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2nd draft for September 1 - please review prior to class if possible

Notes: italics are stage directions they don't get read out loud,

Intro ES: The Akedah: Page 220 mahzor – the pshot (the text) is in the sparest of language. Written as if it's a tweet and limited to only 19 lines. And where are the conversations that you just know had to be happening? Where is the arguing with G-D that Abraham is so famous (or infamous) for? Where is Sarah's voice? Why does Isaac not cry out when he is bound upon the altar? With apologies to my namesake, Paul Simon "These are the sounds of silence."

This drash fills in some of those gaps. For centuries commentators have written in the conversations between G-D and Abraham, Abraham & Sarah, (now there is a couple that could work on their communication patterns!) G-D and Sarah, Abraham & Isaac, maybe even the angels & G-D, well, you get the point

Linda; To set the stage for the Torah reading, we offer you the first of our unwritten conversations, "Sarah's Choice" written by Eleanor Wilner and brought to our attention by Deborah Eisenbach-Budner. We will begin the Torah reading immediately following the poem, and read through all of the aliyot. We urge you to follow along closely during the Torah readings and then we will be back after the Torah is read with additional unwritten conversations.

All else forward

ES: Arlene Slive and Steven Katz will narrate the poem. Sarah will be read by Dick Mastbrook, Linda Appel will be Isaac and I, playing to type, will be "The Voice"

Poem read

Sarah's Choice
Eleanor Wilner

ARLEJE:

A little late rain
the desert in the beauty of its winter
bloom, the cactus ablaze
with yellow flowers that glow
even at night in the reflected light
of moon and the shattered crystal of sand
when time was so new
that God still walked
among the tents, leaving no prints
in the sand, but a brand burned into
the heart - on such a night
it must have been, although
it is not written in the Book
how God spoke to Sarah
what he demanded of her
how many questions came of it
how a certain faith was
fractured, as a stone is split
by its own fault, a climate of extremes
and one last drastic change
in the temperature.

ARLEJE:

ES

"Go!" said the Voice, "Take you son,
your only son, whom you love,
take him to the mountain, bind him
and make of him a burnt offering."

ES

STEJ:

Now Isaac was the son of Sarah's age,
a gift, so she thought, from God. And how
could he ask her even to imagine such a thing -
to take the knife
of the butcher and thrust it
into such a trusting heart, then
light the pyre on which tomorrow burns.
What fear could be more holy
than the fear of *that*?

ES

"Go!" said the Voice, Authority's own.
And Sarah rose to her feet, stepped out
of the tent of Abraham to stand between
the desert and the distant sky, holding its stars
like tears it was too cold to shed.
Perhaps she was afraid the firmament
would shudder and give way, crushing her

ARLEJE:

}

like a line of ants who, watching
the ants ahead marching safe under the arch,
are suddenly smashed by the heel
they never suspected. For Sarah,
with her desert-dwelling mind, could
see the grander scale in which the heel
might simply be the underside of some Divine
intention. On such a scale, what is
a human son? So there she stood, absurd
in the cosmic scene, an old woman bent
as a question mark, a mote in the eye
of God. And then it was that Sarah spoke
in a soft voice, a speech
the canon does not record.

Dick "No," said Sarah to the Voice. *Al L...*
Pick "I will not be chosen. Nor shall my son –
if I can help it. You have promised Abraham,
through this boy, a great nation. So either
this sacrifice is a sham, or else it is a sin.
Shame," she said, for such is the presumption *Al L...*
of mothers, "for thinking me a fool,
for asking such a thing. You must have known
I would choose Isaac. What use have I *Al L...*
for History – an arrow already bent
when it is fired from the bow?"

stew Saying that, Sarah went into the tent *stew*
and found her restless son awake, as if he had
grown aware of the narrow bed in which he lay.
stew And Sarah spoke out of the silence
she had herself created, or that had been there
all along. "Tomorrow you will be
a man. Tonight, then I must tell you
the little that I know. You can be chosen *Dick*
or you can choose. Not both.

