

MAZON Sermon Seeds

Yamim Noraim 5780/2019

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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 ndarim — 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 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