

Shabbat shalom. There was an article in the Times this week about some folks in Springfield, Ohio and how they and their Haitian neighbors are changing the story in our country in some beautiful ways. See, beginning in 2010, Haitians were given TPS, or Temporary Protected Status in the US. TPS is given to people whose home country has become too dangerous for them. In June of 2025, the Trump administration announced the termination of this status, a change that would have gone into effect last month, unless a judge ruled otherwise. With TPS removed, they would become immediately deportable and the federal government promised ICE agents on the ground the very next day. This created a terrifying state of limbo and vulnerability for the 10,000 Haitian people living in Springfield, Ohio.

But Haitians have contributed meaningfully to Springfield over the past decade. They've opened restaurants and worked in various industries. They've gone to church and their children have become friends with their classmates. They've built warm relationships on their blocks and they've helped to revive the struggling economy. And like any neighbor who contributes to the good and welfare of their community, they've become a beloved part of it. And so when they were threatened like this, when they were terrified, their American citizen neighbors did not turn their back.

This article explained that one way the community responded was when two women decided they would need to create safe harbor for their neighbors. So they discreetly began preparing rooms in their homes, ready to house a Haitian family for as long as needed. They developed a caring network of others ready to do the same. And they invited families they knew to come and be safe. Thank goodness, a judge ruled that TPS could not be revoked in this case. Several families, however, did end up staying in these rooms for a bit. They cried together, host and guest, for their shared humanity and love.

The first *line* of this article, I believe, was not an accident. It begins: "The upstairs room was ready." The Upstairs Room is the name of the autobiography of Johanna Reiss, who, as a Jewish child during the Holocaust, was hidden by the Oosterveld family in Holland. She survived because of that upstairs room. I believe this was meant as a reminder that when things are very dark, neighbors *have* shown up for each other and linked their destinies to one another with immeasurable courage. And now here we are.

I was recently speaking with a pastor of a church who told me that where before there were 120 people coming every Sunday morning, now there are only 55 coming. Some have been detained or deported. But many are simply retreating from public life for it has become too risky to go out and about in one's routine since that is when ICE often takes a person. A father, a mother, a grandparent, someone's child, a neighbor. Not just in Minneapolis and Springfield and LA, but right here.

And yet, through the darkness, a light is shining to illuminate this whole tragic situation. That light is the love of neighbors for neighbors. Human beings for human beings. American citizens for immigrants and refugees. Jewish and other faith communities for Latino, Muslim, and Asian communities.

This moment in time draws us deep into Moses' experience here in parshat Ki Tissa. In this parsha, Moses had gone up the mountain to receive the Torah from God and when he didn't come back down when the people thought he would, they gave in to their fear, and they asked Aaron to build them a new god. Aaron builds the Golden Calf for them, and they worship it with dance and song, for which they were gravely punished. Following this, Moses is in a dark place. He's never felt this low before and he doesn't know how to go forward from here. Perhaps we find ourselves empathizing with Moses in his despair.

So Moses, out of patience, out of steam, out of ideas, finally just cries out to God: *hareini na et k'vodecha!* God, show me your face! Give me evidence that there is goodness, proof that I can see and touch that things will be okay. And God gently tells Moses - I cannot show you My face, but I can reveal to you My essence. And as God passes before Moses, God calls out God's own divine identity. *Adonai Adonai El Rachum v'Chanun*, God begins. Adonai Adonai, a God of mercy, and of compassion. And God tells Moses that when he and the people are at their lowest, their most broken, to call God by this name.

When things are more broken than we have ever experienced before, we are told to call out mercy and compassion. *Rachum v'Chanun*. *This* will connect us to that which is greater than ourselves, *this* will help us access the truth that mercy and compassion exist and flow through all things and us, and *this* will remind us that it is mercy and compassion that turn darkness into light, healing what feels broken beyond repair.

It is in that light that I am so grateful to introduce you now to our CBE members who will speak tonight. Each has been participating in acts of mercy and compassion, of love and courage and humanity. They are each loving, scrappy, resilient, courageous, and humble people. The purpose of hearing them tonight is not so that we can say ... wow... I could never do what they do. But instead to know that they are like you and me. Sometimes unsure. Figuring it out. New to this. Learning from others! Big-hearted people who kind of hope that you'll join them. We are so grateful to them tonight for speaking, and every day for meeting this moment with acts of mercy and compassion.

Kala Seidenberg and Andrew Schwartz, together  
Anita Haravon  
Yana Lantsberg

### **Ending:**

- Gratitude for our speakers
- Gratitude for Bonnie Kerker, incredible and generous chair of our Refugee Task Force and Gale Kaufman and Karen Levenberg, wise and tireless co-chairs of our Democracy Team - together they make up our Meet the Moment Team.
- Sign up at the QR code at your seat

- Tuesday night Vigil at MDC, Thursday night Shine the Light, Food delivery, Lawyer support/CBE Justice League, Patrolling in Sunset Park or Camp Friendship, election protection, to be on the Refugee Task Force and/or Democracy Team listserves. (later, you'll find new trainings there, too, and more)
- Song we sing at our vigils: No estan solos, no estan solas, juntos hacemos la liberacion - they are not alone, they are not alone, together we will make freedom real. May this be true through our own actions as we close with this prayer:
- Adonai Adonai El Rachum v'Chanun - God, in this time in which we wake up to worse news each day - may we not forget that it is our own acts of mercy and compassion, of love and courage, of humanity that will change the story, bring light to the darkness, and set us, as it did for Moses and our people, on a path toward a hopeful and better future. Amen.
- Shabbat shalom