

Gabby, you've worked hard for this day have performed well. I know that you could never have imagined performing your bat mitzvah under the circumstances of COVID, yet you have dealt with this challenge with aplomb.

Your Torah portion, which you spoke so well about this morning, has two especially salient points that relate to you. The first is about Noah. The Torah reminds us more than once that Noah was righteous in his generation. He stood out in the crowd. He rose above the shoulders of others to become outstanding. I see the same quality in you. Ever since I met you last year, primarily by visiting your class during religious school, I noticed how you shined out. You're an exceptional young person with a wonderful mind. When I would ask a question, I would look around the class. I'd look at you and watch you raise your hand in a somewhat shy manner. You would then thoughtfully offer an answer and that answer – pretty much as a rule – demonstrated a creativity and attention to the text that rendered your answer remarkable. You are more than a capable student of the Torah. Just as God looked around the world at the time of the Flood and noticed Noah, you, too, stand out among your peers as a special person.

The second point from the parsha that is relevant to you is the subject of family.

When we studied the parsha together, we noted how Noah entered the ark with his

wife and his sons and his sons' wives. The Torah intentionally highlights the family unit in order to convey to us a message about the importance of family. The formation of the family is one of the great gifts of the human condition. The family lived within the ark while the waters raged and the Flood came. The message could not be clearer. Our families are the ark that we inhabit in the midst of a world in tumult. Right now, the world is especially tumultuous, but even during more normal times, the family serves an important purpose for the Jewish people giving us a refuge in the midst of a complex and at times uninviting world.

Your family – your father, Aviv, your mother Liz, and your brother Benji – are the kind of family unit that the Torah has in mind when it highlights the role of the family during the Flood. You care about and for one another; you hold one another during challenging times, and you rejoice with each other in the midst of your triumphs. Now that you are a bat mitzvah, your role in your family will change. You will still be your parents' daughter and your brother's sister, but your journey into adulthood will raise you to a plane that is more equal and less hierarchical than the relationship that obtained with your parents when you were younger. I know that even as you establish your individuality and develop into an independent person that you will pay heed as well to your evolving role in your family and strengthen the ties that bind you together.

Our families contain the most important relationships that we have in this world, and nourishing and developing those relationships is the key to a fulfilling life.

On this day – your bat mitzvah – you have established yourself as a young adult in the eyes of the Torah. My hope is that you will continue on your present trajectory, which will allow you to continue to shine as brightly as you do and to enhance the bonds in your family that will prepare you to weather the storm of COVID and any future storms that are before you. Mazel tov