

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
June 19, 2021 **** 9 Tamuz,, 5781
Parashat Chukat

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.

[Chukat in a Nutshell](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2959/jewish/Chukat-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

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Moses is taught the laws of the red heifer, whose ashes purify a person who has been contaminated by contact with a dead body.

After forty years of journeying through the desert, the people of Israel arrive in the wilderness of Zin. Miriam dies, and the people thirst for water. G-d tells Moses to speak to a rock and command it to give water. Moses gets angry at the rebellious Israelites and strikes the stone. Water issues forth, but Moses is told by G-d that neither he nor Aaron will enter the Promised Land.

Aaron dies at Hor Hahar and is succeeded in the high priesthood by his son Elazar. Venomous snakes attack the Israelite camp after yet another eruption of discontent in which the people “speak against G-d and Moses”; G-d tells Moses to place a brass serpent upon a high pole, and all who will gaze heavenward will be healed. The people sing a song in honor of the miraculous well that provided them water in the desert.

Moses leads the people in battles against the Emorite kings Sichon and Og (who seek to prevent Israel’s passage through their territory) and conquers their lands, which lie east of the Jordan.

[Haftarah in a Nutshell: Judges 11:1-33.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/696127/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

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This week’s haftarah describes how the people of Israel were attacked by the nation of Ammon. The Israelites engaged Jephtah to lead them in battle against this military threat. Jephtah first sent a missive to Ammon, declaring his peaceful intentions. In his message, he also discussed the Israelites’ conquest of the lands of Sichon and Og, victories which are related in this week’s Torah reading.

Jephtah the Gileadite was the son of a harlot. He was sent away from his home by his half-siblings, and settled in the land of Tob where he became a great warrior. When the nation of Ammon attacked the people of Israel, Jephtah was called upon to lead the Israelites in battle. Jephtah agreed, on one condition: "If you bring me back to fight with the children of Ammon, and G-d delivers them before me, I will become your head." The Israelites accepted his terms.

Jephtah tried to bring a peaceful resolution to the conflict by sending messengers to reason with the king of Ammon; but the latter remained inflexible. Jephtah then successfully led his countrymen in battle, and they trounced and eliminated the Ammonite threat.

Food For Thought

Miriam, Moses' Friend (Chukat 5781 by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l
<https://rabbisacks.org/chukat-5781/>

It is one of the great mysteries of the Torah. Arriving at Kadesh the people find themselves without water. They complain to Moses and Aaron. The two leaders go to the Tent of Meeting and there they are told by God to take the staff and speak to the rock, and water will emerge.

Moses' subsequent behaviour is extraordinary. He takes the staff. He and Aaron gather the people. Then Moses says: "Listen now you rebels, shall we bring you water out of this rock?" Then "Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff" (Num. 20:10-11).

This was the behaviour that cost Moses and Aaron their chance of leading the people across the Jordan into the Promised Land. "Because you did not have enough faith in Me to sanctify Me in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I have given them" (Num. 20:12)

The commentators disagree as to which aspect of Moses' behaviour was wrong: His anger? His act of striking the rock instead of speaking to it? The implication that it was he and Aaron, not God, who were bringing water from the rock? I proposed in an earlier Covenant & Conversation that Moses neither sinned nor was punished. He merely acted as he had done almost forty years earlier when God told him to hit the rock (Ex. 17:6), and thereby showed that though he was the right leader for the people who had been slaves in Egypt, he was not the leader for their children who were born in freedom and would conquer the land.

This time, though, I want to pose a different question. Why then? Why did Moses fail this particular test? After all, he had been in a similar situation twice before. After emerging from the Red Sea the people had travelled for three days without finding water. Then they found some, but it tasted bitter and they complained. God showed Moses how to make the water sweet. (Ex. 15:22-26)

Arriving at Rephidim, again they found no water and complained. Despairing, Moses said to God, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me." God patiently instructs Moses as to what he should do, and water flows from the rock. (Ex. 17:1-7).

