

**Rabbi Richard Levy**

**Rabbi of the Campus Synagogue and Director of Spiritual Growth at Hebrew Union College (Los Angeles Campus)**

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**Reform CA Sample Sermon on Affordable Homes & Economic Justice**

In the beginning, the house in which humans lived was the great wide world. Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden, with the sky as their roof and the trees as the beams. They slept on the ground, ate from the trees, and the animals which they had named trusted them and were not afraid of them—nor were they afraid of the animals. The world was their shelter—they needed no shelter from the world.

But disobedience to God—eating from the forbidden tree—changed all that, and God exiled them from the Garden, and in time, by allowing humans to eat animals, animals began to fear us, and we them—and so we needed shelter from the world, and houses were created. Noah's ark was a kind of house upon the flood, keeping two of everything alive so the world might be created anew. This is the ideal of a house: an ark that keeps us safe from the roiling waters of the world.

*For the sake of Noah and his mission, let us work to secure ongoing, steady state investment in affordable housing that will give the homeless the housing that will keep them from the floods of the world outside.*

We know what happened to the people who couldn't make it aboard the ark. When the waters receded, people wandered the earth, people like Abraham and Sarah, who lived in tents, open to the rains and winds, desert heat and bitter cold. Whenever we read the Abraham stories in the Torah, we remind ourselves that we too used to live in vulnerable housing, not far removed from the conditions in Eden—but in a much more hostile world. We can imagine that whenever it was time to pull up the tent stakes, Abraham and his servants would wonder where they would pitch their tent next, where “home” would be next, whether they could find a sheltered place, or whether the sun would beat down on the tent flaps making dwelling even harder, or whether a violent desert rainstorm would uproot the tent poles, flooding the ground on which they lived. Yet Abraham and Sarah opened their humble dwelling to other wanderers, strangers seeking shelter from the heat, the winds and the storms. Yossi ben Yochanan in Pirkey Avot (1:5) urges that our house too be open wide, a description that brings to mind Abraham and Sarah's tent.

There are Californians who do not even have a tent for their dwelling, but find themselves moving from one homeless shelter to another, because housing is so expensive here. Abraham and Sarah's tent was high-level housing in Biblical times; some of our fellow Angelenos do not even have a tent.

*For the sake of Abraham and Sarah, let us work to secure ongoing, steady state investment in affordable housing that will give the homeless the housing for which they long, as children of God.*

When Abraham and Sarah's grandson Jacob led the people into Egypt to escape the famine, a cruel Pharaoh enslaved their descendants. In urban Egypt, where people lived in houses, not tents, the house was the place from which the Israelite slaves would be led to freedom, boldly daubing the blood of the slaughtered lamb-god on their doorposts as they prepared to eat the Passover meal. As the Angel of Death passed over them, they huddled together in their houses, praying that they would be spared the plague of the Egyptian first-born. Afterward they ate the Passover meal and gathered their belongings to leave their sheltered houses and embark on the journey to freedom.

*For the sake of our ancestors who were strangers in Egypt, leaving the safety of their homes to begin the walk to liberation, let us help to secure these funds that will give the homeless the freedom and dignity of homes in their own city. They are not asking for the sea to be split—they are asking that they be able to rent and buy a home to shelter them from the many Angels of Death that stalk the poor.*

. We are a people for whom the house is central—so central that the means for us to encounter God in the wilderness is a tent, the tabernacle, to which we all contributed our store and our labor that it might be erected as a fitting tribute to God. Once the people had settled into urban Jerusalem, they built a sanctuary called Beit Ha-Mikdash, the House of Holiness. The individual and the community built these sanctuaries together.

*For the sake of our ancestors who built a house that they might encounter God, let us secure ongoing, steady state investment in affordable housing that will give our neighbors the spiritual uplift of a secure dwelling, with windows to let in the sun of God's creation. Like the tabernacle and House of God of old, these dwellings will be secured by the hard work of their new owners and by the taxes of the community.*

In the period of the kings, a woman from the town of Shunem (2 Kings 4:1-37) made her house into a small hospital, caring for her sun-stricken boy while she waited for the Prophet Elisha to bring him back to life. One cannot care for the sick in the streets; our neighbors too deserve a secure dwelling where the needs of both sick and healthy can be met with dignity.

*For the sake of the Shunemite mother, let us work to secure these funds that will bring safety and security, healing and dignity to our neighbors who deserve no less.*

For the sake of all these ancestors who have helped shape who we are as Jews, Reform rabbis and laypeople around the state have signed on to this campaign to address the affordable housing crisis in California. We are working in partnerships across lines of race, class, and faith, asking that the state allocate money for the building of affordable homes for us and our neighbors in California to restore the act of building, to restore our economy and businesses, to restore dignity to our brothers and sisters without access to an affordable shelter. To consign people to live in the cold outdoors of Eden in this day and age, with all the dangers that lurk in the streets, is a cruel punishment—and puts us in danger of disobeying God just as Adam and Eve did—not by eating forbidden fruit, but by denying food and shelter to the poor.

*For the sake of the God who clothed the naked, let us help to secure ongoing, steady state investment in affordable housing. In the spirit of Abraham and Sarah, the freed slaves of Egypt, and all those who have provided healing from the Source of healing, let us act for justice!*

(If you are comfortable, please invite your community to take part in the action steps of the campaign at this time)

Rabbi Richard N. Levy / May 2014