

SERMON YOM KIPPUR MORNING 5781

Rabbi David Edleson, Temple Sinai, South Burlington Sept 28 2020

TZEDAKAH AND JUSTICE

In a few minutes, we will recite the Yom Kippur *Amidah*. This *Amidah*, more than anything else in our tradition has been the focus of great attention, intention, musical and poetic effort. For many of us, it reaches its climax in the *Unetaneh Tokef* Prayer. Written in the midst of the Crusades in which Jewish villages were massacred, the words 'who by fire and who by sword, were very real to them, as was 'who by pestilence'. And now it is to us.

So these Jews, living in constant threat of attack, did not stop at the list of very real threats they faced, they went on to say what could make those threats seem less harsh, less terrifying. The things they said made living in fear more bearable were:

- *TESHUVAH*
- *TEFILAH*
- *TZEDAKAH*

Teshuvah, making right the hurt and harm we have caused, and repairing our relationship with one another and with God. That makes life meaningful in the face of mortality.

Tefila, prayer, remembering in the face of our transitory existence that there are things more enduring, more lasting, and more important than our brief lives. In prayer there is both the development of humility, but also of awe. Humility and Awe require each other.

Tzedakah, helping make right the injustice in our societies, making sure to support the most vulnerable among us.

It is worth pausing and considering that the three answers they gave to what **makes life in the face of death less scary:**

Teshuvah, Tefila, Tzedakah.

These lessen the harsh decree. **These make our lives meaningful.**

It should be noted that having a meaningful life can be a very different goal than having a pleasurable life, or an exciting life.

As David **Brooks** put it, having a meaningful life and a rich spiritual life means putting much more attention to our **eulogy virtues** than to our resume virtues. How do we want our children to remember us? Our friends?

What is the legacy we are going to leave? To our families. To the Jewish community. To the larger society?

Over these holidays, I've talked about *teshuvah* and *tefilah*, so today, on Yom Kippur I wanted to talk about *tzedakah*.

Tzedakah is not charity. Charity flows from a sense of giving to the unfortunate. ***Tzedakah flows from a duty to address the injustice that will inevitably arrive in any social system.*** Tzedakah is from the root ***Tzedek***, or justice. When we know who are the most vulnerable in our system, we have a responsibility to protect them, feed them and give them a home. **These are basic Jewish values.**

In a few minutes we will read the words of **Isaiah** who tells us that the fast today is to remind us to feed the hungry and house those with no homes.

With this pandemic, and the **disruption of the economy**, those at the margins of our economy are very vulnerable. The demands at food shelves have gone up. Food insecurity is likely to keep going up as the economic impact of the epidemic continues.

Of course, the economy makes us fear for our own security, and can make us hold back on giving, but remember that giving gives back to the giver. It gives us a sense of goodness and agency in the face of so much we can't control. ***Tzedakah is an act of faith and a statement of values, a physical enactment of the world we want to see.***

And remember what earlier generations facing the Crusades and much greater insecurity than we face, they still made *Tzedakah* central to their sense of having a meaningful life.

With so many facing hunger, I want to ask you to make donations to the **South Burlington Food Shelf**, an organization this community supports. If you can, become a “**Food Hero**” by giving monthly so they can budget their work more effectively. We already do go work for the Food Shelf, but we could do and need to do more. So please this year of all years, please support them. Let’s put our values into action and be a force for good in our community.

And I hope you will continue to **support Jewish organizations**, including this temple. Synagogues around the country are struggling, and closing. If we want to live in a city that has a vibrant Jewish life, and a progressive synagogue, we need your support. **We want to pass on what we’ve built to the next generation. Let that be our legacy, as so many have done before us.**

Let’s remember that in Judaism, it is through our actions that we come to faith. Judaism is in the doing. WE “**do Jewish.**” Tzedakah is just that. It is taking our inner faith out into the world. It is taking the ***tikkun middot***, the inner work of personal growth that is needed for each of us, but then we move it out to ***tikkun olam***, repairing the world, the outer work by which we take not so much a leap of faith, **but a leap of action.**

Please Rise for the **AMIDAH**.