

Book Talk, May 11

This is a slightly edited version of the auto-generated transcript provided by Zoom for May 11 Book Talk hosted by Tzedek Chicago with Virginia Spatz as speaker, R' Brant Rosen doing introductions, and questions from participants.

It was edited as follows:

- 1) Who is speaking is noted in brackets;
- 2) Names of speakers and people mentioned are corrected;
- 3) Hebrew and other specialized words, like "*Mitzrayim*," are added in place of phonetic nonsense;
- 4) Some punctuation, especially quotations, is added.

Repetitions, breaking off mid-sentence, and fillers such as "you know" and "like" are left as is.

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Brant Rosen speaking

...program as well, because we want to be able to maximize, maximize our interaction and conversation as much as possible.

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So I think, to begin by introducing our speaker.

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Virginia Spatz was born on Chicago's West Side, lived her first 16 years under the shadow of the L.

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Tracks at Austin and Lake. She also lived in Hyde Park and South Shore.

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Before leaving town, Virginia and her husband her husband, Cary O'Brien lived in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and Boston, Massachusetts, before settling in Dc.

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Where they have lived for 34 years and raised 2 children.

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now adults and living elsewhere. Before leaving Chicago, Virginia worked in election campaigns and for Project Leap (legal elections and all precincts).

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On the East Coast she worked for educational organizations, including the Institute for Responsive Education in Boston and the Adult Education Department of Gallaudet University.

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She directed Dc's independent cross community Jewish Study Center for several years, had taught of a variety of classes at

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DC area synagogues. A big believer in education outside institutions.

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Virginia had primary responsibility for homeschooling their 2 children for a total of 12 years, and tutored other children, and served as a nanny for 2 little ones.

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Virginia's writing on Jewish and more general topics appears in several national print publications, and she blogs irregularly on Jewish and community-related topics.

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She reported regularly for the Hill Rag and East of the River newspapers,

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and for We Act Radio's Education Town Hall. She has helped produce and host radio programs for most of we act radios 10 here 10 year history and helped help.

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So organize the Charnice Milton Community Bookstore literacy effort of the Station.

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Virginia helped coordinate a Jewish Women's Interdenominational Leadership

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Dialogue, and worked in a number of other Jewish and Interfaith Bridge building efforts.

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Rereading Exodus along the Anacostia,

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the book that we will be featuring in our program tonight was inspired in large part by her experiences with Dc's Cross River Dialogue, A small group of white Jews living west of the Anacostia and

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Black non-Jews living and working east of the river.

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And finally, I want to add that I Virginia is also a very active and beloved member of congregation at Tzedek Chicago, and it is our great honor to be able to present her in our program tonight i'll turn

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things over to Virginia now. [Virginia Spatz speaking:] Thanks and so I wanna start by saying that I wrote out a bunch of remarks because i'm really really bad at gauging how much time things take And so I'm going

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to try sticking to the written remarks for a while and we'll see how that goes.

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And I thank Brant for the introduction, and also thank Tzedek Chicago for helping whether you know it or not.

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Helping to bring this book into fruition because it's It's been a long, complicated project, and just knowing that there is other people who really care about the you know the topic and trying to read differently it was a big part

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of getting this off the ground, so as my initial bio said, I grew up on Chicago's west side, right at the border of Chicago and Oak Park, right right at the Lake Street 'L.

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almost underneath it. I know it's called the green line now, but I always forget that and the Austin neighborhood that I knew as a kid was quite stable, and there were people moving in and out and the wor some

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changes, but it was, in my young experience very settled. kind of a place.

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I I thought, a very rich and wonderful neighborhood to grow up in, but we were also experiencing some a lot of changes, and we had 2 major community groups that that we're kind of bickering about how to preserve the neighborhood

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as the racial composition was changing, and we only learned later that the Chicago Police's Red Squad, which is kind of like Cointelpro but local, had infiltrated one of them, and was like deliberately trying

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to stir up trouble, which is a story for another day, but also kind of part of this.

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This whole thing. If I just had to say it in a sentence or 2, I would say, You know I grew up in a very lovely neighborhood, and then they Urban Renewed it out of existence.

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They knocked down all the shopping, all the communal spaces that had meant anything to any of us. and put up, and I still have very vivid memories of this chain link fences with gravel and a big

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sign that said courtesy, Richard J. Daley Mayor, and that was my --

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you know, my young experience of how the city was gonna come in, and you know, fix your world for you.

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So then. Not that long after that,

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I left the city with Cary, who is has been my husband for I think we're coming up on 33 years.

