Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Vayera
November 7, 2020 *** 20 Cheshvan, 5781

Kol Rina – An Independent Minyan, is a traditional egalitarian community. We are haimish (homey/folksy), friendly, participatory, warm and welcoming. We hold weekly services in South Orange as well as holiday services and celebrations which are completely lay led. We *welcome* all to our services and programs from non-Hebrew readers to Jewish communal and education professionals.

Vayera in a Nutshell
https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3171/jewish/Vayera-in-a-Nutshell.htm

G-d reveals Himself to Abraham three days after the first Jew's circumcision at age ninety-nine; but Abraham rushes off to prepare a meal for three guests who appear in the desert heat. One of the three—who are angels disguised as men—announces that, in exactly one year, the barren Sarah will give birth to a son. Sarah laughs.

Abraham pleads with G-d to spare the wicked city of Sodom. Two of the three disguised angels arrive in the doomed city, where Abraham's nephew Lot extends his hospitality to them and protects them from the evil intentions of a Sodomite mob. The two guests reveal that they have come to overturn the place, and to save Lot and his family. Lot's wife turns into a pillar of salt when she disobeys the command not to look back at the burning city as they flee.

While taking shelter in a cave, Lot's two daughters (believing that they and their father are the only ones left alive in the world) get their father drunk, lie with him and become pregnant. The two sons born from this incident father the nations of Moab and Ammon.

Abraham moves to Gerar, where the Philistine king Abimelech takes Sarah—who is presented as Abraham's sister—to his palace. In a dream, G-d warns Abimelech that he will die unless he returns the woman to her husband. Abraham explains that he feared he would be killed over the beautiful Sarah.

G-d remembers His promise to Sarah, and gives her and Abraham a son, who is named Isaac (Yitzchak, meaning "will laugh"). Isaac is circumcised at the age of eight days; Abraham is one hundred years old, and Sarah ninety, at their child's birth.

Hagar and Ishmael are banished from Abraham's home and wander in the desert; G-d hears the cry of the dying lad, and saves his life by showing his mother a well.

Abimelech makes a treaty with Abraham at Beersheba, where Abraham gives him seven sheep as a sign of their truce.

G-d tests Abraham's devotion by commanding him to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Moriah (the Temple Mount) in Jerusalem. Isaac is bound and placed on the altar, and Abraham raises the knife to slaughter his son. A voice from heaven calls to stop him; a ram, caught in the undergrowth by its horns, is offered in Isaac's place. Abraham receives the news of the birth of a daughter, Rebecca, to his nephew Bethuel.

Haftarah in a Nutshell
https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/579813/jewish/Haftorah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

In this week's Torah reading, G-d promises a child to Abraham and Sarah, despite childless Sarah's advanced age. This week's haftorah describes a similar incident that occurred many years later — the prophet Elisha assuring an elderly childless woman that she will bear a child.

The haftorah discusses two miracles performed by the prophet Elisha. The first miracle involved a widow who was heavily in debt, and her creditors were threatening to take her two sons as slaves to satisfy the debt. When the prophet asked her what she had in her home, the widow responded that she had nothing but a vial of oil. Elisha told her to gather as many empty containers as possible — borrowing from neighbors and friends as well. She should then pour oil from her vial into the empty containers. She did as commanded, and miraculously the oil continued to flow until the last empty jug was filled. The woman sold the oil for a handsome profit, and had enough money to repay her debts and live comfortably.

The second miracle: Elisha would often pass by the city of Shunam, where he would dine and rest at the home of a certain hospitable couple. This couple even made a special addition to their home, a guest room designated for Elisha's use. When the prophet learned that the couple was childless, he blessed the woman that she should give birth to a child in exactly one year's time. And indeed, one year later a son was born to the aged couple.

