

Well, you thought **you** had problems, right?

Yesterday's Torah portion has Abraham send Hagar and Ishmael away, into the desert. And the Torah speaks about her experience in these verses:

“When the water was gone from the skin, she left the child under one of the bushes, and went and sat down at a distance, a bowshot away; for she thought, “Let me not look on as the child dies.”

And sitting afar, she burst into tears.

And God *heard* the cry of the boy...And God opened Hagar's eyes and she saw a well of water. She went and filled the skin with water, and let the boy drink!”

There was a well of water right **where** and right **when** she needed it, but she didn't know it was there and she couldn't see it. Her *anxiety* kept her eyes down. Her *panic* kept her eyes down. Her *despair* kept her eyes down.

Friends, let us open our eyes wide this year to see the wells we might not yet have seen: Our inner strength. Our resilience. Our kindness. Our patience. Let us lift each other up to see the wells that we can share. And like Hagar, we *can* look up! We *will* look up.

And then... today's Torah portion offers us almost the same scenario, this time with Abraham and Isaac: “An angel of the

LORD called from heaven: “Abraham! Abraham!” And he answered, “Here I am.” And he said, “Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him.

When Abraham looked up, suddenly his eye fell upon a ram, *caught* in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering, in place of his son.”

There was a ram caught in the thicket right **where** and right **when** he needed it, but he didn't know it was there and he couldn't see it. He was too *distressed* to look up. He was too *busy* to look up. He was too *frenetic* to look up.

Friends: let us also look up this year. Let us look up and see the rams caught in the thicket that we may not yet have seen: Our willingness to sacrifice. Our faith in the community. Our ability to pivot. And we will lift each other up to see the rams that we can offer one other. And like Abraham, we *can* look up! We *will* look up.

Rashi teaches: that ram was predestined to be there from the very first days of creation תישארב ימי תששמ ךכל היה וכו' it has been ready and waiting. Our strength has been there all the time, waiting for us to take it and use it.

Ibn Ezra comments: “He noticed the ram only *after* it had become entangled by its horns.” Our strength comes to us sometimes only after we've been tangled up, bruised by the thorns and tired of waiting.

Daat Zekanim writes: Ram's horns which are open ended at both ends, are remind the Jewish people that though they will seemingly enter a dark tunnel, there is light at the end... Our strength will show us the light.

Isn't it ironic? **Both** of our ancestors, Abraham *and* Hagar, were too exhausted, too frightened, too caught up in their own pain to just LOOK UP! They were people just as we are, who set out into the unknown with no map, with confusing and conflicting instructions on what to do and where to go. It was painful and complicated and unbelievably challenging, with tests that would tax any human being in the extreme. No wonder they lost hope.

And then... things that they never imagined possible, happened. They happened!

And to us as well. Here we are, here in a drive in on the holiest day of the year! With cameras rolling so we can live stream to the folks at home! I was definitely absent the day in seminary when they gave us a lesson on Rosh Hashana at a drive in! All of you looked up and saw a well and said yes hineni—when you came here tonight

So I'm posing this question: where's the well *you* didn't see? Where's *your* ram caught in a thicket? **Remember**: our strength sometimes comes to us only after we've been tangled up, bruised by the thorns and tired of waiting. **Remember**: no matter how alone it feels sometimes, both Torah portions are telling us that we are not alone. **Remember**: we've made phone calls – voice-to-voice interactions. Neighbours have played live music on their

patio, dancing and singing every night for 100 nights and we all cheered. Online classes, lectures, services, concerts, virtual tours are being offered everywhere for us to find one other in the thicket—albeit in small Hollywood squares—and— think about it—we're all engaged in the largest acts of widespread care and concern in human history.

Tonight we heard the shofar, which can be both the voice of *trauma* and the voice of redemption. How? The Arukh HaShulchan, a 19th century compilation of the origins of Jewish law written by Rabbi Yechiel Michael Epstein explains that there are two different types of blasts that are mentioned in the Torah. One is a *tekiah*, which is always mentioned in the context of *simcha*, or rejoicing. The other blast mentioned in the Torah is a “t’ruah,” which he says is “the language of a broken cry”. We blow both sounds several times, interspersed with each other: tekiah, truah, tekiah.

When we blow the shofar, we give voice to joy, then suffering, then joy. Hope, then hopelessness, then hope. Celebration, then mourning, then celebration. T’kia, t’ruah, t’kia. Its a club sandwich.

And what do we end on? Tekiah gedolah, a blast of pure simple longing and pure simple hope.

Our shofar gives voice to pain and fear and grief *and* it gives voice to joy and victory and redemption. It calls out to us and it calls out to the world and to God. Its voice reverberates through us, allowing us to feel an entire panoply of emotions. It gives

voice to all that we have felt this past year and all that we may feel in the year ahead.

So tonight it is the beep in our spiritual watch, the buzz from our spiritual phone, the ping from our spiritual google calendar that reminds us: LOOK UP! May the tekiah gedolah we will soon hear to conclude this “who’d a believed it” Rosh Hashana evening service, be the reminder we need to see the well so we can get water, to see the ram so we can feel our strength, and to see one another so we know we are not alone. Shana Tova.