



Bread for the World Louisiana

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Recently I was attending a meeting at the Jewish Community Center and I came across the following article by Rabbi Jacobs. I found her words energizing and want to share them with you. Sr. Jane

Prayer and Justice Work: The Perfect Complements

By Rabbi Jill Jacobs

In contemporary Jewish discourse, the worlds of the synagogue and the worlds of service and advocacy sit far apart. The former is a place of introspection, of prayer and of relationship with God. The latter is a place of action and engagement in the world.

Many of us distinguish between “religious” Jews and “secular” Jews. Religious Jews attend synagogue, observe Shabbat and keep kosher. For secular Jews, their primary involvement comes through culture and justice.

But these boundaries between prayer and justice, and between the internal and the external, are foreign to Judaism. Halachah, most often translated as “Jewish law,” literally means “the way to walk.” To be a Jew is to walk through the world in a Jewish way. This Jewish way includes contemplation and action, prayer and service, relationships with the Divine and relationships with other human beings.

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justice work and sustain us in these
efforts.**

On Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, many Jews spend more hours in the synagogue than at any other time during the year. For this reason, these holidays can feel purely contemplative. Yet Rosh HaShanah is also “yom teruah,” “the day of sounding the shofar,” when we hear the sound that the Torah associates with liberation. And Yom Kippur morning is punctuated with Isaiah’s call to “loose the chains of injustice... to set the oppressed free.”



These intrusions of real-life politics into the contemplative business of prayer remind us that prayer and justice work were never meant to be

separate realms of behavior. Rather, the two constitute complementary aspects of an integrated Jewish life. In this integrated life, prayer and ritual push us toward justice work and sustain us in these efforts.

We often think of prayer as one-way conversation with God. We praise God for everything that is good in the world and beg for supernatural forces to change what is not. Instead, we might understand prayer as a two-way exchange that includes a challenge to us as well as an appeal to God.

For example, Jews each morning traditionally recite a series of blessings about everyday miracles. We give thanks for our vision, our freedom, our clothing and our other basic needs. For those who have what they need to survive, these blessings remind us to be grateful for what we have, even when every one of our desires might not be fulfilled. For those who are struggling to get by, these blessings offer hope that our situations will improve.

For all of us, these blessings challenge us to create a world in which every person is free, and in which every person can meet the basic needs of his or her family. We cannot simply thank God for opening the eyes of the blind without considering how we can make the world more accessible to people with physical limitations. And we cannot thank God for giving us freedom without working to secure the

freedom of the estimated 12 million people in the world who remain enslaved. Rather than allow us to retreat internally, prayer forces us out into the world.

At the same time, prayer provides a necessary check on the tendency of social justice activists to try to fix the world right now, no matter the cost to them or to others. Prayer, Shabbat and other rituals provide spiritual nourishment, the feeling that our work is connected to a broader whole, and even a sense of humility.

Social justice work famously burns out many of the idealistic young people who sign up after college to be organizers or campaign workers. As for the longtime social justice activists, some begin to feel like the work is the only thing that matters. In many cases, this leads to long work hours and a never-ending sense of urgency. In the worst cases, some come to believe that the relentless pursuit of the cause justifies bad behavior toward others or the tolerance of abusive work environments.

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Stopping to pray, to mark time or even to take off 25 hours for Shabbat is a means of acknowledging that even if we work every minute of every day, we're not going to fix everything. This realization forces us to see

ourselves as participants in a long-term struggle rather than as heroes able to repair the world on our own.

Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur may be days to sit in prayer and contemplation. But this ritual does not constitute a break from justice work. Rather, these days should both nourish our justice work and challenge us to recommit to these efforts in the year ahead.

Rabbi Jill Jacobs is the executive director of Rabbis for Human Rights-North America.

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Thanksgiving: A Time To Give Thanks, A Time to Give Help

As we prepare for giving thanks for the many blessing bestowed upon us, let us not forget the millions who are hungry and without adequate water.

Across the Horn of Africa region (Somaliland, Ethiopia and Kenya) people are suffering from one of the driest years in memory. Severe shortages of food and water, along with spiraling food prices and the deaths of livestock, have plunged many families into destitution.

