

## **Common Meditation for February 13, 2012: The Rainbow Sign**

When I was very young, and was dealing with my buddies in those wine- and urine-stained hallways, something in me wondered, What will happen to all that beauty? For black people, though I am aware that some of us, black and white, do not know it yet, are very beautiful. And when I sat at Elijah's table and watched that baby, the women, and the men, and we talked about God's--or Allah's--vengeance, I wondered, when that vengeance was achieved, What will happen to all that beauty then? I could also see that the intransigence and ignorance of the white world might make that vengeance inevitable--a vengeance that does not really depend on, and cannot really be executed by, any person or organization, and that cannot be prevented by any police force or army: historical vengeance, a cosmic vengeance, based on the law that we recognize when we say, "Whatever goes up must come down." And here we are, at the center of the arc, trapped in the gaudiest, most valuable, and most improbable water wheel the world has ever seen. Everything now, we must assume, is in our hands; we have no right to assume otherwise. If we--and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others--do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world. If we do not now dare everything, the fulfillment of that prophecy, re-created from the Bible in song by a slave, is upon us: God gave Noah the rainbow sign, No more water, the fire next time!

from James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*