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We've been together a very long, time we left the city together when I was 19, so it's it's it's a long, long long partnership there, and we lived a couple other places and then we settled in DC.

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And when we got here it was the height of Chocolate City.

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Marion Barry was in his first stint as mayor, and like looking this up to like, make sure I got dates right and stuff,

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I realized he was only the second mayor in DC, because we didn't have Home Rule until you know very recently

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DC as an entity is a is a a new thing in some ways.

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So Marion Barry was mayor. We had a crack epidemic.

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We had hundreds of gun homicides in some parts of the city, and then other parts of the city were relatively unscathed --

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for quite a few years. Cary and I purposely moved to what we thought was a neighborhoody city.

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It had a working class history and a substantial black population, and for people who are like not familiar with DC

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as a place to live. You might get the impression that it's all focused on the capital.

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But when we moved here our block didn't have anybody who worked for the Federal Government and we nobody neither my husband nor I,

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nobody in our family ever worked for the Federal Government, except for our daughter, had an internship at the FCC

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for a minute one summer. We raised our 2 children here they're both elsewhere now.

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And at this point I'm gonna say because it is part of this story that almost everything that I loved about DC is gone.

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The shops and the restaurants that we could afford are gone.

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We could never afford to buy our house now and we can't leave, because if we sell it,

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we got nowhere to go and most of our neighbors are gone.

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In the last 20 years. this Isn't. just like you know sometimes you you think well, maybe it's just the way i'm looking at things in the last 20 years DC.

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Has has had 100,000 new residents, most of whom are white, young, and can afford luxury apartments.

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We've lost 80,000 black people and most have moved east of -- we have 8 wards in DC

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and sometimes we call Prince George's county we call word 9. Most have moved just over the border to where it's a little bit cheaper.

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And so this is twice in my life that i've seen my hometown just disappear out from under my feet, and that is a big part of how I got into this Rereading Exodus along the Anacostia because

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the Exodus story, which we you know we are told to retail is about oppression, but it's not about people who are

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It's not an easy story to fit to the circumstances that I just described to you.

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This is this is oppression that we are experiencing in Chicago, in DC.

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In many other places and Exodus, on the surface of it anyway, doesn't really speak to that, and so I got into studying about it and trying to make it work more for me. And then, way back.

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-- what seems a long time ago, even though it's only 2019 --

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that Cross river dialogue that Brant mentioned decided to put together something that would kinda address this divide that we have in DC.

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Our river is such a strong divide that I actually don't think apartheid is a bad word.

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I mean it's not legally mandated that Black people live east of the river and white people live West, but it's a huge huge divide.

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The levels of poverty and crime and just lack of infrastructure east of the river is enormous.

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And then west of the river is all the privilege.

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Not that there aren't problems on the West side but there's much more safety, infrastructure schools all of that kind of thing.

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And, as I kinda said, Jews live west of the river.

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All Jewish institutions in DC are west of the river.

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In fact, most are really far northwest. There's two cemeteries

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two Jewish cemeteries east of the river, but both of them were founded by congregations that are far west of the river. Right near my house, which is in the southeast quadrant

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there is a Havurah that started about 20 years ago with a very small number of people, and only in the last 5 years has there been a large enough Jewish population to support a rabbi

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and a permanent office and a permanent -- well, semi-permanent, we rent -- worship, worship, and office space on the Hill.

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Before that it was people's living rooms and that kind of thing and

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So this this divide is enormous, and this Cross River Dialogue was founded to try to address some of that. And our first idea was, we were going to have this book that was gonna tell white people, especially white Jews living

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west of the river, some of what it was like living east of the river. And that started.

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And then Covid hit, and so many, so many things changed, and

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The book changed a lot as I was experiencing...

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What I thought was like too stark to say back in 2019 just became almost less than less than strong enough,

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as I was trying to write and rewrite the book a few years later, because the ways in which resources were distributed during the pandemic were just in some ways just unconscionable and apartheid is

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not too strong a word, even though, like I said it isn't legally mandated.

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It is so baked into the way we live here that we we really quite --

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We have, We have quite a a situation to work on, and trying to figure out how to cope with that and cope with it through Jewish tradition, is how rereading exodus started and how it evolved and it really changed a lot over the

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last couple of years, and I I know i've already talked a whole lot, and I could pause and answer questions or have discussion.

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Now I was going to read you a little bit of the book, but I really don't like I feel like I'm just talking a mile a minute.

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Maybe i've i've said too much already. Or I can go on and and share some parts of the book, and then we can have a discussion after that.

