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FROM RABBI ZEMEL

THE RITUAL OF A LIVED EXPERIENCE: FREEDOM AND RESISTANCE AT PASSOVER

DEAR FRIENDS,

I write this column with an inner turmoil that surprises me in its depth. It is early March. Russia has invaded Ukraine. Ukrainian resistance is stronger than expected. President Volodymyr Zelensky has become a powerful international symbol of courage and resistance as the future of his country hangs in the balance. What the situation will be as you read these words is unknown at this point.

We do know this: Russia's Vladimir Putin is this era's symbol of evil. I am always, and I mean *always*, more than reluctant to make comparisons to Hitler who set history's standard for evil. Still, Putin's attempted land grab of Ukraine cannot help but bring back memories of Hitler and Sudetenland. In the meantime, we must do our part to support the refugee efforts created by this monstrous invasion.

I find that I long for greater clarity and understanding about when our own country should use our own military. I ask myself about our nation's role in the world as a defender of national sovereignty and the world order. On a more theoretical but perhaps even larger scale, I worry that moral progress is a figment of the liberal imagination—a wish, a desire, but not a reality.

Personally, I long to echo the biblical *Song of Songs*, which celebrates this season with the proclamation, "The

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Reflections on the Sukkat Shalom Journey at Passover

By Jan Gordon with the Sukkat Shalom Committee

Refugees seek liberation and find new freedoms. They are also strangers in a new land and feel the melancholy of missed loved ones and worry when family members who remain in their home country face danger and hardship. Temple Micah's work with Sukkat Shalom (*Shelter of Peace*), which began more than four years ago, offers a welcome that lasts for generations. And it changes us, too. Why I feel Jewish is wrapped up in, exemplified by, this work by our congregation. By the time we celebrated Refugee Shabbat in early March 2022, we were expressing our purpose in new ways. Rabbi Stephanie Crawley, who often provides the spiritual context for this project, has offered us blessings. One of my favorites is "Praise to you, Adonai, who strengthens our steps."

Our organizing dates back to 2017, when we channeled our anger over new federal immigration policies into action. Our goals were to do a little advocacy against the separation of refugee families and the Muslim ban, and to help one family. By 2021 we had done much more. We had made one Afghan family's start in this country more successful, and their three children were thriving through uncertainty because their parents had the resources and reserves to cope. Our members also continued to provide support to them, especially through tutoring. We also became valued partners of our local resettlement agency, Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area.

Late in 2019, we visited the U.S.-Mexico border at El Paso and Juarez and made contributions to humanitarian organizations doing life-saving relief work. We decided in 2020 to support legal assistance through HIAS. Though delayed by COVID, in 2021, we leveraged HIAS' valiant staff's fight for asylees' rights by providing significant funding. We raised what we needed—and more—for that project from the incredibly generous Micah community. As the most recent crisis in Afghanistan unfolded, together we asked what more we could do. First, we found legal help and offered sponsorship for relatives of our Afghan friends who were—and still are—desperate to leave their country. There was hesitation: we remembered the exhausting process of shepherding our first family through the bureaucratic gates of all kinds of health, welfare, and educational programs. We recalled the intensity of our many meetings and the hours spent in rides to appointments, job hunts, and more. Did we have the necessary resources to do it all again? We were not sure, but we chose to go ahead anyway. Acting on our faith, we told Lutheran Social Services we were ready to help one more family's resettlement journey as a Good Neighbor Partner. We issued calls for volunteers and donations and—as we should have known all along—the Micah community again responded with generosity. We looked

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"Every person shall sit under his grapevine or fig tree with no one to make him afraid."
MICAH, CHAPTER 4, VERSE 4

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ANOTHER EXODUS. ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY TO ACT.

By Joshua Berman

My grandfather's family was from Ukraine. Dnipropetrovsk to be precise. In 1914, with hasty goodbyes to family that, sadly, they would never see again, my great-grandparents fled. Family lore has it that they nearly lost my grandfather, an infant in his mother's arms, in

a midnight river crossing (!), but somehow, they all got through. In search of a better—safer—life, they left the world they knew, traveling to France and, finally, to a new home in the United States. The rest, as they say, is history. My family's history, as for so many in our Micah family, is part of the fabric of who and what we are. It's an old story, but maybe not so old after all.

