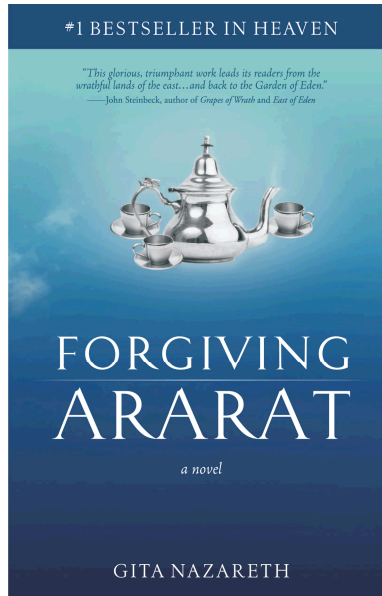


# ONE BOOK+ONE PARISH+ONE SUMMER 2010

## STUDY GUIDE



A young lawyer dies unexpectedly and, arriving in heaven, learns she has been chosen to join the elite lawyers who prosecute and defend souls at the Final Judgment.

*Nominated "#1 Best Beach Read for 2010" and "Favorite Spiritual Novel" by readers on Oprah.com.*

*"This novel tucked itself in my heart for all time, so overwhelming was its message at the end."—  
Christianity.com, Crosswalk.com*

## INTRODUCTION

Thank you for participating in One Book+One Parish+One Summer 2010! We're certain you will experience a spiritually deeper summer and feel more connected to your parish...no matter how far you may roam!

The book selected for One Book+One Parish+One Summer 2010 is *Forgiving Ararat* by Gita Nazareth (Bette Press, 2009). Please note: The book is for mature older teens and adults and is not appropriate for children or younger teens. The official website of the book is [www.forgivingararat.com](http://www.forgivingararat.com).

Hardcover, paperback and digital (Kindle, PC, iPhone, iPad, etc.) copies of *Forgiving Ararat* can be purchased online from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) and other online booksellers. Audiobooks can be

purchased from MP3 Virtue Audibooks. The publisher of the book, Bette Press, LLC, is offering free eBook review copies to clergy and volume discounts to parishes ordering 20 or more copies at a time. To take advantage these offers, email the publisher at [info@forgivingararat.com](mailto:info@forgivingararat.com).

This study guide can be adapted to fit any reading/discussion schedule, from the entire summer season down to one book group session in the fall. Parishes have many options for participating in One Book+One Parish+One Summer 2010 and should choose what works best for them:

- Some parishes may wish to be entirely informal and simply announce that the One Book+One Parish+One Summer 2010 program exists as an opportunity for parish members to enjoy during the summer and to discuss in groups when and where they see fit.
- Other parishes may wish to be a bit more organized and formal and, beginning in May, start announcing that they are participating in One Book+One Parish+One Summer 2010 and encouraging all to read *Forgiving Ararat* over the summer in preparation for organized discussion of the book at the end of summer or early fall while the story is still fresh.
- Other parishes may wish to host summer discussion groups or programs on some regular basis to discuss *Forgiving Ararat* while reading it (as opposed to at the end of the summer).
- Other parishes, and clergy, may wish to incorporate some of the diverse themes of *Forgiving Ararat* into Sunday sermons throughout the summer (or early fall) as a way of creating a unifying effect, knowing that parish members are reading the book outside church and are familiar with the plot, characters and issues. This can be particularly powerful in achieving cohesion and spiritual deepening and also in encouraging members to participate and read along (but always carefully providing enough background so those that not reading the book are not lost).
- Other parishes may wish to form a One Book+One Parish+One Summer 2010 Retreat at some time during the summer or early fall during which the book and its themes are explored in more contemplative, spiritually deliberative manner.
- Other parishes may wish to incorporate One Book+One Parish+One Summer 2010 into existing summertime plans.

Regardless of how your parish chooses to approach One Book+One Parish+One Summer 2010, this study guide can be used to facilitate discussions (or stimulate sermons and retreats).

This study guide contains 20 total questions for group discussion. Because *Forgiving Ararat* is a novel of suspense (and even a murder-mystery), with many plot twists and surprises in addition to being a nuanced philosophical and theological debate, care has been taken with these questions not to reveal plot twists that might spoil the read. The questions focus on overarching themes in the book rather than taking a chapter-by-chapter approach, which does not work well with a novel.

