Shemot, the first parsha of the book of Exodus, opens with Pharaoh enslaving the Israelites and his decree to kill every male baby. The story then immediately moves to the birth of Moses. It tersely states:

 וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֵוִי וַיִּקַּח אֶת־בַּת־לֵוֽי וַתַּ֥הַר הָאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן

A man of the house of Levi went and took as a wife a woman of Levi. The woman conceived and bore a son

Later in the parsha, we learn more about Moses’s family – that Moses’s father’s name was Amram and that his older siblings were Aaron and Miriam. A midrash, an early rabbinic commentary on the Torah, therefore tries to understand the reason for this enigmatic verse about the “man of the house of Levi,” Moses’s father Amram who was already married. The midrash explains this verse by saying that Moses’s father, Amram, was an important figure in his generation. When he heard Pharoah’s decree, he despaired at bringing children into the world only to be killed, so he divorced his wife. The rest of the Israelites followed his example. But his daughter, Miriam, critiqued him and said that his refusal to have more children was worse than Pharoah’s decree since it affected girls as well as boys. While it was uncertain if Pharoah’s decree would be completely carried out, it was certain that not having children would put an end to the Israelites. Amram accepted his daughter’s words and remarried his wife, who then gave birth to Moses.

There is a powerful message in this midrash about despair and cynicism. It’s easy to look at the state of the world, from wars to gun violence to climate change, and decide it’s not worth bringing children into such a future. Or even more simply, it’s easy to give up on working for change because it seems hopeless. But if we decide there is no future worth working towards then we’ve already sealed our fate. The power we have to change the future is to believe that there is a future worth building: to both strive towards change ourselves and to help raise up the next generation to continue the work.