

## Highlighting Markup of Genesis Video Transcript for Academic Discussion

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These become in a kind of secondary sense, significant revelations to me.

BURTON VISOTZKY:  
Yes, but--

LEWIS SMEDES:  
From God-- but-- but this is something different.

BILL MOYERS:  
But what makes it different in your-- it's--

LEWIS SMEDES:  
What makes it different is what has happened as-- as a result of its being. All the drama of the Old Testament, and of the new, is always a drama of where our we with respect to him.

Below the video player, there are navigation controls (10s back and forward) and a 'Share a Segment' button. A banner at the bottom of the video player area states: 'This record is featured in "Bill Moyers Collection."'.

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NARRATOR:

God made a covenant with Abraham. He promised to make him the father of many nations. But Sarah, Abraham's wife, had borne no children. Sarah waited and waited and finally said, "Abraham, lie with my Egyptian slave, Hagar. Perhaps we can have a son through her?"

Soon Hagar became pregnant by Abraham. And when she felt Abraham's child move within her, Hagar looked down on Sarah. When Sarah complained to Abraham, he said, "Do with her as you please, she is in your hands." So Sarah treated her slave and Hagar fled into the wilderness. An angel of the Lord found Hagar by a spring of water. The angel said, "You are carrying a son who will be called Ishmael. He will be wild and strong. Go back and submit to the harsh treatment of your mistress. I will bless you and your descendants."

After Ishmael was born, God told Abraham, "You and Sarah will have your own son. I will bless her and make her the mother of nations. And I will make an everlasting covenant with your son." Abraham fell on the ground laughing. "How can a hundred- year-old man have a son," he asked, "By a woman who is ninety?"

One day, Abraham sat outside his tent with the sun beating down on his head. Three strangers appeared. After Abraham offered them food and drink, one of the strangers said to him, "By this time next year you and Sarah will have your son."

Sarah overheard this and laughed to herself. "How can I find pleasure with my body so withered and my husband so old?" she asked.

But God kept his word and Sarah gave birth to a son. Isaac was his name. There was a great feast on the day he was weaned and Sarah came upon Ishmael laughing and playing. Sarah demanded of Abraham, "Drive that Egyptian slave and her son far away from here. The son of this slave woman will not share inheritance with my son, Isaac."

This grieved Abraham because he loved Ishmael. But God said, "Do as Sarah asks you. One nation of descendants lies within Isaac. Another will grow from Ishmael."

So Hagar and Ishmael were set to wandering in the desert. Abraham gave them bread and a skin of water, and when the water was gone Hagar cast the child under a bush so she wouldn't have to watch him die. And she wept.

God heard the cry of the boy and an angel appeared from heaven. "Lift up your child," the angel called out. "God has not forgotten Ishmael. He and his nation shall live."

And God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water and gave her son a drink.

[ \_\_\_\_\_ ]

**BHARATI MUKHERJEE:** [5:07]

**I feel that whoever put the story together of the Genesis, is making me sympathize with all the characters.** I mean I feel as a writer, I have learned so much about narrative strategy from this. It is so passionate and so concentrated.

ROBERT ALTER:

Yeah. I agree.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

And as a writer, I want to give my best lines to my villains. Otherwise we have stick figures.

ELIZABETH SWADOS: (LAUGHTER) Right, right.

**BHARATI MUKHERJEE:** [5:36]

And so here, you know, it's so understi-- my sympathies are mostly really with Abraham, in the-- move from original land towards Canaan. But I understand Hagar's position. I understand Sarah's position. And I say, here is an older woman who feels that her sexuality is nil right now. **And here is Abraham, got this nice trophy mistress, right?** With great muscle tone, probably. (LAUGHTER) So there's a kind of--

ROBERT ALTER:

The famous Egyptian build.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

Right, right. And so something happens between--

ELIZABETH SWADOS: Yeah.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

--in bed, between Abraham and Hagar, which is not about sex. Because she could have-- Sarah could have accepted a mixed race child, if she hadn't felt jealous, somehow of an emotional connection between the two.

**BURTON VISOTZKY:** [6:35]

This is a complicated business. Because you say it's not about sex. And part of it is. And I think-- well, the Bible's very clear about it. The Bible lets us know from the writer's point of view, Sarah's barren. So she's bearing the burden. And I think she wants to call Abraham's bluff a little bit. You know? He's always turning it-around-- saying, "Yeah, we would have offspring. We could fulfill God's promise, if only you weren't barren, dear. Right?" And she's thinking, "Me barren? He's impotent! So she says, "All right, I'll call his bluff." And she gives Hagar, right? Go with this--

**ELIZABETH SWADOS:**

I think that's demeaning Sarah, because I think that her-- her motivations that which we don't know and we're imagining here, but that's what's great about the story. The-- the character of Sarah is-- if-- is somewhat steadfast. She is-- she is-- she's-- she's a matriarch, in a sense. She's a strong lady. She's been through a lot. You know, she's waiting, she's waiting.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE: She's a cold warrior.

**ELIZABETH SWADOS:**

Right. So she's building this up. She's feeling this. And she brings in this -- slave. The slave conceives and-- and at a certain moment, Hagar gives her a look. And after that look, it's that look--

**ROBERT ALTER:**

That's right.

**BILL MOYERS:**

She almost smirks at her, doesn't she?

**ELIZABETH SWADOS:**

It's a --

**BHARATI MUKHERJEE:**

But we don't know that she actually does smirk.

**ELIZABETH SWADOS:**

We don't know what the look is. But either Sarah goes ballistic, right?

**ROBERT ALTER:**

She certainly does, she does.

**ELIZABETH SWADOS:**

--because of what she interprets. Or because--

**ELIZABETH SWADOS:** Wait, wait, wait in the future--

**BURTON VISOTZKY:**

-- I'm trying to understand why she gets ballistic?

ELIZABETH SWADOS: [7:59]

She is all ready to do what a Jewish woman-- well, or whatever-- **the ancient woman is supposed to do. Which is to-- if you can't have a baby yourself, you're supposed to take charge of the future.** It says that. You're supposed to. She's all ready to do that. And she finds out in the moment, when another woman looks at her or is sensual or sexual. Is with child-- Does the so-called real thing. Boom.

