I recently learned that a young one in our congregation doesn't believe that rainbows are real. She sees them on shirts with unicorns, which aren't real, so in Kindergarten logic, since she hasn't seen one in the sky, they must be in this category of mythical or unreal.

Water and light — the great rainbows of our sky occur when the sun shines through a storm as trillions of raindrops fall from the sky. These droplets bend the light leaving us with the projection of a rainbow. No mythical element, a rainbow is the result of a beautiful combination of natural events.

Rainbows are so special — they only appear if the sun can fight through the clouds before the raindrops stop falling. A simple hose in the backyard produces small rainbows, but they might not be enough proof. This young girl is waiting for that big bow to rise up over our earth so that she can see it stretch across the sky, because if she can't see it in person, it must not exist.

We begin this week, our second reading from the Book of Genesis, Parashat Noach. Our ancestors share with us that the beautiful colors that stretch across our sky — they are no myth — they saw them in their time too. They felt such a connection to this miraculous sight that it was used as a marker of our covenant with God. After the flood waters receded, God made a covenant with Noah, and God stretched out a rainbow in the clouds to serve as a sign of that covenant between God and the earth (1). We read further, When God brings clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds, God will remember God's covenant between Adonai and us and every living creature among all flesh, so that the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh" (2).

But if a child has not yet seen that rainbow, does it exist to the child? Developmentally, the answer may be a resounding, no. The rainbow can't exist as fact until she sees it for herself — and not in pictures, and not with a hose in the backyard. This child has heard the story of Noah and the ark, of the rainbow and the dove and olive branch, but she might not be able to fully comprehend our sacred story, our sacred covenant until she sees the same colors as our ancestors saw painted across the sky. This issue of not understanding the reality until we see it laid out before us, has been a topic spread across headlines this week. Actress Alyssa Milano called out to the women of the world on Sunday afternoon; she called for a figurative flood so that humanity could find a rainbow. That figurative flood was to reveal how deep the issues of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and any other unwanted sexualized behavior run for women in this country.
She wrote on Twitter, “Me too. Suggested by a friend: ‘If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote ‘Me Too.’ as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem.” The call swept through not only Twitter but Facebook as well. By Monday evening my Facebook feed was filled with women who wrote those two simple words. By Tuesday morning there were more than 500,000 #MeToo tweets and over 12 million Facebook posts (3).

Many even shared their experiences, some beginning as early as preteens and others relating scenarios that happened just last week. Women who are now rabbis, teachers, dental hygienists, hair stylists, police officers, military officials, doctors, lawyers, moms, sisters, daughters, and wives.

This has all come to light again, of course, because another high profile man in power, this time a Hollywood producer, Harvey Weinstein, has been accused of sexual assault and harassment by scores of women. For those who knew it was happening, they allowed him to continually use his power to control women’s voices. The New York Times found that “at least eight settlements [were] paid over several decades to women who said Mr. Weinstein had sexually harassed them” (4). He used his power in the industry to take advantage of young women. Since the New York Times article posted, more and more women continue to come forward and share their words about being sexually harassed by Harvey Weinstein and other men in power.

As humans, we have to flood the earth with these stories so that people can see that they are real and so that we as a society can come together to make this stop. When we witness the comments, the cat-calls, the unwanted physical contact, we must put a stop to it. “Boys will be boys” is not an answer in 2017. She was asking for it with that outfit is not a response in 2017. We must reshape the way we teach boys what it means to be men, we must teach consent in our preschools and every year after that, we must teach our children to respect “no,” and we must believe the women who come forward, and we must honor their pain.

To anyone who has been on the other side of this, who has made someone uncomfortable or has intentionally or unintentionally hurt another through their words or actions, we have a process of teshuvah for a reason; we are all constantly working to become better people.

To all those, especially men, who have absorbed the magnitude of posts from women acknowledging that they have experienced sexual assault or sexual harassment, thank you. One of my male friends wrote, “While I was aware of the issue, I don’t think I grasped its severity until I saw the entirety of my Facebook filled with posts by women in my life who I care for and respect. I think this has all been so effective because it helps to visualize the problem in a way that shows its full extent.”

The #MeToo viral campaign is simplistic, and yet so powerful— like the idea of a rainbow, sometimes you can’t grasp how real it is until you truly see it. I hope you’re looking, because women are standing up and we’re telling the world that this is a problem. Men in powerful positions in this country should not be allowed to hide behind their money or their status. As a society, we need to do better to protect women.

#MeToo is the flood of women saying that sexual assault and harassment are real. It is a divine smack in the head to say pay attention; we are starting over, this is how things are going to be from now on. The new covenant is for us to say to our children, “See that flood over there, we are stopping it. We will not normalize behavior that objectifies human beings. We will not allow the men who sexually harass women to go unpunished.”

Adults, talk to your boys and young men about what is happening — your sons, nephews, grandsons — talk to them about how male behavior has led women to hold keys between their
fingers when they walk to their car at night; how they may not enter an elevator when traveling by
themselves if it is full of men; how they can’t leave their beverage for even a moment for fear that
someone will spike their drink and take advantage of them. Talk to them about consent. Talk to
them about power dynamics and the extra care that must be taken in those relationships so that
they remain appropriate.

Adults, talk to your girls and young women about what is happening — your daughters, nieces,
granddaughters — because things aren’t going to change overnight. We still need to teach them
to walk with their keys between their knuckles late at night because that is our current reality. But
we also need to continue to hammer home that they can have the power to speak up, that they
are worthy of respect, and we must empower them to assert themselves when boys or men treat
them inappropriately. Teach your children that their body is their own, it is not for other people to
comment upon or touch without permission. We have raised the bar on awareness with the
#MeToo campaign. Now is the time to carry this momentum into real changes.

That five-year-old girl in our congregation is counting on you to see the flood so that she can see
the rainbow. She is counting on you to really hear us. To really make changes this time, so that
she can worry a whole lot more about rainbows and unicorns and a whole lot less about growing
up to fend off catcalls, “boys will be boys” scenarios, sexual harassment, or sexual assault.

Citations:

(1) Gen. 9:13

(2) Gen. 9:14-15

(3) https://www.cbsnews.com/news/metoo-more-than-12-million-facebook-posts-comments-
reactions-24-hours/

(4) https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/08/business/media/harvey-weinstein-harassment-
hollywood.html?_r=0