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What do you all think? [Brant Rosen:] I don't know would vote for hearing a little bit of the book myself

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But that's just me. [Virginia again] okay. Well, if I don't okay, I hear.

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Please go on. Just go on. Hear the book. Okay. Good. Thank you.

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Thank you all. I just Thank you. I appreciate the advice.

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Okay, So i'm going to start by showing you if I can do this correctly.

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I'm going to show you pages from the book just so we can,

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we can see. Okay, you should be able to see this thing that says starting points.

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And this is the first real chapter in the book there's there's a long introduction in lots of other material.

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But this is this is the the first real chapter. and I'll just start by reading: "The book of Exodus starts with individuals showing up in a place that is new to them.

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This is not insignificant. Much of rereading Exodus is about what happens to a place and its people when new folks arrive.

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It is also about the more usual view of Exodus as a story of getting out.

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To truly conceive what it would mean to escape the narrow place of the Exodus story. We must first explore how all parties ended up in here, and how we they relate to one another."

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And I don't know if I can make this any smaller.

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But I think that's that's okay the idea was supposed to be just in case anyone doesn't have the ability either technic technologically or can't see the material the idea was to use use a

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visual structure to show that we are like stuck in this narrow place.

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And I do want to mention that in this book and whenever I speak in general, I talk about meets "Mitzrayim" instead of Egypt, so that we know we're talking about a Biblical and mythological place and not about either

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an ancient or a contemporary nation, and similarly use Israel rather than Israel, unless we really are talking about Israel as as a nation, and in the Bible and in common transliterations,

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there is the word Yisraelite and so I invented.

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At least, I think I invented it i've never seen it anywhere else Mitzrayim-ite.

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I just decided that I would didn't want to go through clunky things, like "the people who lived in mitzrayim" Yadda Yadda.

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So I just made up "Mitzrayim" so that is meant to keep us oriented on this idea that this is a mythology, and not any kind of history or about it's about pieces of land in

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a very, very abstract way, and I also want to note that there's this thing here that says crucial note, and it's a little box that I put in there that says "The Exodus is an important part of

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theology for Jews and for Christians. Rereading Exodus is not about any religious community's understanding of covenant.

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It's about the story, theirs, as in the characters we read about in the Bible, and ours, as in what lessons we learn from the story for ourselves, and our communities." And I was telling Brant that I put this in there as kind of a

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disclaimer. I was talking about who's "we," how do we understand "we," relate to in the story, that kind of thing, and I wanted to make sure that it was clear that I wasn't talking about how any whether Christians or jews

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relate to covenant. It was just kind of a disclaimer sort of thing, but a rabbi that I showed it to said, "Oh, well, like this actually is theology.

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And this is really important. And why do you have it in this little box?

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And why did you skip over this?" And I'm reminded that as a journalist I was often sort of chastised by my editor, who would call me up and say, why'd you bury the lede and and maybe

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it's a habit I have. But I I am kind of harping on this, because I wanna say that this book is kind of my journey with this material.

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It's not like polished theology it's not polished philosophy, or anything like that.

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It's kind of a journey and this is, ended up here because that's where I put it, and we're just gonna have to kind of kind of go on with that.

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So I put that there to to get us started. And that starting point chapter has another couple of things that I think are important to note.

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One of them is one of them is this idea of which really was, I have to say?

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I think it was new to me to really spend time thinking about like --

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Who do you think you are in this story? I mean, I think a lot of us have been taught over the last couple years to think about, You know. Are you

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maybe, Pharaoh, Are you maybe the midwives, or you know: Can you relate to all these things?

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But I'm, I don't think I ever sat and thought: Well, we what about these Mitzrayim-ite

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folks who were living there like, How do we relate to them?

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And who are these people who just show up in the beginning of Shemot [Exodus]?

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And how you know, do we automatically relate to those people?

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Do you know? How do other people relate to them, like who are we in the story?

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The other thing that's really important, that I I think is a relatively well, at least a new thing for me to think about in this particular way is: Where do you start the story and I think most people Who've read the Bible

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or go through passover you know know that there's a kind of a back and forth between Genesis and Exodus.

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You can't really read Exodus, without knowing who Joseph was, for example. Joseph is a huge part of the story, even though he's dead by the -- I think it's the fifth verse.

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So you know you have to going back into Exodus and finding -- or Genesis -- and finding out how the people got there

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is part of the story, and I mentioned at Torah study the other day that this this thinking about this really made me think about

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You know a couple of things that I put in the introduction and I have an excerpt that I can share with people.

