## [**Here Comes the Flood – HOKHMAH and Parshat Noakh**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/here-comes-the-flood-hokhmah-and-parshat-noakh)

There’s a story in the Talmud about the great sage and healer, Rabbi Yohanan, that once Rabbi Hiya bar Abba became ill and was suffering greatly. Rabbi Yohanan came to visit and asked him, “Are these afflictions dear to you?”

Rabbi Hiya mustered the strength to answer: “Neither they nor their reward!”

Rabbi Yohanan said, “Give me your hand.” Rabbi Hiya gave him his hand, and instantly he stood up and was revived.

Another time, Rabbi Yohanan himself became deathly ill, and Rabbi Hanina went to visit him. Rabbi Hanina asked him, “Are these afflictions dear to you?” to which Rabbi Yohanan replied, “Neither they nor their reward!”

Rabbi Hanina said to him, “Give me your hand.” Rabbi Yohanan gave him his hand, and instantly he too was revived.

The Gemara then asks, “Why would Rabbi Yohanan need someone else to heal him? Let him heal himself!” It then answers its own question:

אֵין חָבוּשׁ מַתִּיר עַצְמוֹ מִבֵּית הָאֲסוּרִים – *Ayn havush matir atzmo mibeit ha’asurim*

*A prisoner cannot free oneself from a prison!*

What is this enigmatic story talking about?

When the rabbis say that they want neither the afflictions “nor their reward,” it brings to mind the Jewish doctrine that whatever happens to us is the result of our own deeds, that there is an ethical balance in the universe, a kind of “karma” that makes us responsible for whatever we experience.

But if this is true, that our experience of suffering comes from our own misdeeds, why would these holy sages be suffering? And second, why does the story emphasize that R. Yohanan can’t heal himself?

Let’s look at the first question – does our suffering come from our misdeeds? The story of Noah and the great flood seems to say so:

וַיֹּ֨אמֶר אֱלֹהִ֜ים לְנֹ֗חַ קֵ֤ץ כָּל־בָּשָׂר֙ בָּ֣א לְפָנַ֔י כִּֽי־מָלְאָ֥ה הָאָ֛רֶץ חָמָ֖ס מִפְּנֵיהֶ֑ם וְהִנְנִ֥י מַשְׁחִיתָ֖ם אֶת־הָאָֽרֶץ׃

*Elohim said to Noah, “The end of all humans has come before me, for the earth is filled with violence because of the humans; behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth!*

* *Bereisheet* 6:13

The story of the great flood is among the earliest examples of the Jewish idea of Divine justice. At the same time, the tradition has also always understood that suffering cannot possibly be caused *only* by one’s misdeeds. After all, there are countless examples of innocent and even holy people suffering, such as the martyrdom of Rabbi Akiva who, while having his skin raked off his body by the Romans, calmly chanted the *Sh’ma*, not to mention the case of the holocaust and countless other examples in history and in our own experience.

In fact, for some of our teachers, the idea of “karma” or Divine justice is outright denied:

בֶּן עַזַּאי אוֹמֵר, הֱוֵי רָץ לְמִצְוָה קַלָּה כְבַחֲמוּרָה, וּבוֹרֵחַ מִן הָעֲבֵרָה. שֶׁמִּצְוָה גּוֹרֶרֶת מִצְוָה, וַעֲבֵרָה גוֹרֶרֶת עֲבֵרָה. שֶׁשְּׂכַר מִצְוָה, מִצְוָה. וּשְׂכַר עֲבֵרָה, עֲבֵרָה

*Ben Azzai said: Run to do a minor* mitzvah *(commandment, good deed)* *even as you would a major one, and distance yourself from an* aveirah *(misdeed, sin). For one* mitzvah *leads to another* mitzvah*, and an* aveirah *leads to another* aveirah*. For the reward of a* mitzvah *is a* mitzvah*, and the consequence of an* aveirah *is an* aveirah.

