

At times like this, I often struggle with not knowing what to say. What can any of us say? Is it better to keep silent?

The 11 Jews who died praying last Shabbat also died on *Parshat Vayera* - a *parshah* famous for containing the saga of Sarah, Hagar and Ishmael, and the tale of the Binding of Isaac. And they died in part for their communities support of refugees and the important work of HIAS.

In *Vayera*, Abraham almost kills both his sons (Isaac more directly than Ishmael), and God saves them both in the nick of time.

I wish we paid attention to many overlooked things in *Vayera*. It is the first time God speaks to a woman - and not to Sarah. God speaks to a foreigner, a servant/slave, a person with darker skin and little power. God speaks to a refugee trying desperately to save her child.

So I share with you some thoughts about last week's *parshah*, and this week's *parshah* Chayei Sarah. Sarah and Abraham both talk a lot throughout the Torah. In *Vayera*, Sarah even orders Abraham to expel Ishmael and Hagar. Sarah was not quiet or shy with her husband regarding her son. Later, Hagar too finds her voice and her salvation in *Vayera*. But in *Chayei Sarah* things go silent. If we take the text at face value, Sarah has nothing to say about Abraham's plan to sacrifice Sarah's beloved son. She just dies.

Sarah is important enough to be among the few women whose age is recorded at her death. The Talmud tells us she is a prophet. Yet she has no voice at the end. Abraham too loses his voice. The text tells us how he mourns for Sarah. But he doesn't speak. When Abraham dies, Ishmael and Isaac reunite to bury their father and both are silent.

How are we to understand this silence? Is it the silence of trauma? The silence of wise aging? The silence of shock? Fear? Anger? Lost dreams? Remembered Nightmares?

Since I first learned of the anti-Semitic attack at the Tree of Life Synagogue, I have felt all these things. I have struggled to find the words. I have sat in silence, feeling a whirlwind of feelings.

This week, I remember my grandparents who were Holocaust survivors. I think of my kids and I fear for their safety. I fear for Bet Mish, that as an LGBTQ *shul* we might be a target for haters. I am overcome by anger and I don't even know where it came from. I remember (mostly unconsciously) the trauma I've experienced in my own lifetime. Though my own experience is nothing like my grandparents or the latest victims of those who kill Jews, memory isn't rational. Thoughts just come. Most of all I feel despair.

I share this with you because I know that many of you are experiencing similar thoughts and feelings. You are not alone. We all grieve in our own way, and we all mourn together.

Today I need to preach to myself my *drash* that I shared with you on Rosh HaShanah:

They want us to despair so they can defeat us.
They want us trapped in the pain of the past,
and the fear of the future, so they can steal
our present.

“[I]n this moment, [in every moment], hope is the
power that makes our lives possible.”^[1]

You do not abandon us
You give us the courage to enter our struggles...^[2]
And the hope to believe that a Rainbow Highway will be found.

I need a God who is with us in our fears and our struggles, giving us strength
and courage we never knew possible.

‘Fear not, for I will be with you.’

Ehyeh imach: “I won’t do it for you, I won’t do it without you, but I won’t
leave you to do it alone.” I will be with you, and your community will be
with you, and I will give you strength and courage and hope to do what you
could never have done yourself.

God’s essence is ‘the One who will be with you’ when you have to do
something you’re afraid will be too hard.

In conclusion, I recall the words of William James:

“These then are my last words to you. Be not afraid of life. Believe
that life is worth living and your belief will help create the fact.”

For, All the world is a very narrow bridge,
and the most important thing

is not to give in to our fears.

This week we sat shiva for 11 Jewish souls who died worshipping God. In a way, we also sat shiva for Abraham and Sarah whose tents were always open to welcome the stranger. *In their memory*, this Shabbat and every Shabbat, *we will welcome strangers, refugees* and those seeking a spiritual home. We will raise our voices louder to *fight for justice*. We will remember that *hope* is a form of spiritual resistance. We will find great *joy amidst the pain*.

Please join us for **#ShowUpForShabbat** this Friday, November 2, 2018 at 8pm at Foundry United Methodist. Our own Larry Neff and Vinny Prell will lead us in memorializing those we lost, and in joyously welcoming Shabbat. We are honored to be joined this Shabbat by a special guest speaker, Mr. Elad Strohmayer, Spokesperson of the Embassy of Israel to the United States, who will present “**Confessions of a Gay Israeli Diplomat.**” And don't forget the **Women's Potluck** at Foundry before services.

If you are looking for a LGBTQ space to process, please consider joining me, GLOE, and our own Dr. Stuart Sotsky on Thursday November 8th at The DC Center from 6:30-8:30pm for “**In Sorrow & Solidarity: An LGBTQ Response to Pittsburgh.**”

If you haven't yet had the chance to read Dr. **Al Munzer's moving letter to the Washington Post**, you'll find it here: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/readers-respond-to-the-tragedy-in-pittsburgh/2018/10/29/892bb8c6-db0b-11e8-8bac-bfe01fc3a6_story.html?utm_term=.d177e55a9a91

As always, ***if you need someone to talk to***, pick up the phone and ***give me a call***. I am always here for you. Your *mishpachah* is always here for you.