ROBERT ALTER:

I'm a failure, right.

EUGENE RIVERS:

**Wait. This is a fairly common human emotion.**

ELIZABETH SWADOS: Yeah. Yeah.

MALE VOICE:

This is--

EUGENE RIVERS:

I mean, it's fairly basic. As-- as I'm reading this story, I say, this is-- this is basic funky real life. I mean at a very basic level. You know I've failed as a wife. And a --

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

Hey-- in real life, failed wives don't hand over some other maid.

EUGENE RIVERS:

Oh no no, no no.

BURTON VISOTZKY:

Sleep with the cleaning girl -- this is outrageous!

BILL MOYERS:

But, but we all know friends and relatives who have turned to surrogacy for--

ELIZABETH SWADOS: Oh yeah--

BILL MOYERS:

Out of this situation-

EUGENE RIVERS:

Folk can resonate to the basic funkiness of a human relationship you know, that's not-- you know, I'm-- I'm a failure as a wife. Or I'm a failure as a mother. Then there's this younger thing, right? That's going to upstage me. I mean, and-- and so I mean, Sarah's response is I'm sitting there, I'm thinking about it. Sarah's response is quite a-- a--

BURTON VISOTZKY: [9:19]

**Sarah's response is really vi-- I mean, she physically abuses this woman.**

EUGENE RIVERS:

Yeah. That makes sense. That's completely understandable. Why-- why's that surprise?

ELIZABETH SWADOS:

**This is where I think it becomes somewhat political and about class. Because Hagar is a slave -- it's an unspoken, okay, I can abuse you because you're-- I own you.**

ROBERT ALTER:

The class thing comes over -- particularly strongly in the second of the two banishment stories. After the birth of Isaac, Sarah is said to see Ishmael-- now I translate it, in taking one .of several possible choices, laughing. It's the same word that-- is used in connection with the birth of Isaac. It's a word that can mean. Laughing, mocking, since re-- re-- remember, the Yitzhak means "He who laughs". And it's the same verb that means laugh. So I think she sees him, this child of the slave girl, presuming to be Isaac. And so here you begin to get-- You seem to get the class thing.

That is, she now at last has a son. This son is- has-- is everything that she's invested in. And you can think of all the stage and fictional representations of-- of-- of overly dotting mothers that-- that-- that you want.

EUGENE RIVERS: Right. Absolutely.

ROBERT ALTER: [10:49]

And all of a sudden here comes Ishmael, Isaac-ing it. And then the fascinating thing about the awesome compactness that-- that Bharati referred to. That you-- you learn so much about storytelling, because the stories are so compact. So explosively compact. **She never refers to the child by name or to Hagar by name. She says-- "Banish, drive out-- expel the son of this slave girl." She only refers both to the son, to Ishmael, and to Hagar by social status--**

BURTON VISOTZKY:

She just can't get the name out of her mouth. She won't give her--

ROBERT ALTER:

Right, right.

BURTON VISOTZKY:

She'll call her a wife. But she won't call her by name.

BILL MOYERS:

What's the story teller trying to tell us there?

ROBERT ALTER:

Well, the idea looked good before the fact and obviously--

ROBERT ALTER:

It doesn't look good at all after the fact.

LEWIS SMEDES:

**She was not able to imagine what she would feel like-- if she got what she wanted.**

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

Yes, and I think that she could imagine what Abraham would feel like. And to me, a lot of the story telling is through the omissions. And so while you're getting--

ROBERT ALTER: Absolutely

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

--either fantasized or real description of the smirk of the slave woman, what we're not getting is the spring in the step of Abraham.

ROBERT ALTER: (LAUGHTER) I love that.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

Really it is about the marriage. That is in crisis, and she calls-- Sarah calls on God to be kind of marriage counselor. If you don't shape up, I'm going to make sure that God punishes--

**BURTON VISOTZKY:**

**The fact that Sarah can't speak, Sarah, Hagar or Ishmael's name, tells us why everything goes awry. She never actually considers Hagar another person.**

ROBERT ALTER:

Right. Because names are so important--

BURTON VISOTZKY:

And had she thought about that, she might have realized that it was all going to fall apart. Because if you put your husband in bed with a real person, something's going to happen. **I-- I must say-- I feel terribly sympathetic to Abraham. He is in the classic damned if you do, damned if you don't, right?** She says, "Go sleep with the cleaning girl. He says, "Okay." And then he does. And she says, "You slept with the cleaning girl[!]" (LAUGHTER) And he's real smart about it. At that point he says-- **she's yours. You take care of it. I'm out of here, right? I-- I-- I will not deal with this."** But Sarah doesn't let it go. She doesn't then blame Hagar. She says "No, God has to judge between you and me." Abraham's to blame here. She won't let go of that. Abraham-- something went wrong there.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

Right. And Abraham is reducing to a cat fight between wife and concubine.

ROBERT ALTER:

That's right.

BILL MOYERS:

But this is not the first time, is it? That human beings are ignorant of the consequences of their-- original passion? Their original --

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

Why? That's why it's such a great story--

**ROBERT ALTER: [13:43]**

**Actually I think one of the profound aspects of moral realism, of all these stories in Genesis, seems to be that many of the characters get what they wished for. And it turns out not to bring them happiness.** I mean, the whole Jacob story--

LEWIS SMEDES:

Be careful what you pray for-- your prayers might be answered.

ROBERT ALTER: Right, exactly.

BILL MOYERS:

The Bible doesn't make any effort to whitewash these--

LEWIS SMEDES:

No, never.

BILL MOYERS:

Well, you were gonna--

LEWIS SMEDES: [14:05]

**Well, I'd like to add another dimension that I think makes it a universal-- And-- and-- and that is the absolute necessity of living by hope. Everybody has to hope. I think the world today is divided between those who have hope and those who don't have hope.** Now, there's nothing more cruel, I think, than hope given and hope taken away. And so, that-- that helps me understand, though it doesn't help me excuse, but helps me understand Sarah. The time is going, it's almost out. And the promise hasn't been fulfilled. She's got to do something, but she does something wrong and she does something dumb and it all-- it's-- it's a mess.

