this past week as we jews commemorated a

miracle

long ago in which a little bit of oil

lasted much longer than it should have

the entire world celebrated a miracle

of our own time in which a little bit

of biochemical hope arrived much sooner

than anyone could have imagined i'm

speaking

of course of the coronavirus vaccines

before december 2020 the quickest

vaccine

ever created took four years

to develop the miracle workers

at pfizer and beyond tech and moderna

finished the job in a matter of months

the end of the pandemic

is finally in sight

but it is still a long way away

as i was thinking about what the next

several months have

in store for us in the midst of my

reveries of a

triumphant return to the gym

i couldn't help but see a parallel

between our presence present situation

and this week's torah portion mikets

at the beginning of the parsha

pharaoh has his famous nightmares of

seven cannibalistic cows and ears of

grain

desperate for some prophetic

psychoanalysis

pharaoh eventually seeks the counsel of

joseph

who successfully interprets his dreams

egypt will see seven years of great

abundance

followed by seven years of savage

famine to combat the coming crisis

joseph proposes that pharaoh appoint

a wise and discerning faminzar

to collect the extra grain grown during

the years of plenty

and stockpile it for the years of hunger

given our american instinct

for individualism i would

be remiss if i didn't note that joseph's

approach to the problem of scarcity

demands that the egyptian people

sacrifice

some of their freedom but

his plan works the terrible famine comes

and when it does joseph's food reserves

ensure that egypt has the supply of

sustenance it so

desperately needs

what strikes me about this story now

though

is how easily joseph's strategy could

have failed

not because the famine was more severe

than predicted

or because pharaoh pulled his support

for the project

but because of the egyptian people

what if the egyptian people hadn't gone

along with joseph's plan

what if they had refused to participate

to give willingly

of their crops for the benefit of all

which brings me back to the coronavirus

vaccines

according to a recent survey conducted

by the kaiser family foundation

27 percent of americans say that they

probably

or definitely wouldn't take a covid19

vaccine

even if it were available for free and

deemed safe

by scientists the primary reason

for their hesitancy anxieties

about possible side effects worries

about the role

of politics and government in the

development and distribution process

and concern that the vaccines

are too new and the truth is

there are things that we still don't

know about these vaccines

we're awaiting more data for

recommendations for children and for

pregnant women

and we don't know how long the

injections

will confer immunity these fears

are real and i want to say to those

among us who hold them

it's okay to be skeptical

indeed in a recent interview

about the coronavirus vaccines

epidemiologist dr

abdul el-sayed affirmed

that the essence of science

is skepticism scientists are skeptical

for a living their job

is to weigh their professional doubt

against evidence

and in the case of these vaccines

evidence is overwhelming the fda

was looking for 50 percent efficacy

from vaccine candidates to grant

emergency use authorization

these vaccines hit 95 percent

while being held to the same rigorous

safety standards

as all clinical trials

i love the way that dr el-sayed put it

he said that as soon as he can get the

vaccine

he will put his shoulder where his mouth

is

joining him with a bare upper arm are dr

anthony fauci

former presidents barack obama george w

bush and bill clinton

president-elect joe biden and as

of today vice president mike pence

senate majority leader mitch mcconnell

and speaker of the house nancy pelosi

have all received their first injection

of the vaccine publicly but we need to

give a special salute

to nurse sandra lindsey the director of

critical care

nursing at the long island jewish

medical center in queens

nurse lindsay on monday morning in a

televised press conference

became the first american to receive the

vaccine

she specifically said that she hoped

that her example

would inspire vaccine skeptics

to take the plunge of the syringe

the science behind these vaccines is as

clear

and convincing as joseph's

interpretations of pharaoh's dreams

but just as joseph's plans to save egypt

require the cooperation of the egyptian

people

so too will a successful covet 19

vaccination program require the

cooperation of all of us

i don't think anyone in egypt liked

giving joseph their extra crops i don't

know anyone who likes getting shots

but i do know lots of people who like

having passover and thanksgiving with

their families

who like going out to dinner with

friends

who like seeing musicals and movies and

the mets

who like praying in a sanctuary full of

people

who like doing burpees with a group

instead of all by themselves

there are lots of good reasons for each

of us

to get vaccinated individually

and there is one transcendent reason

for all of us to get vaccinated

collectively

what do you think joseph said to the

skeptical farmers that he met

during his travels throughout egypt

what convinced them to give willingly of

their crops

i'd like to think that this was the

conversation that joseph had with these

farmers

this famine is coming and you'll

probably be okay

but your neighbor he's got a bad back

he's not doing so well

and i'm not so sure he's going to be

able to harvest

enough grain to have extra to store for

him and his family

and there's this old woman in town she's

so sweet

she doesn't have a farm or family of her

own

and then there's the orphanage

there are many people who will be unable

to get

vaccinated against the coronavirus

some are at risk of a severe allergic

reaction

some have a compromised immune system

some

won't be old enough and this is the

essential

reason for those of us who can

to get vaccinated to protect

those of us who can't

vaccination is as clear an

application as exists of that most

fundamental of jewish values

the preservation of life

this has been understood since the

discovery of the first vaccine

over 200 years ago that vaccine

famously inoculated against smallpox

and the hasidic master rab nachman of

breslav

wrote that failure to obtain its

miraculous protection

was akin to spilling blood

according to jewish tradition

failure to vaccinate is considered a

sin as grievous as murder

which is why rabbis around the country

reform conservative reconstructionists

orthodox and

ultra orthodox ashkenazi and safari

are telling the their communities

take the vaccine as soon

as you can get it in fact

rabbi shmuel herzfeld of dc released a

tick-tock video of himself getting the

shot that went viral

400 000 views later

rabbi herzfeld said that getting

vaccinated

was the most important sermon of his

life

what will we do with this year's

hanukkah miracle

my dear friend and kavruta rena dyne who

is pursuing

a doctorate in medical ethics at the

university of chicago

shared with me that she when she sees

videos like rabbi hertzfeld's

and vaccination selfies by friends of

hers who are first responders

she can't help but think of these as

acts of piersume

nissa publicizing

the miracle the rabbis say

that pierce may nisa is the reason that

we light the hanukiah

in the window and display its flickering

flames for all the world to see

to publicize the miracle of that little

drop of oil that could

like rot wise rana wrote this week

vaccination selfies serve as candles on

our societal hanukiah

and posts on facebook and twitter are a

virtual windowsill

each shot reminds us of the miracle of

science

our participation in salvation in that

miracle

and brings us closer to filling our

world with light

again

we still have a long way to go

before this pandemic is over and even

after the vaccine becomes

widely available and even after we

ourselves have been fortunate enough to

get it

we still have to wear our masks we still

have to

we still have to socially distance and

we still have to do

all of the things that medical

professionals

tell us to do to keep everyone safe

but once again the darkest time of year

has proven to be a season of miracles

and i can't wait to put my shoulder

where my mouth is shabbat shalom