

I still remember exactly what I spoke about in my first sermon for CBJ. It was short and sweet. I've noticed over time, my sermons have been growing longer. Today, I've got a lot to say. Forgive me in advance for my length, and even more so for the imperfection of my words.

Prior to World War II, Jews were the driving force of Germany's intelligentsia. To give you a sense – 25% of the Nobel Prizes awarded to German citizens were given to Jews. Of German-speaking Austrians, it was 40%.

Imagine if all of that intellectual power had been put to work in support of the German war effort? Or in support of any German effort?

In the space between the two world wars, the Germans were disempowered and humiliated. That's a human experience – one that individuals can suffer in their private lives, or an entire group or country can suffer collectively. In the face of humiliation, you have a choice. You can look it in the eye, seize whatever power remains to you, and overcome your shame. Or, you can allow your victimhood to define you, and look for others to blame. We know which path the Nazis chose.

I'd like to tell you today the story of a German Jewish woman who never allowed her victimhood to define her. Her name was Trude Scharff. Trude had a gift for mathematics and science. She came of age at a time when the doors of German academia had just opened up to women. And then, as she was on the cusp of earning her doctorate, they slammed shut on her - not because she was female, but, of course, because she was Jewish. She slipped through in the nick of time, earning her PhD the same year the Nuremberg laws were passed, and escaping Germany.

She ran to England, encouraged by a colleague Maurice Goldhaber, who had fled Germany himself just a year earlier. But when she arrived, she discovered that England was already flooded with refugee scientists. Trude had managed to bring an expensive camera with her from Germany. She sold it and lived on the proceeds for 6 months, subsisting mostly on

potatoes to stretch her budget. Finally, she got a job translating papers for a physics professor in Cambridge. The work did little to advance her growth or her career, but it paid the rent.

Maurice was in Cambridge, too, working on his PhD at the Cavendish Lab. Maurice had no idea how to court a woman - flirtations, tender expressions of love, none of that was in his vocabulary. But he could talk physics, and that was a language Trude understood. They married in 1939, and moved together to Champaign-Urbana, where Maurice had an offer of a professorship.

And Trude?

So called “nepotism” laws prevented the university from hiring two spouses. In fact, if two people already employed by the university decided to marry each other, one of them would have to give up her job. There wasn’t much else going on in Champaign-Urbana, beyond the one university. So, Trude worked as a volunteer in Maurice’s lab. Though she received no pay and very little credit, at least she was engaging in research, and making real contributions to science.

The patterns of human interactions repeat themselves throughout time, with players taking different names and costumes. Our Torah portion this morning can be mapped onto Germany of the early 1930s. For the Germans, it was a period of rebuilding after World War I. Both infrastructure and national pride needed to be recovered. The Israelites were rebuilding after the much deeper suffering of enslavement. We read about the giant, golden menorah that they built for the Tabernacle. About the role of the Levites, and about the trumpets and the holy ark that would accompany the Israelites on what should have been their brief journey through the desert.

But being out in the desert was hard, and the people started moaning (Numbers 11:4-6):

וְהָאִסְפָּסָף אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבּוֹ הִתְאַוּ תַּאֲוָה וַיֵּשְׁבוּ וַיִּבְכּוּ גַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ מִי יֹאכֻלֵּנוּ בָּשָׂר:

The riffraff in their midst felt a gluttonous craving; and then the Israelites wept and said, “If only we had meat to eat!

זָכַרְנוּ אֶת־הַדָּגָה אֲשֶׁר־נֹאכַל בְּמִצְרַיִם חֵנָם אֶת הַקִּשְׁאִים וְאֶת הָאֲבִטְחִים וְאֶת־הַחֲצִיר
וְאֶת־הַבָּצְלִים וְאֶת־הַשּׁוּמִים:

We remember the fish that we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.

וְעַתָּה נִפְשָׁנוּ יִבְשָׁה אֵין כָּל בְּלִתִּי אֶל־הֶמֶן עֵינֵינוּ:

Now our gullets are shriveled. There is nothing at all! Nothing but this manna to look to!”

This is the voice of victimhood. Yes, life in the desert was genuinely tough. But the text immediately tells us that manna fell from the sky each morning, and it “tasted like rich cream.” Overwhelmed by their victimhood, the Israelites could not appreciate the gifts they had.

Rashi makes it even more pointed. Picking up on the word *chinam* in verse 5 – free - he points out that the Egyptians didn’t give their slaves anything for free. So what did our ancestors really mean, when they claimed that the food in Egypt was “free”? חֵנָם מִן הַמִּצְוֹת , Rashi says. Free of mitzvot.

The essence of victimhood is an inability to accept responsibility for your own fate. The world can force unfair, overwhelming hardships upon you. When we accept this truth, and when we recognize that the only thing we truly have control over is our own actions – that’s when we shed our victimhood, and claim our own power.

Only responsibility can lead to true empowerment.

חֵנָם מִן הַמִּצְוֹת. Nope, the Israelites said, we do not want commandments, we do not want responsibility, we do not want mitzvot.