BURTON VISOTZKY:

Do you think what she did wrong is that she basically that she had lack of faith? Had she just held out a little longer, maybe God would have helped her get pregnant?

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

It's the opposite I think. First of all, let me say that how we come out - on this story depends on which dynamic we're focusing on; God and Abraham, -Sarah and Hagar or Sarah and God. And I think one of the things-- and I'm--

LEWIS SMEDES:

And Hagar and God.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

And Hagar and God, and now--

ROBERT ALTER:

--and Ishmael and God.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

Exactly, and now I'm talking on the--

BILL MOYERS:

It's not God is in all of it, right?

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI: [15:22]

--I'm talking on the Genesis record now, the way I see it when I read the Bible. And what is showing up here is Sarah being a very possessive, exclusivist person. I mean, we-- we have to understand the story in its historical context. In its historical context it was not unusual for a man to take many wives--

LEWIS SMEDES:

Right.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

--to have many concubines. Here's Abraham who's busy with his God, and we won't talk about that relationship now. He has no children. For most of his life, despite of the promise and he has no urge. We don't hear him complaining in the Bible, "Let me marry another woman. Let me have a child. God promised me for my offspring certain things." Neither does Sarah offer. And she doesn't offer her handmaiden or slave until she's hopeless both about herself and him.

BURTON VISOTZKY: A ten year span.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

Yeah, and-- and that is an example of her possessiveness. She wants Abraham for herself. She wants the promise for herself and if she cannot get it through herself, he won't get it at all. But then at this certain moment she says, "No, maybe I should let it go a little bit." **When she lets go, when she lets Abraham have a child with Hagar, then God rewards her for giving by giving her Isaac.**

BURTON VISOTZKY:

It's a little more complicated than-- (OVERTALK)

BILL MOYERS:

You-- you-- you see the long ten year wait as-- as bringing sympathy from God.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

As bringing-- Sarah to the point where she realizes, "I should share, I should give. I should not be so possessive and exclusivist." And then--

BURTON VISOTZKY:

Then she has to wait another 13 years yet to have Isaac.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

Yes, but then-- but then that's the other test because--

LEWIS SMEDES:

Did you say that God rewarded her for giving Hagar to Abraham?

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

For-- for being willing to consider the possibility that Abraham might have a child with somebody else. That when you love you can give sometimes and not just continue taking. Now, that is in the context of the times. We are in different society



BURTON VISOTZKY:

See this is--

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI: [17:20]

--but I want to continue because **I think this whole idea of racism, you're talking about classism, et cetera, I think, it all comes from a very basic idea; exclusivity.**

ELIZABETH SWADOS: Right.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

That I am better and I deserve all this is-- I sacrificed-- I am entitled to it."

LEWIS SMEDES: [17:36]

I-- I-- I think, don't you, that **maybe we excuse too much on the grounds that everybody did it back then. Just because it was custom back then.** It-- it was--

ROBERT ALTER:

It being polygamy or--

LEWIS SMEDES:

No, the-- **the managing of a family affair by taking a slave without-- with no indication that-- that-- that Hagar thought that this was really a good idea.** And-- and-- and have her sleep with Abraham and have a son and have them all live in the same house. It was wrong, I think, whether it was customary or not. **Why shouldn't she be treated as a wife. I don't read in this a-- a kind of upstart slave who is-- who is claiming something not her-- I would expect her to live this way.**

BILL MOYERS:

Bharati, as a -- as a writer, what do you learn about the character of Sarah and Hagar?

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

Well, I mean; as a writer, I say, there would be-- God is the ultimate author. And there would be no story if poor Sarah didn't provide-- all of us and herself with another obstacle. You need conflict, conflict, conflict. You need delay, delay, delay. I love for Hagar to have smirked. I'm not sure that Sarah didn't imagine the smirk, but if she did then I read it as guerilla warfare (LAUGHTER). The only way of dissent that is allowed a woman from despised class and-- ethnicity.

LEWIS SMEDES:

-But that's imaginative on your part, I think, isn't it?

LEWIS SMEDES:

There's no mention of an ethnic--

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

I don't-- I'm not saying-- I'm coming from that part of the -- or reasonably close to that part of the world where that -- ethnic hostilities are in the blood. And so for thousands of years you -- you have to train yourself to get over that blood.

LEWIS SMEDES:

Oh, I don't need the -- the ethnic dimensions in order to recognize that here's a human being treating another human being as a thing.

EUGENE RIVERS:

I think that's an American-- that's an American lens.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

I think so.

EUGENE RIVERS:

-- where we racialize what doesn't

ROBERT ALTER:

You mean Americanize--

EUGENE RIVERS:

No, no. You see -- You see what's interesting--

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

All we need is to say that Sarah saw Hagar as another. That otherness is what really did it.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

Well, but it is --

BILL MOYERS:

-- as a rival?

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI: Yes.

EUGENE RIVERS:

No, no. See--

BHARATI MUKHERJEE: As a rival is too simple

EUGENE RIVERS:

-- my point is this. We don't have to be that elaborate. There's some very basic emotions. Here's a wife, here's a woman who has given birth to a child by the husband. I mean see, it doesn't see, here again I think there may be-- we may be manufacturing a complexity which transcends what is at a fairly basic level. When we talk about the wife, we talk about the husband and--

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

But that's what's great about good story telling, that it suggests all sorts of complications

BURTON VISOTZKY:

Well, I didn't think I'd be the one that-- that's saying, "No, no. It is about race," and you'd be the ones saying-- (LAUGHTER) No, no it isn't.

**BILL MOYERS:**

**I hear Gene saying if they were all Israelites, you'd still have--**

LEWIS SMEDES:

It would be the same problem.

BURTON VISOTZKY:

I think you're right, that they would. But you can't read the Bible and see a Jew and an Egyptian together, an Israelite and an Egyptian and not know that there's going to be some tension. That's a definite part of it.

EUGENE RIVERS:

Oh, oh. Understood. But see, that's -- that's the easy part to me. Right?

