

Noach

After the flood, a spectrum.

GENESIS 6:9-11:32 · SHABBAT, OCTOBER 17, 2026

A queer Jewish study of survival, covenant, domination, difference — and what it takes to build a world where many kinds of life can flourish.

Care note: this study names sexual violence, trauma, homophobic interpretation, and the racialized misuse of the “curse of Ham” directly rather than softening them.

KEY TEXTS

Genesis 9:16 — The bow in the clouds

“When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant.” Keshet means rainbow — and ordinarily, a war bow. Ramban reads it as a bow without its string, pointed away from the earth: a weapon rendered harmless. The covenant is made not only with one family or nation, but with “every living creature.”

Genesis 9:18-27 · Sanhedrin 70a — Inside the tent

Ham “saw” Noah’s nakedness, yet Noah wakes and knows what had been “done to him.” Rav and Shmuel disagree: one says Ham castrated Noah; the other, that he sexually assaulted him. Rabbi Steven Greenberg reads it as domination, not desire: “The parasha then is not about male-male sex per se. There is no punishment for queer sex here.” Michael Sarid adds the ethics of witnessing: Shem and Japheth refuse the gaze and cover their father.

Sanhedrin 108a — What sealed the decree?

Genesis names vatishachet, corruption, and chamas, violence. Some midrashim bundle male-male union with coercion and robbery — a stigma the guide does not disguise. But Sanhedrin 108a draws its own hierarchy: the decree was sealed because of theft. The parashah’s controlling moral category is violence — violation of bodies, property, and boundaries — not loving relationship.

Genesis 6:9 — Righteous in his generation

Tzaddik be-dorotav is heard two ways: praise — righteous even in such a generation — or limit — only righteous by comparison. Noah “walked with God”; Abraham is told to “walk before Me.” Noah names the lonely integrity of being the only out person in the room — and the ark is both necessary refuge and insufficient politics: survival, then the harder obligation to remake the world outside it.

Genesis 11:1-9 — Babel

The builders fear being scattered. The Netziv reads their project as a regime of enforced ideology; Rabbi Jonathan Sacks calls the tower “an artificial unity” imposed on divinely created diversity. God does not end communication. God ends the monopoly of one language.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Questions that open the text.

1 • What would it mean to take a symbol once aimed at us and hang it up as a sign of covenant? What does reclamation cost?

2 • The rainbow covenant includes “every living creature” and requires nothing of its recipients. How does that speak to experiences of conditional welcome?

3 • Do you find Greenberg’s distinction between queer sex and sex used as domination persuasive? What changes when harm — not gender — is the moral axis?

4 • Which reading of Ham moves you more: sexualized domination, or witnessing suffering and walking away? What responsibility follows from each?

5 • How does reading Noah’s drinking as a trauma response rather than simple disgrace change the story?

6 • When has survival itself been righteousness? When did the moment demand more — the move from Noah’s refuge to Abraham’s protest?

7 • Where do you encounter pressure toward “one language” in Jewish life, queer life, or public life? What might holy scattering look like?

8 • What do we do with inherited texts whose stigma cannot be wished away, even when their broader moral logic points toward violence and exploitation?

A 25-MINUTE STUDY CIRCLE

3 min **Arrive** — Read Genesis 9:8-17 aloud.

6 min **Notice** — What does this covenant require — and of whom?

8 min **Choose** — Open one discussion question and study in pairs.

6 min **Gather** — Name one interpretation that changed the text for you.

2 min **Close** — Offer the traditional rainbow blessing or a moment of silence.

Distilled from the Noach Deep Dive study guide and quick guide · Torah Through an LGBTQ+ Lens with Mikki · In the guides, classical sources, modern commentary, and creative queer readings are labeled so they do not blur together.