

Yashar koach Sam and Maxton. You've done a wonderful job this morning as you grappled with some very challenging Torah, raising questions about good and evil, justice and fairness, and about what courage and humanity really look like. So - truly - yashar koach, you've brought us important ideas today.

Maxton, you asked us to look deeply into the generation of the flood and see that God treating them as if they were all exactly the same, and deserving of the same terrible punishment - is reductionist and cruel. In light of the consequences of our own leaders abusing their power today by stereotyping entire categories of people, especially immigrants, you've expressed a great empathy and asked us to question God's assessment of Noah's generation.

And Sam, you've asked us to recognize that we, like Torah describes Noah's generation, are also living through very troubling times. That in our day, the powerless are often crushed by the powerful, there is terrible violence, corruption, and great suffering all around us, experienced especially by the most vulnerable in our society. But, you also see that there is goodness and people trying to help, and instead of giving up on humanity, you asked us to imagine what it could look like to become a more loving and peaceful world.

And you each questioned both God and Noah - the roles they played in the flood and the roles that they refused to play.

Taking your two teachings together, Noah's job was to protect those on whom the violence was being done **and** to stand up to or even change those who were committing the violence. He chose to do neither. And that has drawn your worthy critique. All creatures, save for Noah and his family, marine life, and two of each animal, were wiped out completely. And, according to both of your studies - it didn't have to be this way.

So what's going on for Noah? Because we can throw him under the bus all day long, but we are living in urgent times. And if we don't learn from him, then we may well be at risk of the same outcome that his generation saw. And really - to be very fair - much of the time - we are not all that different from Noah - though our b'nei mitzvah this morning

are certainly challenging us to be. So what's going on here? Why doesn't he stand up and fight back?!

There's a midrash in B'reishit Rabbah that teaches that Noah didn't board the ark when God told him to. Rather, he waited until it had rained and rained and the water had come up to his ankles. Only then did he board his boat. Commentators interpret this to mean that Noah - *tzadik b'dorotav* - this righteous man - had a lack of faith. He didn't really believe this was happening. But commentators also read this to mean that he didn't have faith in humanity either. Didn't believe that people could change. Didn't believe the world **was** redeemable so his faithlessness became hopelessness.

We can understand this. When we see what's happening in the world around us, in our country - we seem to share at times both of these lapses of faith. We somehow can't believe that we're really descending into fascism - for which there are signs everywhere. And we also somehow can't believe that people can change - and maybe we won't always be this divided, this angry with each other. Our faith falters, too, into hopelessness, and **it's hard to act** from a place of hopelessness.

A second midrash teaches what happens **after** the flood, when it was time for Noah to **leave** the ark. After more than a year in the dark, with the animals, and the crashing waves, instead of running for dry land and sunshine and freedom, he hesitates. The rabbis are shocked by this behavior, but this might tell us that Noah is incredibly overwhelmed by all that's happening around him and he is struggling to process the enormity of his grief and disappointment and fear.

We can understand this, too. We've been saying it for two years - there's a lot coming at us all the time - on purpose. And it's hard to know what to do and how to make a difference. We hesitate all the time.

And finally, Noah is silent throughout this ordeal. He never speaks to God, he never speaks to another soul. We never read: *vayomer Noach* - and Noah said . . . We get no wisdom, no soliloquies, nothing to interpret from his heart or mind. Abraham speaks, Sarah speaks, Moses and Miriam speak. Noah is silent.

We even understand this. When we meet him, the entire world is literally placed on his shoulders. Perhaps no human being could find the

words to utter. But it also means that he never connects with the rest of humanity - never asks them a question or tells them a story.

We **have** to learn from this guy. As you both have wisely pointed out, we have seen the consequences of hopelessness, overwhelm, and silence both in our text and in our own day and we cannot allow our own destruction to progress into something we can't return from.

We are living in an age of great cruelty. ICE agents are acting violently in our streets, immigrant children are brought into court without lawyers and told in a language they don't speak that they need to file for a particular status with money they don't have or they will be deported. They sit with teddy bears in their arms to comfort them since there is no one else in that courtroom who will. The government has purchased electrified gloves to torment our immigrant neighbors with impunity. Our elections are being openly threatened. Wars of greed and ego are being fought overseas or manipulated through technology while innocent people suffer the consequences. If this is not called an age of violence, then what would be?

But we can learn - what Noah needed to do then and what we need to do now.

First, we can choose to speak where Noah was silent. We can say what is true. With as much courage as we can muster. We can talk with other people - people who agree with you and those who don't. We can be curious and solicitous of others' ideas. We can tell our own stories and invite others to tell theirs. We can speak our minds and take a position.

Second, as you both suggested, we can address our overwhelm by refusing to go through this alone. For some reason, that's what Noah decided to do so of course he was overwhelmed. But we have partners all over this city. Outside the Metropolitan Detention Center every Tuesday, in Grand Army Plaza every Thursday and so many other places and ways to find that we are not alone.

And third, we can break through our feelings of hopelessness by building bases of power that are more powerful than those who are doing the violence. When communities show up - it is more and more true - ICE goes home. When we show up to protect the vote, we change the balance of power. When we choose to act with others from a place

of love, violence backs down, because violence is cowardice in disguise.

It is clear that we are Noah in this story. Not because we're wholly righteous - that I don't know, though I know that we're trying. But because we see that it's been raining for some time now. And while there will be no ark, it is on us to build something.

You have both given us beautiful ideas about what we can build - Sam, you taught us that we need to work together - not to build a new Tower of Babel, but to join with others to work for a more peaceful world. And Maxton, you advised us all to go vote for candidates who share our values and you showed us a way to literally build something for immigrants today, to help them know that they are welcome here, in their and our shared home.

And there's more we can do. You can join us this Monday night, October 19, to get certified as a poll monitor so that on November 3, we can protect the most vulnerable from those who might threaten violence. Or on November 19th, you can be trained to be a mentor to a young immigrant who's here all by themselves - so that they know that they're not alone either. Perhaps this is our version of building the ark, and this time it's for everyone.

The Prophet Isaiah calls the flood "Mei HaNoach" - the waters of Noah, naming this tragedy after the one who didn't stop it. But later, commentators came to understand this differently. In this verse, Isaiah is talking about the possibility of redemption and a better future, which comes to teach us that Noah's mistakes can be undone. That freedom from suffering is possible, an end to violence is possible, a country where we care for each other and for the most vulnerable - is possible, if we learn from where Noah fell short.

Maxton and Sam, you have put us on the right course this morning. You've inspired us and woken us up to remembering that we have agency. We are not alone. We have voices. We have power. We have courage. And so we have the ability to turn the flood waters back. It won't be easy, but you didn't promise us that. Yashar koach on your leadership this morning and we so look forward to all the ways that you will play the role of Noah 2.0 throughout your lives as Jewish adults and in this community. Mazal tov.