

# Building Relationships

## A Social Justice Program Guide for National Holidays

### Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Study Leads to Action.....	3
Thanksgiving.....	4
Hunger.....	4
Interfaith Relations.....	6
Native-American/Jewish Relations.....	9
Winter Holidays/Community Outreach.....	12
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.....	14
Black-Jewish Relations.....	14
Prejudice, Racism, and Anti-Semitism .....	16
Super Bowl Sunday/Hunger .....	18
Mother’s and Father’s Day.....	20
Honoring Our Elders .....	20
Family Support.....	21
Memorial Day/Veterans Day.....	24
Independence Day.....	27
Freedom and Liberty.....	27
Immigrants’ Rights.....	28
Labor Day.....	31
Worker Rights and Employment Issues .....	31
Education.....	33
Acknowledgments.....	35

# Building Relationships

## A Social Justice Program Guide for National Holidays

Throughout our history, the Jewish people has celebrated and commemorated the holy days of our ancestors. We have joyously lit our *chanukiyot* and spun the dreidel during Chanukah, ate matzah and retold the story of Egyptian slavery during Pesach and personally reflected upon our transgressions during Yom Kippur. Now, as modern North American Jews, our Jewish heritage has begun to share space with our American and Canadian identities as well. We eat turkey during Thanksgiving, watch fireworks boom above our heads on Independence Day and honor our parents during Mother's and Father's Day. Our identities have become as American or Canadian as they are Jewish.

Just as we have adopted many of these American and Canadian customs as our own, we also have the ability to bring our Jewish values and rituals into our secular holiday observances. As our Jewish identity becomes integrated with our national identity, we consider the ways we might celebrate our national holidays in uniquely Jewish ways and incorporate Jewish values and rituals.

Over the past few years, the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism has compiled numerous social justice program guides for the Jewish holidays. They have enabled thousands of American Jews to celebrate Jewish holidays not only in traditional ways, but also through the additional lens of social justice, considering ways to celebrate our holidays by working to fulfill the ideal of *tikkun olam*.

This program guide provides resources for North American Jews to celebrate national holidays through a Jewish lens. Not only will we continue to have picnics, fireworks, and exchange cards like our fellow citizens, but we also can bring a unique Jewish flavor to our celebrations as we make a difference in the world through *g'milut chasadim* (acts of loving kindness). By combining our Jewish heritage and American culture, we will integrate our religious and national identities and further our efforts to repair the world.

In addition, national holidays provide special opportunities to build relationships with other faith and ethnic groups. Through interfaith gatherings, dialogues and social justice initiatives, we can work hand in hand to build a better world during these days of common observance.

For each holiday described in this guide there are Jewish texts and programs for synagogues, individuals and communities to address social justice issues. These programs can take place during the specific holiday, or the holiday can be used as a jumping off point for a more extensive program. Our hope is that by building relationships with others, we can bring justice to our communities and improve the world around us.

## Study Leads to Action

Throughout our history, Judaism has stressed the importance of Jewish study and we are affectionately known as “The People of the Book.” But our tradition also emphasizes the importance of action. We are even commanded to fulfill 613 mitzvot (commandments)! Although study and action can work in tandem, often in Jewish history groups have only focused on one idea or the other. This debate can be witnessed through a discussion which is found in the Babylonian Talmud:

Rabbi Tarfon and the elders were reclining in the upper chamber of Nitzah’s house in Lod. This question was raised before them: “What is more important, the study of Torah or the practice of mitzvot?” Rabbi Tarfon answered: “The practice of mitzvot is more important.” Rabbi Akiba answered, “The study of Torah is greater.” Then all of them spoke up and said, “The study of Torah is more important because the study of Torah brings one to the practice of mitzvot!” (BT Kedushin 40b)

Although the action of our hands is extremely important, we realize that study enables us to learn about an issue, to frame it in a Jewish context, and to further our calling to action. That is why the mitzvah of *talmud Torah* (the study of Torah) has always been a serious focus in Jewish tradition. As Reform Jews, we continue to follow this commandment through lifelong Jewish learning.