* *Mishna, Pirkei Avot* 4:2

In this *mishna,* the author is clear: the reason to cultivate right behavior is because it leads to more right behavior, and the reason to avoid misbehavior is because it leads to more of the same. Life is its own purpose; we don’t live a certain way to bring about some other result, we live for its own sake. Another *mishna* says it in a different way:

אַנְטִיגְנוֹס אִישׁ סוֹכוֹ קִבֵּל מִשִּׁמְעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק. הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, אַל תִּהְיוּ כַעֲבָדִים הַמְשַׁמְּשִׁין אֶת הָרַב עַל מְנָת לְקַבֵּל פְּרָס, אֶלָּא הֱווּ כַעֲבָדִים הַמְשַׁמְּשִׁין אֶת הָרַב שֶׁלֹּא עַל מְנָת לְקַבֵּל פְּרָס, וִיהִי מוֹרָא שָׁמַיִם עֲלֵיכֶם

*Antigonus, leader of Sokho, received [the tradition] from Shimon the Righteous. He used to say: Don’t be like servants who serve the master for the sake of receiving a reward; rather, be like servants who serve the master not for the sake of receiving a reward, and let the fear of Heaven (Mora Shamayim) be upon you.*

* *Mishna, Pirkei Avot* 1:3

These two opposing views – that we should (1) be motivated by the *consequences* of our actions, on one hand, or that we should (2) *not* be concerned with the future, but rather we should live with integrity for its own sake, on the other – are brought together by this teaching from the Talmud:

אָמַר רָבָא, וְאִיתֵּימָא רַב חִסְדָּא: אִם רוֹאֶה אָדָם שֶׁיִּסּוּרִין בָּאִין עָלָיו — יְפַשְׁפֵּשׁ בְּמַעֲשָׂיו, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: ״נַחְפְּשָׂה דְרָכֵינוּ וְנַחְקֹרָה וְנָשׁוּבָה עַד ה׳״. פִּשְׁפֵּשׁ וְלֹא מָצָא — יִתְלֶה בְּבִטּוּל תּוֹרָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: ״אַשְׁרֵי הַגֶּבֶר אֲשֶׁר תְּיַסְּרֶנּוּ יָּהּ וּמִתּוֹרָתְךָ תְלַמְּדֶנּוּ״

וְאִם תָּלָה וְלֹא מָצָא — בְּיָדוּעַ שֶׁיִּסּוּרִין שֶׁל אַהֲבָה הֵם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: ״כִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר יֶאֱהַב ה׳ יוֹכִיחַ״

*Rava, and some say Rav Ḥisda, said: If a one sees that suffering has come, one should examine their actions. As it is stated: “We will search and examine our ways, and return to God” (Lamentations 3:40).*

*If one examined and did not find, attribute it to the emptying of Torah, as it says: “Happy is the person whom You afflict, Yah, and from Your Torah you teach (Psalm 94:12).*

*And if one doesn’t find it there either, then you know they are “Afflictions of Love” – as it says, “For those who are loved by the Divine are rebuked…”*

* *Talmud, Berakhot* 5a

This almost humorous yet incredibly useful teaching seems to be saying – you might be suffering because you did something bad, OR you might be suffering because you are so very good!

In other words, to put it bluntly, *suffering happens.*

We cannot escape it, but we *can* relate to it in a way that is either spiritually helpful or not. The real questions is not *why* suffering happens; the question to each of us is: can we use our suffering in a way that brings about positive transformation?

This Talmudic teaching gives us three possibilities for using our suffering in this way:

First, is suggests looking at our ethical behavior. Regardless of whether our suffering was really caused by a lack in our ethical behavior or not, we can *use* the suffering as a signal to ourselves to become more conscious of our actions, to become more awake to our responsibility toward others.

Second, it suggests looking at how we spend our time. The idiom *“yitlei b’vitul Torah – let him attribute it to the emptying of Torah,”* means neglecting one’s Torah study. To the ancient rabbis, studying Torah was the highest value, and today as well, a committed spiritual life should include a regular practice of learning.

But, we also might expand this idea to include any worthwhile use of our time; the deficiency, then, would be the *wasting of time,* the squandering of these few precious moments of life we have in these bodies on this earth. Seen this way, while the first part has to do with responsibility toward others, the second has to do with responsibility toward ourselves.

