



David M. Valadez  
Senshin Center  
Dojocho

---

## **The Narrative of Noah** by David M. Valadez

At times, we ourselves get in the way of that which is right there for all to see. Our own cultural myths are this way. The story of Noah is a great example. Being too much in the way we end up taking such wisdom solely as a literal reporting of an event long passed. What was clearly meant to be a tale of insight comes over time to be a proof one uses to suit ones desires. Sad as this may be, it becomes sadder by the fact that such interpretations always take place at the cost of the needs of another. Today, for the most part, the tale of Noah is the reporting of a cataclysmic event that it is supposed to document, and/or it's the little toy sets our children play with as toddlers.

Perhaps this is why the average person is so shocked to learn that the region from where the Noah narrative was derived is filled with countless such stories – countless tales of great floods, great boats, and great men. Some of these versions are related directly to the version found in the book of Genesis but others fall totally outside of any Judeo-Christian tradition. When we are too in the way, we miss the wisdom that an entire region was trying to transmit and instead waste our time looking for signs that suggest a great flood did in fact take place and/or we even waste time looking for the ark itself. I remember when I was a boy there was a movie – in the theaters and everything – on how “scientists” believed they may have actually discovered Noah’s ark! There were other movies out around that time, on Big Foot and on the Lockness Monster. For some reason, the proximity of these films never seemed to bother anyone.

Somewhere between finding a great wooden vessel frozen into the face of a mountain and using cute little toys to decorate a nursery, the tale of Noah exists as a tool – a tool for self-reflection. Not so concerned with what “happened” long ago, as such a tool, the tale of Noah can alert us to what is happening now. This is precisely what myths do. They act like they are about some golden past, some long lost time, but they are really about the here and now – they are about our time. They are discourses by which and through which we can come to understand both our very present and ourselves.

As a general guideline for those that aren’t familiar with the myth:

Noah was a man. He was any man. He was any man that had before him the choice to follow God or not to follow. Unlike most, he truly did. That is to say that he saw what was to be done, what was right, what was wise, what was compassionate, what was loving, etc., and he lived life in such a way that he actually carried forth all of these practices. Genesis says, “Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God.” At the time that Noah was alive, God looked out upon all that he created and saw that while men are free to choose the Way, they choose most often not to follow it. God is said to be

almost disgusted with his creation. He is even angry at his creation. He wants to wipe the slate clean, start over. Genesis reads, “Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.” And so God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth.” God tells Noah to build an ark because he is going to bring a great flood – one in which the whole world, that which is not on the ark, will be destroyed. The flood comes, those on the ark are saved, those not on the ark are wiped clean away (destroyed), and after the waters are swept away God makes a promise to Noah. God promises that he will never again destroy the Earth because Man chooses evil over good.

At its core, this story is a story of choices. There is the Way and there is living in opposition to the Way. And there is a choice between these two paths. In the tale, the choices, like in all myths, are posited as extremes to each other. The Way is on the side of God, of life, and of the ark. Those against the Way are sided with death, violence, and having turned from the path of spiritual maturity. Even today, the Way still comes to us like this. It is of our own choosing, whether we follow it or not. And when we stand at the face of these two paths they can indeed appear as extreme to each other.

From this perspective the tale of Noah is something that happens everyday – everyday for each of us. Perhaps “every moment” is more accurate. Like Noah, maybe like his neighbors, we must choose every moment between following the Way or not to follow the Way. We choose to build the ark. We choose to get on the ark. Or we choose to do nothing – to remain who and how we are. We choose spiritual immaturity because of a decision not to invest ourselves in the other choice.

Genesis does not tell us every detail that Noah may have faced – myths never bother to state the obvious. However, we can imagine what Noah’s neighbors must have thought of him – a man of no great sailing skill building a boat! Mind you it was not just any boat, meaning it was not a small boat made for rivers and/or lakes or even inland seas. It was a great ship, to be accurate. Noah’s neighbors must have been like we ourselves who see the living of a spiritual life as a waste of time, a waste of resources, and even a waste of life. They must have been just like us when we fear we will lose “a life” by training daily, or when our acquaintances tell us to “get a life” because they see us more in our gi than in shorts and sandals. Noah must have seemed to be exactly thus, as a man of the sand interested in aquatic things.

We can only guess what such neighbors must have felt when the first raindrops began to fall. Part of us, as readers, may find some pleasure in the poetic justice that is undoubtedly part of the narrative, but I’m not so sure that that is all we are meant to understand. The tale of Noah is not a tale of revenge. I imagine with the first rains a hint of doubt entered into the hearts of those outside of the ark. Some undoubtedly were still laughing at Noah – even openly. But I imagine there were some that indeed said “Oh oh” - like us when the “life” we thought we were having throws us a curve, the one by which we first begin to notice that neither things nor ourselves are as we desire or perceive them. We notice in those first raindrops that said desire is the product of things the spiritually mature does not suffer from so easily. We see the ego behind our desires; we see our fears behind our desires; we see our ignorance behind our desires.

When those first drops began to fall, I imagine there was some that parted from the others still ridiculing Noah outside of the ark. Like us, they tried to cover up as best they could – though not truly entering the Way. With the ark there before them, they instead chose to shield their head with a blanket, to enter into a little hut, to hide within a great house, etc. From there they can remain dry. From there the ark can appear to be just as hilarious as it was before the rain started. It is always like this. This is the luxury of

distraction and the havoc it wages on spiritual investment, and this is an underlying theme that runs throughout the tale of Noah.

