

Somewhere Under the Rainbow – Parshat Noah, 5782

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־נֹחַ וְאֶל־בָּנָיו אִתּוֹ לֵאמֹר: וְאֲנִי הִנְנִי מֵקִים אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם וְאֶת־זֶרְעֵכֶם אַחֲרֵיכֶם: וְאֵת כָּל־גֹּפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר אִתְּכֶם בְּעוֹף בְּבִהֵמָה וּבְכָל־חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ אִתְּכֶם מִכָּל יוֹצְאֵי הַתְּבֵינָה לְכָל חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ: וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם וְלֹא־יִכָּרֵת כָּל־בָּשָׂר עוֹד מִמִּי הַמִּבּוּל וְלֹא־יְהִי עוֹד מִבּוּל לְשַׁחַת הָאָרֶץ:

Genesis 9:8-11 And God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "I now establish My covenant with you and your offspring to come, and with every living thing that is with you—birds, cattle, and every wild beast as well—all that have come out of the ark, every living thing on earth. I will maintain My covenant with you: never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים זֹאת אוֹת־הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר־אֲנִי נֹתֵן בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין כָּל־גֹּפֶשׁ חַיָּה אֲשֶׁר אִתְּכֶם לְדֹרֹת עוֹלָם: אֶת־קִשְׁתִּי נֹתַתִּי בְּעַנָּן וְהִיתָה לְאוֹת בְּרִית בֵּינִי וּבֵין הָאָרֶץ: וְהָיָה בְּעָנְנֵי עָנָן עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְנִרְאָתָה הַקִּשְׁתַּת בְּעַנָּן: וְזָכַרְתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין כָּל־גֹּפֶשׁ חַיָּה בְּכָל־בָּשָׂר וְלֹא־יְהִי עוֹד הַמִּבּוּל לְשַׁחַת כָּל־בָּשָׂר: וְהִיתָה הַקִּשְׁתַּת בְּעַנָּן וְרָאִיתָהּ לְזָכַר בְּרִית עוֹלָם בֵּין אֱלֹהִים וּבֵין כָּל־גֹּפֶשׁ חַיָּה בְּכָל־בָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאָרֶץ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־נֹחַ זֹאת אוֹת־הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר הִקְמַתִּי בֵּינִי וּבֵין כָּל־בָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאָרֶץ: (פ)

12-17 God further said, "This is the sign that I set for the covenant between Me and you, and every living creature with you, for all ages to come. I have set My bow in the clouds, and it shall serve as a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth.

When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds,

I will remember My covenant between Me and you and every living creature among all flesh, so that the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures, all flesh that is on earth.

That," God said to Noah, "shall be the sign of the covenant that I have established between Me and all flesh that is on earth."

1. Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, 1:3:8

When Noah had made these supplications, God, who loved the man for his righteousness, granted entire success to his prayers, and said, that it was not he who brought the destruction on a polluted world, but that they underwent that vengeance on account of their own wickedness; and that he had not brought men into the world if he had himself determined to destroy them, it being an instance of greater wisdom not to have granted them life at all, than, after it was granted, to procure their destruction; "But the injuries," said he, "they offered to my holiness and virtue, forced me to bring this punishment upon them. But I will leave off for the time to come to require such punishments, the effects of so great wrath, for their future wicked actions, and especially on account of thy prayers. But if I shall at any time send tempests of rain, in an extraordinary manner, be not affrighted at the largeness of the showers; for the water shall no more overspread the earth. However, I require you to abstain from shedding the blood of men, and to keep yourselves pure from murder; and to punish those that commit any such thing. I permit you to make use of all the other living creatures at your pleasure, and as your appetites lead you; for I have made you lords of them all, both of those that walk on the land, and those that swim in the waters, and of those that fly in the regions of the air on high, excepting their blood, for therein is the life. **But I will give you a sign that I have left off my anger by my bow [whereby is meant the rainbow, for they determined that the rainbow was the bow of God].** And when God had said and promised thus, he went away.

2. Philo, Questions and Answers on Genesis, 2:64

Why does God say that, as a sign that he will never again bring a deluge over the whole earth, he will place his bow in the clouds? (#Ge 9:13). Some persons imagine that by the bow he means that thing which by some is called Jupiter's belt, from its figure, dwelling on its continual similitude to the **rainbow**; but I do not perceive that that has been positively asserted. In the first place, because the bow aforesaid ought to have a peculiar and essential nature of its own, because it is called the bow of God; for he says, "I will set my bow in the clouds." But that which belongs to God and is said to have been set in any place as his, indicates plainly that it is not devoid of essence or of substance. But the belt of Jupiter has not, properly speaking, any separate nature of its own, but is merely an appearance of the solar rays on a wet cloud, all the phaenomena of which are non-existent and incorporeal. And moreover, this is a further proof of that, that it is never seen at night, though clouds exist by night as well as by day. In the second place, we must also say that even in the day-time, when clouds obscure the whole face of heaven, the belt of Jupiter is never at all seen in them. But what remains may also be affirmed without any falsehood, when the Maker of the law says, "I will set my bow in the clouds;" for, behold, while clouds are present there is no appearance of the belt of Jupiter visible. But he said, "Where there is a collection of clouds let there be a bow seen in the clouds." Still it often happens, when the clouds are collected and when the air is obscured and thickened, that no appearance of a **rainbow** is seen anywhere. We must consider, therefore, whether haply the sacred historian indicates something else by this mention of the bow, namely, that in the very exercise of the mercy of God, and also in the moment of his bitterness towards men on earth, there still shall not be any ultimate destruction of them, in the fashion of a bow, which is too soft and unfit for such a purpose, nor shall there be any violence added, so as to cause a rapid destruction, but there shall be a moderate determination, each attribute being carefully measured; for the great deluge took place with a breaking asunder and disruption of the clouds and of all things; as he himself asserts, when he says, "The fountains of the deep were broken up." And yet it was not an unmeasured vehemence. Moreover, a bow is not itself a weapon, but only an instrument for the use of weapons, namely, for the arrow which strikes; and the arrow being sent forth by means of the bow strikes a part which is at a distance, while the parts which are nearest to it remain unhurt. And this is given as a proof that the whole earth shall never for the future suffer any deluge, since no one arrow ever hits all places, but only those which are at a distance. Therefore the divine virtue, being invisible, is symbolically indicated by the bow in the cloud; being in truth dissolved according to the figure of tranquillity, and condensed in accordance with a cloud; so that it does not permit all the clouds to be altogether dissolved into water, so that the earth may not be made a lake by an inundation, which it carefully forbids, and arranges the condensation of air, checking it as by a bridle, though it is at that time the more accustomed to exhibit itself as rebellious by reason of its excessive fullness. For by reason of the clouds it also shows itself to be replenished, dripping, and saturated.

3. Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah 16a

Rabbi Yehuda, son of Rabbi Nahmani, the disseminator of Reish Lakish, interpreted a verse homiletically: Whoever looks at the following three things, his eyes will grow dim: One who looks at a rainbow, at a Nasi, and at the priests. He explains: At a rainbow, as it is written: "As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about, this was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" (Ezekiel 1:28).

4. Blessing over a Rainbow

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, זוכר הברית ונאמן בבריתו וקים במאמרו

Praised are You, Adonai our God, sovereign of the world, who remembers the Covenant and is faithful to the covenant and keeps the divine promise.