Six years ago, I traveled to Kyiv as part of the official U.S. delegation honoring the 75th Anniversary of the massacre of Jews at Babyn Yar. I trudged through the woods where the mass graves and ditches were found. I prayed with rabbis at the memorials. I stared at those terrible photographs from September 1941. I was struck over and over again by the horrific truth that 33,771 Jews were massacred in a 2-day period. And even as I listened to the stories of the very few who managed to escape, the tragic reality was that so many never had a chance to find a new life in a new land and write their history.

Now, today, staring at the TV screen and endlessly refreshing Twitter, the images of the latest killings and efforts to flee from Ukraine are chilling. The video footage of a mother and child's unsuccessful attempt to cross their river towards safety once again catapulted the horrors of migration to the front page. We are forced to ask ourselves: where will their Exodus from a tyrant with no regard for human life end? Will they make it? Video images of the citizens and government of Poland opening their homes and land remind us that we can help those in need.

So as we sit around our seder tables this month and recount the story of how our collective tribe crossed a sea and fled a despot—and I think about how my personal tribe managed to flee Ukraine – perhaps we need to add a fifth question to the traditional four: *What are we each going to do to help those refugees around the world searching for new and safe homes?* And I mean that literally: perhaps we can instill a new tradition and go around our seder tables with each and every one of us answering that question out loud. For the Ukraine tragedy, an Israeli cousin of mine has traveled to the Poland-Ukraine border to provide medical care; a former colleague just returned from that same border assisting refugees with food, water, tents and basic necessities. Many of us already are routinely deeply involved through the Micah community with efforts to help others—Sukkat Shalom, the underwear drive, Micah House. And individually, many of us have privately supported Afghans and other families in need.

We must continue to find ways to help Jews around the world in search of safety. Importantly, we can do that by supporting a strong Israel. Next May we will celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the founding of the modern State of Israel. Since 1948, Israel has been a place where Jewish refugees can go at any time for any reason. We must preserve that home.

In 1883, Emma Lazarus – American poet, activist and advocate for Jewish refugees fleeing persecution in Tsarist Russia – penned *The New Colossus* and set the standard for how we needed to welcome refugees. 75 years later, John F. Kennedy quoted it in *A Nation of Immigrants* as he opened our doors. Now, yet again, it is on us to continue to find ways to open our arms and help others build their new homes. Chag Pesach sameach.

A Season of Hope

By Michael Feuer

A riddle from Jewish folklore asks about the difference between optimists and pessimists. The mischievous answer is that pessimists have more data. This wry bit of wisdom can help us understand the condition of civic life and prospects for democracy here and elsewhere. Pesach is a good time to think about freedom and its fragilities and to take stock of ourselves as a community. Is our glass, or to stretch a familiar metaphor, Elijah's cup, half full or half empty?

On the gloomy side is Robert Putnam, the political scientist who gained academic and popular acclaim with his book, *Bowling Alone* (published in 2000), in which he argued that "something has happened in America in the last two or three decades to diminish civic engagement and social connectedness." His imagery, people bowling solo instead of how they used to, in leagues, has become iconic for our fragmented and isolated times. Twenty-plus years later, as we confront daily images of partisan tribalism, Putnam seems prescient. And he's not bowling alone: by rough estimate, more books and reports about the fragility of democracy have been published in the last five years than in the preceding 50. The notion of commitment to a vision of the common good seems quaint as we watch reruns of the January 6 attack, anti-maskers screaming about tyranny of government mandates, politicians clinging to the fantasy that the 2020 election was stolen, and eminent scientists mocked by anti-vaxxers.

At risk of sounding like a congenital optimist, though, I see other data too. For example, I am grateful to Jim and Deb Fallows, whose narrated airplane ride across America, Our Towns, published in 2018, conjures a mosaic of culturally and politically diverse places coming to terms with local realities in their own ways but sharing a familiarly common recipe of engagement and generosity. Last year Americans donated a whopping $450 billion to charitable causes. From my vantage point as dean of an education school in a university smacked by the pandemic with the worst financial and organizational crisis in its 200-year history, I witnessed community cohesion and an abiding commitment to the common good. We learned quickly to keep safe physical distance, while sustaining our emotional closeness; we breathed alone but, in a way, bowled (and prayed) together.

