

YK – Morning
Woke and Proud
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Woke, Oxford English Dictionary: **woke, adjective**: Originally: well-informed, up-to-date. Now chiefly: alert to racial or social discrimination and injustice; frequently in stay woke. The term, which has spread virally in recent years after being embraced by the Black Lives Matter movement, has been used since the early 1960's to describe those who are socially aware.

That word – among many others such as “liberal” – has been hijacked by the extreme right wing. It is flung about as an insult, a pejorative, something to be ashamed of.

A year or so ago, I was accused of being woke. The accuser might have been referring to the many congregational emails that I wrote following the Sandy Hook gun massacre – or any of the mass shootings over the past few years – condemning the easy availability of guns intended to be used for mass shooting or the lack of government leadership on gun violence or the horrific “Muslim ban” executive orders from the former president.

Clearly my accuser was using the term as a pejorative, an insult, something I should be ashamed of. Well, whatever the accuser was referring to or however it was supposed to be taken, I accepted it as a compliment. I am “woke.”

I come by it honestly, and I am in good company.

This morning we will read a “woke” rant by none other than Isaiah, one of our greatest prophets:

“Why, when we fasted, did You not see?
When we starved our bodies, did You pay no heed?”
Because on your fast day
You see to your business
And oppress all your laborers!

Because you fast in strife and contention,
And you strike with a wicked fist!
Your fasting today is not such
As to make your voice heard on high.

Is such the fast I desire,
A day for people to starve their bodies?

Is it bowing the head like a bulrush
And lying in sackcloth and ashes?
Do you call that a fast,
A day when the LORD is favorable?

No, this is the fast I desire:
To unlock fetters of wickedness,
And untie the cords of the yoke
To let the oppressed go free;
To break off every yoke.

It is to share your bread with the hungry,
And to take the wretched poor into your home;
When you see the naked, to clothe him,
And not to ignore your own kin.

Then shall your light burst through like the dawn
And your healing spring up quickly;
Your Vindicator shall march before you,
The Presence of the LORD shall be your rear guard.

If you read and hear Isaiah and do not come away with the urgency to be “woke,” I don’t know what you’re reading and hearing.

Deut. 16:20

{ס} צֶדֶק צֶדֶק תִּרְדָּף לְמַעַן תַּחְיֶה וַיִּרְשַׁתְּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ:
Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that your God [יהוה](#) is giving you.

And not just “justice,” but justice “squared.” Abraham ben Meir ibn Ezra, one of the giants of 11th Century Torah commentators, said this about the double “justice:” Moses repeats the word justice to indicate that one should pursue justice whether one gains or loses. Or the word is repeated to indicate that one should pursue justice as long as one exists. 13th Century commentator Hezekiah ben Manoah, Chizkuni, says that “justice” refers both to the presiding judges AND to the litigants themselves.

Torah is “woke.”

And more “woke” Isaiah:

Isaiah 1:17

Learn to do good.

Devote yourselves to justice;

Aid the wronged.

Uphold the rights of the orphan;

Defend the cause of the widow.

Amos 5:24

I loathe, I spurn your festivals,

I am not appeased by your solemn assemblies.

If you offer Me burnt offerings—or your meal offerings—

I will not accept them;

I will pay no heed

To your gifts of fatlings.

Spare Me the sound of your hymns,

And let Me not hear the music of your lutes.

But let justice well up like water,

Righteousness like an unfailing stream.

Amos was “woke.”

Our prophets were “woke.”

I am proud to be “woke” and proud of Judaism’s being woke.

I am woke to the pain and suffering of people in Florida and California and the not unforeseen consequences of climate change.

I am woke to women who, thanks to the Supreme Court ruling on Roe v Wade, no longer have autonomy over their own bodies. As Jews, we have an obligation to make sure everyone can get the care they need. The right to access abortion should not be determined by your zip code. ¹

¹ <https://www.ncjw.org>

I am woke to the pain of the 10-year-old girl who was raped and had to flee to Indiana to have an abortion. I am woke to the pain of the Indiana physician who is being harassed for performing the abortion.

I am woke to the pain of women who are being denied FDA-approved drugs often used to treat inflammatory arthritis and other autoimmune conditions and, at much higher doses, cancer. They are being denied because of the “trigger laws” that went into effect in at least 20 states following the Supreme Court ruling that ban their use without necessarily distinguishing by condition or diagnosis.”² And to the pain of women who are forced to cross state lines for women’s health care.

I am woke to the pain and fear of all LGBTQ+ people who are dealing with the terrifying possibilities from Supreme Court decisions.

I am woke to the bravery of Iranian women who are rising up in protest against extreme Sharia laws. Mahsa Amini, 22, had traveled from her hometown in the province of Kurdistan to the Iranian capital, Tehran, in September. Emerging from the subway, she was arrested for failing to cover her hair modestly enough. Three days later, she was dead.³

I am woke to the deaths and injuries of thousands of Ukrainian men, women, and children. I am woke to the pain of the Uyghurs, the Muslim minority ethnic population in China. Human rights groups believe China has detained more than one million Uyghurs against their will over the past few years in a large network of what the state calls “re-education camps”, and sentenced hundreds of thousands to prison terms.⁴ I am woke to the pain of Palestinians who are being used as political pawns by surrounding Arab countries.

I am woke to the pain of the men, women, and children who were shipped like so much human cattle to Martha’s Vineyard. They had been promised help in getting jobs and a stable life; instead, they were used as fodder for a political stunt.

I am woke to the pain of Black people and people of every ethnicity who deal every day with blatant and subtle racism.

² <https://www.arthritis.org/about-us/news-and-updates/statement-on-methotrexate-access>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/28/podcasts/the-daily/iran-protests-women.html>

⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22278037>

I am woke to the pain of every Jew who has been harassed, assaulted, or murdered simply because they are Jews.

I am woke to the horrific rise in antisemitic incidents in the United States and around the world. I am woke to the fact that our former president dog whistled antisemitism, lifting the lid off the garbage can of White Supremacists.

I am woke to the pain of a Black Jewish woman – **a presenter** at the most recent URJ Biennial in Chicago – who was asked if she could have things brought to their hotel room. I am woke to the reality that Jews of Color are frequently treated with suspicion because they don't appear as white Ashkenazim.

I am woke to the reality of White Christian Nationalist ideologues who are trying to turn this country into a White Christian Nationalist state. To those who are concerned about Congressional representatives who declare that America, our America, American Jews' America, was founded as a Christian nation by Christians for Christians, and that all its laws should be based on the Christian Bible. I will bet you were "woke" to the nauseating sight of tiki torches in Charlottesville being carried by people chanting, "Jews will not replace us." To leftist politicians who equate the United States and Israel to Hamas and the Taliban, to college groups who deny group membership to Jewish students because they support Israel. I am "woke" to those politicians who traffic in incendiary antisemitic rhetoric – who then put on an innocent face and declare that they were "misunderstood."

... this is the fast I desire:

To unlock fetters of wickedness,
And untie the cords of the yoke
To let the oppressed go free;
To break off every yoke.

It is to share your bread with the hungry,
And to take the wretched poor into your home;
When you see the naked, to clothe him,
And not to ignore your own kin.

If Jewish values make me woke, then may I remain so. I cannot read Isaiah or Amos or any of our prophets and **not** be "woke." If I am "woke," so be it. I gladly accept that and proudly wear the adjective.

