

A commentary on Parsha T'rumah:

This parshah speaks a lot to the ways Jewish faith is socially constructed from our collective practice as Jews. It also speaks to the ways that miracles are not the doing of a divine entity that exists on a level above people and life, but instead are reflections of our own collective labor.

The entirety of this parsha is dedicated to providing painstakingly detailed instructions as to how to build the Tabernacle, as well as the ark, table, and menorah within it. I know that for many Jews and non Jews alike, religious writing of this nature can feel hard to parse. It can almost feel as if the spiritual significance of passages like these gets lost underneath the mountain of tedious descriptions of construction directions, how to adorn, what materials must be used where, and in what quantity, etc. However, we musn't lose sight of the significance of the Tabernacle itself, nor the Ark/Menorah. What do they represent, and why is it so important that we take no shortcuts in making sure that the work of building them is done properly?

As revolutionaries, we know the importance of intentionality. We do not do things simply for the sake of doing them or because we are reacting to major events. We have talked at length about our disdain for the spontaneous and directionless organizing styles of groups such as the PSL, and it's for a reason! It is absolutely infuriating and frustrating beyond words to watch the cycle of outrage unfold. An atrocity is committed by pigs, reactionary politicians, street fascists, etc. A mobilization is called, they march around town until everyone's legs and throats hurt, they go home (to paraphrase George Jackson, they become americans again), and they repeat ad-nauseum. This Torah portion underscores the vital importance of knowing WHY we do the things that we do, and what our short and long term goals are. Last week, Benny alluded to Amilcar Cabral's speech where he invokes the masses' desire to fight "to see their lives go forward, to guarantee the future of their children". We cannot ask the masses to march for some hypothetical, abstract idea of "democracy" or "justice", we must come with a program, obtained through mass work, that is reflective of the needs, desires, and will of the most oppressed.

When God instructs the Israelites to construct the tabernacle, God says it will be a way for them to "live among the people". The Israelites relationship to God, their faith in, devotion to and willingness to follow God via their messengers/prophets is the most vital piece of their struggle for liberation. The building of the Tabernacle, then, is a necessary act in order to ensure that the Israelites can be in communication with God and can live with them in their presence. This, to me, is one of the parsha's that best illustrates the metaphor we so often harken back to in this group, that of God being a

stand-in for the masses of people. T'rumah reminds us that the only way that God can live amongst us is through our collective life and labor. It is through the labor, gifts, and sacrifices of the Israelites that the Tabernacle is built and a home for God among the people is established. T'rumah, or "gifts" are also not collected through coercive means. Instead, the people are asked to give gifts from the heart. It is dedication to God and by extension each other that allows for the Tabernacle to be built, which in turn benefits them as a whole and allows for them to be a holy people. It is the opposite of exploitation and individualism. It is the ultimate expression of community.

Returning once more to the topic of communication within this passage, I think of the significance of communication of detail more broadly throughout the Torah and the Jewish faith as a whole. Jews have always taken very seriously the passing down of information through writing, it is one the reasons why we have been able to survive for so many thousands of years in spite of so many attempts to wipe us out. We have been able to, at our best, straddle the dialectic of adhering to and keeping tradition alive, while also adapting it to the incredibly diverse and ever changing conditions we find ourselves in across the diaspora. So i'll close by emphasizing that, although passages like this might seem boring or pointless or outdated in the details they choose to include, we must always be mindful of the reasoning behind why those choices were made. What were our ancestors trying to tell us, why did they feel that it was important to give us such detailed instructions? What is important to us when we communicate to the masses? What are we trying to say, and how can we communicate it in the most effective way possible so that it may have longevity and effectiveness?