So Moses had successfully overcome two similar challenges in the past. Why now on this third occasion did he lose emotional control? What was different? The answer is stated explicitly in the text, but in so understated a way that we may fail to grasp its significance. Here it is:

In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried. (Num. 20:1)

Immediately after this we read: “Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron.” A famous Talmudic passage^[1] explains that it was in Miriam’s merit that the Israelites had a well of water that miraculously accompanied them through their desert journeys. When Miriam died, the water ceased. This interpretation reads the sequence of events simply and supernaturally. Miriam died. Then there was no water. From this, you can infer that until then there was water because Miriam was alive. It was a miracle in her merit.

However there is another way of reading the passage, naturally and psychologically. The connection between Miriam’s death and the events that followed had less to do with a miraculous well and more to do with Moses’ response to the complaints of the Israelites.

This was the first trial he had to face as leader of the people without the presence of his sister. Let us recall who Miriam was, for Moses. She was his elder sister, his oldest sibling. She had watched over his fate as he floated down the Nile in a pitched basket. She had the presence of mind, and the audacity, to speak to Pharaoh’s daughter and arrange for the child to be nursed by an Israelite woman, that is, by Moses’ own mother Yocheved. Without Miriam, Moses would have grown up not knowing who he was and to which people he belonged.

Miriam is a background presence throughout much of the narrative. We see her leading the women in song at the Red Sea, so it is clear that she, like Aaron, had a leadership role. We gain a sense of how much she meant to Moses when, in an obscure passage, she and Aaron “began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite” (Num. 12:1). We do not know exactly what the issue was, but we do know that Miriam was smitten with leprosy. Aaron turns helplessly to Moses and asks him to intervene on her behalf, which he does with simple eloquence in the shortest prayer on record – five Hebrew words – “Please, God, heal her now.” Moses still cares deeply for her, despite her negative talk.

It is only in this week’s parsha that we begin to get a full sense of her influence, and this only by implication. For the first time Moses faces a challenge without her, and for the first time Moses loses emotional control in the presence of the people. This is one of the effects of bereavement, and those who have suffered it often say that the loss of a sibling is harder to bear than the loss of a parent. The loss of a parent is part of the natural order of life. The loss of a sibling can be less expected and more profoundly disorienting. And Miriam was no ordinary sibling. Moses owed her his entire relationship with his natural family, as well as his identity as one of the children of Israel.

It is a cliché to say that leadership is a lonely undertaking. But at the same time no leader can truly survive on their own. Yitro told Moses this many years earlier. Seeing him leading the people alone he said, “You and these people who come to

you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone” (Ex. 18:18). A leader needs three kinds of support: (1) allies who will fight alongside him; (2) troops or a team to whom he can delegate; and (3) a soulmate or soulmates to whom he can confide his doubts and fears, who will listen without an agenda other than being a supportive presence, and who will give him the courage, confidence and sheer resilience to carry on.

Having known through personal friendship many leaders in many fields, I can say with certainty that it is false to suppose that people in positions of high leadership have thick skins. Most of those I have known have not. They are often intensely vulnerable. They can suffer deeply from doubt and uncertainty. They know that a leader must often make a choice between two evils, and you never know in advance how a decision will work out. Leaders can be hurt by criticism and the betrayal of people they once considered friends. Because they are leaders, they rarely show any signs of vulnerability in public. They have to project a certainty and confidence they do not feel. But Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, the Harvard leadership experts, are right to say, “The hard truth is that it is not possible to experience the rewards and joy of leadership without experiencing the pain as well.”[2]

Leaders need confidants, people who “will tell you what you do not want to hear and cannot hear from anyone else, people in whom you can confide without having your revelations spill back into the work arena.” A confidant cares about you more than about the issues. They lift you when you are low, and gently bring you back to reality when you are in danger of self-congratulation or complacency. Heifetz and Linsky write, “Almost every person we know with difficult experiences of leadership has relied on a confidant to help them get through.”[3]

Maimonides in his Commentary to the Mishnah counts this as one of the four kinds of friendship.[4] He calls it the “friendship of trust” [chaver habitachon] and describes it as having someone in whom “you have absolute trust and with whom you are completely open and unguarded,” hiding neither the good news nor the bad, knowing that the other person will neither take advantage of the confidences shared, nor share them with others.

