

## **Planting Peace: Noach's Vineyard and the Power of Balance** **Yali Szulanski, Class of '25**

---

Imagine Noach standing in the quiet aftermath of the flood. The waters have receded, the ark is empty, and a new world stretches before him. His first act? He plants a vineyard. The Torah tells us: “And Noach began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard” (Bereishit 9:20).

This simple action is laden with meaning. After witnessing the destruction of nearly all life, Noach’s decision to plant symbolizes hope—a belief in a future worth rebuilding. Yet, his choice of a vineyard, a crop known for producing wine, introduces tension: the potential for both growth and excess. This reflects the complexity of human behavior, where creation can lead to indulgence without the practice of discipline, moderation, and mindfulness.

The verses that follow reveal how quickly things can unravel: “And he drank of the wine and became drunk; and he was uncovered within his tent” (Bereishit 9:21).

Here we see a stark contrast. The same man who heroically saved humanity now succumbs to excess, losing control and becoming vulnerable. This moment reveals a deep truth about human nature—the ongoing struggle between creation and indulgence, and the essential role that discipline, moderation, and mindfulness play in navigating that balance.

The flood itself was a cataclysmic event designed to reset the moral compass of the world. The Torah tells us: “The earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence” (Bereishit 6:11).

The flood wasn’t merely punishment; it was a divine reset meant to restore balance. However, even after the waters recede, the challenge of human responsibility and self-regulation remains. Noach’s decision to plant a vineyard symbolizes the delicate balance between creation and excess, reminding us that renewal requires more than just action—it demands the discipline to remain aware of our boundaries, the moderation to prevent overindulgence, and the mindfulness to be fully present in our choices.

In today’s world, Noach’s story resonates deeply. Like Noach, we often find ourselves tasked with rebuilding in the aftermath of destruction, whether on a personal, communal, or global level. The floodwaters of violence, hatred, and misunderstanding still rise around us, tempting us to react impulsively or to give in to excess. Yet the Torah offers a different path, one that calls for balance. After the flood, God makes a covenant with Noach, symbolized by the rainbow: “I have set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth” (Bereishit 9:13).

The rainbow is not just a promise of no more destruction; it is a symbol of divine restraint and hope in humanity's ability to choose wisely by practicing discipline, moderation, and mindfulness in all aspects of life.

Each of these qualities is essential for peace—not just on a global scale, but in our everyday lives. Peace is not merely the absence of conflict; it is the active practice of choosing patience over anger, empathy over indifference, and compassion over violence. Noach's story reminds us that peace requires ongoing effort, both physical and moral, often in the most challenging of times. Working towards balance allows us to navigate the fine line between creation and indulgence, fostering harmony instead of destruction.

The Talmud adds depth to this reflection. In Sanhedrin 108a, a parable about Noach and his vineyard describes how indulgence escalates:

The indulgence of the vineyard transforms a person, beginning with the innocence of a lamb, escalating to the aggression of a lion, the indulgence of a pig, and finally culminating in the loss of dignity akin to a monkey.

This progression highlights the danger of unchecked excess and the importance of maintaining balance through discipline and moderation to preserve peace and dignity.

As Pirkei Avot 4:1 teaches: “Who is mighty? One who subdues their own inclination.”

Our strength lies not in overpowering others, but in mastering ourselves through discipline. This idea is echoed in Mishlei 15:1: “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

Mindfulness—the awareness of how our actions affect others—helps us create peace moment by moment. Every choice to practice moderation and discipline is a step toward mindful living, where we reflect before reacting.

Noach's vineyard serves as a powerful metaphor for this balance. When Noach drank too much wine, he lost control, demonstrating how easily we can fall back into destructive patterns, even when trying to rebuild. But the rainbow offers a different vision: a covenant that reminds us of God's promise and our responsibility to live in community in a supportive, and constructive way.

Balancing these qualities is challenging because it requires resisting the human desire for immediate gratification. Whether in relationships, communities, or on a global scale, the impulse to act quickly or assert power can be overwhelming. Yet the Torah guides us toward a higher path—one where peace is achieved through thoughtful, deliberate action, and where the strength to hold back, reflect, and be mindful becomes the greatest form of leadership.

In a world often torn by conflict—whether literal or metaphorical—Noach’s story reminds us that peace is created through the quiet, steady practice of building something together. Despite our failings, despite moments when we give in to excess like Noach, the possibility of peace remains within our grasp. The rainbow serves as a reminder that the path to peace is not just an abstract hope. It is something we can choose, if we practice the balance of discipline, moderation, and mindfulness in all that we do.

---

*Yali Szulanski is an educational wellness consultant, a trauma-informed emotions specialist, teacher, and writer. She is the founder of The "I Am" Project/The Neshima Initiative, through which she integrates emotional wellness practices in classrooms, camps, and community organizations. Yali works with children, teachers, families, and communities to create a shared language of emotional wellness and spiritual fortitude. She received her Masters in Psychology and Education from Teachers' College, Columbia University, with a special certification in SpiritualityMind-Body Integration. Yali has been a teacher for 15 years, and currently lends her talents to various Jewish schools as community wellness consultant, and teacher. Yali is also the Youth Director at The Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, and she lives in Riverdale with her family.*