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I don't didn't want to read everything to you and go into long, complicated things, but the two examples that I shared are how we describe a police killing that have one in particular that happened here in DC

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Where an 18-year-old boy was shot by police. And you know the story that's reported by the press is that he had a gun, and so they shot him. But what they don't tell you which are various agencies that looked into it.

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So we know for a fact is that the officers were chasing this kid for weeks, and that they weren't following even their own department's practices, and that they set this up so that the child was in -- I mean he was a child,

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I mean he's 18 but you know -- was in danger, and we didn't it didn't really need to happen like that.

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And also the other story that's in there is the hostage situation in Colleyville, Texas, which also like how you, where you started has a lot to do with how that story is gonna go. And deciding how far back into Genesis

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you're gonna go is part of deciding how you're gonna tell the Exodus story.

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And now I really have already talked a long time, but I'm gonna go ahead and read you actually, words from -- this is still the the first chapter.

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It's a part called "getting out."

[Virginia reading from book:] "Getting away from oppression in Mitzrayim is the climax of an epic full of promises, plagues, and politics.

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We might picture the story as told in Zora Neale Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, (1939) Cecil B. DeMille's

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The 10 commandments (1956) or Dreamworks'

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The Prince of Egypt (1998). Or perhaps we rely on other artistic renderings,

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Biblical teachings, and/or passover tellings. Whatever our sources, escape from Mitzrayim is dramatic and often treated as decisive and final: Pppression behind us; freedom ahead;

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Hallelujah. And on Passover we add, let's eat. The story is longer and messier than we sometimes remember however, and not nearly as final. Even after the crossing of the Sea of Reeds there are

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27 more chapters of Exodus, and then the next 3 books of the Bible, all in the wilderness.

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The Torah closes 40 years on, an entire generation, having perished on the journey, and a river still to cross.

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Hurston describes this moment from the perspective of Moses at the end of his life and work.

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"But here was Israel at the Jordan. If he had failed in his highest dreams, he had succeeded in others.

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Perhaps he had not failed so miserably as he sometimes felt.

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Israel was at the Jordan inside as well, as out." And I guess I should note that if i'm quoting somebody else, I use their -- if they say Israel or Egypt, I pretty much leave it that way. The leader is aware

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in Hurston's telling, as in many commentaries, of the ongoing trauma, of the many who never made it out,

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the the cost of the trek, and the price still to be paid.

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Still a wilderness. Readers in 1939 were expected to see parallels between the ancient drama and both black experience in the US

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and the rise of Nazism worldwide. 80 years after Hurston's writing some dynamics she described continue to apply. National leaders, not unlike Pharaoh, seek war abroad while declaring "we don't have any home problems that I

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can see," for example, and with fascism again (or still) on the rise, we have much work to do toward understanding race, and how it works in our overlapping Jewish and black context.

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Alicia Suskin Ostriker described the post-Exodus wilderness situation

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this way: "The promised land really exists, it really doesn't, are we there yet?"

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Borders unspecified. We will know when we were arrived, an impossible place.

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Let freedom ring in it. we've been to the mountain, we've seen the land, a terrain of the imagination, its hills skipping for joy.

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How long we say, we know our failure in advance.

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Nobody alive will set foot in it." That's from "the Nursing Father" in the book called Nakedness of the Fathers.

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We know our failure in advance, and yet we learn together, we build community, we celebrate, and we set up one more time reaching toward a fuller future redemption.

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The annual Torah readings, and the Jewish festivals emphasize our enmeshment in cycles that repeat. The circularity might suggest that we are perpetually trapped.

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But cycles also bring new opportunities. We can show up better prepared.

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We can bring new resources, friends and colleagues. we can approach perennial challenges with fresh energy.

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We can look at the Exodus narrative, new this time.

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Decades ago, Michael Walzer, concluded Exodus and Revolution, with this adage about what the exodus first taught: "first, that wherever you are, it is probably Egypt; second, that there is a better place, a world more

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attractive a promised land; and third, that the way to the land is through the wilderness.

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There is no way to get from here to there except by joining together and marching."

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There is much inspiration in this oft-quoted image of joining together and marching to that better place.

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What was once an urgent call of Liberation Theology, however, has become a kind of platitude, and we are so easily lulled into thinking that we are moving toward a better place, when in reality we've long since reconciled to

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marching in place. In many of our communities today. Here in DC,

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for example, displacement is a serious form of oppression, with imminent harm for people of color.