"The voice of the prophet grows shrill.
He will read even defeat as a sign
of distinction, until pain itself
becomes holy. In that day, how shall we tell
the victims from the saints,
the torturers from the agents of God?"

stew "But mother," said Isaac, "if we were not God's *Al L...*
chosen people, what then should we be? I am afraid

of being nothing." And Sarah laughed Steve

(Then she reached out her hand.) "Isaac. I am going now, before Abraham awakes. before the sun, to find Hagar the Egyptian and her son whom I cast out, drunk on pride, God's promises, the seed of Abraham in my own late-blooming loins."

Dick
↓

Linda "But Ishmael," said Isaac, "how should I greet him?" Steve

Pick "As you greet yourself," she said, "when you bend over the well to draw water and see your image, not knowing it reversed. You must know your brother now, or you will see your own face looking back the day you're at each other's throats."

She wrapped herself in a thick dark cloak against the desert's enmity, and tying up her stylus, bowl, some dates, a gourd for water - she swung her bundle on her back, reached out once more toward Isaac.

Armed

Dick "It's time," she said, "Choose now." Linda

Linda "But what will happen if we go?" the boy Isaac asked. "I don't know," Sarah said. Arlene

"But it is written what will happen if you stay."

L
Dick ↗

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ES: And now our second conversation: as described by Rabbi Elie Munk based upon a commentary by Rashbam. Abraham will be read by Steve, Arlene will be Abimelech, Dick will be Abimelech's strongman, Pichol, and Linda will be an Angel. I will continue to be, well, G-D

Abraham: G-D, the first word of the parsha is va ya he "and it happened after these things". What things? What happened that you would put me through this Nisah, put me through this test?

G-D: Abraham, already you don't remember the last two aliyot of the torah reading yesterday?

Abraham: That could have been a long time ago. That's the importance of "va ya he," we have no idea how long ago anything else happened. The Akedah stands alone in time and space.

G-D: Well, since I remember everything, let me remind you what is on page 207 of the mahzor. There was

Arlene and Dick come forward with Dick suspiciously watching out for Arlene

Arlene : Abimelech, King of the Philistines, a very good negotiator, upon whose land Abraham, along with his wives, children, maid servants and man servants was eking out a meager subsistence raising produce and a few farm animals for food and sacrifice.

Dick: *lean into Arlene's microphone* And ... Pichol, Abimelech's silent enforcer (*fold arms and sound tough when you say this and then continue to stand next to her suspiciously eyeing all that is going around you -- you are protecting Abimelech*)

Abraham goes over to join them and shakes hands with them

Abimelech: I can see that you are a man of G-d. I'll make you a deal. I'll let you stay here provided you agree not to try and displace me or my children or my grandchildren.

Abraham: OK, BUT not till you give me back the irrigation ditches your workers took from my back forty

Abimelech (*you are shocked at this news- sarcastically- congregation needs to know that of course he knew*) They did! Why I had no idea, no idea at all.

Abraham: Well now that you know, tell you what. You return those irrigation ditches, I'll give you sheep and oxen and we'll call it good. And we'll live here and not bother you, and you won't bother us for three generations. Swear?

Abimelech: (*as pichol nods in agreement*) Upon our sacred oath.

Abraham and Abimelech and Pichol shake hands, and Abimelech and Pichol sit down leaving Abraham alone to deal with his G-d.

Abraham: Yep, that was a pretty good day at the office. Got us Jews some water rights, negotiated a peace, planted a tree in your name..... What could this possibly have to do with the Akedah?



Linda comes over closer to G-d

Angel: Master of the Universe Can he not see it..... The only one whom you chose among the seventy nations of the world has gone and made an alliance with pagans!

G-D: Now Angel, he has but one son , born to him when he was 100 years old. I shall order him to sacrifice this son to me as an offering. If he accepts – good; if not you are right. He is the wrong man for the job, and I will simply erase him and his name and start over.

Angel: Ah, yes, there's that old familiar Genesis G-d, the one I know and love. The G-d who is always erasing the world, and starting over, the G-d in Noah and the G-d in Sodom. The God who it appears really doesn't like humans very much, or seems to be a little bit sorry that he created them.

G-d: It's that free will part. It just makes me crazy when they actually use it!

Abraham; But what did I do wrong? What was wrong with negotiating with Abimelech?

