

Drilling on Ships

According to an 1,800-year-old Jewish commentary on the Hebrew Bible, Rabi Shimon bar Yochai describes a group of people traveling in a boat. One of them takes a drill and begins to bore a hole. The others ask, “Why are you doing this?”

The person replies, “Why are you concerned? Am I not drilling under my own place?” The rest reply, “But you will flood the boat for all of us!”

Imagine being a passenger on this boat. One person, without concern for others, jeopardizes your safety and security. The person drilling may have compelling reasons. Perhaps they are hungry and want to drop a fishing line, or hot and want to cool their feet in the water. Maybe the boat is on fresh water, and they are thirsty. But no matter how compelling the reason, drilling a hole in a boat to fulfill one person’s desires threatens everyone.

Rabbi Shimon’s story warns us of the destructive power of letting our selfish desires overtake all other considerations. ... Everyone on the boat (or planet) needs to work together to ensure such behavior doesn’t continue. The person drilling is dangerous, but the rest of us ignoring the threat they pose is equally dangerous. If the boat sinks, the fault is both the driller’s and those who stood idly by.

The Earth is our collective ship.

... In our times, the indirectness and “invisibility” of the planetary damage we cause poses a major challenge. Even when we are very aware of our role in the problem, we don’t see the effect of our actions on a daily basis. The earth is so big and complex. Turning on the car engine, a light switch, or an air-conditioner doesn’t suddenly raise the outside temperature or trigger an extreme storm. But we are essentially drilling holes without fully grasping the consequences of our action. If we did fully grasp them, could we look our children in the eye and admit to them that our lifestyle will jeopardize their future?

... We must face the collective reality that we cannot simultaneously expand our consumer behaviors and live sustainably.

~ Introduction, [Eco Bible](#), *Volume 1: An Ecological Commentary on Genesis and Exodus*,
by Rabbi Yonatan Neril and Rabbi Leo Dee

So, how do we respond to the person who does not see how his or her actions affect others? I suppose we could yell at such people. We could tell them how selfish they are being. We could try to make them feel badly. That might make us feel good for the moment, but, that too, is just another form of drilling under our own seat. It’s just another way of insisting on doing things our way while ignoring the needs of another person. ...

So, we don’t yell at the man with the drill on the boat. We don’t wag our finger at the person who wants to build a factory in a residential community. We don’t take a high-and-mighty attitude against the person who turns the thermostat up to 72 degrees. ... No.

What do we do instead? We listen to them. We love them. We see them as reflections of ourselves. We all have places in our lives where we need to care for ourselves first. We don't isolate people or put ourselves above them. We try to see each person as a fellow, a friend, and a companion in life's journey. We remember that we must love others and care for them as they wish to be cared for. That is how we help people see beyond themselves and connect with others. That is how we keep them, and ourselves, from drilling those holes in the boat.

~ excerpt from a sermon by Reb Jeff, September 30, 2019. [Read the whole sermon.](#)