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At the same time fear of displacement by refugees,

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Jews, Muslims, "them" fuels, hatred, harsh laws, and violence in our country and beyond, And visioning en masse departure of the oppressed may not be the most helpful metaphor for these circumstances. Maybe

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sticking around is the more liberatory choice, after all. At the at the very least.

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We must ask some tough questions of ourselves and our communities about this concept of marching.

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Are we prepared to head towards something truly different? Will we let go of what we have in order to get there?

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With whom have we joined hands? Whom have we left behind?

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Have we been marching toward a liberation that never seems to materialize for so long that we now wonder if it's worth the upheaval?

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Finally one passover teaching, repeated and discussed for some 1,500 years, says that each of us must see ourselves as personally coming forth from Mitzrayim.

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There are many ways of understanding this commandment and there's no suggestion that non-jews are under this obligation, so it would be a stretch to insist that we in this generation in the US are obligated

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to reread Exodus, so as to experience coming forth from the narrow place of systemic racism and injustice.

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But we, especially white people in or outside jewish communities, cannot avoid the opportunity to address racism and injustice. And in that context we can see Rereading Exodus as a tool in that work. The temptation is strong to believe that

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we've somehow come far enough. Equally powerful, as exhibited in the Bible story itself, and in our world today, is the urge to give up and return to the narrow place we sought to escape.

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It is clear, however, that we have much to learn from careful consideration of Exodus in its long messy boundary-crossing complexity. And we have long known that -- just as we heard in our singing on Saturday...

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doesn't say that in the book -- none of us is free if one of us is chained."

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So that's the end of my first chapter and that's, that's

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that's enough words for me for for a while so I would like to see if there are any questions, or if we have any

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If there are discuss, you know, just discussion about this. I did want to add one final thing:

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I keep saying "It's final." Is that you know I do think that for communities like Tzedek Chicago, and there's not very many like Tzedek Chicago, But that we we do have to start somewhere to try

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to reinvent the way we read Torah, and the way we do Liturgy, which you know, Brant is already working on, Leah Shoshanah and Adam and other people are working on it, so that the story will work for

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us to create the kind of communities and coalitions that we need to go forward.

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We We have to start from what you know what it sort of seems like square 0, or something to really, really look at

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what does it mean for these two people to be living next to each other?

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How did they get like that? And how did things get so bad so fast?

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And how are we going to get out? Okay, so I do

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think Brant said that he would monitor if people wanna like put their hands up, they're people want to get in line to speak first of all.

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[Brant Rosen:] Thank you, Virginia, very much. I see already we have people raising their hands to speak so.

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We'll call them... Faith first. But if you'd like to get in line, just click on reactions and then raise hand, and then we'll call on people in order.

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I think i'm actually going to raise my hand too? because I have a question of my own.

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But why don't we start with Faith. [Faith speaking:] thank you Virginia

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This is so great. My first question is how we can obtain a copy of this book to read more.

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Please share. My second, and I'm sorry to have my camera off, but there's a lot going on right now,

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I was really I don't know this this whole presentation just really resonated with me.

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Maybe also because I'm someone who grew up in the DC area

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and then has now spent most of my life in Chicago.

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But I was thinking, on the one hand, you capture, you know, like the the role of the the Exodus story and Liberation Theology and the way in which it inspires people.

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But you also talked about the impulse that people have to just kind of stay in the same place, and I guess I've been thinking about this a lot lately. Because it's so frustrating to me that for everything wrong in our

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society, and it seems like more and more people agree that pretty much everything is wrong.

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But there's so much defeatism and so much lack of imagination and i'm i'm especially frustrated now

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because you know everyone suddenly loves Ukraine and yet it's like "Oh, I'm so sad about Roe: Vote.

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There's nothing we can do." And it's like you guys like Ukrainians, when their government did mess up things, just quit their jobs and camped out in winter for two months, and won both times. Like it can be done. What's wrong

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with us? So wondering if you could talk a little more about that inertia impulse and ideas you have about overcoming that or just moving past that because it's just making me so sad right now.

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[Virginia:] Well, thank you for the question. and I will say that the original idea was that this book was going to go through,

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like all of the ways there's oppression and then like move on into how like resistance, and how we're going to get out.

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And the reality is that by the time I was done with this, like the the resistance part would have to be a whole different book.

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There is a section at the end that talks a little bit about envisioning resistance, and how we can use Jewish text for that.

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But how we actually I mean I think I think I'm going to say that it's something I'm thinking about, and there are some ideas, and that I'm hoping that if we have this conversation we'll we'll get there

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But I'm not sure I have a good answer for you right this minute.