But the last is the most remarkable:

וְאִם תָּלָה וְלֹא מָצָא — בְּיָדוּעַ שֶׁיִּסּוּרִין שֶׁל אַהֲבָה הֵם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: ״כִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר יֶאֱהַב ה׳ יוֹכִיחַ״

*And if one doesn’t find it there either, then you know they are* yisurin shel ahavah –  *“Afflictions of Love” – as it says, “For those who are loved by the Divine are rebuked…”*

While the first two suggestions are to improve our behavior in some way, the last suggests the suffering itself can have a transformative effect, if we receive it “with love” – meaning, bringing our hearts and attentiveness into connection with the experience of the suffering – in other words, *be present with the suffering.*

Because when we relax our natural impulse to resist that which is unpleasant or painful, and instead bring our awareness deep into the actual feeling of suffering, the pain becomes food for consciousness. And as we persist in this challenging but simple practice of presence with pain, we are liberated from identification with the pain; the pain subsides in time, and in its place there is a greater ease and sense of spaciousness, a knowing of ourselves as the limitless space of consciousness within which the pain and all experience comes and goes.

From here, we can begin to understand the Talmudic aphorism:

אֵין חָבוּשׁ מַתִּיר עַצְמוֹ מִבֵּית הָאֲסוּרִים – *Ayn havush matir atzmo mibeit ha’asurim*

*A prisoner cannot free oneself from a prison!*

It is ironic, because on the surface, it is talking about Rabbi Yohanan’s desire to be set free from his suffering. But on a deeper level, this teaching points to being set free *by* the suffering. Seen this way, his taking of Rabbi Hanina’s hand represents the embrace of the suffering, the allowing of its fire to liberate him from the prison of narrow identification with pain; in other words, it represents getting free from ego.

There is a beautiful verse in Psalms which also expresses these two ways of relating to suffering –first as consequence of actions, and second, as a path of liberation:

רֵ֘אשִׁ֤ית חָכְמָ֨ה יִרְאַ֬ת יְהוָ֗ה שֵׂ֣כֶל ט֭וֹב לְכָל־עֹשֵׂיהֶ֑ם תְּ֝הִלָּת֗וֹ עֹמֶ֥דֶת לָעַֽד׃

*The beginning (Reisheet) of Wisdom (Hokhmah) is fear of God (Yirat Hashem); good intelligence to all who practice – Its praises stand forever!*

* Psalm 111:10

On the surface, this verse is simply saying that if we want to act wisely, we should have a healthy fear of the consequences of our actions. But a deeper level emerges when we understand the richness of some of the words:

* *Hokhmah*, Wisdom, can also mean consciousness beyond thought – the open space of awareness
* *Yirah*, fear, can also mean “awe” – amazement, recognition of that which transcends all understanding.
* *Hashem* is the Divine Name that means “Existence” or “Being” or “Reality.”

Seen this way, we can read:

Reisheet Hokhmah *– The beginning of transcendent, spacious consciousness is* Yirat Hashem *– Awe of Existence; wise understanding comes to all who practice this – Praises to That which stands forever!*

The medieval Kabbalah text, the Bahir, takes it a step further. First, it equates רֵאשִׁית *Reisheet* with חָכְמָה *Hokhmah*, understanding “the beginning of wisdom” to mean that “beginning” is an aspect of “wisdom”:

רֵאשִׁית *Reisheet*, “Beginning” = חָכְמָה *Hokhmah*, “Wisdom” or “Consciousness”

It then goes on to retranslate the first verse of the Torah with this is mind:

בְּרֵאשִׁ֖ית בָּרָ֣א אֱלֹהִ֑ים אֵ֥ת הַשָּׁמַ֖יִם וְאֵ֥ת הָאָֽרֶץ׃

***BeReisheet*** *Bara Elohim Et Hashamayim V’et Ha’aretz…*

*With* Hokhmah, *(Transcendent Spacious Awareness, called* Reisheet)*, The Divine creates the heavens and the earth…*

* *Bereisheet* 1:1

Why is it interesting to connect *Hokhmah,* spacious awareness, with creation?

Because it hints about the key to being creative – if we wish to create, we must make space within ourselves for the creative idea to emerge; this is meditation, the cultivation of *Hokhmah,* of inner space.

The *sefirah* of *Hokhmah* is traditionally connected in Kabbalah to the “Second Saying of Creation,” which also expresses this idea of making space:

וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אֱלֹהִ֔ים יְהִ֥י רָקִ֖יעַ בְּת֣וֹךְ הַמָּ֑יִם וִיהִ֣י מַבְדִּ֔יל בֵּ֥ין מַ֖יִם לָמָֽיִם׃

*Elohim said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water.”*

* *Bereisheet* 1:6

רָקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמָּיִם – *“Sky in the midst of the Waters”*

Both “Water” and “Air” are metaphors for consciousness/*Hokhmah*, functioning in different ways:

“Air” is the quality of open space, the field of awareness from which all thought and creativity emerges.