A few years later the son complained of a headache and died shortly thereafter. The Shunamit woman laid the lifeless body on the bed in Elisha's designated room, and quickly summoned the prophet. Elisha hurried to the woman's home and miraculously brought the boy back to life.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Answering the Call (Vayera 5781)

https://rabbisacks.org/vayera-5781/

The early history of humanity is set out in the Torah as a series of disappointments. God gave human beings freedom, which they then misused. Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. Cain murdered Abel. Within a relatively short time, the world before the Flood became dominated by violence. All flesh perverted its way on the earth. God created order, but humans created chaos. Even after the Flood, humanity, in the form of the builders of Babel, were guilty of hubris, thinking that people could build a tower that "reaches heaven" (Gen. 11:4).

Humans failed to respond to God, which is where Abraham enters the picture. We are not quite sure, at the beginning, what it is that Abraham is summoned to do. We know he is commanded to leave his land, birthplace and father's house and travel "to the land I will show you," (Gen. 12:1) but what he is to do when he gets there, we do not know. On this the Torah is silent. What is Abraham's mission? What makes him special? What makes him more than a good man in a bad age, as was Noah? What makes him a leader and the father of a nation of leaders?

To decode the mystery we have to recall what the Torah has been signalling prior to this point. I suggested in previous weeks that a – perhaps the – key theme is a failure of responsibility. Adam and Eve lack personal responsibility. Adam says, "It wasn't me; it was the woman." Eve says, "It wasn't me, it was the serpent." It is as if they deny being the authors of their own stories – as if they do not understand either freedom or the responsibility it entails.

Cain does not deny personal responsibility. He does not say, "It wasn't me. It was Abel's fault for provoking me." Instead he denies moral responsibility: "Am I my

brother's keeper?"
Noah fails the test of collective responsibility. He is a man of virtue in an age of vice, but he makes no impact on his contemporaries. He saves his family (and the animals) but no one else. According to the plain reading of the text, he does not even try.
If we understand this, we understand Abraham. He exercises personal responsibility. In parshat Lech Lecha, a quarrel breaks out between Abraham's herdsmen and those of his nephew Lot. Seeing that this was no random occurrence but the result of their having too many cattle to be able to graze together, Abraham immediately proposes a solution:

> **Abram said to Lot, "Let there not be a quarrel between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are brothers. Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I will go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left." (Gen. 13:8-9)**

Note that Abraham passes no judgment. He does not ask whose fault the argument was. He does not ask who will gain from any particular outcome. He gives Lot the choice. He sees the problem and acts.
In the next chapter of Bereishit we are told about a local war, as a result of which Lot is among the people taken captive. Immediately Abraham gathers a force, pursues the invaders, rescues Lot and with him, all the other captives. He returns these captives safely to their homes, refusing to take any of the spoils of victory that he is offered by the grateful king of Sodom.
This is a strange passage – it depicts Abraham very differently from the nomadic shepherd we see elsewhere. The passage is best understood in the context of the story of Cain. Abraham shows he is his brother's (or brother's son's) keeper. He immediately understands the nature of moral responsibility. Despite the fact that Lot chose to live where he did with its attendant risks, Abraham does not say, "His safety is his responsibility, not mine."
Then, in this week's parsha of Vayera, comes the great moment: a human being challenges God Himself for the very first time. God is about to pass judgment on Sodom. Abraham, fearing that this will mean that the city will be destroyed, says:

> "**Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do justice?" (Gen. 18:23–25)**

This is a remarkable speech. By what right does a mere mortal challenge God Himself? The short answer is that God Himself signalled that he should. Listen carefully to the text:

> **Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him" … Then the Lord said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so**

> **great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached Me." (Gen. 18:17–21)**

Those words, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" are a clear hint that God wants Abraham to respond; otherwise why would He have said them?

The story of Abraham can only be understood against the backdrop of the story of Noah. There too, God told Noah in advance that he was about to bring punishment to the world.

So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth" (Gen. 6:13).

Noah did not protest. To the contrary, we are told three times that Noah "did as God commanded him" (Gen. 6:22; 7:5; 7:9). Noah accepted the verdict. Abraham challenged it. Abraham understood the third principle we have been exploring over the past few weeks: collective responsibility.

