



Shabbat Noach 5784
Rabbi Stephanie Kolin

Shabbat shalom. The past two weeks have been brutal. Two weeks ago tonight, we knew nothing, we spent the evening in Sukkot Yizkor together, we celebrated an aufruf for a beautiful wedding couple, much like we'll do later tonight, and even as we carried the ongoing weight of the world, we were blissfully unaware of the storm that was coming.

I think about Noah, on the day before he learned about the flood. Walking the earth as he did, unaware that everything was about to change. Sure, humanity was in disarray, but it all seemed pretty much status quo.

But then, he heard a voice. It told him something nearly inexplicable. "*V'ani hin'ni meivi et hamabul*, and as for me, I am going to bring a great flood." What do you mean You will bring a flood to destroy all flesh? How Noah must have done a double take, a triple take, did he really hear God right? A storm? To destroy? Couldn't be. It's too terrible. But then, it started to rain. And it kept raining. And he started to understand.

Two Saturday mornings ago, in disbelief, in horror, we heard the news that also didn't make sense. A double and a triple take. Hamas went into Israel? 22 people have been killed? It felt impossibly big, as numbers go. But as the fog cleared, as it did eventually for Noah, too, the reality of what was before us became more apparent. And every day since then, it has rained and then rained more, and the waters have just continued to rise until we couldn't even make out the edges of the sea. Not 22 lives. 1400, maybe more. Not a dozen hostages, but more than 200, including babies, children, and elderly. Not just killings, but terror and torture and atrocities. And the deaths of so many innocent people in Gaza, also children and elderly, a barely fathomable 500 people in one hospital. It seems we are living in Noah's times.

Aseh l'cha teivah, God tells Noah to build for himself and his family, and those iconic animal pairs, an ark, a refuge inside of which he will be able to survive the oncoming storm. Make it three decks high to fit everyone. And it rained for forty days and forty nights, without reprieve, *vayigb'ru hamayim*, even when those first rains stopped, the text describes the waters as continuing to swell and increase on the earth as the flood became more and more destructive by the day.

It would be 365 days before Noah left that ark. Must have felt like an eternity.

I want us for a moment to picture this ark. This means by which Noah and his family survived the greatest tragedy they had ever lived through. Sealed up. Safe from the waters, but closed - dark and breathless and claustrophobic. No way to tell what's going on outside. Or even inside. To feed the animals, or just exist, for a year. Pitch black. This can't be right. Not like that, anyway. And indeed it is not.

Because God includes *this* precise instruction: *Tzohar ta'aseh lateivah*. Make in the ark a *tzohar*. The word *tzohar* is often understood in connection with the word *tzohorayyim*, noontime, to mean: "make an opening for daylight in the ark." A window. Make a window near the top to let the light in. Which makes a lot of sense. But there's a problem. In the very same verse, we are reminded that the ark is enormous and has three decks, with multiple compartments. Even the commentator Ibn Ezra starts to wonder how one little window would be enough to light the whole ark. And besides, the Tur Ha'aroch notes that during this time, the earth was so mournful, that the natural light of the sun and the stars did not shine.

So then what is a *tzohar*, if not a window to the outside? Many other commentators come to teach that, actually, the *tzohar* was a glowing stone, a kind of orb that created its own light. Midrash teaches that Adam and Eve possessed this stone in the Garden of Eden and had handed it down through the generations to Noah, who then placed it in the ark. And *it* had a kind of magical power to illuminate that space from the inside.

Don't we also need to build an ark to weather this storm together? And don't we also need to illuminate it so that we don't cast about on the waves in darkness? Perhaps we are also inheritors of this kind of inner light. We've begun to see evidence of it everywhere.

When we have gathered. On Simchat Torah, on Shabbat, twice here in this chapel, to sing, reflect, cry, and hug each other, making sure no one is alone when we feel most alone. That has been a way to illuminate this ark.