“Water” is the power of awareness to “dissolve” and “purify” us from inner negativity, the practice of Presence with pain.

These two metaphors for consciousness are embodied in the traditional daily practice of waking up in the morning – the prayer of gratitude for the breath of life (air) and the cleansing ritual of washing the hands. There is a hint for these practices in the second verse of the Torah:

וְהָאָ֗רֶץ הָיְתָ֥ה תֹ֙הוּ֙ וָבֹ֔הוּ וְחֹ֖שֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵ֣י תְה֑וֹם וְר֣וּחַ אֱלֹהִ֔ים מְרַחֶ֖פֶת עַל־פְּנֵ֥י הַמָּֽיִם׃

*And the earth was unformed and void, with darkness over the face of the deep, and the spirit/wind of Elohim hovered over the face of the waters…*

* *Bereisheet* 1:2

First it mentions the “wind,” then the “water” – hinting at the order of the traditional daily practice – first gratitude for the breath of life, then the ritual washing of the hands.

The ritual handwashing has its roots in another Torah passage:

וְעָשִׂ֜יתָ כִּיּ֥וֹר נְחֹ֛שֶׁת וְכַנּ֥וֹ נְחֹ֖שֶׁת לְרָחְצָ֑ה וְנָתַתָּ֣ אֹת֗וֹ בֵּֽין־אֹ֤הֶל מוֹעֵד֙ וּבֵ֣ין הַמִּזְבֵּ֔חַ וְנָתַתָּ֥ שָׁ֖מָּה מָֽיִם׃

*Make a basin of copper and a stand of copper for it for washing, and place it between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and place water there.*

וְרָחֲצ֛וּ אַהֲרֹ֥ן וּבָנָ֖יו מִמֶּ֑נּוּ אֶת־יְדֵיהֶ֖ם וְאֶת־רַגְלֵיהֶֽם׃

*And let Aaron and his sons wash their hands and feet from it…*

* *Shemot* (Exodus) 30:18 (*Parshat Ki Tisa)*

This passage originally instructed the ancient *kohanim,* the priests, to engage in a water purification ritual before performing their priestly duties. But the ancient rabbis saw in these verses the pattern a daily practice of external cleansing for the sake of awakening an inner cleansing.

The practice of washing the hands is traditionally done for the following three situations: 1. upon waking from sleep, 2. before eating bread, and 3. before each of the three daily prayers.

Here is the prayer for chanting upon awakening:

**מוֹדֶה אֲנִי** לְפָנֶֽיךָ מֶֽלֶךְ חַי וְקַיָּם שֶׁהֶחֱזַֽרְתָּ בִּי נִשְׁמָתִי בְּחֶמְלָה, רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתֶֽךָ:

*Modeh/Modah Ani Lifanekha, Melekh Hai v’Kayam*

*She’hekhezarta Bi Nishmati B’khemla*

*Rabah Emunatekha!*

*I give thanks before You, Living and Enduring King,*

*for You have restored my soul/breath with Compassion –*

*Great is Your faithfulness!*

This is followed by the purification ritual of pouring water from a vessel three times over each hand, focusing mind and heart on receiving purification from any negativity or inner burden that blocks the peace and wholeness of *Hokhmah*, our essence as spacious awareness…

Here is a summary of the KETER and HOKHMAH practices thus far:

* **Chant and meditate** with the *Sh’ma* at least twice per day, morning and evening, using at least the basic six words:

שְׁמַ֖ע יִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל יְהוָ֥ה אֱלֹהֵ֖ינוּ יְהוָ֥ה אֶחָֽד׃

*Sh’ma Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Ekhad!*

*Hear, O Israel – Existence is our God, Existence is One!*

* **Chant gratitude** for consciousness/breath of life upon waking in morning:

**מוֹדֶה אֲנִי** לְפָנֶֽיךָ מֶֽלֶךְ חַי וְקַיָּם שֶׁהֶחֱזַֽרְתָּ בִּי נִשְׁמָתִי בְּחֶמְלָה, רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתֶֽךָ:

*Modeh/Modah Ani Lifanekha, Melekh Hai v’Kayam*

*She’hekhezarta Bi Nishmati B’khemla*

*Rabah Emunatekha!*

I give thanks before You, Living and Enduring King,

for You have restored my soul/breath with mercy –

Great is Your faithfulness!