A careful reading of this famous episode in the context of Moses’ early life suggests that Miriam was Moses’ “trusted friend,” his confidante, the source of his emotional stability, and that when she was no longer there, he could no longer cope with crisis as he had done until then.

Those who are a source of strength to others need their own source of strength. The Torah is explicit in telling us how often for Moses that source of strength was God Himself. But even Moses needed a human friend, and it seems, by implication, that this was Miriam. A leader in her own right, she was also one of her brother’s sources of strength.

Even the greatest cannot lead alone.

[1] Taanit 9a. [2] Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, Boston, Harvard Business School Press, 2002, 227. [3] *Ibid.*, 200. [4] Maimonides, *Commentary to Mishnah Avot 1:6*.

Understanding the Mystifying: The Red Heifer Commandment – and Every Other Commandment - Hukat 5781 by Rabbi Yitz Greenberg

https://mechonhadar.s3.amazonaws.com/mh_torah_source_sheets/GreenbergParashatChukat5781.pdf?utm_campaign=Dvar%20Torah%205781&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=134003218&_hsenc=p2ANqtz--62n6VNM18pB92Uvy83_jAIUIA3h4IBYiyZ_Z2q0PXT164uqO8gNrRm13Y0IKNvSXO0tCjqLEt0iVkXxPOLRq4t7Fd8Q&utm_content=134003218&utm_source=hs_email

Our parashah opens with the “strange” rite of the red heifer. This was a central rite in biblical times in that it enabled people, exposed to dead humans, to regain ritual purity and go to the tabernacle/temple. However, by talmudic times, the understanding of the rationale and process of the rite was lost. Traditions then built up around this supposed mystery to argue that this inscrutability was deliberate.¹ In this framework, the Torah consists of rationally understandable commandments (often called *mishpatim*)—but also of totally incomprehensible mitzvot (*hukkim*), given to teach us to obey instructions simply because God said so, without visible rhyme or reason.² Later commentators pushed this approach to teach us that one obeys the Torah, no questions asked, simply because it is the word of God. I maintain that this direction of interpretation was mistaken, that the red heifer rite was not an exercise in obeying the inscrutable. This ritual was, in fact, fully understood in biblical times. Furthermore, it is a fundamental principle of covenant that the commandments are given, not to train us to robotic conforming obedience in the service of God, but rather to improve people and their character traits.³ As such, they need to be explained rationally, and clarified in presentation, so that people will fully understand which improvements they should work on to become a better human being and partner with God, in living and applying the Torah to make a better world. The deeper truth is that the unfolding of covenant is the grand movement away from obedience—enforced by punishment—toward the human partner becoming a serious agent in defining the mitzvot, and accepting these disciplines in order to live life on a higher plane.

The steps of the red heifer ritual actually offer an example of a rational commandment that was fully understood in its time. *Hukat* opens with the challenge of overcoming the greatest state of ritual impurity: one caused by encounter with a dead human being. The human being is the highest form of life, therefore the human corpse represents the most intense anti-life.⁴ Contact with a corpse plunges one into an intense ritual impurity, which cannot be overcome by standard ritual purification (that is: mere immersion in a mikveh). Rather, one must

be sprinkled by a liquid consisting of the blood of a pure red heifer, mixed with ashes of the cow, plus cedar wood, hyssop, and crimson yarn. If this is done on the third and seventh days, then the special purification rite is efficacious, so that the person—freed from death impurity—can enter the zone of holiness, the zone of life dominant, which is the holy tabernacle/temple (Numbers 19:11-12, 18-20).