The UN announcement of famine in Somalia is both a wake-up call to the scale of this disaster, and a wake-up call to the solutions needed to limit death-from-hunger now and in the future. What is famine and how can we prevent it?

Famine is the “triple failure” of 1) food production, 2) people’s ability to access food and, finally and most crucially 3) in the political response by governments and international donors. Crop failure and poverty leave people vulnerable to starvation – but famine only occurs with political failure. In Somalia years of internal violence and conflict have been highly significant in creating the conditions for famine.

The UN uses a five-step scale, called the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) to assess a country’s food security. Stage 5 – “famine/humanitarian catastrophe” – requires that more than two people per 10,000 die each day, acute malnutrition rates are above 30%, all livestock is dead, and there is less than 2,100 kilocalories of food and 4 liters of water available per person per day

A child dies every 5 seconds from hunger related causes.

In October 2009 Oxfam published a paper on Ethiopia and neighboring regions asking “what can be done to prevent the next drought from becoming a disaster?” Oxfam acknowledged

that food aid saved lives but that it was not cost-effective and did not alone help people to withstand the next shock.

By the time the UN calls a famine it is already a signal of large-scale loss of life. Aid must come quickly and appropriately to prevent an even worse-case scenario. We must ask why this famine happened and why again? And how to prevent the next one?

Famines result from a combination “triple failure”:

1. Production failure: In Somalia, a two-year drought – now being the driest year in the last 60 years – has caused record food inflation, particularly in the expectation of the next harvest being 50% of normal. Somalia already had levels of malnutrition and premature mortality so high as to be in a “normalized” state of permanent emergency. This is true in pockets across the entire region.

2. Access failure: The drought has killed off the pastoralists’ prime livestock assets (up to 90% animal mortality in some areas), slashing further their purchasing power. In addition Somalia’s severe internal conflict has made development almost impossible to achieve and data difficult to access both accurately and credibly.

3. Response failure: Underlying it all has been the inability of Somalia’s government and

donors to tackle the country’s chronic poverty, which has marginalized vulnerable people and fundamentally weakened their ability to cope. There’s been a lack of investment in social services and basic infrastructure and lack of good governance. Meanwhile donors have reacted too late and too cautiously. The overall international donor response to this humanitarian crisis has been slow and inadequate. According to UN figures, \$1 billion is required to meet immediate needs. So far donors have committed less than \$200 million, leaving an \$800 million black hole.

How does this situation compare with current food crises in other parts of the world?

This famine represents the most serious food insecurity situation in the world today in terms of both scale and severity.

This is the first officially- declared famine in Africa so far this century, at a time when famine has been eradicated everywhere else.

The 21st Century is the first time in human history that we have the capacity to eradicate famine.

Emergency aid is vital right now, but we also need to ask why this has happened, and how we can stop it ever happening again. The warning signs have been seen for months, and the world has been slow to act. Much greater

long-term investment is needed in food production and basic development to help people cope with poor rains and ensure that this is the last famine in the region.

**A Time to Give Help -
As Only You Can As A U.S.
Citizen**

Contact your U.S. Senators and member of Congress and tell them. **DO NOT** cut back on U.S. development assistance because ... Countries struggling with extreme poverty do not have the resources to adequately finance their own development.

The world is facing a hunger crisis unlike anything it has seen in more than 50 years. 925 million people are hungry. Every day, almost 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes. That's one child every five seconds.

U.S. development assistance has made a big difference to millions of people in poverty. A well that provides clean drinking water for a village may cost a few hundred dollars, but the benefits far exceed that sum in terms of improving people's health, increasing the productivity of workers, taking care of livestock, and allowing girls to attend school rather than walking hours each day to find other sources of water.

Sincerely,
Your name and address

**Mark your calendar
Walk for the Hungry
Saturday, March 3, 2012**

Theme

A Circle of Caring

**Let's create a circle of caring
around domestic food programs
and foreign assistance programs.
Let us care for the hungry no
matter where they live.**



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