Dear Rabbi,

Parshat Vayera is two weeks away.

The parashah begins with welcoming guests. Later, Abram plants a tamarisk tree, an *eshel*, outside his tent to signal to passing strangers that they are welcome to enter.

The quality of hospitality that Avraham and Sarah embodied is the core of our work at Eshel. And so, in preparation for Shabbat Vayera we are sharing with you sermons, text study materials, and creative resources to help you to enrich the observance of the mitzvah of *hachnassat orchim* in your *kehilah*.

The mitzvah of *hachnassast orchim,* requires of us two different sorts of obligations, a congenial and a more challenging duty. In its more congenial form, it calls us to break bread with friends, to continually add new acquaintances to our regular invite list; in short, to create an ever expanding and deepening community over good food and conversation.

In its most demanding form, it calls for our reaching beyond familiarity and comfort to serve as caretakers for human need. It calls us to love the stranger, to open our doors to difference and to serve the various sorts of refugees (people who need refuge) who may appear at our door.

According to our sages the mitzvah includes accompanying our guests shortly on their journey, which again speaks to both friendly gentility on one hand and in more threatening contexts to defending the vulnerable in the public square.

Before the pandemic some of us regularly hosted guests for shabbat meals. However, even those who are accustomed to shabbat hosting don't often extend very far beyond the familiar faces. For others, the social opportunities for shabbat guests don't seem to present themselves so readily. If we must be honest, some of us don't feel that we have the capacity, the knowledge, physical space, energy or time that hosting would require. In each of these circumstances Abraham and Sarah call to us to stretch beyond our comfort zone.

We are sending to you, rabbis of congregations across the US and Canada, a resource packet. It will include text study sheets, sermons, discussion questions and other creative resources. We aim to see it grow every year.

If you have your own sermons on *hachnassat orchim*, or you own ideas on how to multiply the fulfillment of this mitzvah, please send them to us and we will do our best to share them with your colleagues.

At Eshel, we are dedicated to the mitzvah of welcomefor all the obvious reasons. As LGBT+ Jews and allies, we are eager to enrich the observance of this mitzvah in all its forms, congenial and demanding.

We trust that the borders of our communities will widen in curiosity and joy when we actively shape our homes as Sarah and Abraham's tent, when we mark our houses with signs of hospitality as visible and as clear as a pink flowering Eshel tree. We hope that you enjoy the resources in this packet.

B'vrachot rabot!

Rabbi Steve Greenberg and the Eshel Team