To give but one illustration of the extent to which, by talmudic times, the Rabbis had lost understanding of the rite, one Rabbi said: Even Solomon, the wisest of all mortals, could not decipher the red heifer's meaning. Hence the King exclaimed: "I said that I would be wise but it (meaning: the red heifer rationale) was beyond me" (Ecclesiastes 7:23).⁵ All this became an ideological school that Torah is to be obeyed and there are no moral, intellectual, or other criteria that should be exercised in obeying it.

I stress the alternative school of thought. The Torah's instructions are given not to glorify and obey God but "to purify God's creatures."⁶ Therefore, the commandments had to be presented rationally so people would understand them, and be able to develop their character or behaviors to meet a higher standard of morality and spiritual meaning.

Thanks to modern critical scholarship—and the work of Jacob Milgrom in particular—we can recover the original meaning and rationale of the red heifer rite.⁷ Explains Milgrom: The red heifer is a hattat, a purification offering, which in this case decontaminates death impurity (Numbers 19:9). Blood—which is the carrier of life (see Leviticus 17:11)—is the decontaminant of death impurity. The blood plus the ashes of the all red cow—also symbolizing blood—is mixed with cedar wood, hyssop, and crimson yarn to create a liquid which purges the death impurity. Part of the blood is sprinkled toward the altar to purge the tabernacle/temple. The rest is sprinkled on the impure individual, moving them from the zone of being under death's influence to the zone of life. This makes them eligible to enter the tabernacle/temple, the zone of life dominant and growing. In symbolic language, this is the repeated, fundamental message of our tradition, that the human is to shake off death and act, work, and live on the side of life and in creating life in the world.

Milgrom also points out that the single anomaly that most bewildered the Talmud—that the ashes of the cow purified the impure but made the priestly handler ritually impure—is a characteristic of the hattat sacrifice in general. The death impurity is "absorbed" by the hattat, rendering the individual pure; but it itself is now imbued with the impurity, and so therefore renders its handlers impure. Thus, the priestly handler of the ashes must immerse overnight to become pure again.⁸

In short, Milgrom shows that the red heifer rite made sense in the symbolic language of the hattat system, and was part of a conscious ritual proclaiming the commitment of God and the holy tabernacle/temple to help the individual fight off the encroachment of death, and to turn them to the side of increasing life. This is in

accord with the general thrust of all covenantal—one might say: halakhic—behaviors, to maximize life—and to minimize the death or decay element—in every life activity. This red heifer rite was not imparted to teach people to obey orders even when they were incomprehensible. On the contrary, this rite fits neatly into the overall goal of the commandments as a way of life, as an exercise in acting on the side of life.

The red heifer rite, then, can be used as a model of all covenantal-halakhic instructions, which are meant to guide the individual to live on the side of life. The individual needs to understand the logic of the instruction so they can choose life, and be a mature partner in the covenant of *tikkun olam*, of improving life and of the quality of life in the world. This clear rationale applies to every mitzvah in every society and culture. Each commandment must be articulated toward upholding life and toward a greater human autonomy and partnership role. This is the way that mitzvot move us toward the goal of a final universal triumph over all the enemies of life—poverty, hunger, oppression, all forms of discrimination that deny the equality of the other, war, and sickness. An important part of religious instruction is to upgrade the individual human being to embrace life more, to be more loving, more helpful to others, more self-respectful, more patient and understanding, more capable of restraint, which gives room to others to develop and express themselves. Every instruction, then, is not only to be understood; it is to be articulated so that the individual feels that their choice makes a difference. Their choosing life and maximizing quality is part of an effort by a universal community toward transforming the broader society and the whole world toward a fuller life. The greater the autonomy and individual choice, the greater is the dignity and surge of value of the individual, and the more capable they are to play a role as an active partner in applying the covenant to improve the world.