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So let me hear from Brant and then we'll we'll come back to that.

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Maybe someone else has an answer. Because honestly I'm as tired as you are at the moment.

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So let let let's hear from Brant and then we'll come back to that point.

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[Brant] Thanks for that Faith, You know, when you were talking particularly about the issue of inertia, I mean the first thing that it conjured for me

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is the exodus story is just the Israelites complete lack of desire to leave Egypt,

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their complete resistance to Moses and the the message that he's trying to bring. And I think that inertia continues, even after the exodus has happened.

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It occurs in the wilderness and in some ways it's that generation's downfall.

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So I think that the story gives us a little bit to chew on as far as that that tendency I'm not sure that it's helpful, but it does recognize it as as something that's very real for us.

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You know, I'm just I wanted to say Virginia, that I really love the way you you challenge the story and and really ask hard questions of it.

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I. we were talking before, you know. One of the things we talked about is that so much of our understanding of exodus depends on where we end.

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The story, you know, and you know, for many people it ends, you know, at at the Crossing of the sea.

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For some people it you know it ends with the end of the Torah, which is

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you know where Hurston was talking about, on the the verge of crossing into the land, and for others I think for Zionists, many Zionists, I would say that many it occurs with that you know the Joshua conquering

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the Canaanites. And so that's something that I often I often think about, and I also think that there's something I've always felt there's something very significant about the fact that the the majority

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of the the Torah takes place in the wilderness.

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That the exodus story that we think that we consider to be so central is really just a blip.

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It's just a drop in the bucket and so much of it is just the the reckoning that happens in the wilderness.

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And finally I wanted to ask you, you know because the story, you know, there is so much in the story that we find challenging

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Do you consider the book that you wrote a kind of a Midrash, because midrash is kind of a time honored Jewish pedagogy for taking a story, you know, taking a classical story from the from the

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Torah and, refashioning it for a time in which you live.

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And I just wonder, I'm wondering if you thought about that, or considered your book, on some level to be a midrashic work.

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[Virginia] Well, that is a complicated question. Because because in this particular book I was really conscious of trying --

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I I do mention some previous commentaries in midrash, but I was trying not to get entangled in anybody else's existing vision of what this whole thing means, and so, when I've previously written midrash, which I have done,

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I've always tried to make it fit in with existing Jewish Midrash, and this time I kind of on purpose went a different direction.

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And I'm. It is midrash, it definitely is midras.

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It just sits in a different place and in fact like the the honest truth is that i'm a little uncomfortable with where it sits, because I kind of cut myself off from what is more comfortable. So yeah,

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it's a kind of a midrash, but it also since I was trying so hard to ask questions -- until I kind of bust up the the way we're used to looking -- that I didn't end up with something

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coherent, and that's one of the reasons why I spent so much time on that little little box, you know like, I'm hoping that down the road together we'll all come up with a midraash that gets us out

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but right now I think we're just at the like I don't know kind of throwing mud at the situation, and we'll see what sticks or something. Tha was a convoluted and confused metaphor but

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we're just gonna let that sit. And it's something that, you know,

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I do hope that we will all do it together.

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So I guess we Karen is next

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[Keren] Virginia. i'm really looking forward to your book arriving and reading it.

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Inertia or the impulse to stay in one place really resonated because my son, from a child up until a conversation we had on this Mother's day,

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he never wanted to step foot out of the United States.

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He had no inclination even to visit other States, and I think it goes back to being comfortable with the Pharaoh that you know as a opposed to the Pharaoh that is uncertain and unknown. Because I know

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I mean I've experienced myself, but especially Americans, we want security and certainty, and yesterday.

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And I think that figures into it too. And when you talked about envisioning resistance, it brought up the midrash of Nachshon.

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They reach the Reed Sea and it's nobody wants to cross, everyone's afraid. Again that uncertainty. It took one person being willing to put his foot into the water that created the miracle that led to the wilderness and

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more uncertainties. but I I really resonated with that.

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Thank you. Thanks very much. So I before Glauber speaks,

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do you mind if I say something else? Okay, or do you have, like, a burning question?

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[Glauber] I would rather listen to you the whole night speak anything. [Virginia] Okay, so I I

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I did have one more thought relating to what Faith had asked about. Like, how do we get past the inertia?

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And it a little bit goes toward You know what what Keren was just saying about.

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You know the Pharaoh that you know

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One chapter in this book, or section in a chapter. is almost completely a teaching that was given to me by Rabbi Gerry Serotta, who has spent his whole career

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on edge of borders and, you know, dealing with really complex interfaith, and and all kinds of situations in Israel and...

