



The Children's World of the
Jewish Museum Berlin

The Story of Noah's Ark as the Frame of Reference of ANOHA, the Children's World of the Jewish Museum Berlin

The conceptual starting point of the exhibition is one of the best-known narratives in the Torah: the **story of Noah's Ark. The story has been passed down in the traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.** In the Torah and the Christian Bible, it is told very close to the beginning, immediately following the Creation story, and directly proceeding the story of the Tower of Babel.

The story of the Great Flood and a protective Ark is very topical. The theme of a hopeful new beginning and a changed framework of coexistence between humans, animals, and nature on Earth speaks to important subjects in an age of globalization and climate change: diversity and identity, societal and sustainable change. Similar stories of major floods exist in nearly all world religions and cultures; they often mark a time of beginnings, a new era, and thus the possibility of changing the balance of life.

The Cultural Technology of Storytelling

The cultural technology of storytelling plays a significant role in Judaism. Jewish history, religion, and ethics are passed down from generation to generation through the reading of sacred texts and through oral storytelling – thus, the Torah is considered the written tradition, and the Talmud the oral tradition. Reading and interpreting them are central aspects of Jewish life.

In the children's museum of the Jewish Museum Berlin, the story of Noah's Ark serves as a frame of reference in connection with other, individual or collective narratives. The intention, though mutual dialogue, is to **create "memories of the future" and, through new stories an exploratory scenarios, to enable a fair coexistence between humans, animals, and nature within a common future.** Beyond that, it is a question of interrogating the existing repertoire of stories **against the backdrop of today's social and ecological challenges** and expanding the canon with stories for a world of solidarity and sustainability.

The Rainbow: Reconciliation with Ambiguity

The Noahide Laws, established at the end of the narrative, provide the cultural frame of reference for a positive transformation of our world and the fundamental possibility of reconciliation. The rainbow at the end of the story is the visible symbol of the covenant God makes with humanity. It contains the promise and the obligation to rein in the destructive force of both humanity and God. It holds all the elements of Creation within its protective embrace. This covenant exists without needing to be earned by humans and should be understood in the context of ancient history **as a human covenant "for all ages to come" (Gen 9:12).** **In light of the relationship among humans, this covenant between God and Noah is especially meaningful and demonstrates that a person does not have to be Jewish to be connected to God. Not until the covenant with Abraham is God's specific relationship with the People of Israel forged, thus marking the beginning of the Jewish people's history. This universal and therefore also inclusive significance of the Noah's Ark story is what inspired our concept,** making the exhibition becomes a unifying forum for open, transcultural, and interfaith dialogue.

However, the Jewish interpretation of the story is not skipped over either. The Torah portion of Noah immediately follows the story of the creation, in which the world was created in all its diversity and only one being was given the ability to choose between good and evil: humans. Yet when the balance between possible actions turns in favor of evil, the Great Flood purifies the earth and begins a new world order with Noah. The covenant that was made with the rainbow ultimately no longer **foregrounds the world's dualism** – its division into good and evil – but instead emphasizes the acknowledgment of ambiguity and difference as a characteristic of all Creation. Thus, human

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existence is also rooted in differentiation and variability: in terms of people's physical bodies, values and actions. Humans can have different genders, different physical attributes, and can also vary in their cultures, languages, and geographical heritage. The story of Noah conveys the insight that **humans just are the way they are. A person who behaves "well" also always has the capacity not to; nobody is purely "good" or purely "evil."** For individuals, that means not negating this ambiguity, but accepting it as part of our own identity and living by that insight responsibly.

Tikkun Olam: How can each of us make the world a slightly better place?

This traditionally Jewish interpretation of the Noah's Ark story is also the basis for the Jewish concept of *tikkun olam* and the question of "How can each of us make the world a slightly better place?"

What capabilities, skills, and values do I need in order to take responsibility for this world and to make this Earth a more just place? *Tikkun olam* translates roughly as "improving the world" or "fixing the world." **Yet its meaning goes far beyond rectifying existing defects or damage: at its core, it is about every person's obligation to act righteously by following rules from a religious, social, or political viewpoint.** In this context, the exhibition develops a perspective on the future that aims to discover commonalities within the manifold diversity, living by mutual respect and taking active responsibility to imagine, narrate, and create a more just and, in this sense, also more healthy world.

