



5 Ways to start again

Life is difficult for good people. Families hurt, friends disappoint, even the church can be experienced as failing us. For those tempted to 'give up' on their family, church or other community, Noah's Ark contains a profound word of divine empathy, for in this story even God hurts to the point of giving up on the human race. Yet our Torah portion invites us to ponder the fact that the flood is not God's last word, nor need it be ours either.

Grieve. Floods of tears have their place. Disappointments are real. They need to be faced, grieved, appropriately voiced.

Talk. Share your heart with a wise, loving, friend. Preferably one who cares for your spiritual life. If you must withdraw into an ark to weather a storm, make sure your companions are a healthy influence.

Listen. Listen not only to your pain but to that deeper voice of love and compassion. Don't become blinded by hurt. Think of the dove with an olive branch...do you have

the eyes to see the subtle, gentle signs of hope?

Decide. As far as possible, make a decision to stay in relationship with your community, despite its failings. Open the doors of the ark. Re-enter the world. It may or may not have changed; but you have!

Create. In a tangible deed, word or prayer, give expression to your decision to reconcile with your community. Inspired by God's rainbow, create a meaningful sign of your choice for love and life.

Light of Torah

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.



Why reflect on Torah?

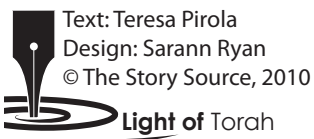
"For the authors and founders of the New Testament, the Old Testament was simply the "Scriptures;" it was only later that the developing Church gradually formed a New Testament canon which was also Sacred Scripture, but in the sense that it still presupposed Israel's Bible to be such, the Bible read by the apostles and their disciples, and now called the Old Testament, which provided the interpretative key." (Pontifical Biblical Commission, 2001)

This **Light of Torah** series seeks to awaken Catholics to the fundamental importance of the Hebrew Scriptures (what we refer to as the 'Old Testament') and the Jewish community of faith from which they came. These sacred writings, precious to Jesus and his disciples, continue to be honored through diligent study by both Jewish and Christian communities to this day. **Light of Torah** follows the cycle of Torah readings read in synagogues each week [starting with Genesis, proceeding through Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy] and highlights Jewish insights into the Torah text

Issue #2.
9 Oct 2010.

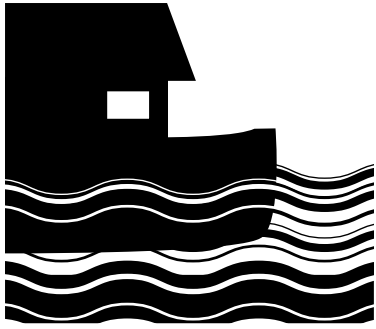
Genesis 6:9—11:32
Noah: 'Noah'

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Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

Genesis 6:9–11:32

This week is an opportunity to extend our knowledge of a familiar bible story, perhaps known since childhood: Noah's ark. You may already be familiar with what God said to Noah *before* the building of the ark. We can readily recall that God expressed disappointment in the wickedness of the human race and revealed the divine plan to destroy the earth in a flood. But what were God's words to Noah *after* the flood, *after* Noah and his family and animals had come out of the ark? Read them for yourself in Gen. 9:1-17.

Sources: Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2001); Leibowitz, *New Studies in Bereshit* (NY, 1994).
Scripture quotes: *NRSV*.

Tasting Torah

God's post-flood speech can be divided into three parts: God commands, God makes a covenant, God gives a sign of that covenant. Note that the words that begin each section are also used to end each section.

God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Read Gen. 9:1-7).

Then God said to Noah and to his sons... "I'm establishing my covenant with you and your descendents..." (Read Gen.9:8-12).

I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant..." (Read Gen. 9:13-17).

Having created the world in Gen.1, God sets out to re-establish the world in Gen. 9. What do you notice as you compare these two stories?

Touching Torah

Perhaps you noted the similarity of some of the creation language, and that in each case God establishes the human race from a single human being. Both Adam and Noah are blessed and commanded to 'be fruitful and multiply.' Noah, however, is given an additional set of commandments prohibiting unlawful killing. Most importantly, while the relationship between God and Adam is presumed, God enters into a covenantal relationship with Noah and his descendents, promising that never again will a flood destroy the earth. What else in the text caught your attention?

Depthing Torah

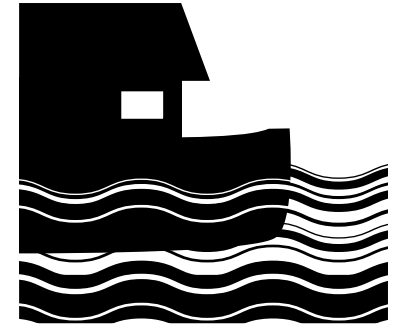
And what of the rainbow? Why might this be chosen as the sign of the covenant? Many have sought a meaning in its shape and color. One *Light of Torah* reader, for instance, remarks that he has always viewed the rainbow's reach across the sky as suggesting the connection between heaven and earth, a fitting sign of God's reconciliation with humanity.

When we delve into the tradition, we find the idea, recalled by the medieval Jewish Torah scholar Ramban, that the shape of the rainbow resembles an archer's bow. When an arrow is released, the bow faces a certain way. If we imagine an angry God shooting arrows at the earth (as suggested by Psalm 144:6), the bow would face a different direction to what we see in a rainbow. Thus the rainbow signifies that an era of peace displaces retribution and anger.

Ramban himself, however, is not satisfied with this explanation. After all, humankind has not changed its ways all that much. Rather than speculate about the rainbow's form or color he prefers to focus on the fact that, as stated in the text, it is given as an assurance of God's unfathomable mercy despite human sin.

Doing Torah

Table topic: Despite the disturbing actions of God in this Torah portion, Noah's ark is ultimately a story about a compassionate God who does not give up on a rebellious people. Do you agree?



Faith & Life

A solo parent shares:

"One thing that helped me on the road to recovery after my divorce was to focus on simple blessings. In the midst of a day of desperate sadness, I would find little things to thank God for: the warm sunshine, the relief of tears, the roof over my head, the gift of a supportive friend."

Reflection: Think of a period of restoration and peace in your life that followed an experience of devastation. What steps helped you through the difficult time? Thank God for this healing grace.