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What he taught me is that -- and some of this is old midrash. This is one place where I did include that in some detail -- that there's there's tradition that only one in 5 of the

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Yisraelites, and I think we might have talked about this when it came up in in Torah Study,

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only one in 5 of the yisraelites actually made it out because the unworthy or the people who didn't want to go -- depending on how you tell the story 00 died in the darkness, and that a whole bunch of

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Mitzrayim-ites did leave. And so you know there's ancient tradition that says that, and that we are a more self-selected group than we might think. And this also goes to what Leah Shoshanah was teaching

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at Havdalah, too, about about Diaspora Judaism.

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I think. Anyway, what Gerry says is that seeking out and naming variety within the Biblical stories helps us avoid pigeonholing people and stereotyping groups in the text in history and contemporary life,

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and he says that what we should be doing is looking for what compelled some people to get up and leave Mitzrayim

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And how can we emulate that? and that it doesn't really directly answer what Faith asked.

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But that... Talking to Gerry always cheers me up, which is hard to understand, because he really does have some very difficult work that he's done.

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But it it the idea that you don't you don't wanna get stuck in what what already didn't work.

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You don't want to get stuck in this idea that there's only this one way to go. And, again,

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the story that Keren told about Nachshon, the guy who in midrash, you know, actually takes a step into the river, and then that's -- or the Sea of Reeds -- and that's when it parts.

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We we do have to be willing to do something different. And that includes looking for and celebrating variety.

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I think I think that that's an important thing so i'll leave that there and get Glauber's question.

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[Glauber] I am really glad that I ordered the book and now, I can't wait for it to come. My question was how do you envision the book being used?

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Is it a book for you to read on your own, or is it a book to be used with the a community, or a church or a synagogue for Bible study or community study? Or what were you thinking when you created this kind of

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[Virginia] All of that! And and the book does have a funny, a funny structure.

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The original book way back in 2019 -- which really like it,

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it is so long ago, and it's like just a minute ago -- was gonna be for the Omer, and it was gonna, our idea was that every day for 49 days we would tell people something about East of the river that

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maybe they didn't know. And the book as it now stands you can just read it, or or there's little

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There's little things these little numbers in the in the various sections in the book, and if you follow the number to the back of the book, there will be more questions to consider, and they're either they can be questions that you meditate on

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yourself, pray about, read about, think about, write about. I would love to see church groups or,

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you know, other people get together and and do the work together. And I think this idea of trying to look for variety and trying to like keep ourselves from going back to the comfortable place is better done in some kind

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of community, even if it's just, you know, checking in with somebody else.

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every now and then, while you're reading the book. And so you can read the book at any time.

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but it is kind of a journey and meant to get us so that you know also, so that we don't just go, "Yippee! Passover,

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we're done!" and then: "Okay, cheesecake! Shavuot! Okay, you know, we're obligated,

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but there's cheesecake!" You know like that that isn't enough. We have to

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we have to really, really be asking ourselves hard questions, or we will be stuck forever. So

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With that little rant there. I'll ask Barry for his comment or question.

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[Barry] Good Good evening. I'm fairly new to this group. I've attended a few of the Saturday morning programs, and very much enjoying, appreciating what i'm seeing and hearing thus far. Virginia, I

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haven't met you before, and others on the call might know the answer to the question.

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I'm gonna ask very impressed with with the way that you think in the way that you write.

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I've been fortunate to be able to meet some accomplished writers and activists in my life, and something that I like to do kind of picked up from somebody else, and it relates to Passover

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The Burning Bush is a metaphor and ask people when I meet them, whether they can think of something in their own life that took the place of a burning bush to reach them personally to activate them personally so

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my question to you, Virginia, is if there's 1)

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If you deal with that in your book, how you locate Burning Bush.

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And more importantly, Really, if you've looked in your own life at that way, or can think back and look at an experience that kind of got you going as the burning bush supposedly got got Moses going. [Virginia] Thanks. That's a that's a

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great question. I there isn't that much about it in this book.

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It is something that I have thought about. and read and and written about. I'm not sure this is exactly what you have in mind,

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but it's what comes to mind so I figure it's probably part of the answer. And that is that you know I mentioned, or I think Brant mentioned in the bio, that for about 10 years I have been spending time --

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I guess what I didn't make explicit is I live west of the river just barely west, but west of the river, and have been traveling to east of the river to the We Act Radio radio station for various work that I've done over the last 10

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years. And when I first got there it was it was almost exclusively run by black men. There were a couple women, but I didn't usually see them at the time I was there, and especially the owner of the station would talk nonstop

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about race, and about how Jews need to do this, and Black people need to do this, and by the time I was done I would just like I would be so tired of... I remember showing up there and thinking, Could we just talk

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about, like, do we have to go through that again? Could we talk about something else for a minute?

