Rosh HaShanah, Day One — Gen. 21: the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael

- While Hagar has been a faithful servant to the family, the story explains that Abraham expels Hagar and her son with very little notice
- Despite her dedication and service, Abraham only gives Hagar some bread and water
- The meager rations are quickly exhausted
- The story highlights the problems of poor families
- Often, families on the margins find themselves in economic trouble through no fault of their own
- Despite this, poor families are often seen as having character defects — lazy, lacking initiative, so on
- God’s non-judgmental assistance to Hagar and Ishmael is a model for us to provide for poor and hungry because of the Jewish demand to create love and justice.

Rosh HaShanah, Day Two — Gen. 22: the binding of Isaac

- Isaac’s life is in danger, though he is never consulted regarding the decision
- Abraham intends to put his son through an ultimate sacrifice, for a vision that doesn’t include Isaac
- Many Jewish commentators are horrified by this possible destruction of life
- There is a parallel for poor people in the US
- Cuts to food, housing, and medical assistance threaten the lives of poor Americans, though they are almost never consulted regarding such decisions
- Political forces sacrifice poor people for a vision that values low taxes and deregulation over the lives of poor people
- American Jews should insist that our political leaders pursue a vision that includes all residents of our country, regardless of economic status

Kol Nidre

- The traditional Kol Nidre prayer asks God for a second chance
- We’ve made nedarim — vows, promises — both to God and to the people in our lives
- Since we’re fallible people, we were not always able or willing to fulfill these promises
- Kol Nidre is a reminder — just because we fell short, doesn’t mean we shouldn’t keep trying
- As Jews, we are required to provide basic sustenance to all people, in the form of tzedek, a just distribution of wealth
With millions of Americans in poverty, it’s clear that we have fallen short
On Kol Nidre, we declare that we cannot give in to fatalism or despair
We should recommit to fulfilling the promise our people and our country have left unfulfilled to America’s poor

**Yom Kippur Morning — Leviticus 16: the two goats**

- The reading describes a ritual of expiation
- Two goats are selected: one sacrificed for God, one for Azazel
- The method of selection is random — it has nothing to do with the quality of the goats
- The reading reminds us of the randomness of life
- Many of us have been randomly born into families of means
- Others have been randomly been born into poverty
- In a country in which economic mobility is increasingly impossible, birth is becoming destiny
- The Yom Kippur reading reminds us that much of our fate is due to happenstance rather than merit
- We are horrified to live in a country in which some citizens are randomly sacrificed on the altar of economic injustice, deregulation, and cuts to basic material needs
- As Jews, we need to work toward the vision of a country that provides for all its residents, regardless of the economic class into which they happen to be born