As an avid fan of the *NBC Nightly News*, I am buoyed by Lester Holt's standard signoff: "Take care of yourselves and each other." Who isn't moved by the footage of apartment dwellers in Manhattan coming out on their fire escapes to serenade ambulance drivers taking victims of COVID to overcrowded emergency rooms? Or scenes of Vietnamese survivors from 1975 helping last year's victims from Afghanistan settle in the US? Doesn't the fact that, in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and other victims of racial violence, public protest was the largest, most diverse, and most sustained in American history, suggest something promising about our collective pursuit of justice and our faith in the grand democratic experiment? And of course, maybe the most compelling source of my optimism is how our Temple Micah managed the migration to on-line services and a seemingly endless series of events aimed at keeping us informed, connected, together.

So who has the right data? That argument will surely go on. But meanwhile, is there a middle ground, a platform upon which we might neither scoff at the bad news (there's plenty of it!) nor skid into utter despair, and from which we might reinforce traditions of civic responsibility as linchpins of freedom and democracy? I don't know. But the season that gives us Pesach, Yom HaShoah, Yom Ha'atzmaut, and Yom HaZikaron offers some guidance: The Hebrews crossing the Red Sea, the inmates of the camps who all wanted to survive, the founders of the revived sovereign homeland of the Jewish people, and the heroes who fought and fell for the safety and security of Israel all knew, long before it became fashionable, that "it takes a village." As members of a particularly argumentative tribe, they all had their points of view – but ultimately their vision of collective responsibility prevailed. Let's keep that in mind as we continue to develop ways for Temple Micah to cultivate and nurture our togetherness as a people.

Hoping that soon we will be able to say "we were slaves unto COVID and now we are free…" I wish you all a sweet and healthy Pesach, with prayers for peace, safety, and freedom.

Postscript:
I wrote this piece before Ukraine. The resurgence of Russian brutality tilts me back in the direction of pessimism, although the Western response offers some hope. Feeling inadequate to do much more than pray, I will certainly keep the victims front and center in my Pesach blessings and remembrance of our people's suffering and liberation.

Michael Feuer is dean of the Graduate School of Education and Human Development and professor of education policy at George Washington University. His family has been members of Temple Micah since 1995.

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for apartments, formulated our strategy and organized teams.

We were in a hurry-up-and-wait situation as resettlement agencies, including ours, were overwhelmed with new refugee cases and volunteers to help them. Did they need us? Then, in late January, we got a call. A family needed an apartment the next week. They had a small child with a serious illness who was being treated at Children's National Hospital through the generosity of a donor, but they had no resettlement partner. LSS had stepped up, but could we? I will remember that Zoom meeting the rest of my life. We agreed that together we had to welcome the potential for love and heartbreak. Of course we did.

We are now at the beginning of a journey of accompaniment toward the promised land. The young couple is overwhelmed with the newness of everything and completely engaged in the medical needs of their child. We are the gate openers to the wonders of American retail establishments – who could ever imagine Costco? We show our shoppers how to swipe a gift card and find eligible food under the federal nutrition program for little ones. We help locate a lost Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) application (with the help of a responsive elected official's staff). We find good female dentists to quell the anxiety and pain of a woman who is unused to contact with strange men—and those dentists donate their services. We deliver developmentally appropriate toys and books and a sewing machine, and above all else we hope for news of the child's improvement together with his parents. And, again, the entire Micah community and Machon Micah responds—with ongoing donations and welcome gifts, with mountains of quarters so the family can use the coin-operated washer and dryer. Hundreds of people in our midst are owed thanks.

We hear the aspirations of a young man who served as a translator for several years for the US Special Forces, often in grave danger. He wants to give his family safety and find a job he can do while still putting his child's health first. He wants to send money to people he loves remaining in Afghanistan. He wants his visa approved. He finally feels

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Rabbi's Message FROM PAGE 1 ▶

winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come..." (2:11)

What shall we sing this Passover?

