

“SPIRITUAL TRAJECTORY”

The Torah calls Noah “a righteous man” (Ber, 6:9), conferring on him a powerful spiritual status. Later, however, he is called “a man of the earth” (Ber. 9:20), which suggests that he lost something of his exalted standing.

Moses is called “an Egyptian man” (Ex. 2:19); that is, tied to a particular land, as Noah is tied to the earth. Yet later he is called “a man of God” (Ex. 33:1). Why did Noah’s spiritual trajectory decline and Moses’ ascend?

The Meshech Chochmah explains that there are two paths in service of God. One is the path of seclusion and the other the path of community. Noah lived in the world until God called on him, and then secluded himself. He did not speak with his neighbors or encourage them to repent. Moses, on the other hand, lived in Exile in Midian but, when God called on him, returned to the people to tie his own fate to the people of Israel. Noah narrowed his circle; Moses widened his.

Is someone on a mountaintop more precious in God’s eyes than someone on a synagogue board? The Rabbi in the library may seem more exalted than the Rabbi in the congregation. But to avoid other people is to sidestep God’s creation. God is best served not in isolation but in community; for it is in relationship that we come alive, and enliven those around us.