We've found this ancient light aglow when we've nurtured our humanity by remembering that even when we are in deep grief for our family, that the most important thing is to live our core belief that the loss of any innocent person is a grave tragedy, Israeli and Palestinian and everyone else caught up in this. Whether it's in a hospital destroyed by a Hamas weapon, or a 6 year old Muslim boy in Illinois who had nothing to do with any of this, or Palestinians now suffering without food, water, or medicine. Even when the waves in the storm are so fierce, isn't our own humanity a bright orb of light that keeps us afloat when anger or hurt or frustration would drag into the depths?

And we have found and are finding ways to help and this is inner light. Powerlessness is a darkness that grips tightly, but doing something to ease pain can illuminate this ark. I am so glad to be able to share with you that CBE, with the exceptional leadership of our members Ariella Golomb and Nogah Rotstein, is figuring out how we can adopt one of the southern Kibbutzim, K'far Aza. See, Nogah has two cousins, Gili and Ziv, who were kidnapped from K'far Aza and are being held hostage by Hamas. And she is scared and sad, and we are along with her, but

also she is strong and told me how much she wants to put light into the world - yes for her family, but for everyone, for all peoples, especially for her cousins, so maybe they will feel that energy, that light, as they sit in the dark unknown tonight. Isn't this what Judaism is for?, she said to me. To create light? And yes, I believe it is. So soon, you, we, will have a way to be part of helping the community of K'far Aza feel less alone, helping to rebuild, maybe writing letters to their children, maybe sending sweets, supplies, love and resources, to illuminate not just our ark, but theirs, or maybe to join our arks, and so our light, together. This project is still coming into view, but even in our first conversations with Nogah's wonderful father and other Kibbutz members, that inner light from the beginning of time - it seems to be making its way through the cracks.

And I have no doubt you have each found so many other examples of inner glowing light in these difficult days. So we can see what's going on and support life inside here.

And I want to tell you something else about the *tzohar*, the ark's light source. The commentator Chizkuni is among those who consider whether the *tzohar* was this glowing stone inner light, or whether it was a window to the outside, and ultimately, he concludes: actually, it had to be both. It has to be the stone and a window, too. An inner and an outer light. Remember the purpose of that window in the ark? Noah used it to send the dove out to see if the waters had dried up yet, if there was any solid ground to land on. And at first, Noah sent out the dove, and it came back, having found nothing. But the second time, it came back with an olive branch in its beak. And the third time, it didn't return at all, because it had found a new and growing world to live in. Chizkuni's teaching is so wise: We need to be able to see the light of possibility from the outside world, too.

Now, we're not at that part of the story yet. We're not at the drying up part. We're still at the waters rising part, which is really hard to face. But that part of the story, where we need the window *tzohar*, it will come. And it's not silly or naive to gaze out of it and imagine what a next chapter could look like. And we wouldn't be the only people doing that. To imagine that dove, that bird of peace, with its symbolic olive branch coming some day to signal that a new story is possible, even necessary. Where two peoples can live side by side on beloved land with dignity and safety and hope and prosperity. I know that I don't know what that looks like, but I also know that if we don't insist that our *tzohar* also be a window, that we'll never see it, we'll never be ready, or open for it, when it's time for the next part of our story to be written.

I don't know about you, but I've been crying all day, all week, for our children being held hostage. Our grandparents. Our injured. The babies. The abused. Fending off images around corners I try not to let my mind turn. And this is how I know that the *tzohar*, the lightsource that is both internal and external, is not just some extra cool feature on the ark, or some rose colored glass to look through. It is essential. The *tzohar* in the ark is essential for Noah to live. Like it is essential for us to live. To survive this.

May we generate light in this darkness through our actions, by joining with others, light in this darkness by being together, light by bringing healing, light by helping our hostages come home,

light by embracing our humanity always. A glowing and radiant light that softens the sharpest dark places. And may we gaze out that small window until we merit seeing the day when light floods in and the dove signals to us that a new dream is possible.