Passover is, after all, the Jewish season of renewal and recommitment to freedom—for everyone. The basic and essential Jewish story is one of human freedom. People, all people, are meant to be free. So we believe. We see this in our earliest texts and their earliest interpretations. Adam and Eve exercise their freedom in the Garden of Eden. Abraham's free thinking gains him a new vision of God and alters the trajectory of the human story. We are challenged by our Passover haggadah to see ourselves as newly freed slaves. Freedom is not to be taken for granted—quite the opposite. Freedom is sacred. This is why we ritualize the experience of liberation annually. We are meant to feel it—and feel it so deeply it pierces our souls.

In this era of the American Jewish experience, our faith's holding of human freedom as a sacred religious mandate informs what we choose to read.

***How the Word is Passed*, by Clint Smith, depicts how historical sites around our country tell the story of American slavery. The title of the book alone reminded me of the Passover Seder. Engaging the book closely brought me to the Seder table itself, as at one point the museum director of a former Southern plantation-turned-tourist-site describes how the plantation is trying to tell its own slave story and, in doing so, come to grips with its past:**

"If you can't see them for being people, you can't see me as a person. I want to get you to see them, because I know as a Black woman what my challenges in society have been. It's stemming from this history, so if I can't get you to see them, you can't see the person standing in front of you."

That is about as close as one can get to the haggadah's directive that "in each and every generation, each person must see themselves as if he/she went forth from Egypt." If we don't try to see people who lived before us as fully as we are able, we simply cannot see or understand ourselves and each other.

Later in the book, another staff member from the former plantation is quoted:

"The problem with [this] country—and also all around the world—is...miseducation... Books are really good, but who can read a book? Who can have access to books? This needs to be an open book, up under the sky, that people can come here and see."

This is the power of ritual. Passover is not reading a book. Passover is the ritual of a lived experience, from eating matzah for a week to retelling who we are and how we as Jews understand ourselves and our religious mandate. The Passover story reminds us that it was not the Israelites alone that Moses led out of Egypt. Torah tells us that our ancestors left as a "mixed multitude." No one was left behind. Freedom was meant to be God's gift for everyone.

If our American understanding of freedom is weak, it is because our American civic ritual life is weak. When and where do we enact our fondest aspirations for all humanity in story and song? When do we ritually recall our past—our glories and our sins—in order to guide us toward a shared future of freedom?

As I write this, the Ukrainian people are engaged in a fight for their freedom and their lives. This Passover, we might each ask ourselves if we were so threatened, would our fight be as valiant as theirs? Thus far, over one million Ukrainians have become refugees, echoing the Passover story's depiction of our ancestors as "wanderers."

The haggadah challenges us to open our doors so that "all who are hungry may come and eat." This year as we celebrate Passover, reunited from the bondage of COVID isolation, let us consider how we might better proclaim our message of freedom to our nation and our world and then, of course, do everything in our power to help those denied their freedom and their homes—to help those who like those of our own past, are forced to wander today.

Chag Sameach—May the sounds of freedom echo from your Seder table.

Shalom.

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unadulterated joy in this country when, guided by one congregant, he rides through a beautiful park on the bicycle donated by another.

It is impossible to know how you can truly help the most until you step up to be a partner. We appreciate the courage of the new family. And every day we love each other more, our own capabilities as a congregation blooming like an entirely new kind of flower in a new kind of spring.

"We have responded to emergency with emergence - what has ultimately come out of these crises is nothing less than a miracle...What has emerged? Dear friends - partners. You have. Temple Micah has. In ways that have inspired so much hope. In ways that have cultivated community. In ways that would make our ancestors beam. Knowing that their stories have meant something for so many others. Thank you. Thank you for all the gifts of your heart. Thank you. May all of us be blessed with emergence. The emergence of peace for all. The emergence of safety and shelter for all. The emergence of all the good that rises to fight the darkness. And a prayer - That one day, no more emergencies. Only peace that births more peace. May we all live to read that book."