LEWIS SMEDES:

There's tension because there is a slave and a master.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

It's easier to objectify her--

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

-- I mean that's interesting. If we were talking about a present day situation, probably she would not tell Abraham, "Go with my cleaning lady," she'll say, "Let's dissolve the marriage," and or "Let's have surrogate motherhood," or whatever she thinks is appropriate. In that society, it was

LEWIS SMEDES: Sure, it-- right.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

It was even appropriate for Abraham to consider it much sooner, especially if we're thinking of a patriarchal culture where offspring was very important and God has made a promise. But **Abraham, as I would claim, was too busy being obedient to God and let God worry about his offspring. It was-- it was Sarah who was really busy trying to make sure that the offspring is hers.**

ELIZABETH SWADOS:

As an artist, I look at Genesis from beginning to end as the beginning. The beginning of a lot of stuff - I'm like a child when I look at it, you know? Everything's happening for the first time in a sense. And what I think of then is that we're a little bit closer. We're a little bit more in-- not-- not primitive but we're more in-touch with the music of life. The impulse, the immediacy, right?

So what I think of as the word *territory*, I think of territorial possessiveness. And **I think that--that something happened to Sarah when her territory, Abraham, when her land that she was promised through some contract that was badly negotiated, right, she's promised this land and like suddenly she's seeing, "Oh, I'm not going to have this and there was going to be this baby but it's going to come this way."** And like suddenly the animal in her is entirely-- not just betrayed but freaked. Because as a--

BILL MOYERS:

Have you seen Fatal Attractions? (LAUGHTER) I mean are you saying we're advanced? They were primitive and we're advanced?

BURTON VISOTZKY: [22:35]

I was thinking about something Lew said, that nobody actually asked Hagar about this. And **part of me is thinking, maybe Hagar is really not happy about this at all.** You know, Abraham is an old man. She's a young woman."

ROBERT ALTER:

It's a great career move. C'mon.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

Can I shed some light on Hagar?

BURTON VISOTZKY:

Yeah.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI: [22:54]

**First of all, you'll be all very surprised to know that this story is not in the Koran.** And yet it's a very important story for us because it impacts what we do when Muslims go to the pilgrimage. For example, we have to travel seven times between two hills, Saffa and Marawa (PH) and the reason for that is that the story goes, in the commentaries, that when Hagar was taken by Abraham to Mecca (that's where he took her), and it was barren land, he left her. And she looked at him and she said, "You're leaving me with a land with nothing. No water, no food. Who are you leaving me for? Who are you depending to take care of me? Is it God?" He said, "Yes." And she **\_didn't say me, she said, "Us (her and her child)." And then she said, "Well, if it is God, He will not let us down." So Hagar comes as a very religious person who is willing to take serious chances because she also is part of what Abraham stands for.**

BURTON VISOTZKY: [23:53]

**In the Hebrew bible, Hagar actually enters into conversation with God well before Sarah does.** Hagar has this long conversation, almost on a par with Abraham, maybe even more than on a par with Abraham. She gets a series of promises from God much as Abraham did. Sarah's out of the loop.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

But, but what kind of--

BILL MOYERS:

Here's-- here's the powerful thing to me. Abraham has to share equally with Sarah, God talks to Sarah and makes her a mother of a great, nation. **Hagar is treated equally by God. She's going to be the mother of a great nation. Both of these women are dealing directly with God or God's messengers.**

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

**Hagar is being treated as a second class citizen, even by God.** Because look at-- Hagar is first visited by the messenger rather than God directly. And what is it that she is promised about when she is pregnant and out-- totally stressed out-- that you will have the son, Ishmael, but he's going to be a wild ass of a man and that he's going to be fighting with everyone for-- He's going to be a brawler. Everyone's going to hate him--

BURTON VISOTZKY:

But she's also promised that you're going to have--

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

Well, it's not the same as saying, "I'm going to give you the best kind of--"

-- as fruitful as the stars. She's promised twelve tribes-- I mean that's -- that's virtually

LEWIS SMEDES: [25:13]

**One thing I found fascinating in this discussion is that we[--]only now has the main character come up.**

ROBERT ALTER: Ishmael?

LEWIS SMEDES: No. God.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

God.

LEWIS SMEDES:

We're-- we're -- we're talking about the. book of Genesis and we're talking about the wonderful storytelling and the conniving woman and the humble and believing Hagar. But the main character here is God. Isn't He? Genesis is-- is--

LEWIS SMEDES:

**-- God making the new start and God is going to do what He promised in spite of a conniving woman and what in my judgment is a wimpish patriarch. (LAUGHTER) I-- I don't find much sympathy for Abraham. And I'm not all that sympathetic with Sarah. But I think it's magnificent, the relationship between God and Hagar. And Abraham and Sarah, have to discover that just because they're chosen it doesn't mean that they're the *only* one who is chosen.**

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

Exactly--yeah, yeah--

BURTON VISOTZKY:

I think that's a very clear message in relationship to God--

LEWIS SMEDES:

Yes, God still says to Hagar, not only will her son be a fighting man, but He says, "I will be with -him.- !!- And isn't that the essence of the blessings of the covenant?"

ELIZABETH SWADOS: [26:41]

**I find this a very, very sad story.** I find this to be, because of what it-- from-- from a woman's point of view, the joy that is supposed to be given to a woman to continue humanity-- to-- to start a whole-- new group of civilization. And all of it all of this. And yet, as people, as human beings, if we're to imagine them as characters, **one woman goes child-- childless for 90 years. She has to wait. And then finally when she has a child, it's after giving another woman the right to have a child that she wanted.**

**Another woman that's a slave gets beaten up for doing what she's told to do. Is sent out into the desert by a man who-- who know-- what is this man, you know, up to, in the middle of all this? Everybody can say, "Oh, poor Abraham." But on the other hand, where's his humanity? Where is he? How is he mediating this situation? You say he was very smart--**

EUGENE RIVERS:

He was human--

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

I wouldn't describe him as a patriarchal wimp. I mean it is very clear--at-- at least in the Koran. There is a reference to that. And what-- what Abraham is saying is that "God, you know, you

God, you made me leave them in a barren land. Please take care of them. I want my offspring not to worship idols. I leave them in your hands. Please take care of them. And God says, I bless your children, those who are not unjust.

So he was a person who was torn apart by everything that was happening. He was very saddened. But he was enough of a believer, a faithful person, to say I will submerge my sadness. And I will rely on God and God will take care of it.

