וַיֵּ֥ט מֹשֶׁ֛ה אֶת־יָד֖וֹ עַל־הַשָּׁמָ֑יִם וַיְהִ֧י חֹֽשֶׁךְ־אֲפֵלָ֛ה בְּכׇל־אֶ֥רֶץ מִצְרַ֖יִם שְׁלֹ֥שֶׁת יָמִֽים׃ לֹֽא־רָא֞וּ אִ֣ישׁ אֶת־אָחִ֗יו וְלֹא־קָ֛מוּ אִ֥ישׁ מִתַּחְתָּ֖יו שְׁלֹ֣שֶׁת יָמִ֑ים וּֽלְכׇל־בְּנֵ֧י יִשְׂרָאֵ֛ל הָ֥יָה א֖וֹר בְּמוֹשְׁבֹתָֽם׃

Moses held out his arm toward the sky and thick darkness descended upon all the land of Egypt for three days. People could not see one another, and for three days no one could move about; but all the Israelites enjoyed light in their dwellings.

The penultimate plague was darkness. Most commentators understand this to mean a physical darkness, either clouds that blocked the sunlight or a thick fog that extinguished any fire. Yet these physical phenomena don’t explain why the Israelites had light while the Egyptians did not. A midrash in Shemot Rabbah interprets the words “their dwellings” to mean that the Israelites could see even in the homes of Egyptians. The 18th century Moroccan Torah commentator Or HaChaim takes this a step further by describing the darkness as subjective. The Egyptians experienced darkness while the Israelites experienced light wherever they were. Or HaChaim understood the light and darkness as righteousness and wickedness. But I think we can also view the light as hope and the darkness as despair. The Israelites had the hope of freedom after eight plagues and the Egyptians had the despair that came with all their sufferings from those plagues.

This past Sunday marked 100 days since Oct. 7th. A hundred days of despair. A hundred days of war, with too many deaths on both sides. A hundred days in which over 100 people have been held captive in Gaza, likely underground in dark tunnels for most of that time. They are literally and figuratively engulfed in darkness. Yet one of the blessings of the Jewish people since Egypt has been the light that never goes out. Our ability to hope, to bring the light to a dark situation and see a brighter future while others are engulfed in the heavy gloom of despair. May we send our light, our hope, to those held in captivity. May they have light in their darkness. And may they soon return to us, free under the light of the sun.