The people of Sodom were not Abraham's brothers and sisters, so he was going beyond even what he did in rescuing Lot. He prayed on their behalf because he understood the idea of human solidarity, immortally expressed by John Donne:

No man is an island,
Entire of itself ...
Any man's death diminishes me,
For I am involved in mankind.[1]

But a question remains. Why did God call on Abraham to challenge Him? Was there anything Abraham knew that God didn't know? That idea is absurd. The answer is surely this: Abraham was to become the role model and initiator of a new faith, one that would not defend the human status quo but challenge it.

Abraham had to have the courage to challenge God if his descendants were to challenge human rulers, as Moses and the Prophets did. Jews do not accept the world that is. They challenge it in the name of the world that ought to be. This is a critical turning point in human history: the birth of the world's first religion of protest – the emergence of a faith that challenges the world instead of accepting it.

Abraham was not a conventional leader. He did not rule a nation. There was as yet no nation for him to lead. But he was the role model of leadership as Judaism understands it. He took responsibility. He acted; he didn't wait for others to act. Of Noah, the Torah says, "he walked with God" (Gen. 6:9). But to Abraham, God says,

"Walk before Me," (Gen. 17:1), meaning: be a leader. Walk ahead. Take personal responsibility. Take moral responsibility. Take collective responsibility.

Judaism is God's call to responsibility.

Shabbat Shalom [1] John Donne, Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, Meditation XVII.

“Shalom, shalom to the one who is far away and to the one who is close.” Drawn from the Yom Kippur haftarah, the editors of Mahzor Lev Shalem used these words to open the high holiday prayer book. This year the words held a special poignancy, as each of us was simultaneously “the one who is far away” and “the one who is close.”

We experience distance this year like never before—we are physically separated, and many of us are emotionally downtrodden or feeling spiritually disconnected. Some of us find that differences in politics have created distance between us and our friends, relatives, and neighbors. For many of us, virtual communication has made us feel closer to those who live far away and the world feel smaller even as others have felt an existential isolation like never before.

Parashat Vayera tells a story of someone living through crisis, difference, and distance. When a conflict develops between Sarah and her Egyptian maidservant, Hagar, Sarah convinces Abraham to expel Hagar and her son Ishmael from their home. In the wilderness, their water runs out. Hagar responds by moving away from Ishmael (Gen. 21:16). They experience multiple other separations too. Physically, Hagar and Ishmael are far from home. The conflict, expulsion, and separation intensify the power differential between Hagar and Sarah and between Ishmael and Isaac.

Commentators have read this part of the story and characterized Hagar as despairing. However, developmental psychologist Carol Gilligan challenges us to hear the complexity in people’s emotional and spiritual experience. She affirms that people have multiple and simultaneous feelings and modes for existing, and she refers to them as contrapuntal voices (“Listening Guide for Psychological Inquiry,” Qualitative Psychology 2[1]:69–77). Listening for the contrapuntal voices in the Biblical text illuminates the array of Hagar’s emotional and spiritual experience and reveals a more dynamic story of her survival, endurance, and even perseverance through the crisis.

The most evocative verse in this story is Gen. 21:16:

> And [Hagar] went and sat down at a distance, a bowshot away; for she thought, “Let me not look on as the child dies.” And sitting thus afar, she burst into tears. (NJPS translation)

The beginning of the verse appears to be an intertwining of two different statements—two contrapuntal voices. One of these is “vatelekh . . . lah.” “Vatelekh” is “she went,” and “lah”—“to her”—is rarely included in translations. If these two words are connected, the full phrase reads “she went to her/herself” and resonates with the well-known opening words of last week’s parshah, Lekh Lekha (Gen. 12:1). In that case, God had commanded Avram “lekh lekha,” “go forth,” and the preposition “lekha”—“to him”—is also often not included in the translation. However, the Hasidic commentator the Mei Hashilo’ah translated the verse as “Go to you,” elaborating, “[go] to your essential self. Nothing out there in the world is properly alive. The only place you’ll find real life is inside you.” Avram had become restless and begun searching for deeper

meaning, and God commanded him to look inward for clarity.

