseed.org/seed.html).

*The Omer period when Rainbow Day falls is also the time that the wheat crop is growing in Israel, and every week the ancient Israelites brought the wheat to the Temple as part of a prayer for the crops.*

#### 35. For older children or adults, discuss this story from Eli Rogosa.

The Omer period, when Rainbow Day falls, is also the time that the wheat crop is growing in Israel, and every week the ancient Israelites brought the wheat to the Temple as part of a prayer for the crops. Read and discuss the following vignette about finding wheat from Eli Rogosa ([growseed.org/stories.html](http://growseed.org/stories.html))

In Jerusalem's Machane Yehuda open-air market, ancient stone buildings with arched portals open up to a colorful tapestry of ethnic peoples and fragrant foods. Abraham and his wife Yehudit opened the first Ethiopian shop in Machane Yehuda after they arrived in Israel from Gonder, Ethiopia, escaping local cross-fire to return to their ancient homeland of Israel. Today, Ethiopian-Israelis number 100,000. Almost all were traditional farmers in rural mountain villages, but most have joined the ranks of Israel's low-income, under-employed populations from third world countries. Few have found ways to adapt their farming methods to compete with agri-tech farming. So they resort to shipping their ancient Ethiopia wheat, teff and other traditional foods direct from Ethiopia to family-run markets such as Abraham and Yehudit's. It was in Abraham and Yehudit's market stall that I found emmer (*Triticum dicoccum*), called “*Em Hachitah*” or Mother Wheat in Hebrew, the almost-extinct delicious wheat variety that was domesticated in the land of early Israel 12,000 - 10,000 years ago. Wild emmer (*Triticum dicoccoides*) still can be found growing in remote fields throughout Israel.

“Do you know what this is?” I asked Abraham incredulously. “Of course, it is *aja*, (Amharic for emmer),” replied Abraham, with an almost gleeful-hinting smile. “Abraham, this wheat was used for our first matzahs in Egypt.” “Yes,” explained Abraham, “It has been kept by our people in Ethiopia.” “Why don't you grow it here to bake matzahs?” “Ah,” he explained sadly, “Who of our people have farms here in holy Israel? Who would buy our simple foods?”

Questions to answer: Why is Abraham importing emmer from Ethiopia? What is the relationship between seeds and culture? Why isn't emmer grown in Israel anymore? Learn more at [growseed.org/wheat.html](http://growseed.org/wheat.html):

*The southern Fertile Crescent is the ancient center of origin for wild wheat, the mother of all cultivated wheats. Wild wheat still grows in undisturbed meadows and field edges. Indigenous Fertile Crescent wheats have been selected by generations of traditional farmers have richer flavor and complex disease resistances lacking in modern wheat bred for yield and uniformity. However today about 90% of the wheat eaten in Israel, Palestine and Jordan is imported from the US. Mideast traditional wild foods, vegetables and wheats, many of which date back to Biblical times, are in critical danger. Arab and Jewish families who were self-sufficient traditional farmers a generation ago have become marginalized in a world of rapid agri-technological advance. Last generation's family farmers are today's cheap labor. In a creative response, regional seed curators, artisan bakers and farmers are pooling our resources together to restore our ancient wheats for the common good. This harkens back to the ancient teachings of Israel, which are rooted in its agricultural heritage of decentralized small-scale farming.*

36. Lead a “L’Dor V’Dor” workshop for older children or adults (younger kids can seed save using the directions here as well)

Learn about seed saving as well as plant biology using Jewish Farm School’s “L’Dor V’Dor” Seed Saving workshops (one focused on the biology of seeds and the other on how to save seeds from different kinds of fruit), which you can download from [jewcology.com/resource/Rainbow-Day](http://jewcology.com/resource/Rainbow-Day).

37. Plant a rainbow garden!

Find plants with all the colors and plant them in a rainbow shape. If you plan it right you can get a renewing rainbow as new blossoms come in through the season. For inspiration see Kayam Farm’s brochure for its rainbow garden on [jewcology.com/resource/Rainbow-Day](http://jewcology.com/resource/Rainbow-Day).

38. Count the omer! And remember the grain harvest and the rainbow promise.

Count the days until Rainbow Day, and from Rainbow Day to Shavuot. These are the days of growth of the wheat crop, which finishes coming in at Shavuot. They follow the days of the barley harvest. In ancient Israel, life revolved around the harvest and many prayers were said and rituals were performed to ask for protection for the harvest. And every harvest is a fulfillment of the rainbow covenant, as it says in Genesis 8:

Throughout all the land’s days, sowing and reaping and cold and hot and summer and winter and day and night will not rest.