* **Purification Ritual:** Intend to open yourself to receive purification from any inner impediments or negativity. Lift vessel of water with your right hand and pour it over the left. Take vessel in left, pour over the right. Repeat to wash each hand three times.

***More on Noakh...***

[**Walking with the Divine – Parshat Noakh**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/walking-with-the-divine-parshat-noakh)  
10/28/2019 [0 Comments](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/walking-with-the-divine-parshat-noakh#comments)  
  
אֵ֚לֶּה תּוֹלְדֹ֣ת נֹ֔חַ נֹ֗חַ אִ֥ישׁ צַדִּ֛יק תָּמִ֥ים הָיָ֖ה בְּדֹֽרֹתָ֑יו אֶת־הָֽאֱלֹהִ֖ים הִֽתְהַלֶּךְ־נֹֽחַ  
These are the offspring of Noah; Noah was a righteous person; he was perfect in his generation; Noah walked with the Divine.  
   
The word for “perfect” is tamim, which comes from tam, meaning “simple,” as in the “simple son” of the Passover Seder. In that context, tam doesn’t seem to be a positive thing, at least on the surface; the tam is normally thought of as someone without much intelligence.  
   
But in his commentary on Deuteronomy 17:13, Rashi says, Kol mah sheyavo eilekha – all that comes to you – kabel b’timimut – accept with simplicity.   
   
This “simple acceptance of whatever comes to you” is the deeper level of being tamim. On the surface, it resembles being unintelligent – isn’t it stupid to “simply accept” bad things? But this misunderstanding of acceptance makes the common mistake of forgetting to include oneself in “what happens.” Of course, “what happens” includes what we do; it’s not only “what happens” outside ourselves.  
   
So, being tamim doesn’t mean passively resigned to whatever happens; it means being present with what happens.  
  
There is a hint of this in the word טעם which has the same sound as תם – tam, and means “taste” – to be tamim means to “fully taste” the present moment, to be intimately connected with whatever is present.  
   
And, this connection with our situation includes what we do about the situation. For example, if we accept and “fully taste” a situation that is causing suffering, then that naturally leads us to a response aimed at relieving the suffering. That’s why this pasuk doesn’t only say that Noakh was tamim, it also says he was an ish tzaddik – a “righteous person.”  
   
Presence is Acceptance and Love in One.  
   
Another hint of the this comes from the unusual form of the pasuk:    
   
אֵ֚לֶּה תּוֹלְדֹ֣ת נֹ֔חַ – Eleh toldot Noakh, Noakh – These are the offspring of Noah, Noah…  
   
The name Noakh actually means “comfort” or “ease.” The fact that the word Noakh is repeated hints at two kinds of ease: ease within oneself (accepting what happens with simplicity, being tamim), and bringing easefulness to others (love, righteousness, being a tzaddik).  
   
There’s a wonderful mishna that expresses this idea:  
   
הֵם אָמְרוּ שְׁלשָׁה דְבָרִים. רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר אוֹמֵר, יְהִי כְבוֹד חֲבֵרְךָ חָבִיב עָלֶיךָ כְּשֶׁלָּךְ, וְאַל תְּהִי נוֹחַ לִכְעֹס. וְשׁוּב יוֹם אֶחָד לִפְנֵי מִיתָתְךָ  
They said three things: Rabbi Eliezer said: Let the honor of your friend be as dear to you as your own, and don’t easily become angry. And, return one day before your death.  
(Pirkei Avot 2:15)  
   
These three aphorisms are all connected: if you want to make the honor of your friend be as dear to you as your own honor, you’ve got to get free from your own anger, because it is anger that causes us to be callous toward others.  
   
Furthermore, there is a funny play on words here: v’al t’hi ***noakh***likh’os – don’t be easeful/comfortable ***(noakh)***to get angry.   
   
If we want to be like Noakh, if we want to be easeful, accepting what is (tamim) and we also want to be a helpful person to others (ish tzaddik), then we should not be **noakh** likh’os – easy to anger.   
   
But how do we do this?  
   
