

It's really good to be together this evening. As I have been telling people throughout the week, the most important thing is to remember that we're not alone.

When these antisemitic flyers are spread through our community, there is a lot that I try to do to simultaneously get our allies mobilized and to minimize its impact on us. I tell jokes. I speak – truthfully – about how pathetic and philosophically weak the anti-Jewish conspiracy theory is. I remind us to come together.

I don't want to give the people who spread antisemitic messages the satisfaction of allowing their bs to take up an ounce more of my attention, my brain space, my community discourse than they already do. And also, I genuinely have other priorities that I don't want to get derailed, from continuing to show up for our members who are sick and dying, thinking about TBI's long-term financial sustainability, to strategizing about how we face and discuss the societal disaster unfolding in Israel. I don't want the flyers of a few idiots to distract me.

But the body has its truth. And for me, that truth has manifest in awakening, fully alert, ready to pounce out of bed and get *something* done – at least an hour before my usual waking time - every single morning this week. That gets wearing after a few days.

If you are a Jew who is descended from Jews, I invite you give attention right now to how your body holds and reacts to antisemitism – that which you encounter and that which you just hear about. Do your feet want to run away? Does your heart beat faster? Do you feel the frantic urge to *fix* something, to do something right now? Does that urge lead to respond to people around you in snappish or hypercritical ways?

If you are a Jew who is not descended from Jews, if you are a non-Jewish ally in this space, I invite you to consider how acts of antisemitism affect not only your psyche but your body, as well. We live in this world. We act on our surroundings; they act on us. There is no escaping it.

In this week's parashah, Terumah, the Israelite people are only a few weeks out of Egypt. They've already seen the sea crash over the armies of their oppressors, fought off an attack by Amalekite raiders, and had the overwhelming experience of revelation at Mt. Sinai. They're on the move, seeking a home in the land of their ancestors, a land none of them have ever seen.

And now, they wait, encamped at the base of Mt. Sinai, while their sometimes-trusted leader Moshe communes with God at its heights. At the end of last week's parashah, Moshe ascended alone, to continue receiving instruction on behalf of the people.

Up at the top of the mountain, God gives Moshe instructions for a communal project: Terumah means "gift" or "donation" and Hashem instructs Moshe to tell the people to bring *terumot* of gold, silver, copper, fine yarns, animal skins, precious and oils for the purpose of a grand communal structure. Chapter 25, verse 8 says it simply, "let them make for me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." The 18th- century Moroccan commentator Chaim ibn Attar notes how the phrasing is curious: "It does not say "within it," which means that the place that God will sanctify to dwell there is within the children of Israel."

As ibn Attar notices, the creation of the tabernacle is not about making a nice box for God. It's about giving the people a purpose that unite them in holy work, that will forge them into a sacred community where the Divine can dwell.

As Noa Bechtle commented in Torah study yesterday, the mishkan project looks a great deal like collective art therapy.

I was particularly struck this week by the imagery of the menorah, described in verses 31-38. It opens: You shall make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand shall be made of hammered work; its base and its shaft, its cups, calyxes, and petals shall be of one piece. Six branches shall issue from its sides; three branches from one side of the lampstand and three branches from the other side of the lampstand.” And it goes on to describe in great detail the imagery of almond blossoms along each of the branches. Two things about this struck me: first commentators are very clear that “shall be of one piece” means that this lampstand needs to have been made of a single block of gold, not many different pieces welded together. But how would anyone in the wilderness have been carrying a talent of gold? (Our classicist, Kris Seaman announced in Torah study yesterday that a talent was the equivalent of wages for about 10 years worth of labor, and the internet says it’s the amount of gold of equivalent weight to the weight of a person – in any case, a lot of gold!)

Obviously, no one had a single block of gold of that size. But gold can be melted and reformed, so the subtext of this commandment involved a lot of background labor: collecting gold from many people, building a very hot fire, melting the gold down completely and letting it cool to a block before the work described here could even begin.

Imagine all these Israelites in the wilderness, with bits of gold taken as reparations hurriedly from the Egyptians before they left Egypt. What does this gold, in the shapes of the aesthetics of Egypt, mean to them? Does it weigh them down? I imagine the invitation to contribute these bits of Egyptian gold to the building of a menorah as a great redemptive gift. It reminds them – and us – that what has been handed to us is not the end of the story. We can take what has been handed to us and transform it, especially when we share it with others.

And consider what they're making – not just any lamps, but a lamp in the form of six branches surrounding a trunk, each adorned with almond blossoms. It seems so obvious to me that this menorah is meant to invoke a living tree, a source of shade and food and life.

I'll leave us with this image: the pseudoscience of alchemy, of trying to make gold from more common elements, has fascinated the world for millennia. And one antisemitic trope is that Jewish have an almost supernatural power to attract money for its own sake. But when our ancestors needed to heal and come together after the trauma of slavery, what they needed to do was to give their gold away, to do a reverse alchemy – to turn their gold into a blossoming tree.

So I write songs, as many of you know, and I turned to that this week as my own art therapy. In the spirit of this week's parasha, this is the chorus of a song that I am working on:

We never sought to turn our straw or dirt to gold
We'd rather keep the dirt, if we knew you'd let us hold it
But when you push us out, we grab what can be sold
and there isn't always time to kiss the ground.

But we read each season of the tree of life
Of gold worked into petals to contain a sacred light
And this is the ambition, our reverse alchemy
That we try to fashion gold into a blossoming tree

Shabbat shalom.