LEWIS SMEDES: [28:21]

**I will believe that. And I want to believe it. But I have a hard time being sympathetic with a man who sends his own son away into the desert with a skin of water and a hunk of bread.**

ELIZABETH SWADOS:

There seems to be a lot of stuff that gets thrown around, people hurt, because of this covenant. It sounds like this enormously important kind of thing. What does Abraham have to do? What does Sarah have to do to keep the covenant? What do they think there--

Tell me what the whole deal is. Tell me.

LEWIS SMEDES: [28:56]

**I think we have to remember that the Bible, the Old Testament, is not a collection of short stories. This is a chapter in a big story. And the big story has the author, who is also the chief character in the big story. So you've got the author of the story and the character in the story. And God is up there. And the picture that I get is of the creator saying, I want to get involved. I want to make a new start for those creatures of mine. And this is how I'm going to do it. I'm going to come to one of them-- it doesn't seem to matter much who. But he comes to Abraham and says, I make a promise to you. I make a commitment to you.**

From now on, I am as it were stuck with my commitment to you. And to Abraham he doesn't say, "I'll make this commitment on the proviso that you do likewise." To Abraham he just says "It's yours. It's going to be yours." And then later on--Then later on -- then later on there's-- there's-- there-- there is-- "and now you've got to do something."

ROBERT ALTER: That's right.

ROBERT ALTER:

Well I think the way that--

ELIZABETH SWADOS:

If you just yeah just give me -- give me--

ROBERT ALTER: The terms of the--

ELIZABETH SWADOS:

But this is a quiz show. If you say to me after this instead of paying you we're going to give you a Covenant with God--

ROBERT ALTER:

Okay, right. (LAUGHTER) Okay.

ELIZABETH SWADOS:

What am I going to get?

LEWIS SMEDES:

You get God. You get God.

ROBERT ALTER: [30:25]

A-- a hundred words or less. (LAUGHTER) No, the terms are-- - unfolded progressively. To begin with, what you get is that you're going to be lots and lots of people. People needs a land to live in. So you're gonna have this--

EUGENE RIVERS: That's one of the deals.

ROBERT ALTER: [

-- particular land. That's part of-- part of the deal. And then the-- the crucial third element is-- is then added, is that this people is going to be a blessing for itself and for all the peoples of the earth. **It's-- it's not so much a-- a-- a kind of triumphalist vision. That this people will have imperium over all the peoples of the earth.**

BILL MOYERS:

Sovereignty-- power?

ROBERT ALTER:

Yeah. Right, right. Except-- **but that this people will be a blessing. Kind of will emanate out to-- to all-- all the people.**

ELIZABETH SWADOS:

So, so, so to have a child is a big part of a Covenant with God, right?

ROBERT ALTER: Urn Hmm (AFF.) Right.

ELIZABETH SWADOS:

Okay.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI: [31:17]

Because of the way people thought at that time I would think-- you have to again look at it in the context of the time. And in the Koran it speaks of blessings and-- and-- and promises. But only to the just amongst us. **So the story comes Sarah, Hagar, Abraham, Ishmael. They all have relationships with God. They're all pious. And all doing it out of piety. But the interesting part, if we look at the stories, they all are-- at each one of them is at a different level of consciousness. And therefore a different level of piety.**

But God does not pen-- penalize them for that. He accepts all of them. And he blesses all of them. And he teaches them through events. Sarah is taught through the event of Abraham. And that's God's way of teaching us how to rise to a higher level of spirituality.

LEWIS SMEDES: [32:05]

I-- I need-- if I may-- to-- to insert Christian vision in this. The-- **the reason Genesis comes before Exodus in the Christian view, is to emphasize that this Covenant is God originated. And God defined.** So that the-- the establishment and the being in of a Covenant was without regard to Sarah's conniving. To Abraham's pardon me, wimpishness. (LAUGHTER) Without regard to Herrod (PH)-- Hagar status.

**They're all in the Covenant.** And then later on, **now that you're in the Covenant, we've got to have order. We've got to have a human community. So this is what you've gotta do.** But you've got to do it. **Not in order to be in the Covenant. But because you're in the covenant.**

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

Right. I want to also look at all this polygamy in the context of demographic need. In my grandfather's generation, including my grandfather, they had more than one wife, because there were too many women in the Bengali (PH) Brahmin caste. And so it wasn't a matter of--it was made religiously valid.

ROBERT ALTER: Like Brigham Young.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

Right. Right.(LAUGHTER).

ROBERT ALTER: Yeah. Right. (LAUGHTER).

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

And I don't know. I mean, barrenness is still a problem within my community over here. That it's a blight from-- it's unfortunately seen as a blight from God. And if you are not barren, but have only daughters, as did my mother, then you are made to—you're humiliated day in, day out.

ELIZABETH SWADOS: [34:01]

This thing about sons. You know, you gotta have sons. No matter what, you have to have sons. Sons are the most important thing in the world, you know. Isaac, Ishmael-- you know, I mean, what is that?

EUGENE RIVERS:

Let's talk about that.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

Well, yeah--

EUGENE RIVERS:

No, no, let's talk about that.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

Yeah. Let me tell you about my--



EUGENE RIVERS:

But I mean--

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

Let me tell about my personal experience about that. I mean, there's a whole other way you could look at that story. I don't have children. And I don't-- I don't think I ever will. And so when I married my husband, and I told him I can't have children, I also allowed him you know, to rethink the marriage, if he wants children. And his answer was, "look, if God meant for us to have children, you will. Even if you're 90, as Sarah did." And if he didn't mean for us to have children, then I could marry ten other women and nothing will happen. So it gave-- it gave him the faith. I love you, I'm in this marriage, you know, together. And what God wills is what's going to happen. And so he took a very positive interpretation.

ELIZABETH SWADOS:

(LAUGHTER) I know, but living in this world for the last--

EUGENE RIVERS: [35:00]

You know, there are two sides to this male thing. On the one hand, you know, there is this emphasis on the sons, which has to be balanced against the fact **that in certain contexts the male child is the most vulnerable**. So when we talk about it, let's-- let's-- not-- let's not stack the cards. In the present context, when I read these passages, and I see the emphasis on sons, it plays a completely different role. Because I'm in a community, where the sons are biologically the most vulnerable. They are the least present, okay?