G-D: You didn't follow my commandment. In Lech Lacha I promised you the land of the philistines along with the rest of the promised land. That meant that you were supposed to take the land and occupy it, not cut a deal that kept you as a mere squatter for three entire generations. As the last line of chapter 21 says "va ya gar Abraham b erez pilishtim yamim rabim.

Angel: The Mahzor translates this as "And Abraham resided in the land of the Philistines a long time." Va ya gar clearly implies that Abraham is a foreigner in the Philistine Land

G-D: And instead of taking the land; by negotiating you guaranteed that you would be a stranger in the land for generations to come, and look at the mess we are in now. If you had just done what I told you, in the manner in which I told you, and not gone off on your own, it would have all been different. Thus, the test I needed to make sure you really believed in me before I gave you or your descendants any more responsibility.

Angel: Oh, on second angelic thought, maybe I don't like this G-D so much, this retributive, punishing G-D.

Dick: Well then let's try something completely different. I read ----- *dick; we need your sources here* on the historical sources of the Akedah and I think the whole thing was a big show to impress the neighbors. I've imagined (with the help of Steve Katz) the following conversation taking place between Abraham, read by Linda, and Isaac, read by Arleen, and a couple of their neighbors read by me and Steve.

Abraham: Well Isaac, it's time to honor our G-D with another sacrifice.

Isaac: Good idea. It's Rosh Hashanah , and we've got some pretty good-looking first-born sheep and goats.

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Abraham: Fine. You know, I've been feeling a lot of pressure from our neighbors to follow their human sacrifice practices.

Isaac: You're not seriously thinking about it are you?

Abraham: Of course not! Human sacrifice does not fit into the kind of G-D I have been conceptualizing for the last century or so. But, if someone was going to be sacrificed, it would have to be you.

Isaac: Me?!?!?

Abraham: Sure, some commentators say that you're 37 years-old when the Akedah takes place. What's a little human sacrifice? Nothing you can't handle or decide about for yourself, big boy.

Isaac: But sacrificing your first born, especially an only child, doesn't make sense.

Abraham (Considering): Hmmm, you are the only way I will have the descendants G-D wants me to have.

Isaac: Exactly.

Abraham: And besides, I've come to believe in sacredness of all human life.

Isaac: What are we leading up to, Pops? What's the big finish?

Abraham: I'd like you and I to stage a human sacrifice, as if you were the sacrifice. We would let our neighbors know and lead them to believe we're really going to do just like it says in the Second Aliyah. We'll even have two of them come along and wait at the bottom of the hill while we go up to build the altar and put you on it. Then just like in the Third Aliyah, at the last minute we stop and find a ram for our sacrifice.

Isaac: And why would we want to do that?

Abraham: I'd like to get people off my back about human sacrifice and get them to understand that our G-D doesn't want it, and that our G-D provides animals for that.

Isaac: This seems like a hard way to make a point, but I've been feeling some pressure, too. I'd like them to leave us alone. After all, I don't want them to continue all of this pressure when I have kids. I'm in.

Abraham: Great. How about tomorrow morning?

Isaac: Okay. I can get someone to supervise the last of the shearing.

Abraham: Good. There's a place called Mariyyah, where I've wanted to build a new altar for sacrifice.

Isaac: Okay, I'll find the firewood, while you warm up the donkey and round up a couple of neighbors to come along.

(Dick and Steve walk forward, and all of you mime walking.)

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Isaac (*stage whispers to Abraham*): Dad, are you sure we're going to find a ram?

Abraham (*stage whispers to Isaac*): Sssshhh. Don't let the neighbors hear. I'm convinced it will all work out as we planned.

Abraham (*to the neighbors*): Well, three days later, and here we are. Like it says in the First Aliyah, you two stay here with the donkey. We'll be on that ridge you can see from here. You can watch us do the human sacrifice.

1st Neighbor: You'll finally be like all of us who find human sacrifice exhilarating and blessed by our gods. We'll watch from here.

(*Abraham and Isaac walk away from Steve and Dick. Both neighbors mime looking.*)

2nd Neighbor: I can barely see them

1st Neighbor: I think I've lost them in that thicket.

Isaac: Look, Dad a ram!

