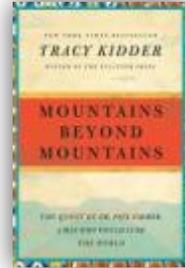




Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World
by Tracy Kidder



Mountains Beyond Mountains tells the story of Dr. Paul Farmer, founder of the international NGO Partners in Health, as he works to heal disease and fight poverty in some of the most underserved communities in the world. Farmer, a Harvard-trained physician and public health icon, believes that all people should have access not only to basic, but to top-of-the-line medical resources and technology, regardless of their financial means. The book follows Farmer and his colleagues around the world as they work to save lives and build healthier communities in Haiti, Russia, Peru and right here in North America.

Discussion Questions

1. Does the portrayal of Farmer as a person (his attitude toward others, personal and professional interactions, his family life) resonate with you? What about Farmer felt familiar? What about him do you aspire to? What about his character strikes you as impossible to model?
2. How replicable is the work of Partners in Health? Can such a program work without a leader as dedicated and well-connected as Farmer?
3. Farmer describes certain topics as “areas of moral clarity” (or AMCs), where our response should be clear and obvious. Do you agree? What are the AMCs in *your* life?
4. Several times throughout the book, Farmer spends an inordinate amount of time and resources saving (or attempting to save) a single individual. How does this relate to Judaism’s teaching of *tikkun olam*?
5. How do Farmer and his colleagues navigate the tension between the academic approach of their Harvard colleagues, who largely reject religion, and the centrality of faith for their Haitian patients? Does this tension contribute to their success or work against it?
6. *Mountains Beyond Mountains* speaks extensively about the traditions of voodoo and sorcery. How are voodoo and sorcery similar to/different from the way in which we balance our own belief in prayer against modern medicine?
7. Page 79 provides the translation and explanation of a Haitian peasants’ proverb: “*God gives but doesn’t share.*” This means, as Farmer would later explain it, ‘God gives to humans everything we need to flourish, but he’s not the one who’s supposed to divvy up the loot. That charge was laid upon us.’” How does this concept relate to Judaism’s understanding of social justice?
8. The book states, “The world is full of miserable places. One way of living comfortably is not to think about them, or when you do, send money.” Do you agree? Should we/can we do more? If so, what?
9. *Mountains Beyond Mountains* shines light on largely “invisible” populations and issues: children, prisoners, HIV/AIDS patients, lack of accessible health care, global poverty, etc. What is our role, as individuals *and* as a community, to address these issues? How can we raise awareness and take action?

TAKE ACTION!

- Donate! Collect funds for local, national or international organizations bringing relief to the vulnerable.
- Millennium Development Goals: Host discussions within your community to educate members on the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals. As a community, choose one and get involved!
- *Nothing But Nets*: Join URJ's *Nothing But Nets* campaign to provide \$10 bed nets to prevent families living in extreme poverty from contracting malaria. www.urj.org/nets.
- Join a local coalition to learn more about issues facing your community and how you can raise your voice for justice.
- Volunteer at a local hospital or health clinic.
- Advocate for improved public health programs in your own community, or for increased investment in global public health and the Millennium Development Goals by the United States and Canada.
- Write about global public health issues for your local newspaper, synagogue newsletter or your favorite blog to raise awareness.
- Share information about global public health challenges in your workplace, synagogue, and home. Help raise awareness about how these challenges affect our brothers and sisters around the world.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- URJ's Haiti Relief Work: www.urj.org/haiti
Learn about our recent efforts, projects funded and donation information.
- Cambridge Reads Program: www.cctvcambridge.org/node/752
Video of a special program with Dr. Paul Farmer and Tracy Kidder.
- Partners in Health & Stand with Haiti Campaign: www.standwithhaiti.org
Strategic re-visioning of Haiti's health care and hospital systems following the January 2010 earthquake.
- Doctors without Borders: www.doctorswithoutborders.org
An international medical humanitarian organization working in more than 60 countries.



Religious Action Center
of Reform Judaism

www.rac.org/racreads