—Rabbi Stephanie Crawley

Supporting our new Afghan friends has been a community-wide effort. For those Sukkat Shalom members who have had the honor of working directly with the family in recent weeks, it has been deeply affecting. Here are a few of their reflections:

"Our work with the family has brought home to me that acts of loving kindness are much more challenging than donations, monetary or otherwise. They require so much humility, self-awareness, and the willingness to really listen, so that one's acts truly address the needs and values of the person one is trying to help rather than one's own preconceptions of what should be done."

—Gail Povar

"The connection with my family's Jewish journey is profound for me. My mother and her brothers were refugees from France after WWII. They had to pack up all of their belongings and start a new life here: a strange land with a different culture and learn a new language. I can identify somewhat with Sharifa and the others I am teaching basic English as I recall the challenge of learning to read Hebrew as an adult. The big difference is that for me, my life didn't depend on it. For them, it really does."

—Stephanie Kaufman

"Our work with this family has made real for me the admonition in Leviticus not to harvest the field's corners, and to leave the gleanings for the stranger. The gleanings of the present day may differ, but the principle remains constant."

—Larry Bachorik

"I had the honor of being one of the people to set up a new home for this family. Shalom bayit has always been important to me, and was very much part of the process. Home should be a safe place to land. I have sewed since I was 10, and the skill has been valuable creatively, financially and emotionally. When I went to show Sharifa how to use the sewing machine, Amir told me how different it was in Afghanistan. Sharifa had used a machine that had to be hand cranked since electricity was intermittent. Once shown how it worked, Sharifa sewed like a pro. The light in her eyes gave me pure joy! Practicing tzedaka is a wonderful feeling! Within a couple of days, she had made a pair of pants for her daughter without a pattern – a skill I doubt I will ever have!"

—Jill Berman

Coming Out of Egypt

By Ronit Zemel

For the first 18 years of my life, at my parents' Passover seder, I would recount the Israelites' journey from slavery to freedom. I recited the four questions, pointed to objects on the seder plate, and dropped grape juice on my plate for the ten plagues. As the Haggadah said, I would try to put myself in the shoes of the Israelites, and consider myself as if I had come forth from Egypt—but honestly, I was mostly thinking of the matzah ball soup and brisket to come when we finally made it to Shulchan Orech.

And then, between my 18th and 19th year of celebrating Passover, I stumbled into a volunteer opportunity during a gap year I spent in Israel. Every day, I met people who themselves had wandered through Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, walked through the Sinai desert, and come to the "Promised Land." The journey of these people, though, wasn't filled with manna, nor was the land to which they came flowing with milk and honey. It was a journey of Eritrean and Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers. When I heard their stories, I first came to understand the wisdom that Passover lays bare: we must think of ourselves as coming out of Egypt, not only to remember that the Jewish people have fled persecution time and time again, but also because at every time and in every generation, there are others who cannot yet celebrate their freedom because they are in the midst of their own refugee story.

This Passover season, as I prepare my seder plate, dust off Elijah's cup, and browse my local grocery stores for matzah and macaroons, I will be thinking of the refugees I met who had been airlifted out of Kabul during the fall of Afghanistan. Many came to the United States with just the shoes on their feet and the clothes on their back. I met these Afghan evacuees at National Guard Base Fort Pickett, as part of my work for HIAS. As I helped collect documents and information to begin the resettlement process, I had the honor of hearing these people's stories, the first-hand accounts of fleeing their homeland to seek refuge in a strange land.

Many had worked in the American Embassy in Kabul; some had worked to build Afghan civil society. I heard the stories of soldiers from the Khost region, the stories of dentists, teachers, lawyers, students, technicians, airport employees. The stories of those who would rather go back to Afghanistan so they can reunite with their loved ones they had to leave behind, and the stories of those so excited to be here in the United States to begin their lives anew. The stories of those who spoke perfect English, and the stories of those who came from a place without written language and last names.

When I sit at my Passover Seder this year surrounded in person by family and friends, I will be thinking of these stories, and the stories of the rest of the 84 million people currently experiencing forced displacement around the world. I will be praying that today's refugees and asylum seekers will fulfill their dreams of building a new life in safety and in freedom.

Ronit Zemel is the Culture and Communications Manager at HIAS, a humanitarian organization helping refugees rebuild their lives in safety and dignity. She and her husband Ethan Porter have been Micah members since 2018.