That moment of longing to be free of mitzvot, of craving the imagined past of the glory days of Egypt, and refusing to see the blessings they held in the midst of their current hardship - that moment was the beginning of the end for that generation.

I'm sure many of you have seen my invitation to read the book "In This Place Together". I consider this invitation my parting gift for our community. Sheila Zelinger and I will be leading a discussion about the book next Shabbat. It gives a taste of what can happen if both sides of a conflict are willing to accept their share of responsibility, and empower themselves to change the narrative. At this moment, with missiles falling on Tel Aviv, that hope feels very far-off. As it must have felt for ancestors through 40 years of wandering. As it surely felt for Trude Scharff Goldhaber, with opportunity after opportunity denied her. But patterns change, when enough people are willing to step into their true power.

Trude knew how to work with whatever bits of power she was given, amplifying and growing them – for the purpose of doing good in the world. In time, she and Maurice moved to Brookhaven National Laboratory. She never "caught up" with Maurice, if a person's value is measured by external status. He ultimately became the head of all of Brookhaven. He was decorated with every prestigious award, short of the Nobel Prize. She became a full research scientist, running her own lab within Brookhaven, and making essential contributions to nuclear physics. And she became a strong advocate for women in science. Her most prestigious award is not something she won for herself, but something she enabled for others to win. The Gertrude Scharff Goldhaber award is offered every year to an outstanding woman graduate student at Brookhaven.

Most of Maurice and Trude's immediate family managed to escape the Nazis. Maurice's younger brother, Gerson Goldhaber, went on to become a celebrated physicist too, and he also married an accomplished physicist, Shulamit. Both of Trude and Maurice's children, Fred and Michael, became physicists. Fred's son, David Goldhaber-Gordon, became a physicist, and also became my husband. And now our son, Zev Goldhaber-Gordon, is starting graduate school in Applied Physics this fall. Gd willing, Zev will be the 8th Goldhaber to earn a PhD in physics, spanning four generations.

When David was applying for faculty positions 24 years ago, he received several offers - including one from Champaign-Urbana. I was a graduate student in Biochemistry at the time. Turns out, the university now has a spousal hiring program, to help attract talent to their remote campus. Had we decided to go to Urbana, I would have had my choice of positions in their biology department, paid in part by the spousal hiring fund. This was the best come-uppance - not retribution, but genuine, positive change.

Today, David runs a lab at Stanford that employs 14 talented young physicists.

Their future careers are dependent upon him.

And he depends on government funding to run his lab.

David can trace his ability to run his lab— and to educate future scientists— directly to the time period when Trude and Maurice, and a flood of Jewish talent, all arrived in this country. It was about that time that Vannevar Bush, previously science advisor to FDR, turned a report he had written for the president into a book entitled “Science: The Endless Frontier”. He made the case that investing in basic research would yield enormous benefits that no one could yet predict. Truman and congress were impressed. Everyone knew that the inventions of radar and of the atomic bomb had been crucial to the ally victory, and that neither would have been possible without basic science. So began a decades long commitment to science funding, that has made America the world’s leader in science and technology.

But the funding spigot has been slowly closing over the past 15 years. And then this year, it has been cranked half shut. In response to the sudden withdrawal of research funds, European universities have begun recruiting American talent. And they are flooded with interested applicants.

Given my family's personal stake in the matter, and the history of David’s grandparents, it is hard for me not to draw parallels to the 1930s, to the cultural revolution, and to other fascist regimes that targeted academics. But I also don’t want to overstate the case. It is true that government actions today are driving an exodus of American scientists. But so far the

scale of the exodus is small, and, more importantly, withdrawal of funding is not an act of hate. The government is not imprisoning scientists simply for being scientists, and a reasonable, ethical person could argue in favor of funding cuts.

Our government *is* imprisoning another group unjustly. And again, reasonable, ethical people can argue that we needed a more firm approach to immigration enforcement. But the brutality of the current crackdown, and in many cases the complete lack of due process - these are hateful.

In the resulting maelstrom of anger and hatred, of course we Jews get targeted. From all sides. Do you know about the “Great Replacement Theory”? It’s a conspiracy theory that Jews are plotting to bring immigrants of color to the US, in order to overwhelm the white majority. It is spoken of openly now on some very influential right-wing broadcasts. The Tree of Life shooter was spewing that nonsense. Similarly commonplace on the left, is the depiction of Jews as genocidal barbarians. Words turned to deadly violence this month, with the shooting of Sarah Milgrim and Yaron Lishinsky, of blessed memory, and the attack on the Run For Their Lives rally in Boulder.

The right is unsafe, the left is unsafe - it can be tempting just to give up and stay home. Pull in the flanks, round the wagons, stay tightly in our safe groups.

But I do not want to let them disempower us.

Many of you may have heard of Manny’s cafe - a Jewish owned community hub in San Francisco, that periodically gets vandalized. It happened again this week - windows broken, “Death to Israel” and other hateful words painted on the walls. It happened during the zeal of a pro-immigration protest. A protest of the type that Manny - who considers himself a progressive - often participates in. From what I’ve read about Manny, I don’t believe that this experience will keep him away from future protests.