Abraham: I just knew we'd find one. Keep it hidden next to you and climb up on this altar

First neighbor: _Wow, just like it says in the third aliyah, they're really doing it. They've built the altar, placed the wood on it and it looks like Isaac is tied up and lying there

Second neighbor: Wait! Isaac is getting off the altar and Abraham is holding up a ram to put on it. Where'd that ram come from?

First Neighbor: Geez, it's like it dropped from the sky! Their G-D must have provided it. Abraham has been telling us that his G-D only allows animal sacrifice.

Second Neighbor: Yeah, I say that we should stop human sacrifice and start worshiping the G-D of Abraham. That guy really delivers!

ES: In distinction to the "viewing the people in the context of their times tradition" as was just put forward by Dick and Steve, Linda had a very different moral tenor as she imagined a conversation between Abraham, Sarah and a much younger, as is also supported by the commentators, Isaac. In this conversation, Linda will be Sarah, Dick will be Abraham, and Arlene will be Isaac.

Sarah: So here we are, ready to tell this old, old tale again. I'm tired, tired of going over and over it and still not sure what to think. Why did God ask us to sacrifice Isaac? Our son? Our beloved one? All night Abraham and I went round and round about this.

Abraham: God told me to do it and I'm going to obey him.

Sarah: Are you crazy? He's our only son. Our future. The most we have to show for our life together. Not if I have anything to say about it, you won't sacrifice him.

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Abraham. Sarah, Look at the first aliyah on page 221. God told me very clearly to take Isaac to be a burnt offering. It's very clear. I have no choice.

Sarah. Abraham! Listen to me. You always have a choice. And I say don't do it. You can't do it. It is wrong.

Abraham. No. It would be wrong to disobey God, wrong to lack faith in Him.

Sarah. Faith! What does faith have to do with the loss of our son, Isaac? He'll be dead! That is REAL. And it's unreasonable. I won't do it.

Abraham. God has been good to us. I owe a sacrifice of thanks that will be pleasing to Him.

Sarah. If you go through with this, you'll be making two sacrifices to God. The knife that slits Isaac's throat will also pierce my heart. God isn't telling you to do that.

Abraham. If I obey God, if I show my loyalty and devotion to Him, he'll take care of us. He always has.

Sarah. So that's what you think this is? Some kind of Nisah, Some kind of test? Why? Haven't we done all he's asked of us all these years? We're old, coming to the end of our lives. Why would He need to test us again? And why this worst of all possible tests?

Abraham. Sarah, Look at the first aliyah. It is a test! The word Nisa is used -- that means it's a test. And if I fail the test.....

Sarah. Oh, for heaven's sake! We've done our best, and what do we get? Insufficient rewards, arbitrary punishment, tantrums like those of a two-year-old! He may be the all-powerful but he doesn't seem to understand us trying to scratch a living out of this dry and treacherous place he created, looking for a little light in our lives. Sacrificing Isaac is just plain WRONG. I can't believe that we're even talking about it.

Abraham. Oh, Sarah. We've always obeyed Him and things have turned out pretty well. Look we're here, still. *(said sadly – with voice trailing off)*..... And he did give us Isaac

Sarah. Yes, only to ask us to sacrifice him! What kind of gift is that?

Abraham. Sarah, when God first spoke to me tonight, I thought I was having a nightmare, a horrible nightmare. Now I know that the text says that G-D spoke to me, but you heard Him, too, didn't you?

Sarah: Well there is plenty of commentary that says that yes I heard G-D, just like you, and that although we may have heard the same words, we sure didn't get the same message.

Abraham: Good, now we're getting somewhere. Since we both heard the same words, we have got to submit to His will. Don't worry, it will come out OK. Remember, I had real doubts in yesterday's parsha when G-D told me to listen to you and send Ishmael and Hagar out into the desert. We thought they would die, but it came out all right in the end.

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Sarah: Well, I've actually had some second thoughts about that, and I'd like to talk to Hagar; but that can wait. Remember also, that you bargained with God over Sodom and Gomorrah. He listened to you. Can't you talk to Him now?

Abraham: I don't know. I don't hear His voice anymore; Do You?

Sarah: *(she shakes her head no)* I think he's said all He has to say tonight and then disappeared. Typical! But doesn't that indicate he wants us to decide what to do?

Abraham: Yes. He wants me to obey His command.