BILL MOYERS:

This is a-- poor neighborhood?

EUGENE RIVERS:

In a poor neighborhood. And the mothers, not the fathers. The mothers give the son a privileged place. Because in terms of mere survival, the child is-- the male child is the most threatened, number one. So for us, when we-- we talk about the role of the son, it's a completely different context. So this son business is more complicated than simply patriarchy and misogyny going mad, giving privileged status to males, because you hate women.

ELIZABETH SWADOS:

Wait wait wait. I'm just asking -- I'm talking about the overall/writer. Okay?

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

Yeah.

ELIZABETH SWADOS:

We don't -- wait, wait, wait. Let me finish.

BURTON VISOTZKY:

(INAUDIBLE PHRASE)

ELIZABETH SWADOS:

And you know, whatever--whoever wrote this story decided that everybody's gonna get all upset and crazy and beat each other up, and do all kinds of stuff because it's Isaac and Ishmael.

ROBERT ALTER: Right.

ELIZABETH SWADOS: [36:27]

Or Ishmael and-- and to me, that is-- there's no-- nowhere much in the Bible that I know about anywhere where a woman is given birth to, and it is such a big deal.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

The way to answer this, at least from my family's point of view. Because I remember when I was studying the Koran as a child with a sheikh.

BILL MOYERS:

With a who?

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

A sheikh. A religious lea-- person. I looked-- I-- I read the Koran. And at one point I sheepishly asked him, is -- was there never a chance for a woman to be a prophet? You know, why are all the prophets men? And he said, "Well, there have been many prophets we don't even know about. Because it's the Koran says that-- every nation has a prophet in the past. And some of them might have been women, for sure," he said.

But now when I think about it today, I mean, as a feminist, I had to deal with this. And really, what I come to is a philosophy of religion. How does God relate to us; How God-- how does God change our consciousness? And from my Koran, I see it very clearly. There is a whole notion of gradualism. Teaching us throughout the process of history. We were living at that time of the

stories until today, in many places, everywhere maybe (LAUGHTER), in a patriarchal society. So for God to get out the message, God will have to-- you know, reveal and talk and bless people who are active in the society. If Sarah or Hagar tried to spread the message, I don't think they would have been able to--

BURTON VISOTZKY: But you see--

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

-- go very far. That's-- that's what I'm thinking. But at the same time, **in the message itself, there are the elements to deconstruct the patriarchal society. Remove it. Feminize it.** And that's where the progress in history becomes promising.

BURTON VISOTZKY: [38:04]

It's real interesting to me. **To the extent to which this is male history, that-- that men are writing this book. The fact of the matter is, is willy nilly. Women get an enormous role.**

EUGENE RIVERS:

Not really.

BURTON VISOTZKY:

**I think the same thing is true about-- Ishmael in-- in this story.** If Israelites are writing this story, it's the Israelite bible. Nevertheless, **Ishmael has a very powerful role. The fact is is that Ishmael is not drawn as completely a bad guy.** He's quite--

LEWIS SMEDES:

He is not a bad guy --not at all.

BURTON VISOTZKY:

In fact, not a bad guy at all.

BURTON VISOTZKY:

What a powerful claim--

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI: Can I-- can I--say

BURTON VISOTZKY:

Ishmael must have not to be edited out or not to be marginalized.

ROBERT ALTER: [38:40]

To put it in contemporary terms, the biblical writers worked both sides of the street. And-- and that's part of the greatness of it. **Ishmael also is a blessing.** And-- and he also is the father of 12 tribes. And he's going to become the progenitor of a great people.

LEWIS SMEDES: And God is with him.

ROBERT ALTER:

And-- and-- and God is with him. On the other hand, there's this. Almost a kind of game that the narrator plays. I mentioned before that -- **Sarah can't bring herself to mention Ishmael's name or Hagar's name.** Now strangely, the narrator is in collusion with her. If you read the, the text again. **You'll see that the narrator in that story never mentions Ishmael's name-- neither does the-- the messenger, the-- the angel.** He-- he's-- refers to him as the child or the lad. But, the ghost of Ishmael's name hovers over the story. Be-- because he says, "God has heard the voice of the-- the lad where he is." And-- and his name means God has heard. Ish-- that's what Ishmael means.

LEWIS SMEDES:

This-- this--

ROBERT ALTER:

So I-- I-- I think even that kind of little narrative game suggests the-- the-- okay, it's-- it's a great people. We legitimate them in every way. But it's not quite the same kind of great people.

LEWIS SMEDES:

No, I-- I-- I-- I-- I love that part of it. I feel it and read it just a little bit differently than that.

ROBERT ALTER:

Okay.

LEWIS SMEDES:

I see Sarah as using Hagar and Ishmael for her family purposes.

ROBERT ALTER: Right.

LEWIS SMEDES:

And Hagar and Ishmael are of use to Sarah only in her purview. But when Isaac is born, we can dispense with it--

BURTON VISOTZKY:

Right at the first excuse.

LEWIS SMEDES: Oh yeah.

LEWIS SMEDES: [40:37]

**Ishmael-- Ishmael is the -- utterly marginalized person. And then Yahweh comes in and says, "Not quite."** I have a covenant with you, Sarah and Abraham. I'm not gonna go back on that. But just because I have a covenant with you, does not mean that I marginalize Ishmael.

BILL MOYERS: Yes, because--

LEWIS SMEDES:

He's--

BILL MOYERS:

It is the cry of the lad in your translation. The cry of the child under the bush. The deserted, abandoned Ishmael that God hears and--

LEWIS SMEDES: i

God hears.

BILL MOYERS:

-- to which God responds.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE: Exactly.

That's right.

BILL MOYERS: [40:56]

**This is the-- this is the first time--**

LEWIS SMEDES:

I think that's a--

BILL MOYERS:

**In the story that God actually hears a cry. A-- a supplication. A--**

BURTON VISOTZKY:

It's-- it's --

BHARATI MUKHERJEE: [41:13]

**Does this mean that even God is surprised--**

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

Yeah, that's how consciousness is raised--

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

That like Sarah who didn't anticipate her emotional reactions to Hagar being pregnant. **That God says, "My God, I didn't really anticipate--**

BILL MOYERS:

Interesting question.