Perhaps Hagar, too, was turning inward, taking some time to connect to her authentic self to gain clarity about how to proceed, taking a moment to breathe and assess her own needs. During a crisis, the roles of caregiver and care receiver often break down. Hagar had been in the role of caregiver for Ishmael, who she feared might die. She was also in need of care. In fact, her crisis may have been more acute than Ishmael's: even if he were to be revived, the two of them would remain homeless and in poverty. Hagar had already faced adversity with resilience and a connection with her spiritual life:

> Then Sarai treated her harshly, and she ran away from her. An angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness . . . . And she said, "I am running away from my mistress Sarai." (Gen. 16:6–7)

In this earlier story, Hagar took clear actions in response to this crisis: she distanced herself from abuse, found a spring of water in the wilderness, and spoke.

We could assume, therefore, that Hagar comes to the crisis in Parashat Vayera already equipped with spiritual and emotional resources. When Hagar "goes to herself," she is seeking to ground herself in order to better respond to the crisis.

The second of the contrapuntal voices is vateshev mineged, "she sat afar." This appears twice, often understood as a repetition to emphasize that she was despairing and had abandoned Ishmael. However, the first use includes the word harhek, from the word "distant." It is followed by an elaboration on how she experienced this distance—it was "a bowshot away; for she said [to herself], 'Let me not look on as the child dies.'" Here Hagar expresses her fear in a prayerful way, looks away, and is at a loss for her own agency.

Hagar's two responses to the crisis are quite different: In one instance she turns inward as an act of coping, self-care, and resiliency, re-focusing on herself. This is a healthy distancing, less away from Ishmael and more toward herself. In the second instance, she specifically distances herself from Ishmael. Her turning away is filled with fear, despair, and loneliness. Gilligan encourages us to resist thinking about emotional experiences in binary, either/or categories. Hagar is despairing and resilient. Accepting that these are both Hagar's genuine experience, we can listen to how these voices interact. Are they harmonious, conflicting, silencing? What happens with Hagar's despair and resilience when they encounter each other? The verse begins with rapid movement between the statements of resilience and despair, then moves to a longer reflection on her fears. We see Hagar experience conflict between her despair and her hope.

Then the verse shifts again with the second mention of the phrase vateshev mineged, this time without the word harhek. The absence of the word "distance" makes it unlikely that this part of the verse is reinforcing her distance; it could simply mean "facing." At this pivotal point, Hagar turns from looking away to facing Ishmael. She shifts psychologically from being at a distance to being connected. Hagar emerges

and reengages her work as caregiver and activist. She "lifts up her voice." The next verse states that "God heard the cry of the boy" even though he is not recorded as crying. Perhaps Hagar lifting up her voice is an act of advocating on behalf of Ishmael. The verse concludes "and she cried." Her tears may have been tears of desperation, of relief or cleansing, or a combination. She is able to stop moving away from Ishmael and begin moving toward him only after expressing her fears about him dying. By acknowledging these fears she was able to re-emerge from inner conflict as an activist and caregiver.

A few verses later the Torah describes, "Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went and filled the skin with water, and let the boy drink" (Gen. 21:19). In the earlier story, Hagar had found the well by herself. During this instance, God helped her identify what she struggled to see.

We learn from Hagar that living through difficult times involves movement—distancing oneself, dwelling in place, and drawing near. These are true whether the distance is physical, emotional, spiritual, or ideological. Making space for this complexity in ourselves and in others allows both grieving and resiliency. Allowing for our full experience opens the possibility of seeing our own wells of water. (Naomi Kalish is the Harold and Carole Wolfe Director of the Center for Pastoral Education at JTS))

Vayera by Rabbi Shauel Rosenblatt
https://mailchi.mp/tikun/haazinu5781-2578282?e=e0f2ca6c0d

Three strangers visit Abraham. He is not aware that they are angels, but treats them as one would royalty nevertheless – for every human being is indeed a child of the King of Kings. What could be more regal than that? The 'men' head off to Sodom and Gemorrah which they promptly destroy – having first saved Lot, Abraham's nephew. Lot and his two daughters have a bit too much of a good time together and both become pregnant. Isaac is born to Abraham and Sara and Abraham passes the greatest test of his life – that of being willing to sacrifice his son and all of his dreams in order to listen to God.