A person who absorbs the *mitzvah* in this spirit of participatory agency feels confirmed that they are an image of God—infinately valuable, equal and unique—and therefore a legitimate and important partner in the covenant of *tikkun olam*. In turn, the partner is capable of applying the Torah's instructions to ensure that they maximize life in whatever culture is currently regnant. This also means that where applying the inherited patterns from past articulations will harm life or undermine the dignity of others, the partner has the authority to apply the norms in a way that enhances the dignity of life instead. Thus, in an egalitarian society where women are fully participatory on an equal basis and fully eligible for leadership, the inherited special-but-not-equal status of women in Jewish tradition can be upgraded to honor the fullness of women's image of God. Similarly, all other participants who traditionally are rated less than equal—be they based on sexual orientation, or gender, or based on disabilities, or even on being non-Jewish—can be upgraded and articulated to honor the fullness of their life and their dignity as an image of God.

It should be stressed that in every area of life, having full understanding, having the capacity to choose and affirm the specific behaviors, having the sense, not of yielding to an inscrutable dominant power, but rather joining in partnership with a higher force to make a better life for all, increases the dignity and sense of higher purpose that gives life richer texture and deeper meaning and inspiration. This is, in fact, the lesson of the red heifer rite.

Shabbat Shalom.

¹ See Bemidbar Rabbah 19:7, especially the words of R. Yose ben Hanina and the colloquy of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai and the idolator on the red heifer rite.

² See Maimonides' discussion in his Guide of the Perplexed 3:26.

³ See my prior essay on Parashat Hayyei Sarah, "The Torah Came to Make a Mensch: Reflections on the Discovery of Rebecca," available here: <https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/torah-came-make-mensch>; and especially the teachings of Rabbi Israel Salanter, referenced there. See also Rabbi Avraham Isaac Hachohen Kook chapter 51 of his Guide of the Perplexed of Our Time.

⁴ See my prior essay on Parashat Tazria-Metzora, "Purity-Impurity: A Code of Life and Death," available here: <https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/purity-impurity-code-life-and-death>.

⁵ See Bemidbar Rabbah 19:3.

⁶ Bereishit Rabbah 44:1 (= Vayikra Rabbah 13:3).

⁷ Milgrom, Leviticus: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (Anchor Bible series), in two volumes.

⁸ See Leviticus 16:28 and Milgrom's extended discussion of the hattat system in vol. 1, pp. 270-278.

[Heroes and Humans by Amy Kalmanofsky](https://www.jtsa.edu/heroes-and-humans)

<https://www.jtsa.edu/heroes-and-humans>

One of the things I love most about the Bible is that it presents humans, not heroes. Even the Bible's greatest figures have virtues and vices.

Moses has many wonderful attributes that qualify him to lead the Israelites. He fights against injustice (Exod. 2:11–12) and overcomes his own limitations and fears to challenge authority (Exod. 4:10). He is persistent, facing Pharaoh ten times to demand Israel's liberation. He is also a careful arbiter for his people (Exod. 18:13–16). And he is humble (Num. 12:3).

But Moses also has shortcomings. His initial reluctance when God first approaches him to become Israel's liberator could indicate cowardice, or worse, a lack of faith (Exod. 4:11–12). Moses also has a temper. He gets angry at the people (Exod. 32:19) and at God (Num. 11:10–15).

His anger gets the better of him in this week's parashah when, frustrated yet again by the complaining people, Moses strikes a rock twice instead of commanding it to produce water as God directed him, and yells at his recalcitrant people (Num. 20:6–11).

Given the great things Moses accomplishes and the intimate relationship he has with God, one expects God to forgive him this tantrum. Instead, God punishes

Moses along with his brother Aaron and denies them entrance into the land of Israel.

Generations of readers question how the punishment fits the crime and search for more serious wrongdoing. After all, a moment of anger should not cancel a life's work. Moses must be guilty of more.

Rashi suggests that by striking the rock, Moses showcased his own power; he failed to sanctify God before the people by not demonstrating how an inanimate rock would respond to God's command. Similarly, Ramban suggests that Moses expressed doubt in God's power by asking the Israelites: "Shall we get water for you out of this rock?" Moses should have stated affirmatively "We will get water for you," or better yet, "God will get water for you."

