Parashah Noach Our Drash
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As we prepared for tonight's service, we spent time talking about this week's Torah portion, Noach, and the questions it raises for us. Our conversation led us to a broader question we wanted to explore with you: What does it mean to be a righteous person?

We might think of a righteous person as someone who does the right thing, lives by good values, and treats others fairly. But Judaism invites us to consider whether righteousness is only about how we conduct ourselves or whether it also has to do with how we respond to the people around us.

In Parashah Noach, the Torah tells us that God sees that the world has become corrupt and decides to send a flood. Noah is instructed to build an ark to preserve his family and the animals through the flood. He follows God's instructions, and the ark becomes a refuge where life can be preserved.

But the Torah doesn't tell us that Noah speaks up for the people who will be lost in the flood or asks God to reconsider. Later Jewish commentators have explored what this might mean for our understanding of Noah's righteousness.

The Torah describes Noah as *ish tzaddik tamim hayah b'dorotav*—a righteous and blameless man in his generation. Rashi discusses a debate among the rabbis about those final words, "in his generation." Some see them as praise: If Noah could remain righteous in such a corrupt world, imagine how great he might have been in a different generation. Others take a more critical view: Perhaps Noah was righteous in comparison with the people around him but might not have been considered so righteous in another time.

This debate invites us to think about what righteousness asks of us. Is it enough to live according to our values, or do those values sometimes call us to do more?

Later in *Genesis*, we encounter Abraham, who offers us another perspective. When God tells Abraham what may happen to Sodom, Abraham doesn't remain silent. He challenges God and pleads for the people there, asking whether the innocent should suffer alongside the wicked.

The contrast is striking. Noah follows God's instructions and preserves life within the ark. Abraham speaks up on behalf of people whose lives are at stake. Neither story gives us a simple formula for righteousness. Together, though, they invite us to consider not only the values we hold but also how we put them into practice.

Jewish tradition offers another image that brings this question closer to home: Noah's ark, which offers protection to those inside; and Abraham's tent, traditionally described as open on all four sides to welcome those who approach.

We all need places where we feel safe, connected, and at home. But feeling at home ourselves doesn't necessarily mean we've noticed whether others feel the same way.

When we think about TBE, we may think about the friendships we've made, the traditions we share, and the people who have become part of our lives. Those connections are an important part of what makes this community meaningful to us.

Judaism has a concept called *arevut*, the idea that we are responsible for one another. We see that spirit of care in many ways at TBE. But *arevut* also asks something more of us: to consider how each of us contributes to the experience others have in this community.

There is a difference between being part of a welcoming community and helping others feel that welcome, too. We naturally gravitate toward people we know and feel comfortable with. The question is whether we're also willing to look beyond those familiar circles and notice who else might appreciate a conversation, an invitation, or simply being acknowledged.

As we think about the culture we want to continue building at TBE, each of us has a role to play. Over the coming weeks, perhaps we can make a conscious effort to say hello to someone we don't know well, invite someone to join us during an activity at the temple, or take a moment to connect with someone who might be sitting or standing alone. These may seem like small gestures, but they can make a difference in how someone experiences this community.

When we each make that effort, those individual moments become something larger. They shape the kind of community we are and the experience people have when they walk through our doors. Maintaining a welcoming community, and continuing to make

it stronger, isn't the responsibility of any one person or committee. It's something we build together, through the choices we make and the way we treat one another.

As TBE moves into its next chapter, the way we welcome one another will be an important part of what we carry forward.

May TBE be a place that offers the protection of Noah's ark and the openness of Abraham's tent: a place where we find comfort and connection, and where we help others find them, too.

This is *our* community. And this is *your* temple, too.