

There is a story in the Talmud, Tractate Avoda Zara, about Adam Ha-Rishon - Adam, the first human being. It's set *bayamim hahem, bazman hazeh*: in those days, in this time. Or to put it plainly, it's set a long time ago, but during the season we are in now.

Here is how it goes: in the days approaching the first Winter Solstice, Adam is noticing the days getting shorter and shorter, colder and colder, the sun becoming utterly diminished. Looking around the world, he comes to an utterly rational conclusion:

The world is ending.

It is being devoured by darkness and by cold, the light is being snuffed out, and like any good, neurotic Jew, he blames himself. "This is due to my sins," he says, and he sits and fasts and prays for eight dark and cold and hungry days.

At which point the Winter Solstice arrives and slowly, slowly, the days get not shorter but longer. There is just a little bit more light every night, just a little bit more warmth every day. "Oh!" says Adam. "מנהגו של עולם הוא!" This is just how the world works!

Every winter, the days get shorter and then we reach a certain point, and they get longer again. Brighter again. Warmer again. And so Adam, in what must have been acute and dizzy relief, celebrates eight joyous festival days corresponding to the earlier eight days of fasting.

And that is where Adam's part of the story ends.

Obviously, the parallels to Chanukah are clear. Eight days of rejoicing in the concept of light in the middle of winter, although interestingly, the eight days of fasting take places when Chanukah would - the days leading up to the Winter Solstice. In fact, this year's winter solstice is next week.

But what strikes me about this story, strikes me as both the least realistic and yet also the most resonant, important, even miraculous, is how quick Adam is to declare that the way of the world is for days to shorten and then lengthen. How quick Adam is to turn to gratitude and hope at the first smallest sign of increasing light.

This is the first winter of *all time* and according to the midrash, the world was created at the end of Elul, in August or September. Which means that Adam, and the world, have never yet witnessed the rebirth of Spring.

And yet Adam is taking it on faith that it is coming.

There is something so extraordinary in our capacity to build off the smallest slivers of hope. And I do mean slivers.

I recently saw an absolutely beautiful piece of Chanukah art online. It was a collage with a menorah placed in front of a window, silhouetted against a bright, full moon.

But can anyone tell me what is wrong with that description?

Chanukah always begins on the 25th of Kislev, which means Chanukah always begins during a waning crescent moon. In the middle of Chanukah is Rosh Chodesh Tevet, which means that at least a few nights of Chanukah are completely swallowed into darkness with no moon visible at all.

And then, towards the end of Chanukah, a sliver, a peek, a hint that waxing crescent shows up again in the sky.

Chanukah is not always during the darkest part of the year. It's also during the darkest part of the month. But we, who have learned from Adam that this is the way of the world, respond to this darkness not with fasting but with lighting lamps, a little more light for each of the eight days. Carefully increasing the amount of light in the world, as if to compel the world to respond in kind.

When the world around looks dark and hopeless, that is when we light our lamps. When it seems as if there is not enough oil to sustain us, we do not squirrel it away - we use it on the hope that abundance is yet to come. It is exactly when it is most difficult to have faith that the days will lengthen again, that it is important to assert that, in fact, spring will arrive.

It is no coincidence that last week's parasha, Vayeshev, and this one's Mikeitz, always fall during or close to Chanukah, when Yosef is thrown down in the darkness of the pit or languishing in Potiphar's prison. Like the cycle of the moon and the cycle of

the sun and seasons, we have the cycle of the Torah, and it is now in the Torah when all seems lost, when moon is waning, when the days are shortening, that we hold out hope for better days.

For being lifted out of the pit, for being released from prison.

In Parashat Mikeitz, our protagonists, the brothers who will become the nation of Israel, head down to Egypt in hopes of procuring enough grain for their families to survive the famine. But they do not know that the famine will last seven long years and that in order for them to survive, they must relocate to Egypt. Only Yosef, who has survived the pit and prison, has foreseen that in order to survive hungry days, we must carefully and defiantly feed ourselves from what we have stored up in our days of abundance.

And while they will finish out the book of Bereishit, Genesis, well fed and respected in Egypt, they do not know that their descendants will be slaves in Egypt in the coming years for generations. Only we, who have read these books over and over, know that after the horrible times come the miracles. During the plague of darkness, we will find light.

And Israeli friend of mine told me, completely matter of fact as she said she had no time for her own emotions right now, that people cannot dare despair. She for fifty years and a day people called the Yom Kippur war the worst tragedy to hit the State of Israel, but that five years after the war, Israel made peace with Egypt.

Now she says, October 7th is the greatest tragedy to hit the State of Israel but we do not know what peace we may be able to create in five years.

A Palestinian friend of mine told me that she has no practical hopes for the future. But she says she knows history and by the rules of history and the rules of God, no injustice lasts forever. And while she was talking about her own people, her sentiment sounds like it could have come from a Jew speaking about Jews: whatever horrors come, individuals may die, but something good survives the worst times.

Plants pop up again every spring, and while like Adam, many of us may be unable to picture that spring, מנהגו עולם הוא. Spring coming again is the way of the world.

Tonight no longer Chanukah. The world has been plunged into ethical famine, the sickly cow of Pharaoh's dream has gobbled up the fat one.

And we haven't even reached the Winter Solstice.

The days are still getting shorter, and we are no longer lighting the Chanukah lights.

But the moon, now, is waxing again. Our oil lasted longer than anyone could have imagined. And while last night we lit eight lights, tonight we at least lit two.

And next week we will light two more. And the week after that. And the week after that. And the lean years will pass. And the days will grow longer and warmer. And if we look forward to those times, if we light our candles and stretch our oil and distribute our grain to the hungry around us - we will survive to see it.