Like these rabbis, I believe that Moses is held accountable for more than his anger and his ego. In my reading, God holds Moses accountable for not instilling the people with faith, as God states explicitly in verse 12: "You did not make them believe in me" [לא האמתם בי]. This is a serious wrong—enough to prevent Israel's great liberator from entering the land.

At this point in the Torah's story, it has been a long time since Israel stood at the banks of the Reed Sea and declared their faith in God and Moses (Exod. 14:31). Since then, Israel's faith has faltered time and again. Wandering through the desert, the people expressed their preference for slavery over starvation (Exod. 16:3; Num. 11:5) and Egypt over Israel (Num. 14:3). They worshipped a cow made from earrings (Exod. 32) and rebelled against God's and Moses's authority (Num. 16:1–11).

Certainly, God holds Israel accountable for its lack of faith [אינכם מאמינים] (Deut. 1:32) and condemns this first generation to death in the desert outside of the land of Israel (Deut. 1:35). I suggest that God also holds Moses accountable for Israel's faithlessness and condemns him to a similar fate. In my view, Israel's persistent doubt and denial is a failure of Moses's leadership.

For many, holding Moses accountable for Israel's failures seems unfair. It certainly is sad, if not tragic. But it also offers a profound lesson in leadership, particularly religious leadership.

Leaders cannot stand apart from their communities. Communities choose leaders that reflect who they are and the values they hold. Leaders are best able to guide and transform communities they are aligned with and are a part of. Leaders shape their communities, but communities also shape their leaders.

Given the symbiotic relationship between leaders and their communities, it makes sense that leaders be measured by their impact on their communities. Religious leaders in particular should be measured by their ability to create holy communities that are bound by shared values that transcend human experience. Religious leaders should inspire their communities to look beyond themselves to have faith in a greater power and a stronger moral force.

Moses certainly had faith in God, but he could not translate that faith to the desert generation. He could not make this generation believe that God would lead the people from slavery to freedom, from the desert to the promised land. Moses failed to transform Israel's first generation into a holy nation [גוי קדוש]. Instead, as Moses declares before striking the rock in anger, frustration, and resignation, they remained a community of rebels [מררים].

Heroes are people we admire. Humans are people to whom we can relate and from whom we can learn. Moses successfully lays the groundwork for a holy community defined by transcendent values that continues to flourish. For this, he becomes the hero of the Jewish people. But Moses also was very human, and his humanness is as profound and as powerful as his heroism. *(Amy Kalmanofsky is the Dean, List College and Kekst Graduate School; Blanche and Romie Shapiro Professor of Bible at JTS)*

In the End, There was Love by Rabbi Alex Kress

<https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/torah-commentary/end-there-was-love>

On June 19, 1865, two-and-a-half years after President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, Union troops arrived in Galveston, Texas. They delivered the news that the Civil War had ended and General Order Number 3, declaring that “all slaves are free.”

In a Thanksgiving address a few months later, the abolitionist rabbi Bernhard Felsenthal chastised the masses for their incredulous indifference to this historic moment: “Were not those who spoke for universal freedom and acted for universal justice in a small, small minority? And was not the name abolitionist a name of disgrace? And now this name has become a name of honor...” His optimistic proclamations -- “The fetters of prejudices are broken” and “The white people have become emancipated just as well as the black people” -- were premature. The fetters of prejudices are still intact and our society is still broken. Slavery was abolished, but discrimination remains embedded in our laws, our cultures, and our biases. As the struggle against racism continues, Parshat Chukat holds a hidden lesson in how we might find sustenance and purpose in our journey in the pursuit of justice.

In Numbers 21, we read how the Israelites battled against adversaries during their trek through the wilderness. The Torah tells us that in the “the Book of the Wars of Adonai speaks of et vahev b’sufa” (Numbers 21:14). These last three Hebrew words are particularly confounding. The English translation “Waheb in Suphah” reads like a bygone locale, but our tradition takes an interpretive approach to explain the phrase.