Today is a big day of protests across the country. Our own Nancy Nagel is a lead organizer for the one in Palo Alto this afternoon, which I expect will be huge but much more tame than San Francisco. David Goldhaber-Gordon plans to grab a bite of Dottie's wonderful lunch, and then quickly head over there.

Our strength as a community lies in our political diversity. Many of you may completely disagree with the framing of today's protests. Then find other ways to get involved. Join one of the several Run For Their Lives rallies near us. Or do something apolitical. People are hungry. We had two groups from CBJ volunteer at Second Harvest over the past two weeks, as part of my farewell activities. We need someone to step up and keep that going. Our Am Yisrael and our Social Justice groups are building bridges with neighboring communities. Join their efforts. And there are countless ways to get involved out in the broader community.

When our people are in trouble, that is the time to find our power.

I hope you all know by now that every sermon I write is personal. I speak about what I most need to hear, believing that if I need to hear it, others do, too. Many of you have asked me why I am leaving, and where I am going. Some of you have asked am I retiring? No, quite the opposite. But I don't know yet what my next move is. In fact, it took a lot of courage to step out into the unknown. I love this community. I believe in you. I have learned and grown an enormous amount in my ten years serving you. And, I was reaching the end of my space for growth. It was time for me to step into my own power.

A community as strong, and loving, and good as you are, deserves professional leadership that is equally so. You have that. I know, because I have been the student of each of my CBJ colleagues. Some have moved on to other positions, but our professional staff has amazingly low turn-over. They are here for you.

Beginning with my mentor, Rabbi Ezray. When I first came to CBJ, I was a two-year-old rabbi who knew almost nothing about serving a synagogue. All new rabbis should be as blessed as I was, to find a mentor with such a wealth of wisdom to impart, who believes in them as he believed in me, and gives them the space they need to grow. Here are just some of the many lasting lessons Rabbi Ezray taught me. The importance of showing up. That small gestures matter, and that small-minded criticisms do not. He taught me how to look someone in the eye and give them the truth they need to hear, and he taught me to be compassionate with myself.

Bill taught me what it means to truly love your community. We learn in this week's Torah portion that Moses was an *Ish Anav*, a humble man. Bill is a student of Moses. Never seeking glory, he gives unendingly of himself, motivated only by love. Bill taught me to hold things loosely when needed, without once letting go of the essence. He showed me how to meet kids where they are at, and he showed me true delight in Torah *l'shmah* - learning for its own sake, Bill you are the only member of our clergy team without a formal title, but you don't fool me. I know a rabbi when I see one.

Cantor Barbara, too, is a student of Moses. Often working quietly behind the scenes, she is a nurturer. She is consistent, and strong, and in times of weakness we lean on her. I lean on her. Our Cantor has shown me how to prioritize the needs of the community. She taught me how to seek out knowledge wherever it is offered. She taught me how to hold good humor and a gentle touch even in the face of another's unkindness. She taught me to be forgiving.

Natalya is our third student of Moses. She, too, gives of herself unendingly to this community, out of pure loyalty and love. It was Natalya who first showed me the CBJ way, of seeing each child as a whole human, and accepting them and loving them as they are. She taught me how to engage young children through art. Natalya taught me about dignity in the face of unfairness. She showed me true generosity.

The newest member of your professional staff is Jeni Clancy. Some of you may have not even met her yet. But I am unendingly grateful to have had a year to work beside her. The Religious School is my baby, and I feel confident handing it over to her experienced, loving hands. Among the many things I learned from Jeni in the past year is how to take tefilah to the next level of both fun and meaning for our students. She showed me how to take big bumps in stride, to keep things in perspective, and to hold on to what matters most. And she, too, understands the CBJ way of meeting every person where they are at.

I have learned a great deal from our support staff, watching how they excel in their domains, borrowing from theirs to take into mine. The thing about having such a large, talented professional staff and such engaged volunteers - we generate A LOT of ideas, and then the office staff has to make it all actually happen.

Laura does everything with warmth and kindness. She takes great joy in creating beauty on the screen.

Andrew makes us all smile. He is smart as can be, and funny, and honest, and unbelievably generous.

Deborah is gentle, and thorough, and professional, and hardworking and kind. We missed her, and are so happy to have her back.

And out of Deborah's absence came a beautiful baby for the Jewish people – AND a wonderful new staff member for CBJ. Kelly is creative, and fun, and wicked competent.

Martin is smart, and strong, and unbelievably creative with his hands, and very generous.

Dottie is technically not on staff, and yet she may be the most important professional supporting our community. We feel loved by the exquisite food she creates, and by the true love that comes with it.

Sarah is brand new to the staff, and I can already see she will be terrific.

And above all, I have learned from our community. So many of you have touched me profoundly, personally - it is almost entirely due to you that I have become the rabbi that I am. I suspect most of you don't even know how much you have given me, and to my sorrow there are too many of you to name by name. But from the depths of my heart, I thank this community for everything you have taught me. CBJ is a place of strength and values, and I know that our community will continue to learn and grow and step into our power at this moment of need and beyond.