וְשׁוּב יוֹם אֶחָד לִפְנֵי מִיתָתְךָ – V’shuv yom ekhad lifnei mitatkha – Return one day before your death.   
   
On the surface it’s saying we should “repent” every day, because we don’t know what day we will die. But on a deeper level, this is the “death” of everything extraneous to this moment; it is the death of anger, of worry, of overthinking. We achieve this “death” through shuv yom ekhad – returning to this one day – meaning, returning to this moment.  
   
But to do this means learning to distinguish between being Present and being lost; between the truth of this moment and the mental projections we impose on this moment. This is a constant effort of discernment:  
   
אֶת־הָֽאֱלֹהִ֖ים הִֽתְהַלֶּךְ־נֹֽחַ  
Noah walked with the Divine.  
   
The Divine Name here is Elohim, the Name associated with discernment. Our natural tendency is to become absorbed into our own thinking and then see the world through the lens of our minds. To counter this, we must constantly “walk ourselves back” to the truth of our actual experience, into the Divine Presence that is always present…   
  
  
**​**[**Snake and Scorpion – Parshat Noakh and Rosh Hodesh Heshvan**  
​](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/snake-and-scorpion-parshat-noakh-and-rosh-hodesh-heshvan)10/9/2018  [0 Comments](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/snake-and-scorpion-parshat-noakh-and-rosh-hodesh-heshvan#comments)  
  
The Amidah is the central prayer of Jewish practice. It is believed to be so sacred that, traditionally speaking, one should not allow oneself to be interrupted while praying the Amidah. However, there are certain circumstances under which one must interrupt one’s Amidah prayer for specific reasons. In the Talmud (Berakhot 33a), there’s a discussion about when it is permissible and even mandatory to interrupt one’s praying of the Amidah:  
   
אפילו נחש כרוך על עקבו לא יפסיק: אמר רב ששת לא שנו אלא נחש אבל עקרב פוסק  
  
We learned in the mishna that ***even if a snake is wrapped around one’s heel, one may not interrupt*** one’s prayer. In limiting application of this principle, ***Rav Sheshet said: They only taught*** this mishna ***with regard to a snake,*** as if one does not attack the snake it will not bite him. ***But*** if ***a scorpion*** approaches an individual while one is praying, ***one stops,*** as the scorpion is liable to sting even if it is not disturbed.  
  
​There is a Hassidic teaching that the “snake” and the “scorpion” are actually metaphors:  
   
The snake represents desire and passion, while the scorpion represents the opposite: lifeless apathy. So, when it says that the “snake is wrapped around one’s heel,” this alludes to one being disturbed by thoughts and feelings of desire. For example, you’re trying to focus on the holy words of the prayer, and suddenly you’re salivating for a cheeseburger.  
   
In this case, there’s no need to stop davening, because the desire you feel for the cheeseburger isn’t a bad thing; all you have to do is redirect its energy into the prayer. In fact, the desire is actually a wonderful gift, because it is raw energy that you can use to bring the prayer to life.  
   
On the other hand, if a scorpion starts crawling on you, this means the opposite of passion; you are simply saying meaningless words with no life in them. In that case, you should stop the prayer, do something to awaken your passion, and start over again.  
   
But how do you awaken your passion?  
   
Of course, there are many ways, but here is one that I find helpful: do something to create beauty and order in the world. Paint something. Make some art. Organize your closet. Vacuum the rug. Do the dishes. When you do, you will feel empowered by the force of blessing can comes through you, and you can direct the energy of that blessing into your practice – into your prayer, chanting, or meditation.  
   
The reason this is so powerful is because beauty and order are actually qualities of Presence. When consciousness is cluttered, the radiant beauty Being can get covered up somewhat. But the more you come to this moment with openness, the more your consciousness becomes more and more expansive and free. Then, your inner beauty begins to glow its own brightness.  
   
Sometimes, however, the ambient chaos (and sometimes trauma) of life can keep that beauty stifled on the inside, even when you attempt to become present through meditation or prayer. Then we need an extra boost from the outside; we need to take some physical action. This is the secret of how art becomes ritual – do something on theouter level to create an effect on the inner level.  
   