Being Ordinary

By Rabbi Susan Landau Moss

Springtime is about to bloom, though up here in New England it often comes in fits and starts. It feels even closer in Israel, as our calendar reminded us at Tu B'shevat. And Pesach preparation once again monopolizes our to-do lists. We are invited to channel our ancestors and feel liberated from the isolation and weight of yet another COVID winter. Cases are dropping and we cautiously consider emerging again. I feel a charge in the air (and certainly in the media) urging us that we can make this time extraordinary.

"'Extraordinary' is overrated." This headline recently caught my eye. *Extraordinary* sounded like a good thing to me, if a bit unattainable. I then proceeded to listen to an interview with author Rainesford Stauffer, during which she spoke about her book, *An Ordinary Age: Finding Your Way in a World That Expects Exceptional*. The book is essentially a recommendation to aim for a perfectly ordinary life. I was drawn into this topic, which sounds so very counterintuitive. This book is geared toward young adults, yet it felt so relevant. In some ways, aren't we all continuing to discern the kinds of people we want to be in the world, and wondering how we measure up against society's expectations? I listened on.

First, I resonated with the nagging feeling that this supposedly "quiet" period of cancelled plans, limited activities, and general pandemic living could be good for helping me "work on myself." In reality, the pandemic has not been quiet for many of us—especially not for those of us working in healthcare, those of us who contracted COVID, those of us who cared for someone we love who had COVID, and the rest of us, who feel the weight of this broken world on our shoulders month after month with little respite. And when we do get some quiet time, we need it to recharge.

So much pressure! And even more than that, Stauffer reminds us, we are taught to look always to the future. We might not have what we want right now, but we can, with time. In ways big and small, we are told we can always be getting better. An advancing career path, healthier meal-prepping, better parenting, better sleep, better body, and more of that ever-elusive Band-Aid "self-care." With just a little more work, we are meant to believe we can be better versions of ourselves.

I have been wondering about this. What do we need from *extraordinary*? And do any of us ever find it? Some do—but not most of the people I work with each day: the young mother who is dying and simply wants to finish the memory boxes she is making for her children; the countless family members who have told me about their loved ones in the hospital with COVID—each and every one had the kindest heart, made the best food, was beloved by all who knew her; not the patient who was told she is in remission, but doesn't feel well enough for her favorite outing, simply going to the dog park; and not the man whose wife has dementia, who simply wants permission to find hope again. None of these people talk about degrees, promotions, or public recognition. They tell me, "This is so hard. She's still my mom."

The ordinary things that draw families together are the extraordinary things that mean the most. Deep down, I think we all know this. We do not have to be the best in our fields, the most published, well-regarded, or well-known. We simply need to be present for the people we love, to dedicate ourselves to a few causes that stretch our awareness beyond our small and particular lives. We need to be quiet and listen, reach out, and hold each other in silence when there are no words.

Sometimes, we need to take a step back and marvel at the miraculous beauty of spring, finding one tiny bud that takes our breath away. Spring is not actually a season demanding us to "get a move on" and pick up self-improvement projects abandoned in winter's hibernation. Spring unfolds around us, and only demands that we are present to notice. It is a reminder to bring the best of ourselves out of hiding again: we are good enough, already. Spring, in and of itself, is really quite ordinary.

Our Seder reminds us to marvel at the ordinary as well: the miracle that once-slaves can taste freedom, that green things grow after the winter, that stories can taste sweet when passed from generation to generation, and that it is never too late to offer praise. I want to lean into those simple truths this season. I hope part of the liberation this year invites us to simply return to what we know is good, to have patience with ourselves, and to be more present. That would be extraordinary.

Rabbi Susan Landau Moss is the palliative care chaplain of Bridgeport Hospital, part of the Yale New Haven Health system. Susan is a former assistant rabbi of Temple Micah, and together with Rabbi Danny Moss, cherishes an ongoing relationship with the Micah family.