In the Talmud, we read of two study partners whose intense arguments made them feel like enemies. Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz teaches that vahev is related to the word for love, ahava, and b’sufa as “at its end” [b’sofa]” (Kiddushin 30b). In other words, et vahev b’sufa could be interpreted to mean: “In the end, there was love

Read in the context of war, it may seem naive to expect enemies to end up as lovers. However, the Jewish understanding of love is based on the depth of covenant, not on the flutters of infatuation. The great Civil Rights rabbi Joachim Prinz reflected this understanding when he said, “You cannot be a rabbi unless you love people. You don’t have to like them, but you have to love all of them. [God] says, ‘Thou shalt love the neighbor as thyself.’ [God] doesn’t say, ‘Thou shalt like them.’ I have loved all the people with whom I’ve come into contact. Even those ”.with whom I have disagreed because I think God wants us to love people

This non-romantic, communal type of love elevates the concept of humanity as being created in the Divine image and espouses an understanding of covenantal responsibility to each other. Every human being has innate, inalienable worth, and Judaism demands that we see each other through that lens of covenantal love. When I read et vahev b’sufa through the creative exegesis of our tradition, I am transported to the March on Washington in 1963, when, just before Dr. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech, Rabbi Prinz laid out the Abrahamic case for our ongoing fight against racism: “Our fathers taught us thousands of years ago that when God created man, he created him as everybody’s neighbor. Neighbor is not a geographic term. It is a moral concept. It means our collective responsibility for the ”.preservation of man’s dignity and integrity

Just as Parshat Chukat lists the Israelites’ battles and resting places in their trek toward the Promised Land, so too should we mark our nation’s jagged journey toward racial justice. It is therefore appropriate to mark not just the official end of slavery with the phrase et vahev b’sufa, but also the continuing struggle against the legacy of Jim Crow – systemic racism.

Perhaps et vahev b’sufa is yet another reminder in our tradition of what redemption should look like: a time of overflowing covenantal love in which we lift up our fellow human beings’ dignity and integrity. Though that promised land remains far off with many righteous battles and much good trouble between here and there, a prayer for redemption in the prayer book Mishkan T’filah guides our way: “Wherever we go, it is eternally Egypt. That there is a better place, a promised land; that the winding way to that promise passes through the wilderness. That there is no way to get from ”..here to there except by joining hands, marching together

(Rabbi Alex Kress (he/his) is the rabbi of Beth Shir Shalom in Santa Monica, CA. His rabbinate centers on pursuing justice, inclusion, and good synagogue coffee.)

[Yahrtzeits](#)

Rabbi Lenny Levin remembers his father Emanuel Levin on Friday June 25 (Tamuz 15).

Coming Up at Kol Rina

In Person Shabbat morning service, Saturday, June 19, 2021, beginning at 10:00 am

Shabbat morning services will take place in the Kol Rina parking lot unless there is rain or the temperature is above 85 degrees, in which case services will move indoors. Attendance is restricted to fully vaccinated (plus two weeks) individuals. Masks optional if the services are outdoors, mandatory if indoors.

We ask that people come promptly at 10:00 or before to assist with setup, and that they plan on assisting with cleanup at the end of services. Many thanks to Peter Greene for lining up participants.

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### **Monday evening minyan via Zoom**

Our regular weekday evening minyan will take place on Monday, June 21, beginning at 8:00. Your presence allows mourners and those observing yahrzeits to say Kaddish. Please support your Kol Rina friends by attending.

Use the following Zoom link to attend:

<https://zoom.us/j/97663987468?pwd=NjFhaVZUZkpSZ3pxQWJjOU5UWFR4QT09>

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Susan Marx paintings available online through Agora Gallery

Our late member Susan Marx z"l left many beautiful paintings to Kol Rina, in addition to the ones that grace our sanctuary. A number of them are available for purchase online through Agora Gallery; proceeds will benefit Kol Rina. [Click here](#) to see the online catalog.