When Abraham welcomes strangers to his tent, it is an act of incredible humility and incredible kindness. You see that he is eager to give to them, desperate almost. This is the Jewish ideal – kindness towards others should not be a fulfilment of an obligation but an act that one genuinely desires.

I often look in the mirror in this regard and find myself lacking; especially when I compare myself to my wife. For me, most of the time, kindness is an obligation. Now, that is most certainly better than nothing, but it is not what giving is about.

Abraham begs, yes begs, that the three strangers come and partake of his food. He bows down to them and refers to himself as their 'servant', he runs to go and get food for them. He runs. I ask myself, how often do I run to do kindness for others? How often am I genuinely eager to put myself out for other human beings? If I'm late to watch the football, I might run. If I'm going to buy something that's important to me, I

might run. But, somehow, if I'm doing something for others, which I do regularly, it feels like an obligation. It feels like almost a burden – something I must do because it's right, because it's what a caring person does, because it's what God expects of me.
This was not Abraham, Torah's role model for kindness. The portion begins three days after his circumcision and God, we are told, had made it a boiling hot day so that no one would be travelling and hence Abraham would not need to bother himself for guests. Abraham, however, sat at the entrance of his tent eagerly hoping that people would come nevertheless. That's a genuine desire to give.
It's a lofty ideal, but that's the Torah's role – to give us lofty ideals to aspire to. Otherwise, we are likely to get comfortable in our own mediocrity.
Torah teaches that we are here in this world, a world where our default is taking, in order to give. But it requires us to rebel against our human nature – or rather to find, and nurture, a deeper and holier part of our nature. Abraham is the prototype for this. He found that care inside of himself and he cultivated it. It was a lifetime's work, but he developed into a person who enjoyed giving, who genuinely wanted to give from the depths of his heart. Far from being a burden, or merely the right thing to do, giving was the joy of being like God, of being Godly. He was on the look out for giving. He ran to give. He cared about every human being in a way that he would care about his own children.
As I say, on a personal level, I'm a long way from there. But minimally, I feel that Torah wants me to have it as a goal – and I very much do. Even if sometimes kindness feels like a burden, I wish it were not. Even if I don't often find myself running to give, I wish that I did. Even if my life is not entirely given over to making a contribution to the lives of others and the greater good of humanity, I strive towards the day that it will be. With Abraham as a role model, I hope that I cannot go too far wrong.

Letting Abraham's Example Guide Us, During Election Season and Beyone by Rabbi Michael Dolgin

https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/torah-commentary/letting-abrahams-example-guide-us-during-election-season-and

Parashat Vayeira contains some of the most well-known and controversial texts in the book of Genesis, including the Akeidah. These words we read and hear on Rosh HaShanah remind us that no matter how strongly we feel about our principles, we cannot sacrifice our fellow human beings to realize them. The miraculous birth of Isaac and his conflict with Ishmael precede this event. The children of Sarah and of Hagar each have a narrative worthy of respect. Coexistence among nations and within families requires no less.
The opening of this week's reading is the model of hachnasat or'chim. Abraham and Sarah welcome angelic visitors, even as these moments prophesy an unlikely but blessed future. While any of these texts would be worthy of an exposition of their own, this year's reading of Vayeira falls during the first week of November: election week. I cannot think of a more significant time to read the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Genesis 18 describes the famous interaction between God and Abraham, as the progenitor of the Jewish people seeks to save the residents of these two troubled cities, including his nephew Lot.

Abraham sees Sodom as the home of his clan, not as an abstraction to be written off. And despite the fact that Sodom does not share his values, he seeks to support and save its inhabitants. Despite their problems, these cities were inhabited by fellow human beings created in the image of God. We can reject their evil behaviors, but where there is life, we must seek the hope of repentance.

Abraham does not judge these communities but rather challenges the Divine One to find any righteous inhabitants and to save the entire populations of both cities on their account. Abraham's powerful, challenging moral focus is clear in Genesis 18:23,25:

> Abraham came forward and said, "Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty?...Far be it from You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty, so that innocent and guilty fare alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?"

