



Sermon Resources

Prepared by Rabbi Marla Feldman, Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism

The Torah portion that may be read during **Cover the Uninsured Week** this year is Kedoshim. Below are some statements from the portion that can be applied to our obligation to help those who lack affordable health coverage.

“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the LORD am your G-d (Lev. 19: 9-10).” This statement demonstrates the importance of caring for those who are less fortunate. Although some individuals have the means to obtain health care, others do not, and those who have the means are obligated to help the millions of Americans who lack health care. Just as in ancient times Jews made efforts to help others, we should continue this tradition in today’s society.

While this Biblical law reflects the customs of an ancient agricultural society, during the rabbinic period, when the community was in a more urban setting, this mandate evolved into a tax upon members of the community to maintain communal welfare institutions. This two-thousand year old safety net included institutions to meet the needs of the sick and was in addition to taxes imposed by the governing authority for security and other needs. Those able to give greater amounts than the minimum set by the community were encouraged to do so voluntarily and as generously as possible.

“You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind (Lev. 19:14).” When individuals have disabilities or disadvantages, we should not make things harder for them, but rather work to remove their stumbling blocks. A lack of health care can be as debilitating as being deaf or blind. When people cannot afford health care, we should be mindful of their predicament and work to improve their lives.

“Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor...(Lev.19:16).” When our neighbors are bleeding, or otherwise in need of care, we cannot walk away, but instead must offer assistance. When we live amongst people who lack health care, we are required to help them obtain the services they need.

“You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the old...(Lev. 19:32).” This teaches us to recognize that the aged and infirm require special care, and we cannot neglect them. Instead, we should go out of our way to respect and care for these individuals. The millions of Americans who lack health care need us to rise up and come to their aid.