Throughout this guide, we have included various texts from the Torah, Talmud, midrash, medieval and modern sources. These texts can be used to begin discussion and to further our call to *tikkun olam*. The texts can be used for board meetings, social action committee meetings, home study, adult education courses, or to aid in the writing of a *d’var Torah*. By beginning with study of Jewish texts and values, we show commitment to Jewish learning, which creates an ethical foundation for our daily action and inspires us to make the world whole.

Text study should enable discussion among the various participants at a meeting. Traditionally in a yeshivah, study occurred in *chevruta* (group study) in which two or three participants would work together to examine a piece of text. *Chevruta* study is important, so that different views and ideas can be shared with one another. In addition to reading the texts, various questions might be utilized to facilitate discussion such as:

1. What values does this text address? What does the writer wish to change about the society in which he/she is living?
2. What connections can be made between these values and the holiday we are celebrating?
3. What actions can I take to fulfill the dreams of the writer of this text?
4. How can we live these values as we observe this holiday? How can we help others make these same connections?

# THANKSGIVING

## Hunger

As we sit down with our family and friends at the Thanksgiving table and offer thanks for the bounty that is ours, we often forget about the thousands of people in America, Canada and around the world who do not share our prosperity. While we gorge ourselves on turkey, stuffing, cranberries, and pumpkin pie, others do not even have the bare necessities to sustain themselves and their families. Jewish tradition teaches us that we are required to feed the hungry. Instead of celebrating this holiday in our own insular family units, Thanksgiving is a perfect time to reach out to the community and serve those who are most in need.

### Jewish Texts and Values

If there is among you a poor person, one of your kin, in any of your towns within your land which God gives you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against them, but you shall open your hand to them, and lend them sufficient for their needs, whatever they may be. (Deuteronomy 15:7-8)

This is the fast I desire: to unlock fetters of wickedness, and untie the cords of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free; to break off every yoke. **It is to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house;** when you see the naked to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh. (Isaiah 58:7-8)

When you are asked in the world to come, “What was your work?” and you answer: “I fed the hungry,” you will be told: “This is the gate of the Eternal, enter into it, you who have fed the hungry. (Midrash Psalms 118:17)

When you give food to a hungry person, give your best and sweetest food. (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Issurei Mizbayach 7:11)

Hunger is isolating; it may not and cannot be experienced vicariously. He who never felt hunger can never know its real effects, both tangible and intangible. Hunger defies imagination; it even defies memory. Hunger is felt only in the present. (Elie Wiesel)

### Programs

#### Support WorldManna.org

WorldManna ([www.worldmanna.org](http://www.worldmanna.org)) encourages consumers to purchase their food items from companies that have the “WorldManna.org” logo. These companies donate 1% of their proceeds to organizations that work to prevent world hunger. As a consumer, you can sign the pledge stating that you will attempt to purchase products with the worldmanna.org logo, tell your friends and family members about the pledge, and continue to learn more about the issue of hunger.

### Community Soup Kitchen

Many congregations volunteer at area soup kitchens to serve Thanksgiving meals to those who are in need of a warm holiday dinner. Also many area churches, synagogues, or other non-profit organizations host Thanksgiving meals in their facilities. Contact a soup kitchen or shelter in your area and see how you can be of service. Volunteers can purchase, cook, deliver, or serve food.

### Alphabetical Food Drive

Congregation Beth Tikvah (Worthington, OH) organizes an annual alphabetical food drive. Congregants are encouraged to contribute pasta, rice, canned vegetables and fruit, tuna, juice, soup, baby food, and a host of other non-perishables that match the first letter of their last name. Although Beth Tikvah traditionally does this food drive during the High Holidays, many food pantries and soup kitchens are in need of non-perishables during the cold winter months and Thanksgiving is an opportune time to hold another drive.

### Thanksgiving Food Project

Temple Beth Am (Williamsville, NY) organizes food baskets for various food pantries, senior centers, and Jewish Family Service for Thanksgiving. In the weeks preceding Thanksgiving, volunteers contact various service agencies and offer food boxes to those who may need them. Up until the Monday before Thanksgiving, congregants and households from a nearby Presbyterian Church shop for food for a Thanksgiving dinner for five. These food boxes include a frozen turkey, vegetables, bread, desert, and beverages. They are delivered to the synagogue by Monday morning and are sent out to the various agencies before Thanksgiving begins.