Photo by Julie Blake Edison *on* Unsplash

TWO POEMS FOR PASSOVER REFLECTION

By Rabbi Stephanie Crawley

Praying in a Pandemic

Sometimes Egypt is a place on a map for us to trace its borders
And sometimes it is a space held in time for us to always leave
And sometimes it is a mythic adversary in the battle of hard hearts
And sometimes it is my open concept kitchen
    Where I lead prayer each week

It isn't so bad, here
    I've even decorated it
I just can't leave
    Not yet -
Not safe to sing
Not safe to take glorious deep communal breaths
Not safe enough to be together

So I harmonize with my refrigerator
Thank my tziztit for sweeping as they graze the floor
And make my table into a sanctuary once again

Miriam

My mother named me for her sake and not for mine

mar -bitter

Like the maror you will eat one day at the seder that barely mentions my name

She named me for her bitter life
For the taste of blood that the slave driver causes
For the taste of salt tears
For the forgotten taste of freedom

And She named me for what was but she also named me for what could be

yam -sea

Like the place that would come to be my liberation that you sing of each day

She named me for freedom
    For the sweet waters of redemption
    For the pools of my tears I now dance in
    For the waters that taught me I could be held without being constricted

And she named me in defiance

myr - beloved

Not in her mother tongue but in the Egyptian language

I carried a symbol - a testament
That when you say my name you will know that
    nothing about this captivity shutter our hearts
    Will keep us from loving our children
    From the words of care shared between a mother and her daughter

We are (still) human because we love

I am Miriam -

I am named for the bitter and for my one day hoped for sweet freedom waters and
I am named for defiant love

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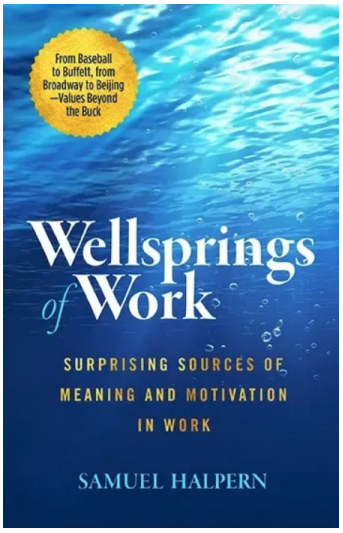

"I want more from work than just a paycheck. What am I looking for?"

Temple Micah member Samuel (Skip) Halpern has just published *Wellsprings of Work: Surprising Sources of Meaning and Motivation in Work*.

The book explores psychological and spiritual drives that can make work fulfilling, whether you're beginning your work life, in mid-career, or nearing retirement. Episodes from his long career in investing and lawyering—from Warren Buffett to Bernie Madoff, from Major League Baseball to Beijing—are springboards for explaining how many people, across many types of work, can tap into these sources of meaning and motivation as well.

"In researching this book," Halpern explains, "I was particularly influenced by Jewish thinkers, and especially German Jewish ones."

***Wellsprings* is available through online booksellers and through his website, wellspringsofwork.com.**

This new Vine *feature spotlights recent publications by Temple Micah members. If you're an author with a new book (in any genre), please email the editorial staff at vine@templemicah.org.*

MAZAL TOV

Whitney and Zach Howell, on the birth of their daughter, Miriam Wallace Howell

Richard Just and Adrian Alvarez, on the birth of their daughter, Ruth Ella Celeste

Libby Pearson and Sam Haltiwanger, on the birth of their daughter, Josephine Susan Haltiwanger, granddaughter of Sonia White

Suzanne Saunders, on the marriage of her son Isaac Logan Saunders to Sophie Caterina Slesinger

Mary Beth Schiffman and David Tochen, on the birth of their grandson, Jordan Reid Tochen

Rabbi Rachel and Geoffrey Schmelkin, on the birth of their child, Lilah Binah

CONDOLENCES

The Temple Micah community extends its deepest condolences to:

Dean Brenner, on the death of his cousin, Susan Maltz Schultz

Helene Granof, on the death of her brother-in-law, Stanley Talpers

David Gregory, on the death of his sister, Stephanie Gregory Mitchell

Charles "Chip" Kahn III, on the death of his father, Charles Kahn Jr.

Jane Yamaykin, on the death of her great-aunt, Ginda "Ina" Benenson

May their memories be for a blessing.

