

Kudos to Cantor Hyman, who created probably one of the funniest memes I've ever seen, showing Bernie Sanders on our Bimah as our synagogue *shomer*, or monitor. (If you missed it on our Facebook page, you can see it here) It follows a series of Bernie memes in all kinds of pictures and scenes, taken from inauguration day earlier this week, sitting at the ceremony wearing those big gloves knitted by Jen Ellis. And while they are all in good humor, one friend commented "maybe the memes are missing the bigger message that we could also be spreading. Be like Senator Sanders, who is supporting his community and reducing consumption. Shop local, women owned, small businesses that are sustainable."

One of the things I like most about the image of Senator Sanders is that he never stops being who he is - committed to the causes he's made public, and he unapologetically will make it known that he will support our country and continue to work, whether he was elected President or not. And, for many Americans this week, no matter the political side that you sit on, that was one of the key takeaways. This week marked a moment of transition and change, but there is still much work to be done and we still need to roll up our sleeves and do it. It is not a moment to sit back and believe that the wrongs of the world will suddenly be made right. It is a

moment, instead, to try and come together and to try and begin to heal our broken world.

With the holiday of Tu B'shvat coming up next week, a holiday in our tradition where we honor our environment, specifically in Israel around trees, it is an important reminder that there is still so much work to be done to help repair our struggling earth. While this week has included an Executive Order that is meant to tackle the climate crisis, it's so important to remember that it's not just our government but also each one of us that can do our part to help mend the world. Our pandemic helped us see a drop in carbon emissions, but that was a by product of not as many people leaving their home as once before. When the world goes somewhat back to normal and there is more movement again, the numbers will go back to their pre-pandemic state where we saw increases by about 1% each year over the previous decade. Circumstance let us breathe easier for a moment, but this has to be a change that we commit to in the long-run, not one that we happened into. We must commit to reducing our carbon footprint, reducing our use of single-use plastic such as water bottles, shopping bags, or straws and reducing the unnecessary waste that we produce, each and every year. We cannot rely just on policies and

government, must be the ones to commit to the change - our Earth is depending on every single one of us.

On January 21st, the Religious Action Center, the lobbying branch of our Reform Movement, announced our next New York based initiative called "Less is More parole reform." RAC-NY's new campaign aims to change New York State's current system, which imprisons 7,500 individuals per year for missing an appointment, staying out beyond a curfew, testing positive for alcohol, and other minor, technical violations after their release from prison. New York re-incarcerates more people for minor transgressions like these than any other state in our country except Illinois, and forty percent of all people sent to prison in New York are sent for technical violations.

This is a racial justice issue. Black people are 12 times more likely to be incarcerated in New York City jails for technical parole violations than white people. RAC-NY's new campaign to pass the Less is More bill aims to rectify this racial injustice. Yes, it is work we do with our representatives and legislators to change policy, but it is work that we can do and commit to that can make a real difference in other human beings lives. How can you help? You can reach out to me, and tell me that you'd like to be involved in our virtual lobbying. We will spend time, during the month of March,

working with the Religious Action Center to train and lobby our politicians to vote on a bill that will change this system for minor technical parole violations. We MUST commit to this work, together, in order to create a collective voice that is so loud that you cannot do anything but hear us. I am here to do this work. There are others in our congregation who are here to do this work. Now I ask, are you here to do this work?

In this week's Torah portion, Bo, the last of the plagues are sent down upon Egypt. And, eventually, Pharaoh's heart changes and he tells Moses that his people can go. As we know, the Israelites pack, in haste, to leave immediately. It took effort and work on their part to make that happen, but they did it. They didn't just sit back and say, well now there's a new leader we look to (Moses, instead of Pharaoh) and so we'll wait for him to make our decisions for us and let what will be, be. No, they had to be part of the effort to get up and go. We, the people, need to be part of the work that comes next. Our country is still divided, still struggling, still hurting, still sick, still endangering our planet, still harming others needlessly. So it is up to us to look at all of our transition and change this week and say, like the words we read from *Pirke Avot* "It is still up to me to do the work." I have to commit to get up and get going, no matter the task ahead. As we all heard this week, so beautifully, from our Youth Poet

Laureate Amanda Gorman “We will not march back to what was, but move to what shall be....For there is always light, if only we are brave enough to see it. If only we are brave enough to be it.”

On this Shabbat, I pray that each one of us is brave enough to see that we can be the light in this world - we can help heal it, we can help make it peaceful, we can help make it better for all humankind. We cannot simply sit back and let others take charge. We can be like Senator Sanders and remember that our work is not yet done, we must go on and forge ahead and remain vigilant in the needs of our world. If only we commit to the work, if only we commit to making change, if only we are brave enough to be it. Shabbat Shalom.