*An omer is a measure of grain, and counting the omer is something we do from Passover to Shavuot. In the seven weeks between them, grain was brought to the Temple in prayer for a successful harvest. (In fact, one of the reasons why there is a custom not to cut one’s hair during part of the omer period may be to sympathetically encourage the grain to keep growing.) Each week corresponds to a Sefirah in Kabbalah, and each week can correspond to a color of the rainbow. If you have an iPhone, you can use neohasid’s Omer Counter app to count to Rainbow Day and find out the Sefirot for each day. Find it by searching under “omer count” or “omer counter” in the app store. Learn about how to count the omer at [neohasid.org/omer/count\\_the\\_omer](http://neohasid.org/omer/count_the_omer).*

## The Seven Noachide Laws

39. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 56b) explains seven commandments that were given to Noah and his family and are therefore commandments for all humanity. These seven laws are derived through rabbinic interpretation of God’s instructions when Noah comes out of the ark. They are:

1. Set up courts and bring offenders to justice. *Dinim* – judgments
2. Do not curse God. “*Birkat*” *Hashem* – blasphemy, euphemistically called “blessing the name”
3. Do not worship false gods. *Avodah zara* – literally “strange worship”
4. Do not be sexually immoral. *Giluy arayot* – literally “uncovering nakedness”
5. Do not murder. *Sh’fikhut damim* – literally “spilling blood”
6. Do not steal. *Gezel* – theft
7. Do not eat any part taken from a live animal. *Ever min ha-chai* – “limb from the living thing”

*Since these laws are given at the same time that the rainbow covenant is made, many people connect the seven laws with the seven colors of the rainbow. What connection do you think there is between law and beauty? Between human law and nature?*

*The word “covenant” or brit is mentioned seven times in the verses about the rainbow covenant. Some people connect this repetition to both the seven colors and the seven Noachide laws.*

## More study

40. Read either of the following two articles about the rainbow covenant. Both can be found on [jewcology.com/resource/Rainbow-Day](http://jewcology.com/resource/Rainbow-Day).

1) Excerpt from “A Reflection on Environment, Sentience, and Jewish Liturgy” by Rabbi Everett Gendler, in *Worlds of Jewish Prayer* (1993)

2) “Biodiversity and the Bible” by Calvin deWitt, University of Wisconsin professor and Christian environmentalist, in *Global Diversity* 6:4 (1997)

*Either article would make the basis for an excellent discussion. Both can be found on the Rainbow Day page, [jewcology.com/resource/Rainbow-Day](http://jewcology.com/resource/Rainbow-Day). Special thanks to David Arfa ([maggiddavid.net](http://maggiddavid.net)) for suggesting the article by Everett Gendler.*

## Acknowledgements

This is the version of the Rainbow Day curriculum for 2013. It is version 5.0.

These resources and the Rainbow Day web page were put together by Rabbi David Seidenberg, creator of [neohasid.org](http://neohasid.org). All text without attribution was written by Rabbi Seidenberg. The following members of the Green Hevra of organizations have contributed to the Rainbow Day curriculum.

\* The Shalom Center [theshalomcenter.org](http://theshalomcenter.org)

\* [neohasid.org](http://neohasid.org) [neohasid.org](http://neohasid.org)

\* Kayam Farm [kayamfarm.org](http://kayamfarm.org)

\*Teva Learning Alliance [tevalearningalliance.org](http://tevalearningalliance.org)

\* Jewish Farm School [jewishfarmschool.org](http://jewishfarmschool.org)

\* Green Zionist Alliance [greenzionism.org](http://greenzionism.org)

\* Religious Action Center [rac.org](http://rac.org)

The following organizations have helped by sharing information about this curriculum:

Isabella Freedman Retreat Center [isabellafreedman.org](http://isabellafreedman.org) | The Shmita Project [shmitaproject.org](http://shmitaproject.org)

Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life [coejl.org](http://coejl.org) | Eden Village [edenvillagecamp.org](http://edenvillagecamp.org)

Urban Adamah [urbanadamah.org](http://urbanadamah.org) | Wilderness Torah [wildernesstorah.org](http://wildernesstorah.org) | Hazon [hazon.org](http://hazon.org)

Jewish Greening Fellowship [isabellafreedman.org/environment/greening](http://isabellafreedman.org/environment/greening)

Organic Torah [organictorah.org](http://organictorah.org) | Adamah [isabellafreedman.org/adamah/intro](http://isabellafreedman.org/adamah/intro)

Jewish Reconstructionist Movement [jewishrecon.org](http://jewishrecon.org)

Thank you to all the other organizations that spread the word and encouraged people to pay attention to Rainbow Day! We hope this is the beginning of something beautiful in the Jewish world, and the coming to fruition of the vision of Rabbi Arthur Waskow, who first proposed Rainbow Day in 1981, and of Rabbi David Seidenberg, who has been organizing resources and events for Rainbow Day for the past few years and who initiated and compiled this project. Special thanks to Nili Simhai for moral support when this project got started two years ago, an best wishes in her continuing path post-Teva!

From Rabbi David: Besides the simple joy of honoring rainbows and appreciating the beauty of this creation, I also hope this project will help people think about a sustainable world, a world where humanity honors and keeps its side of the rainbow covenant, to not let the cycles of life cease. I also hope this project will feed into the conversation about finding ways to observe the Sabbatical (Shmitah) and Jubilee years, and using them to imagine how to re-create the world. Though Rainbow Day can be meaningful for many different reasons, we also hope it helps the Jewish community focus on the goal of sustainability as well. The midrash says that several righteous people in Tanakh were known to “feed others” and they “saw a new world”—chief among them Noah. May we also be so blessed.

Ideas? Feedback? Contributions? Contact Rabbi David Seidenberg, [neohasid.org](http://neohasid.org), [rebduvid86@gmail.com](mailto:rebduvid86@gmail.com)