There’s a hint of the power of beautification in this week’s reading, Parshat Noakh:  
   
יַ֤פְתְּ אֱלֹהִים֙ לְיֶ֔פֶת וְיִשְׁכֹּ֖ן בְּאָֽהֳלֵי־שֵׁ֑ם …  
  
May God expand Yaphet, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem…  
Bereisheet/Genesis 9:27)  
   
This verse is part of a blessing that Noakh gives his son Yafet after the famous flood. The name Yafet means beauty, or expansiveness. The words are: Yaft Elohim l’Yafet –meaning, May the Divine expand Expansiveness, or May the Divine beautify Beauty.  
   
This hints at the secret of how beauty becomes revealed: Consciousness contains the quality of beauty, but this inner beauty is easily obscured from itself. So, consciousness externalizes its beauty through action, and this outer beauty reflects the nature of consciousness back to itself, freeing it from its constraining clutter: The Divine expands Its Expansiveness…  
   
This week begins the new moon of Heshvan, the eighth month. Heshvan is associated with water and rain, since the traditional prayers for rain began a week ago. Heshvan is also the month in which the flood began, according to this week’s Torah reading. In Kabbalah, water is often associated with awakening passion and desire, since water causes seemingly dead things to sprout and grow.  
   
Heshvan is also associated with the Zodiac sign of Scorpio – the sign of the scorpion.  
   
Thus, Heshvan is a time to shift from the inner beauty accessed during Tishrei (through the prayers of the High Holy Days and Sukkot) to outer beauty through action, in order to reveal the inner beauty externally. This in turn further awakens the inner beauty, creating a positive pulsation between the inner and the outer…

[**The Ark- Parshat Noakh**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-ark-parshat-noakh)  
11/3/2016 [1 Comment](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-ark-parshat-noakh#comments)  
  
The world is a river; you cannot hold a river.  
  
The world is a wave, but we see it as particles.  
  
Forever the mind is building arks to float upon the churning ocean of Truth,  
Holding frames of changing being above the morph so as to discern a narrative-  
   
The arks- words!  
   
The tzaddik’s naming of beings saves them from dissolution in God;  
The tzaddik gives full attention to the being beheld, while all else drowns (for now) in the One.  
   
Two by two- one being beholds another-  
  
But when the ark is beached on the dry wasteland of things and agendas, the tzaddik cannot function!  
  
S/he must plant a vineyard in the midst of the wreckage and take refuge in the wine of ecstasy-  
  
That is, withdrawal from time into the Place where prayer erupts.  
   
To others s/he looks naked and dysfunctional- useless.  
“Let’s cover up this embarrassment!”  
  
People are more comfortable with the building of great towers so they can say,  
“Look what we have done!”  
  
Not content with the warmth (Ham) of life, they must make a name (Shem) for themselves, claiming authorship of beauty (Yafet).  
   
Have you forgotten how to let go?  
To behold the one who stands before you and let all else drown in the One?  
Don’t grasp for the spotlight, you will find everyone speaking gibberish.  
   
But relax and take a walk with God~  
God will show you how to construct your words, and illuminate them from above…​  
​  
  
[**The Window- Parshat Noakh**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/october-15th-2015)  
10/15/2015 [8 Comments](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/october-15th-2015#comments)  
  
Recently a friend of mine posted a tragic news story on Facebook, in which some horrible violence was done in the name of religion. My friend was so disturbed by it, he said that religion should be destroyed.  
  
The Torah might agree-  
  
This week’s reading begins with the story of Noah’s ark, and how nearly all life was destroyed in the Great Flood due to the corruption and violence of humanity:  
  
“Vatimalei ha’aretz hamas-  
“The earth was filled with violence…” (Gen. 6:11)  
  
But is religion really the source of the corruption and violence today? Or is there something deeper that infects and corrupts religion?  
  
One thing is for sure:  
  
All premeditated violence springs from a particular story that the perpetrator buys into.  
  
Without the story of how the “other” deserves punishment for being immoral, or is guilty of various crimes, is less than human, or whatever, would it be possible for premeditated violence to exist?  
  
Of course, there are many wonderful things created by the narrative-making mind as well. In fact, without the fiction of mental narrative, you would not know what to do when you wake up in the morning. You would not even know your own name.  
  
The problem is not narrative, but the confusion between narrative about reality and actual Reality. That confusion happens because most of us are almost completely unaware of what Reality actually is.  
  
Without awareness of Reality, you are bound to look for Truth in your stories. But your stories, though they may be more or less accurate, are not the same as Truth.  
  
What is Truth?  
  