Imagine, if you will, if upon building his ark, no rain came to Noah's desert. Not a drop fell. The region as dry as always, picture Noah, his family, and the animals sitting there in the ark with life going on around them as it always did. Would he in the boat, there with his family, and with two of every animal he could find, be any less right in the following of the Way? Would those who failed to board the ark be any more right in their turning from the Way? In other words, does the rain really need to fall for there to be a distinction between those on the ark and those not on the ark? According to the myth the answer is a resounding "no." Remember the initial distinction was based upon how Man had fallen into evil and was lost in his/her own flood – a sea of violence. In the tale, Noah was already separate from his neighbors – he walked WITH God. Then the flood came. The flood did not separate Noah from others, so the ark did not either. The ark, the flood, these things only made the difference obvious to those that could not see with the clarity of the divine. No rain was truly needed. For us, who cannot clearly see the great chasm between a life of the Way and a life of violence, the flood is needed. The flood is a kind of amplifier of difference that should be clear to all of us but is usually not.

I remember when I was a boy I had a book on Noah's ark. In this book it had a picture of men and women screaming to Noah from outside of the ark. The seas had already risen and it was raining quite hard. The skies were dark and foreboding. These men and women were bobbing up and down in the great swells of the deepening waters, their arms reaching up, stretching to Noah, and they were pleading with him to open the ark so that they could be saved. Seeing this picture I asked my mother, "Why doesn't Noah open the boat so that they could get in?" This is the question of a child, the question of a mind that cannot see the true lesson at hand. So I received only a mother's answer. We, as readers of narrative, are faced with this question, a child's question, "Why didn't he let them in?" but we as souls standing at the crossroads of the Way and the non-Way should understand that the flood, the rains, the rising oceans mark not a difference that has a temporal foundation. We as seekers of the Way are supposed to understand that the waters mark a state of spirit. In other words, the myth is not about a sequence of linear events. Myths often suspend time even though their superficial meanings may make use of it. The myth does not offer the rising flood to us as a second chance. The darkening skies and the heavy rains are not that "last chance" through which we can come to see the error of our choices and finally come to take refuge in the Way.

The flood simply amplifies a difference that is there, as was said above, and that will always be there. The question isn't why didn't Noah let those screaming souls in the boat, the question is the same one that has always been present – the question that was present even before the flood waters came: "Why are they (we) choosing to live in a sea of violence?" It is the same question we face every day, every moment, even today: Why do we choose to live in a sea of violence, in an ocean of immature spirit? Why when faced with two choices do we choose wrongly? (Note: It should be said that these questions are not asked so as to be answered, as in the case, "Because we are weak?" etc. They are asked only so that we can reflect more deeply in order that we may choose more rightly then next time we are faced with the two choices.)

The myth ends with God making a covenant with Noah. Genesis has God saying:

"I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease...And I will establish my covenant with you (Noah); neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.' And God said, 'This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual

generations. I do set my (rain)bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between the earth and me. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud. And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.' And God said unto Noah, 'This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.'"

Here, from the perspective in which we are using Noah's tale, we are not to see a reason for why rainbows exist, and/or any other such interpretations contained therein. Here from the perspective in which we are using Noah's tale we are to understand one thing: Never in our lifetime will the difference between the Way and the non-Way be so clear. Never will that great difference be so amplified, as it was when Noah faced the flood. In other words, the Way will not come to us in so forceful a manner – it will never appear as a difference between living life in a world reborn or drowning in a tumultuous sea for 150 days. Life will never – EVER – be so low, so hard, so disagreeable, so depressing, so difficult, so violent, so unforgiving, etc., due to the various aspects of our own Modernity, and our own trappings contained therein, that we will out of a lack of choices choose clearly to follow the Way as someone like Noah did – that is to say, choosing to follow the Way fully. Noah's tale tells us that any epiphany that may come to us through such means is at most short-lived, if not outright false. Noah's tale is a statement on this eternal truth, a truth that transcends all times and all cultures. It is a noting to the fact that in our own time, no flood, no wrath of God, no powerful motivation will ever come our way to lead us onto the Path. In short, we come to the Way solely as a choice that we must choose. We come to the Way in the face of another choice that is at least initially the more appealing one.

Earlier I raised the question of how Noah's tale would still hold meaning for the seeker of the Way even if no flood ever came – how Noah and his family would be no less right for being on the ark, etc. Today, the "our time" of every generation, as Genesis tries to denote, the choice is not between being on an ark and not being on an ark when no flood rains come. Today we are not only faced with the distractions of a blanket shielding us from the rain, or by a hut or even a great house doing the same. Today Noah's ark itself rests in a sea of other arks, other vessels wrongly treated as equals. I am not here referring to other spiritual traditions between a multitude that is ever growing, etc. I am referring to how things like materiality, selfishness, violence, etc., in our time have come to take on an almost religious meaning. That is to say, I am talking about how the very elements that make up the path that is antithetical the true Way have come, through things like the widespread acceptance of excess, etc., to offer us senses of Self that can not only be understood as culturally acceptable but now have actually become culturally productive.

The tale of Noah speaks of the spiritual relationship that exists between choosing freely and the lack of clarity concerning the difference between what two things we are choosing between – the Way or the non-Way. The tale of Noah tells us that this is it – this is as clear as things get. This is as simple as things get. This is as important or as significant as things get. No flood is going to come; no great lightening in the sky is going to rage; no thunder is going to shake us loose. Nature will not arrange itself for our sake. This is it. Choose wisely – because one way or another the choice is decided. Choose wisely – because one way or another the consequences will be played out regardless of our intentions. Choose wisely – because it's now or never. And understand this most of all, says the tale of Noah, it is always now or never.