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It's not like we didn't talk about other things, it's just I felt like: Yeah this again! And then one day I was standing on the bus stop

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waiting to go back across the river, and I realized that I could get on the bus, and I could keep on going west.

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I could go on up to the Jewish congregations that are mostly white, and where nobody ever gets shot.

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That bus stop is a place that people get shot. But at the places where I was worshiping at the time,

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people were not getting shot. I could just go there and hang out. I have an option.

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And Kymone, who owns the station, did not have that option, not from the day he was born, and his child didn't have that option, and that moment of going, "holy shit! like you know I thought I understood but like

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whoa wait!" And then, of course another 6 months later, i'm like, "Well, I thought I understoodm

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but oh, wait!" And I do think that is kind of a burning bush moment, because it it made me realize that disappearing into my privilege was a choice that not everybody had, and that even though I understood it intellectually like something happened to

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me that day, and I saw things differently and since then I guess I would say: I don't --

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there's no way, I don't, I no longer have that choice. I cannot possibly, like,

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if I go there, I'm unhappy and like raging at them for not being upset. So I don't know.

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Does that? I hope that answers your question a little bit.

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I mean it is a favorite of mine, and I can -- actually, I did a thing a couple of years ago on racism that was inspired by something of Avivah Zornberg taught about how the burning bush is about Moses

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taking the trouble to see. And it's, you know, it's about it's about that that dynamic where you like actually, you know,

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notice something that probably has always been there but you didn't notice it before.

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So. thank you for that question. And is there, remind me if there's something I didn't answer. [Brant:] Of the people that raised their hands, all been addressed and we are coming up on the hour. You know, one thing that

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occurs to me is in your response to Barry's question of

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you know that you were really interrogating your privilege and the choices that that gives you.

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It reminded me of, you know, the burning bush episode, you know.

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Moses was a person of privilege himself, you know.

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He grew up in Pharaoh's court and you know he also had the option to just stay in Pharaoh's court, and not, you know.

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Just enjoy. You know all the power that comes with privilege. And maybe on some level,

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the burning bush is just a reckoning, you know, it's it's it brings you face to faith with the the the consequences of the choices that you make. And you know he didn't want, he resisted

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at the burning bush, too. He didn't want to go back. He was very happy to stay in you know, in hiding in Midian, so there might be something going on there about about checking privilege and connected to the burning

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bush. Well, I this was wonderful. You really whetted our appetite, Virginia, and I really appreciate your your teaching.

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I think this, as always, with with wonderful teaching, is so much more to say.

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But I know we'll have the opportunity to have these conversations in the future.

00:54:07.000 --> 00:54:21.000

But I want to thank you, and I want to thank everybody for coming and supporting Virginia and Tzedek in this program, and I think I will turn off the recording in a moment.

00:54:21.000 --> 00:54:34.000

But after I do the last thing I would like to do was to Well, first of all, before I do that the Virginia is anything else that you would like to add before we conclude. [Virginia:] Well, I do want to say i'm sorry

00:54:34.000 --> 00:54:39.000

that, like getting the book is a little bit complicated. You can get it print on demand.

00:54:39.000 --> 00:54:46.000

Glabuer put the the link in there for the paperback There's also a an ebook that you can get through Lulu.

00:54:46.000 --> 00:54:59.000

I have print I have paperback books here in my house that were supposed to be for local people, but you know i'm mailing them to people who who want that option.

00:54:59.000 --> 00:55:04.000

And I do. I guess I do want to say that it is a work in progress.

00:55:04.000 --> 00:55:09.000

There are mistakes in it. I hope that it isn't too.

00:55:09.000 --> 00:55:15.000

Distracting to have the mistakes but i'm really hoping like we.

00:55:15.000 --> 00:55:19.000

I just felt like like the burning bush like we gotta have this conversation, and we gotta have it now.

00:55:19.000 --> 00:55:26.000

And if there's typos in here, well you know I have to get over my ego and just like send it out.

00:55:26.000 --> 00:55:40.000

Of course it would have been better if it had been better...I really

00:55:40.000 --> 00:55:53.000

I think I have talked like a lot, and I do hope we can

00:55:53.000 --> 00:56:07.000

We can, you know, as like, maybe as people read it we can have conversations...