LEWIS SMEDES:

That's a very interesting question.

BILL MOYERS: [

**Are these unintended consequences for God?**

LEWIS SMEDES:

But then God responds to it in his own way.

BILL MOYERS:

But you make me think-- you know--

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

Yes, as opposed to with Sarah.

LEWIS SMEDES:

Yeah.

BILL MOYERS: [41:34]

I think-- do you ever think that maybe our lives are just stories and that they're stories that are written mostly before we're born? And that **the only real choice we have in the middle of the story is whether or not \_we're going to fully live or fully resist the plot.** I mean, that's the choice Abraham, Sarah and Hagar made that I really appreciate. They didn't resist the plot. They went with the story.

LEWIS SMEDES:

Bill, to me, that is the essence of building a character. The only way you can live a life is to begin by taking whatever raw material destiny or God has given you, and say, "What am I gonna do with that?" And-- and I think that this is the story of the creation of character. Begin with the raw materials, and then be responsible for what you do with them.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

That's why I say God gave us a realm of responsibility and freedom, moral freedom. So that we can response-- be responsible for our own actions. **God gave each one of these people in the stories their own realm, and gave them also the ability to make their choices and live with the consequences. And that's how God teaches.** Because once you see the consequence, if you don't like it, then it's gonna back and-- to you. And you're gonna say, is this the ideology I should be adopting? Is this the--"

BILL MOYERS:

It's all-- it's also true, isn't it, that you said earlier that this is go-- all God had to work with?

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

Right. Well--

BILL MOYERS:

He chose these people because they--

LEWIS SMEDES:

Those were God's raw material.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

But God created them that way.

BILL MOYERS:

I mean I wish I were a novelist[.] I could create this a different way.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

Yes. And I would do--

BILL MOYERS: I'd tell the story--

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

--the scenes that are left out (LAUGHTER).

BILL MOYERS: Yes!

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

Fill in some of the backgrounds of the settings--

BILL MOYERS:

What would you like to know?

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

Well, I'd like to have seen a big conflict scene between Sarah and Hagar, for example.

ROBERT ALTER:

That would be great (LAUGHTER).

ELIZABETH SWADOS:

For me, it would be much more like a-- because it would be-- they-- they-- of course they'd sing. You know, but (LAUGHTER)--

**ELIZABETH SWADOS: [43:19]**

What I'm fascinated by is completely not written into it. But-- but the-- the-- the unspoken, for some reason con-- community between the two of them, the draw. Not just the cat fight. **But the unspoken moments where the two disparate kinds of music, the Egyptian music and the-- you know, more Hebraic music I guess were there. Their tonalities would come together where one woman who can bear a child looks at the child-- childless and isn't just smirking at her. But feels that identification. And where the upper class woman looks at the slave and realizes that this is a real woman.** And those-- those moments-- they're all made up without the text. But it's all potentially there.

BILL MOYERS:

I wanna ask Gene, coming back to what Lou had been saying about you know. Building the character, taking the card you're played How would-- how do you tell this story on the streets in Boston to these kids you're working with?

EUGENE RIVERS: [44:19]

What you do with these young people, I mean for me, when I look at the spiritual lessons and the adversity and the unfairness of it all, the one or two ways that you can view this. I can whine and complain about the injustice of adversi--- you know, the injustice. The fact that I wasn't the privileged one. On and on and on and on. All right? You know, and I-- you know, I can whine.

**Or, I can say that every adverse circumstance through the eyes of faith, is an opportunity.** (GENERAL AGREEMENT) So every circumstance of adversity is an opportunity to see God work his ultimate desire for wholeness, humanness and reconciliation out in your life. And which is why the scriptures are so important for people. The adversity. The unfairness. The injustice. Well, I can seize this as an opportunity to exercise faith in God and have a tragedy transformed into an opportunity for triumph. And that's what poor people have to be told, or there's no point.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE: [45:33]

But as someone who has, because of the color of my skin, been for many, many years spat upon, sent to the back of the bus, not been served in hotels and so on.

ROBERT ALTER:

In North America you mean.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

In North America, meaning during my 14 years in-- Canada. I want to see empowerment not as what is the lesson in adversity. But **I want to be the Hagar who then takes action.** And says--

EUGENE RIVERS:

Well, see it's not--

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

It's not right. I'm going to--

EUGENE RIVERS:

either or. It's not either or. No. In terms of teaching, what I tell the young per-- I say, "Listen. Look. Here you are in the wilderness of North America. It's a bad break. Okay? You know, you gonna catch hell from can't see in the morning till can't see at night. That's the card." Now, that's the material you have to work with. **You could do one of two things. You can do as your ancestors did in the face of formal slavery, pogroms, lynchings. You can seize these crises that confront you. Or-- and use them as opportunities to transcend the oppressor and the oppression.** All right? So the adversity is an opportunity. And-- and-- and so I teach that. Then I say, "Look here brother. Look. Faith without works is dead. In the Christian tradition, right?" Faith disconnected from action, struggle and fight, a real fight, is meaningless. **And so I want to empower, to facilitate the empowerment of individuals in groups and communities by saying, "Here's adversity. And God has a lesson for us as to how we can transcend and transform tragedies into victories."**

BHARATI MUKHERJEE: [47:13]

It's the word transcend that I have a little trouble with. If transcend means submission--

EUGENE RIVERS:

Of course not.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

--For--

EUGENE RIVERS:

No.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

For a future goal.

BILL MOYERS:

What do you mean by it?

EUGENE RIVERS: [47:23]

Oh no. I mean when I say transcend, listen transcendence means, you know, biblically, theologically, politically, that when I'm confronted with oppression, I am going to embrace a vision of myself that says that I am more than the sum total of the brutal acts committed against me.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

See whereas I see it, . . .

EUGENE RIVERS:

I am more than that. No. I am more than that.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

O[r] what other people say you are.

EUGENE RIVERS:

or what-- or-- or more importantly, I am more than all of the attempts to denigrate my being, and suggest that I am anything other or less than--a child of God.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

Exactly.