Three Common Threads of Communication

ANOHA Children's World at the Jewish Museum Berlin is sensitive to minorities and encounters outside the majority culture – thematically, culturally, and by virtue of its intercultural location in **Berlin's Kreuzberg neighborhood. The children's museum defines itself as an open, inclusive site of learning and discovery, encounter and mutual respect.** We attach particular importance to partnerships with our neighborhood. At the same time, we keep sight of trans-regional, Germany-wide, and international visiting programs at the museum and make use of mobile formats as well. **At the children's museum of the Jewish Museum Berlin, the story of Noah's Ark, as a frame of reference, enters into conversation with other stories, both individual and collective.** The narrative from the Torah serves as a point of departure for new stories and exploratory scenarios that make possible a just coexistence between humans, animals, and nature in a common future. **For generations, the story of Noah's Ark has been a springboard for contemplating big global questions,** how to approach rules and fellow humans, as well as topical issues such as nature and the environment, identity and diversity. Now, these discussions are guided by educationally trained helpful companions and take place in workshops, with a preschool group, a school group, or independently **with one's family. Crucial aspects here include the consistently accessible approach** and that the children have fun, feel comfortable, and can freely express themselves. In particular, the animal sculptures in the exhibition serve as key objects for child-friendly learning. This approach opens a participatory, playful, and comprehensible gateway into religious, ethical, and social questions at an unusual location and offers parents, children, and guardians unique opportunities to tackle diverse topics together and to learn from each other mutually.

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– Thinking About Big Global Questions

How can and should we coexist on the earth in the future? Alongside the story of Noah's Ark, this question turns our attention to the importance and existential function of storytelling for us human beings. We use stories to convey knowledge, values, traditions, and cultures. They contribute fundamentally to the development, affirmation, and modification of individual and collective identities. Working on and with stories brings together people from different backgrounds and cultures, promotes creativity, builds mutual trust and cultivates an increased capacity for empathy. At the same time, stories are always embedded in their respective cultures, and as a result the understanding of one and the same story – **in this case the story of Noah's Ark** – is dependent on religious and historical traditions. At ANOHA, all of these perspectives are presented pluralistically side by side.

- Coexistence, Inclusion, Diversity and Prevention against Antisemitism and Marginalization
Flood stories, present in nearly every culture, frequently mark a moment of beginning and thus an opportunity to change the balance of life: How can and should we coexist on the earth in the future? On the Ark, people and animals – for all their differences and diversity – live together as equals in a limited space. The leopard is particularly fast, while the snail is very slow. The hedgehog is awake at night, whereas the meerkat is mostly active during the day. Diversity comes in many dimensions: gender, age, physical, cognitive, ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural, familial, **and many more. The children's museum facilitates access to and participation in the discourse** around current questions of coexistence in a diverse society. It invites children to ask questions, to listen, to express their opinions, to establish contact, and to enter lasting conversations. Who am I? Who are the others? What can I achieve in the world by myself? What can I perhaps only **achieve collaboratively? At the Children's Museum, each child has the opportunity to contemplate** their own interests, preferences, dislikes, wishes, and fears. At the same time, it sets out to promote the acceptance of difference and to illustrate the responsibility each person has to themselves, their fellow people, and the environment. In observations, in conversation, and interaction with the animals of the exhibition, parents, children, and guardians exchange their views on the effects of power, exclusion, defamation, and antisemitism, how to treat each other with respect, and how to imagine, narrate, and create a more just and, in this sense, a more healthy world.

– Protecting Nature, the Environment, and Biodiversity, Treating Resources Responsibly

The story of the Great Flood is very topical today. Even the youngest among us are confronted by news stories about climate change, species extinction, the wasteful use of resources, and so forth. Changes to the environment affect both humans and animals alike. For children even as young as three, empathy for animals can be a gateway to making **these topics truly "palpable." Engaging** with the animal sculptures in the exhibition, which have all been brought to life from recycled everyday objects, directs their attention to the responsible use of resources. Some animals, such as the saber-tooth tiger and the mammoth, have already gone extinct. The panda, the polar bear, and the orangutan are now on the red list of endangered species. The coexistence of all these **different animals with all their unique traits underscores the crucial importance of life's** diversity.