Sarah: No, I don't think it's a test of our blind obedience. He wants us to figure out what's right and do that. If this is a test, it's a test of our capacity to distinguish right from wrong, to choose life over death, creation over destruction.

Abraham, we've always listened to each other and come to an agreement about what we should do. Sometimes I've submitted to your wish, sometimes you've listened to me. In fact, looking back I can say that sometimes God has agreed with me and sometimes not. But not this time, Abraham. I can't agree to this. And this time I can't submit to God either. I can not and I will not agree to sacrifice my only son. If you sacrifice Isaac, you will be murdering the laughter in our lives. You will be destroying our trust, Isaac's, mine, even yours.

Abraham: Sarah, this is my decision. God has called to me, God has told me to return to Him my most precious possession. God has commanded me to sacrifice Isaac, and I will do his will. As the parsha says, we will leave early tomorrow morning.

Sarah: No, No, No! Oyyyyyy!

Isaac: I heard them fighting all night. I knew that something was going on, something hard, but I couldn't quite get it. I heard my mom say that my Dad must have had an iron heart and that maybe I would decide on my own not to go. Not a chance. If my Dad was going somewhere, I was going too. I wanted to do whatever he asked of me. I wanted to show him that I wasn't a little boy anymore, but that I was a man.

Sarah: I watched Abraham and Isaac prepare to leave that morning, and with my heart breaking I began to make my own preparations. I knew that I would also leave, regardless of what actually happened on Mount Moriah. I could struggle no more. And yet I do. Where was I right and where was I wrong?

ES: And in the continuing to play to type department, our last conversation, THE NEGOTIATOR'S CONVERSATION WITH G-D, was written by Arlene. In this conversation Arlene will be Sarah and I will hand my G-D baton, not to be confused with Moses' staff, to Steve.

Sarah: G-D, this is Sarah. I know that you are probably a little angry with my alter ego's outburst but I wondered - Can we talk?

G-D: It can't hurt.



Sarah: Have you thought about what this experience will do to Isaac even if you step in to save him? Knowing his father would kill him? Knowing that the faith he is expected to carry on involves a G-D who would order that he be killed. I'm afraid he will be traumatized for life, have trust issues, shun close relationships, suffer from anxiety....

G-D: I don't care.

Sarah: Wha...!(*muttering to self*) – Hmm – so much for negotiation Plan A. What do I do to get to goal? (*thinks for a minute*) OK then – You, oh almighty one, have proposed killing others, erasing your people at the flood and at Sodom, and then reconsidered. You destroyed some but spared others.

G-D: Your point?

Sarah: Yes, well – since you seem to feel that someone has to die here, although why I can't fathom, and since Abraham is the one who failed to carry out YOUR PLAN, exactly as You directed him, why not kill him and have Isaac lead Your people?

G-D: What??? You would sacrifice your husband?

Sarah: The one who pimped me out twice and now insists on killing the only child I bore, in my old age? That one?

G-D: Well, there is that....Go on.

Sarah: I see Your light in all others, but especially in my son, Isaac, and I could not endure living if that light were extinguished. A test of my love for and faith in You, is my love of him, Isaac, because You made him; more so than You made others born to fertile women. Your people will love and honor you for your acts of compassion, understanding, forgiveness, more than for your acts of vengeance and punishment.

G-D: You state your case well, Sarah. Do not fear for the life of your son. Abraham's hand will be stilled and a ram will appear as a sacrifice to Me. Isaac will return to you.

Sarah: (*muttering to self*) – traumatized, anxious, hating his father – but that's the best I can do for Isaac – everyone gets to go away with face and fate saved. And I just get to go away, because as we learn from the Torah, the next thing that happens after this is that I die. Not another word heard from me. But, Isaac will be saved (*Aloud*) – Thank you my G-D, the Compassionate One.

ES: And so, you have heard 5 different hidden conversations, conversations that we hope have stimulated thought, compassion and maybe even a little bit of anguish. We firmly believe that there are many conversations hidden in the Torah, conversations that are just waiting to see the light of the day, to be heard in our bet Knesset and talked about over our Shabbat tables. In this coming year, we the adult drash group, wish you a year of discovering those conversations and making them into your own. L'shana tovah.