Abraham teaches us that we cannot write off our fellow humans because their behavior troubles us; we must even be willing to call out God if that will help rebuild our society's moral fiber without condemning our fellow human beings. While we are compelled to judge behavior, we must leave judging people to the Holy Blessed One.

The confrontation between Abraham and God is introduced by an important, if often overlooked, statement. In Genesis 18:22, the Torah reports, "The men went on from there to Sodom, while Abraham remained standing (Amidah) before the Eternal." Abraham demands a prayerful audience from God. What is his goal in forcing himself into the Divine presence? As Ovadia Seforno comments on this verse:

> "Even though the destroying Angels had already arrived in Sodom, Abraham continued to seek mercy and to defend the innocent. As our sages say, even if a sharp blade has reached a person's throat, one should never stop seeking mercy."

As I write these words in August, the shape of the United States election and events surrounding it are undefined. However, by the time Shabbat Vayeira arrives on November 7, much more will be known. While elections decide who will hold office, they do not release us from the obligation to build a better future. Whatever the shape of these political events, we must continue to seek righteousness and justice and peace.

Despite this season of great tension and conflict, Abraham's example must guide us: We must seek mercy, forgiveness, and justice for all. Though we might not understand those whose worldview seems to be 180 degrees from our own, that does not make them beyond redemption. We must demand mercy and model it on this Shabbat Vayeira and beyond. *(Rabbi Michael Dolgin has served Temple Sinai Congregation of Toronto since 1992.)*

We are Living Inside the Book of Exodus by Rabbi Arthur Waskow

https://www.tikkun.org/we-are-living-inside-the-book-of-exodus

Would-be Pharaoh Trump has reached the crucial point of his reign: Shall he mobilize the chariots and drown in the Reed Sea, or grumpily relinquish power?

Whether the biblical Book of Exodus is factually accurate history or a brilliant archetypal story of the exercise of power run amok, it has much to teach our own generation, our own America.

The story goes back to the end of Genesis. We find that a previous pharaoh has centralized all power in himself, following the advice of a clever power-climber who became the Pharaoh's viceroy.

All over Egypt, free yeoman farmers have been reduced to sharecroppers on the Pharaoh's land. They and their families have been forced to move from the lands of their ancestral clans to distant places; so their emotional, spiritual, and political connections as well as their economic base have been disrupted. Yet the Viceroy's family has had a protected allotment of land and privileges in their own district, in recognition of his service to the crown.

It is easy to imagine that insurgent energy begins to bubble up among the Egyptians. Grandparent tales of a freer, more abundant, and culturally more resonant life may have started roiling the royal power.

And perhaps there was also growing resentment aimed at the protected minority of outsiders who had settled in the Goshen region, and were doing well. Even their language and religion were alien.

In this stew of political and cultural trouble, a new Pharaoh comes to power. He needs to deflect the increasing hostility against his own authority.

Ahh! Best to respond not by restoring the local and decentralized yeomanry but to aim their anger against the foreigners. Portray them as a threat. Stigmatize them as Ivrim, a word of contempt for people who cross boundaries, the equivalent of "wetbacks" or "rootless cosmopolites" or "globalists" in the parlance of today. (The word "Ivrim" became "Hebrews" in Western languages.)

Egypt was already a great power, an empire. It had perhaps the strongest army in the region, focused on horse-drawn chariots that small tribal politicians could not afford. But empires never rest easy. They are always concerned about encroachments from other Imperial centers or defiance from small cantankerous communities.

And in the unfolding royal tale of defining the Ivrim as a foreign force, it made sense for the Pharaoh to warn the Egyptian public that the Ivrim might side with Egypt's foreign enemies, perhaps become terrorists attacking the old-stock Egyptians whose language and religion they didn't share.

So they must be put under tight control by the state, made to work for the royal family as builders of the warehouses for storing the national food supply, kept in line by overseers who doubled as police. And all of this could be carried out only by making them pariahs in the national culture. separating them from Egyptian share-cropping farmers.

In the old Egyptian culture, Pharaoh was already seen as a god. Now his political and economic power grew even greater. His power went to his head. It began to infect his own outlook on the world. He began to believe his own propaganda about the dangerous Israelites, the Ivrim.