### Hunger Banquet

In conjunction with Oxfam America, Temple Sinai (Glendale, CA) created a Hunger Banquet to dramatize the limited amount of food available daily to most people. One group is given a full meal, the next larger group is given a simple meal and the largest group is given a small bowl of rice and small glass of water. For information and resources about the banquet go to: [www.oxfamamerica.org](http://www.oxfamamerica.org).

## Resources

**Hunger No More** (<http://rac.org/pubs/packets/hunger/>) – This study guide on world hunger was produced by MAZON: Jewish Response to Hunger along with the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. It provides resources for community-wide learning for both adults and children on the issue of hunger. The guide assists congregations to become advocates for the most vulnerable in our society. Study materials include an opening prayer, biblical text study, hunger stories from around the world, discussion questions, and other resources on hunger. Additional information can be found on the Mazon's website: [www.mazon.org](http://www.mazon.org).

**“Hunger is a Challenge Not a Problem-Solutions Abound”** By Mark Talisman ([http://www.socialaction.com/issues/economic\\_justice/hunger/hunger\\_challenge.shtml](http://www.socialaction.com/issues/economic_justice/hunger/hunger_challenge.shtml)) – This article focuses on our Jewish institutions and their challenge to create a solution to hunger. By organizing trips to understand food production, creating inter-generational partnerships between the elderly and youth, and looking at innovative community ideas to provide food and drink, this article explains long term solutions for ending hunger in the world.

**MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger** ([www.mazon.org](http://www.mazon.org)) – MAZON represents the response of the Jewish people to hunger and the problems it creates. It takes action to end hunger in the United States and around the world through distribution of funds donated by the Jewish people.

**The Hunger Site** ([www.thehungersite.org](http://www.thehungersite.org)) – By visiting this site, you can make a donation of one meal to someone in a Third World Country. It doesn't cost anything but a few seconds. The advertisers pay for the food.

**Stop the Hunger** ([www.stopthehunger.com](http://www.stopthehunger.com)) – Stop the Hunger is similar to The Hunger Site. You donate 3 1/3 cups of food each time you visit the site.

**America's Second Harvest** ([www.secondharvest.org](http://www.secondharvest.org)) is a network of food banks and food-rescue programs. Find a local food bank where you can volunteer with your congregation or youth group or drop off the collections from a food drive.

**USDA Food Nutrition Service Online** ([www.fns.usda.gov/fns/](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/)) has information on U.S. government programs designed to help fight hunger through improved food distribution.

**Food Resource and Action Center** ([www.frac.org](http://www.frac.org)) is a great site for information on hunger, especially food stamp advocacy and issues.

## **Interfaith Relations**

Since coming to North America, the Jewish community has reached out to other religious groups in order to make Thanksgiving an inter-faith day of worship, dialogue, and celebration. Even though Thanksgiving is a secular holiday, the day is filled with religious overtures that are not specific to any religious tradition. Thanksgiving is a holiday that almost all Americans observe and many wish to make religious connections to this celebration. Through inter-faith prayer services, text study, or dialogue, the Jewish community can reach out to the Muslim, Christian and other faith communities to create a day of religious tolerance and celebration. On this day of Thanksgiving, we can thank God for the abundance of food by bringing together our various religious traditions.

## Jewish Texts and Values

Human beings are beloved, for people were created in the image of God. People are exceedingly beloved for it was made known to them that they were created in the Image, as it is written, 'For human beings were made in the image of God.' (Genesis 9:6) (Pirke Avot 3:17)

This is a favorite saying from Abaye: A gentle reply turns away wrath, and one should increase peace with one's brothers, with one's relatives, and with every person—even with a non-Jew in the market—in order that one shall be beloved above and desirable below, and that one shall be accepted by all people. (Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 17a)

They said this about Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai: That no one ever greeted him first—even a non-Jew in the market. (Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 17a)

## Programs

### Synagogue-Church Partnership

Temple Beth Torah (Melville, NY) at its inception was without a building. A local Lutheran church made their building available on Saturday mornings. Even though the two religious organizations now have their own buildings, they have remained linked to one another after all of these years. Each year, on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, the two congregations hold an inter-faith service together, changing the venue every year. During the service the visiting clergy gives a sermon, there is a joint choir performance, and charitable donations are made to a local food bank.

