

Rabbis Message March 2021

Dear Friends,

Though it feels like we were celebrating Purim and enjoying the spiel only a few days ago (mostly because we were!), Passover is already waiting for us just around the corner. Jews around the world will gather for first night festivities on Saturday, March 27. And for the second year in a row, JCNWJ will join together over Zoom to celebrate the second night seder on (surprise, surprise!) the next day, which is Sunday, March 28. More on that second seder will come to you by email soon).

As we begin to look ahead to our Spring holiday, many of us will soon be cleaning our homes and beginning to rid ourselves of prohibited foods. Normally we would have a collection box for your discards at 115 Youmans Avenue to help fight local hunger, but since Covid has rendered that an impossibility once again this year, we encourage you to reach out to your own local soup kitchens or food pantries and make donations directly to them.

Unfortunately, we Jews have known intimately over the course of history what it feels like to be food insecure. Hunger is why Abraham went to Egypt (Gen 12). It's why Isaac went to Gerar (Gen 26). It's how Joseph's destiny to save the world was realized. And it's why Ruth and Naomi journeyed to Moab (Ruth 1). King David understood hunger (2 Samuel 21). So did King Ahab (1 Kings 18:1-2) and the prophet Jeremiah, too (Lamentations 4:9 – Jeremiah is the traditionally recognized author of Lamentations).

Over the course of time, there have been so many times when we, as a people, have felt the pangs of hunger, either because of physical attack or governmental restrictions regarding the sources of income we were permitted to have. Yes, we know how it feels to be hungry, and it does not feel good, which is why we are commanded in the Book of Leviticus to leave food for the poor and the stranger when we harvest the fields of our land (Leviticus 23:22).

So please, even if ridding your home of all leavened products is not a tradition familiar to your family follows, and even if you don't personally read from the Hagadah during Passover, please do what you can to fulfil one of the most central commandments of this holiday, as presented in the text of the Hagadah, when it instructs us to declare: "לֹא יֵיטִיב לְכָל דַּכְּפִיּוֹן יֵיטִיב לְכָל יֵיטִיב לְכָל" Let all who are hungry come and eat."

No doubt, the challenges of hunger have become especially acute during this time of Covid-19. According to the Jewish organization, Mazon, whose mission is "to fight to end hunger among people of all faiths and backgrounds in the United States and Israel," while there were already a staggering 40 million Americans struggling with food insecurity prior to Covid-19, that number has doubled to 80 million over the past twelve months. 12.9 million of the food insecure among us are children (<https://mazon.org/hunger-in-america/>). This cannot be permitted to continue.

According to the classic rabbinic collection of Exodus Rabbah, "If all the world's miseries were placed on one side of a scale and poverty alone were put on the other, poverty would outweigh them all." (Exodus Rabbah, 31:14) With poverty, of course, comes hunger. Yes, poverty, which leads to hunger, really is that massive a challenge. No, our donations alone will *not* put an end to hunger, not even just in Warren County. Hunger is a scourge that will not only require all hands on deck, it will require all hands on deck for a significantly extended period of time. All the same, if our donations turn out to be that which is needed to keep even just one person alive, what an honor that would be! After all, according to the Talmud, "Whoever saves even a single life is considered by Scripture to have saved the entire world." (Sanhedrin 37a) Wow!

So please, whether you need a place to donate the food you'll be clearing from your homes for Passover or not, whether you'll be reading from the Hagadah, which implores us to feed the hungry, or not, either way, whether it in food or cash, please give what you can to those who are in greater need than we. Because if you do, if *we all* do, who knows? We just might be able to save the very world itself. And who among us wouldn't jump at and opportunity like that?

Chag Pesach Sameach – Happy Passover (in about three weeks)!

Next year in person,

Rabbi Dubin