Truth is simply this moment.  
  
It’s your reading of these words right now. It’s the breathing movement of your body, right now. A feeling arising, a thought occurring- it’s the ever-evolving fact of this moment.  
  
“Vay’hi khol ha’aretz safa ekhat ud’varim akhadim-  
“And the whole earth was of one language and unity between all things…” (Gen. 11:1)  
  
In the present moment, before the mind splits Reality into pieces, there is only one this, and we are all here in this Oneness. In the present, there is no that.  
  
But in our thirst for purpose and understanding, we tend to multiply our thoughts and ignore Reality. Not content with the Mystery, we want to feel like we know something, like we’re getting somewhere, like we have meaning:  
  
“They said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks and burn them in fire.’ And the bricks were like stone…”  
  
The word for “brick”- “L’veinah”- shares three letters with the verb “to build” (Bet-Nun-Heh). The first two letters, Lamed-Bet, spell Lev, which means “heart”, or “mind”.  
  
The “Bricks”, then, are not just physical bricks. They are the building blocks for the stories we hold in our hearts and minds- namely, our thoughts and words.  
  
Our thoughts and words are the most precious expression of our inner life. They form the landscape of who we are.  
  
But when they substitute for Reality rather than point to it, when we become enflamed with a passion for being “right” rather than being open, they burn like fire and are dense like stone.  
Exiled from the present moment by our multiplying of thoughts and words, we hope to find security by building our thoughts and words into towers of narrative:   
  
“Come, let us build a tower with it’s top in the heavens, and let’s make a name for ourselves…”  
  
The word for “top” here is “rosh” which also means “head”. The word for tower is “migdol” which comes from the root that means “great”. We try to capture the Ineffable Greatness with our heads!  
  
But there is a problem: there is no limit to the number of different and conflicting stories we create.  
  
Sometimes I listen to people debate. I will listen to the conservatives and the progressives. I will listen to the theists and the atheists. Almost invariably, there is an unwillingness to hear the valid points of the other. Real communication is rare; it’s all just opposing stories, babbling at one another.  
  
“Hashem said, ‘Let us confuse their language’... that is why it was called Babel…”  
  
But there is another way.  
  
In the beginning of our parshah, we are introduced to the savior of all life:  
  
“Et HaElokim Hit’halekh Noakh-  
“Noah walked with the Divine…”  
  
The name Noakh comes from the root that means “rest”. It has a passive quality. And yet, this kind of rest is in motion; it “walks”.  
  
The mind grasps after something solid, something static and secure, but the Divine (Truth, Reality) is not something static. The present moment is ever flowing, ever in motion. It cannot be made into a tower, an idol, or an edifice. So to “walk with the Divine” is actually to rest the grasping of the mind and relax into the movement of the present.  
  
​After all, as soon as your mind tries to grasp this moment as something solid, the moment is already being washed away. The flood is constantly coming.  
  
What will save us?  
  
Only the quality of Noakh- the one who can rest into the flow of Reality.  
  
“Make an ark of gopher wood…”  
  
The word for “ark” is “teva”, which also means “word”. A word is a representation of something; it’s not the thing itself. So to rest in the flow of Reality, make your words of wood, not stone. Let them be alive, supple.  
  
“A window you shall make from above…”  
  
Let your words be open to the heavens, rather than trying to reach the heavens. Your mind cannot capture the infinity of the heavens!  
  
But relax your mind open to this moment, and let the inspiration flow downward. Like the rains of the flood, inspiration washes away the old and dead towers of thought, but gives life to the mind that is open like a window.  
  
The Kotzker Rebbe once surprised a group of learned men with the question-  
  
"Where is God present?"  
  
They laughed at him, assuming that he must be thinking of God as a limited being that would exist in once place and not in others. "Of course, God's Presence is everywhere! As it says, 'm'lo kol ha'aretz k'vodo- The whole world is filled with It's glory!'" (Isaiah 6:3)  
  
"No," replied the Kotzker, "God's Presence is wherever you let It in."   
  
My friends- on this Shabbat Noakh, the Sabbath of Rest, may we relax free from the narratives that trap and divide us. May our thoughts and words be like open windows, permeable to the Presence of the Ineffable Present. May our species speedily grow into this wisdom and remake our world in the image of love, care and respect for all life.  
  
Good Shabbos!  
love,