

Noah (Gen 6:9-11:32)  
Guided meditation  
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## Niggun

### Introduction

The portion of Noah contains two creation myths: the story of Noah and the ark, and the Tower of Babel.

These two new creation myths operate in two difference spheres of being: Noah lives in the world of action and consequences. He lives with the struggle to act righteously. The other creation myth, the Tower of Babel, begins at a mythical time of spiritual unity, when we all are of one language and purpose. The question is posed—is our purpose dedicated to the glory of the collective self, or does it include the glory of God? Both the story of Noah, and the Tower have predictable difficulties, which derive from our human nature, and both stories end with dispersal of the people. There is a scattering, which also contains the promise of a return to unity.

Unity, wholeness, *Shalom*, the knowledge of *Ehad*, is available in the world that is coming, constantly coming, coming now, in the eternal present.

This afternoon's contemplation is in three parts. First, I simply want to review story of Noah and the ark, to hold it in a way that can prepare us for the second part. In the second part, I would like us to use the symbolic ark to hold our personal, internal introspection. And the third piece of this guided contemplation will propose a way of holding the story of the Tower of Babel, that can possibly, if we are so blessed, deepen our collective understanding of our relationship with the Divine. By elongating the themes of this parsha with periods of silence, I am hoping that these words resonate and find meaning within you, within us.

Of course, you are welcome to listen to me or not, to fold the noise of your mind and the room into the bare attention you bring to the moment. You will hear what you need to hear, and the rest will simply be part of the background.

## Niggun

## Part I--Reviewing the Noah story

Noah begins in a time of lawlessness, in a time of violence among man and beasts, among all flesh, among all air breathers. There is no struggle to do the right thing. There is no consciousness of right or wrong or striving for integrity of being.

God notices Noah as a righteous man. It is not clear what righteous means. But he works to do the right thing, and he walks with God. He can listen to God. There is an ongoing relationship. God instructs him to build the ark, to enter the ark with his wife, and sons, and their wives, and pairs of all the animals. Seeds of all living beings are to be stored in the Ark.

The floodwaters rise, and soon the whole earth is covered, higher than the highest mountain. The seeds of all being are safe within this womb, floating above the earth. The one door is sealed shut. There is just one small opening on the top, for daylight, and all that can be seen is the sky. There are no bearings, no landmarks, just water and sky and the movement from darkness to light and back again. Over and over.

The rains finally stop. The earth slowly dries up enough. God invites Noah, along with his wife, and their sons, and the sons' wives, and every living creature, to come out of that Ark. They come out as families.

Noah then builds an altar to the Lord, and offers his burnt offerings on the altar. God smells the odor and says to Himself:

“Never again will I doom the earth because of man, since the devising of man’s mind \*Yetzer are evil from his youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living being, as I have done.  
So long as the earth endures,  
Seedtime and harvest,  
Cold and heat,  
Summer and winter,  
Day and night  
Shall not cease.”

Gen 8:21-22

God blesses Noah and his sons. They are given some rules for their behavior, with laws to obey. This is the covenant between them. They are given template

- 2 these 3 sons are potential unleashed. Noah conserved the potential of the world during the flood. And when the flood was over, this potential is unleashed - given room to interact - to react. What do we learn from their reactions?

for righteous action. The rainbow is the symbol of that covenant, for the commitment to the relationship between us and God. The spectrum within the white light is revealed. The white light is scattered into its parts, all its colors are displayed in glory.

Noah, the husband of the earth, the tiller of the soil, plants the first vineyard. He drinks the wine and becomes drunk. There is a mystery here we cannot know: he uncovers himself within his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers. Shem and Japheth took a cloth and covered their father's nakedness without seeing it. Noah woke up, learned what had happened, and cursed Canaan.

From these three sons of Noah, the world becomes inhabited again. The blessed and the cursed all exist in their separate parts, in the world, in us.

In Noah we go from multiplicity and lawlessness, to re-entry into the womb of all being, and back to multiplicity. God now understands our limitations are part of the whole of who we are. White light is scattered into the rainbow as the symbol of this understanding.

We know all these colors within us.

Chant #1

**Vatimalay ha'aretz et hamayim  
And the land was filled with water**

**Silence**

Part II--The work of the ark

God tries to separate the wicked from the virtuous once and for all, and fails.

And we want to align ourselves with the righteous.

Here comes the great storm. We take cover. We are concealed within the sanctity of the ark. Protected.

We float without any comforts of the familiar. We can feel the movement of the water beneath us. We can see only a sliver of the sky above.

We are within the womb of all potential. No past or future exist. Floating on the waters of unknowing.

And within the watertight womb, there is space for all air breathers. It's us, and all the animals. We are in the same circumstance, together.