Tzedakah FROM PREVIOUS PAGE ▶

IN HONOR OF
Rabbi Samantha Frank, by Sarah Frank
Kate Kiggins, by Priscilla Linn, Sue Strommer
Rachel Chalmers Kirsh and Jonathan Henry Fraser Kirsh, by Russell and Maggie Kirsh
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This list reflects donations received Dec. 2, 2021–Jan. 31, 2022. Every effort has been made to ensure its accuracy, but if there are any errors or omissions please accept our apologies. For corrections or clarifications, please contact Rhiannon Walsh in the temple office. Thank you.

AN ODE TO PASSOVER

By Rabbi Josh Beraha

Passover has a lot going for it. By the time we're trading recipes for brisket and flourless chocolate cake, there are signs of spring everywhere, and whether or not you're still defrosting your bones from winter, Passover offers hope as abundant as the redbuds and daffodils outside.

"To hope," writes Terry Eagleton, "means to project oneself imaginatively into a future that is grasped as possible, and thus as in some shadowy sense already present." And so even in a chaotic world that often leaves us in despair, we still say "Next year in Jerusalem!" When we speak these words, we free ourselves, if only mentally, from the darkness of the moment, looking toward the brighter, more attainable future.

On Passover, freedom is raised up and celebrated. We consider the ways others around us–like the ancient Israelites– are still unfree today, and how *we ourselves* can move from a place of constriction, to experience life more fully, in all its expansiveness. What greater value is there than freedom, the very foundation of self-determination. Freedom is paramount to who we are–as Jews, Americans, and human beings.

Passover is also full of creative possibilities. An orange on the seder plate symbolizing feminism and LGBTQIA diversity–maybe the most widely known change to the seder–is but one example. The website haggadot.com allows you to customize the entire haggadah, with options ranging from the ridiculous–the *Schitt's Creek* Haggadah– to the serious– the HIAS haggadah. There's an elasticity to the home ritual that allows each family to adapt the holiday, each in their own way, thus furthering the idea of Judaism as a growing, living thing. "Rebellion for the sake of innovation," write Amos Oz and Fania Oz-Salzberger. "Dismantling for the purpose of assembling differently." This is what it means to be Jewish.

On Passover, uniquely, we celebrate the voices of the next generation by encouraging them to ask questions, thus encouraging curiosity and lively debate. From the time of the Mishna (200 C.E.), which first put forward the idea that children should be central to the Passover ritual, Judaism got right what John Locke eloquently put some fifteen hundred years later, that "there is frequently more to be learned from the unexpected questions of a child than the discourses of men."

Passover is an entryway into a new season, the season of the omer. After the first seder we count the omer, one day at a time, for seven weeks—and thus, with steadiness and momentum, we fill our lives with anticipation for Shavuot. During the omer, we march ever onward, with confidence and determination, leaving behind the shackles of days gone by.

But Passover is not a holiday of naive optimism. Throughout the seven-day celebration, we are reminded that we must simultaneously project ourselves into a redeemed future, while remaining grounded in current reality. We see ourselves "as if" we left Egypt, but know very well that the story is a metaphor.

Passover preaches action, not simply reliance on God. Famously, the haggadah makes no mention of Moses, let alone Aaron, Miriam, Yitro or the scores of others who no doubt helped to make the Exodus possible, if only by packing their bags and following the long caravan out of Egypt...as if to say, it's up to us, not them.

If, over the centuries, Jewish communities took the Passover story to mean that Jews must wait for divine intervention to overcome threats, we would have written ourselves out of history entirely. But while Jews call God go'el yisrael, redeemer of Israel, we know too that we are God's covenantal partner, and *we* will ultimately be the ones who move history forward.

The late 19th, early 20th century poet, Hayim Nachman Bialik, expressed this idea well when he wrote in honor of the First Zionist Congress—"Even if salvation has not yet come, our Redeemer still lives." Bialik is referring here to Theodore Herzl, as if to say, what will become of the Jewish people will come because of human action. Passover encourages the same.

After two years in which we were tied to our homes, restricted in our movements, may this Passover be an opportunity for all of us to take life into our own hands, and work toward a future world of peace, love and justice. Happy Passover!