EUGENE RIVERS: [47:51]

See, the thing that has happened in the black community is that faith and hope has died. As a result, nihilism and decay prevail. **Now the goal of the scriptures is-- is-- is-- or the-- the scriptures should function, you know, as a-- an emancipatory mechanism to resurrect faith and hope.**

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

And let me say that whatever you say about the African Americans in the U.S., is also true of so-called Third World countries. They are resorting to religion, because that gives them the faith and



hope. Because they have lost the faith and hope in what the west had exported to them, about their view of themselves.

BILL MOYERS: [48:33]

**We all know, the presence of a religion has been an agent [of that detrimental export].**

EUGENE RIVERS:

Sometimes.

BILL MOYERS:

Sometimes an agent of repression and oppression and remaining the status--

BHARATI MUKHERJEE: [48:38]

Of sensitizing the minority to its oppressions and what the rights are. And **so I want to be an Ishmael who works towards the introduction of Civil Rights and then the enforcement of those civil Rights.** I don't want to wait for some good will to trickle down to me.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

No, that is consistent with it.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

And I don't want-- **you know, I'm sure Abraham is great. And I'm sure God is great. But I want to think of destiny-- whether I'm Ishmael or Abraham, as cooperating.**

EUGENE RIVERS: You're absolutely right.

BILL MOYERS:

Are any of you struck by the fact that just simply talking about the Bible, the stories of the Bible, spark discussions that often go way off the story?

ROBERT ALTER: Yeah. Are further--

BILL MOYERS:

Move way beyond that-- the realm of the journey of

Abraham, Sarah and-- Hagar.

LEWIS SMEDES: That's right.

BILL MOYERS:

What is it about this? This allegory--

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

That's what great stories are all about. To make you think about all issues, big issues in the world. And make you go through experiences that you have not been destined to live in this life.

BILL MOYERS:

And yet the stories are not just simply stories, are they? For people who find in these stories, the word of God, as Lou does, you know, you ask the question, what do I get from Covenant, and he answered God. Did that satisfy you?

ELIZABETH SWADOS: [49:50]

Well, in a way, having listened to the words of these stories in a different-- my own way, **I find that all these conversations are in the Bible. They are in the Bible. They are there. They are all there.** This might be great literature. It might be great music, or it might be God, do you know what I mean? But they're all there in the Bible. There in the interpretations and they're--

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

But you know what? There are even better conversations than the Bible and the Koran, etcetera. And we have not discovered them yet or somebody else has had them.

BILL MOYERS:

What do you mean?

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI: [50:20]

What I mean is that you cannot go through life, for example, saying-- well I studied the Bible when I was in high school, or I read the Koran ten years ago. And so I know my religion. Because **every time you open and read it, depending on the dialectic of your own life, the dynamics-- what happened to you, your consciousness, you see a whole new reality maybe. Whole new issues come before you that you never thought about.**

BURTON VISOTZKY:

Azizah's point of view is-- it's-- from my perception a very rabbinic one.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI: (LAUGHTER) Okay.

BURTON VISOTZKY:

As I said-- we--

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

Yes, because we share **the concept of Ishdihad.**

BURTON VISOTZKY:

We read--

BILL MOYERS:

Which is--

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI:

Ishdihad means to-- for Muslim scholars to read the Koran and interpret it in terms of --

BURTON VISOTZKY: [50:56]

**The rabbis have this marvelous notion of Revelation. The Revelatory power of Scripture. And they say, what was given to Moses at Sinai? Not just the written words, but in—in their-- you know, lovely conception, even what many generations in the future-- a disciple will offer as a novel interpretation-- that too was in Sinai.** In other words, it's all there in the text. We build a community. And as a community, we consent to make this book sacred. The minute we-- we do that, in reading together, we knit ourselves in a way. I mean, I think that's happening here.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE: In to community, yes.

BURTON VISOTZKY:

We have this little community. We're not just sharing our reading of the words of the narrative. We're sharing our lives with one another. That's what Bible study's meant to do. And that's why it's such a powerful book.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

And to encourage reading and listening. And love of God through the story.

LEWIS SMEDES:

And I do think we need to--

BURTON VISOTZKY:

-- love of one another.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

LEWIS SMEDES:

Would-- would you not agree--

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

And I do think any good literature exists outside of that kind of-- divinity.

LEWIS SMEDES: [51:59]

Would you not agree, that as fascinating as all these stories are, and as-- economically as they are told, so that we're always wondering what might have been really going on-- there are many stories in other books, and in other traditions. And what makes these stories important, first of all, in the-- the-- the reason these stories are preserved, is that-- **that these stories are about people establishing themselves as a community in response to a divine initiative. So there is always that God coming in and then God going back. And God coming in again.** So you have to reckon with that--

BURTON VISOTZKY: [52:46]

But I think it's even more complicated than that. **Any story-- any art is always a response to a divine initiative.**

BHARATI MUKHERJEE:

Yes.

BURTON VISOTZKY: [52:55]

Certainly there is enormous power to Torah, to the New Testament, to the Koran. Because the readers firmly believe that God's word is somehow implicit in that narrative.

LEWIS SMEDES: [53:06]

But--in-- in-- in this community formation, I can read great literature. I can read Mark Twain, or I can read Dostoyevsky. And especially Dostoyevsky. These become in a kind of secondary sense, significant revelations to me.

BURTON VISOTZKY:

Yes, but--

LEWIS SMEDES:

From God-- but-- but this is something different.

BILL MOYERS:

But what makes it different in your-- it's--

LEWIS SMEDES: [53:27]

What makes it different is what has happened as-- as a result of its being. **All the drama of the Old Testament, and of the new, is always a drama of where our [are] we with respect to him.**

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Description

Episode Description

The story of Abraham's relationship with Hagar and Sarah. Participants: Azizah Y. al-Hibri, Robert Alter, Bharati Mukherjee, Eugene Rivers III, Lewis B. Smedes, Elizabeth Swados, Burton L. Visotzky.

Series Description

GENESIS: A LIVING CONVERSATION is a ten-part series designed to stimulate interfaith dialogue. Writers, artists, psychologists, composers, lawyers, college presidents, journalists, translators and Biblical scholars discuss, debate and discover the great stories of Genesis.

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Asset type

Episode

Genres

[Talk Show](#)

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