Groups reading the book together are encouraged to begin each session by discussing their experiences with the plot and the mystery unfolding, asking questions of each other about what exactly is going on in the book and what they believe will happen next. Likewise, groups first meeting after having finished the entire novel are encouraged to begin with an introductory general discussion about the plot, twists and themes.

After these introductory discussions, which may easily consume half of a study session, appropriate questions in this guide can be introduced to help frame, and reveal, deeper meanings of the book. Indeed, it will be highly profitable to reintroduce some of these same questions again in later study sessions to test whether earlier assumptions were valid or reconsideration is necessary.

Because this is a novel that builds in both suspense and revelation, group participants reading over time are encouraged to be patient if matters in the book at first seem disorienting, slow or even disorganized. This is all with a grand purpose, and all will be brought dramatically together in the end, which is well worth the wait. The final study sessions in the series are likely to be the most meaningful, satisfying, intense and joyful. Participants who read ahead (which is perfectly acceptable) should be reminded to avoid revealing facts that may spoil the experience for others. *But, above all, enjoy the truly unique and wonderful experience about to unfold!*

### Discussion Questions

1. What is the primary philosophical, theological and eschatological debate being waged in the book? What is the relevance of this debate to the lives we lead here on earth?
2. What is the significance of Brek Cuttler's profession as a lawyer, and Brek's best friend Karen Busfield's profession as a minister, to this debate?
3. Brek Cuttler devotes her life to the pursuit of justice. How does she benefit from leading such a life? How does it benefit others? What does it cost her? What does it cost others?
4. Mahatma Gandhi, a lawyer himself, said that the true function of a lawyer is to unite parties riven asunder.
  - a. If Gandhi is correct, could we argue that Jesus Christ was the greatest lawyer who ever lived?
  - b. Is this how Brek Cuttler viewed her role as a lawyer?
  - c. Is this how lawyers function in our society today?
5. How is the word "justice" defined throughout the book? Does it have more than one (contradictory) definition?
  - a. How do *you* define "justice"? How does *our society* define "justice"?
  - b. What does the word "justice" mean in Micah 6:8: "Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God"?
  - c. What does "justice" mean when our national leaders say we are going to "bring the terrorists to justice"? What does it mean when, after a criminal has been executed, our leaders proclaim: "Justice has been served"?
  - d. Does justice have two opposite meanings? How are these meanings reconciled in the book? In our society?
6. In *Forgiving Ararat*, is justice in conflict with forgiveness?
  - a. In our society, is our modern legal system in conflict with Jesus' teachings?

7. Brek Cuttler becomes a lawyer of souls at the Final Judgment. Do you believe there is Final Judgment? Does the book reflect your view of how it might unfold?
8. By becoming a lawyer of souls, Brek is able to experience the inner thoughts and feelings of other people (souls). What does Brek learn from this experience? What do we learn?
9. Luas, Brek's mentor, has been presenting the same soul at the Final Judgment for two thousand years. Why?
10. Nana Bellini, Brek's great-grandmother, says that Brek can help Luas finally leave Shemaya. Does Brek help him? How?
11. How are Ott Bowles and Brek Cuttler alike? How are they different?
12. Does Ott Bowles ever repent of his notorious sins? Is his repentance necessary?
13. Ott Bowles and Sam Mansour debate the Holocaust and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Do you agree with any of the views expressed in this debate? How does this debate symbolize the conflict waged throughout the book between justice and forgiveness? How does this debate reflect the debate waging in the Middle East today?
14. Who does the character Haissem symbolize?
15. Who does the character Elymas symbolize?
16. Who does the character Luas symbolize?
17. According to the author of *Forgiving Ararat*, who is the ultimate judge at the Final Judgment? Do you agree? Disagree?
18. Why do you think the book is called: "Forgiving Ararat"? Do you agree with the choice of title and its underlying meaning?
19. *Forgiving Ararat* has been called a modern parable and an allegory. What is the message of the parable? What is the meaning of the allegory?
20. Has *Forgiving Ararat* altered your beliefs or understanding of the world in any way? How?