There are compartments, and three levels, room for all of who we are. There are spaces for our anger, and our drunken disregard, and our capacity for forgiveness. There is a way to create order out of our confusion. There is a means to create a settled consciousness, many rooms so we can know the location and functions of each aspect of our being. The ark contains and orders all our animals. And water tight and sealed with pitch.

paraphrased, from Living Waters, Commentary on the Torah by R. Mordechai Yosef Isbitza, translated by Betsalel Philip Edwards, p.28

We float here, contained, separated from the rest of the world and its demands. Our impulses seek stillness, enabling us to know them. All the obstacles of our character can become conscious. We can know where we locate our strengths.

The storm is passed, and the waters recede.

The one door is open. We are invited to emerge onto land.

We have the character we had when we entered the ark.

We have our vitality and our spirit. We have our intention to seek righteousness.

We have our intention to remember God.

From the Zohar:

Vitality and spirit intertwine, while soul is in her hidden abode, her site unknown. If we strive to purify our self, then she is assisted by a holy soul, purified, sanctified...getting a supernal boost.

Paraphrased from The Zohar Vol I, Daniel Matt, translator, p. 358

So we get off the ark and build an altar, to make an offering to God. Is this out of fear? Is this out of love? Is this out of thanksgiving?

The altar “sustains the site on which faith depends.” It is continually falling into disrepair, weakening the covenant, and continually needing to be restored.

The Zohar Vol I, Daniel Matt, translator, p. 391

The smell of our offering is pleasing to *Adonai*.

Here God learns Compassion. Here is the sustaining promise. We see the rainbow in all its glory.

It is such a delight to witness the rainbow.

And here, we are present with Noah, and all his offspring, with all their attributes of character. We contain them all.

“When Israel proved virtuous, the land was called by this name: land of Israel. When they did not, the land was called by another name: land of Canaan.”

The Zohar Vol I, Daniel Matt, translator, p. 431

It is the same place. It depends on us. Who are we being? What do we elicit? From where do these impulses spring? And when we live in unity, all are present.

Chant:

**Though Mountains may tremble,  
And hills may fade away,  
My love for you will never die**

**Silence**

### Part III--the yearning for unity above and below

And we move into another story of unity and dispersal--the story of the great tower.

The journey of unity and faith and was waylaid by our usual pride, and our forgetfulness of the source of holiness.

From the Zohar--

At first

“The whole earth was of one language and identical words.” The world shared a single essential root of unity and faith. These are the spiritual children of the eternal Adam who forever sits at the edge of the Garden of Eden, greeting the righteous and the repentant, who know how to return to God. These people are of one language and the one word. They migrate from the east and they came upon a valley. And they said, “Come, let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in the sky, to make a name for ourselves....”

The Zohar Vol I, Daniel Matt, translator, p. 441

Go back and look at this paraphrase and citation

It is not God's name, the Divine mystery and the source of creation, but their own name that they want to invoke.

The Lord actually came down to see for Himself and saw what their unity in hubris could accomplish, and confounded their speech, making them of many minds so they could not understand each other. And they become the peoples of the world, in their multiplicity.

The Zohar Vol I, Daniel Matt, translator, p. 441

Go back and look at this paraphrase and citation

As we sit here, and when meditative absorption feels like entering holiness, how quickly do we notice our pride sneaking back in?

When our mundane self starts emptying out, do we end up erecting a large capital "I am" which towers up toward the heavens? In this, have we separated our self from the Holy?

Have we tried to capture the *Shekinah*, the Indwelling presence of God, separating her from her roots in the Infinite Unknowable?

We get glimpses of Wisdom. How do we know it? How do we separate ourselves from Wisdom by calling it ours?

Can we, sitting here, as a group, in unity of intention, speak a common Holy language of silence, remember that even our yearning for the bridge between heaven and earth comes from the Divine?

Can we speak in this Holy language as one?

We call upon our highest soul, wherever she should abide, which already Knows.

**Ma-Gadlu Ma'asecha Yah, m'od amku mach'sh'votcha (Psalm 92: 6)**  
**How great is your work, oh God, how very deep are your thoughts!**

**silence**

*(concluding comments)*

As we enter silence and as we emerge from silence, these themes work within us.

We come across the voices, the colors of our own character, our own intention, and our own reactivity.

We are passengers on the ark. We are all held within compassion.

We bring what we need to the journey. We include all of who we are.

To the altar.

To the streams of compassion and judgment within us.

To return again and again. From dispersion to unity.

Within the unity we seek Wisdom, within the silence of the sound of the one Name.

And if we are so blessed, we do this together.

Zohar: Volume One, translation and commentary by Daniel C. Matt  
Living Waters, the Mei HaShiloach, a commentary on the Torah by Rabbi Mordechai Yosef of Isbitza, translated by Betsalel Philip Edward