He decided they needed to be erased as a separate community. He issued the order to murder new-born boy babies of the Ivrim. Best to start there. Soon he can kill the grown-ups too.

But some people are horrified. The first cracks appear in Pharaoh's authority. Women — two midwives and then his own daughter – begin creating a Resistance movement.. They start saving children's lives, including one Moses. He mixes knowledge of his real origins with "white privilege" from his place at court to become a troublemaker. Fearing the police, he disappears.

Years later he reappears, possessed of a burning new vision, announcing that the very Name of God had changed. Everyone must understand the world in a new way, and then change the world to embody the new vision. The Ivrim must be free to leave their forced labor, to withdraw from Egypt, and to explore how as a free people they can serve their new sense of God, create a new kind of society that would fulfill the vision.

And here we see a remarkable unfolding of pharaonic psychology. Moses begins with a seemingly innocuous request: three days of Time Off to focus on religious practices to connect with God. Pharaoh responds not with any effort at accommodation but with more draconic rules of forced labor. The fragile unity of the Ivrim totally dissolves..

Meanwhile, Pharaoh, determined to please his supporters in the Water Production Corporation, stops regulating water purity. The Nile and all of Egypt's water becomes undrinkable. In the palace, drinkable bottled water, though expensive, is available.

Moses and Aaron and their prophetic sister Miriam warn Pharaoh that his own behavior is corrupting the national water supply. They warn him that this is because Humanity and Earth are interconnected by a sacred process they call YyyyHhhhWwwwHhhh, the Interbreathing Spirit of all life.

Frightened, he tells his courtiers to restore the regulations. The plague of undrinkable water recedes. The Water Production Corporation nabobs complain, and he recovers from his fear. Pharaoh hardens his own heart against his wounded people, acts so exploitive toward the Earth for his own wealth's sake that swarms of locusts, frogs, mad cow disease, climate crises in the form of unprecedented hailstorms, lightning bolts, and wildfire, all descend upon his people. Some of his advisers urge him to ease up and meet the Ivri demands.

But by this time he has become addicted to his own power; he fires the advisers and hires sycophants. At each disaster, Moses, Aaron, Miriam, and a growing number of critics warm him that he is fighting against the whole process of universal Consequence. At each disaster he first recoils and then returns to his own hubris: The disaster? "Stuff happens!"

But then his arrogant treatment of Earth brings a devastating disease to afflict his own

citizens, his wife, himself. At first, he tries to dismiss it. But it grows so terrible that his own Egyptian supporters start denouncing him. He tells the "wetback" foreigners not only that they are free to Go, but they Must Depart. He tells his people to offer them gifts of gold and silver as reparations for hundreds of years of subjugation.
They smear blood on their doorways as a symbol of going forth from wombs of rebirth, and leave. Many Egyptians sign petitions that he resign and allow his compassionate daughter to become Pharaoh.
And now comes the moment of fateful decision. Pharaoh wakes up the next morning. Should he accept his fall from power, or mobilize his imperial Army, catch the Israelites at the edge of the Reed Sea, and force them back into slavery? Remind them that back in Egypt forced labor always came with the onions and garlic that they loved, whilst they will have only "God-knows-what?" to eat if they cross the Sea into a wilderness? And if he sends the Army or orders relief from his pet High Court, what will the people do? Choose normalcy, or make themselves a civil-disobedience Sea of Reeds, seeming to bend and sway but always returning thick and bristly to block the path of Subjugation? Choosing to hear their own internal Voice, pointing their way toward a Loving and Beloved Community? ***(Rabbi Arthur Waskow directs The Shalom Center and has written more than twenty books on US public policy and on religious life, including the original Freedom Seder and, most recently, Dancing in God's Earthquake: The Coming Transformation of Religion (Orbis))***

Yahrtzeits

Roni Bamforth remembers her mother Marjorie Gelfond on Sunday November 8th (Cheshvan 21)
Ilisia Kissner remembers her stepfather Frank E. Strassfeld (Ephraim ben Avraham Ha Levi) on Tuesday November 10th (Cheshvan 23)
**** Ilisia will share memories of her father during Monday evening's Zoom service.****