### Pulpit Exchange

The Temple (Atlanta, GA) each year has a pulpit exchange with a major African-American church. Around Thanksgiving, temple members attend Sunday services at the church and the rabbi delivers the sermon. Around Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, the members of the church are invited to Shabbat dinner and services at the Temple and the minister delivers the sermon.

### Interfaith Thanksgiving Service

Every year Temple Beth El (Great Neck, NY) takes part in a joint Thanksgiving service at St. Aloysius Roman Catholic Church. All priests, ministers, and rabbis of Great Neck join together to conduct this service in which people of all faiths participate.

### Thanksgiving Prayers and Readings

Celebrate your Thanksgiving meal with people of different faiths or ethnicity, recognizing that this celebration is something we share in common. Offer prayers of thankfulness and consider our relationships with other faith and ethnic groups. Sample readings and prayers:

Eternal God, we give thanks  
For the gifts of life, wonder beyond words;  
For the awareness of soul, our light within;  
For the world around us, so filled with beauty;  
For the richness of the earth, which day by day sustains us;  
For all these and more we offer thanks.  
Baruch Atah Adonai, hatov shimcha ul'cha na-eh l'hodot.  
Blessed are You, Eternal, Your Name is goodness,  
and to You we offer thanksgiving.  
(Rabbi Judith Z. Abrams)

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Watch over me,  
Hold your hand before me in protection.  
Stand guard for me, speak in defense of me.  
As I speak for You, speak for me.  
As You speak for me, so will I speak for You.

May it be beautiful before me,  
May it be beautiful behind me,  
May it be beautiful above me,  
May it be beautiful all around me.  
Restore me in beauty.  
(Traditional Navajo Prayer, translated by Gladys A. Reichard)

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For the good in us, which calls us to a better life,  
We give thanks.  
For the strength to improve the world with our hearts and our hand,  
We offer praise.  
For the desire in us which leads us to work for peace,  
We are grateful.  
For life and nature, harmony and beauty, for the hope of tomorrow,  
All praise to the Source of Being.  
(Adapted from the words of Chaim Stern and Abraham Rothberg, Gates of  
Prayer, 1975 p. 271)

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We give thanks by remembering our freedom...  
We are thankful for the freedom from hunger.  
We are thankful for the freedom to worship.  
We are thankful for the freedom to challenge our minds.  
We are thankful for the freedom to chart our lives.  
We are thankful for the freedom to work for a better world.  
We are thankful for the freedom to celebrate this day.  
We pray for our country, for the men and women who today are protecting our  
freedom, and for the day when this nation and the entire world will know peace.  
(*America's Table – A Thanksgiving Haggadah*, The American Jewish Committee)

## Earth, Teach Me

Earth teach me quiet – as the grasses are still with new light.  
Earth teach me suffering – as old stones suffer with memory.  
Earth teach me humility – as blossoms are humble with beginning.  
Earth teach me caring – as mothers nurture their young.  
Earth teach me courage – as the tree that stands alone.  
Earth teach me limitation – as the ant that crawls on the ground.  
Earth teach me freedom – as the eagle that soars in the sky.  
Earth teach me acceptance – as the leaves that die each fall.  
Earth teach me renewal – as the seed that rises in the spring.  
Earth teach me to forget myself – as melted snow forgets its life.  
Earth teach me to remember kindness – as dry fields weep with rain.

--An Ute Prayer (cited in Return to Earth Project Study Guide)

## **Resources**

**Open Doors Open Minds** (<http://urj.org/opendoors/>) – *Open Doors, Open Minds: Synagogues and Churches Studying Together*, has served as a foundation for congregations to engage in interreligious dialogue and cooperation. Beginning by establishing a framework of friendship and shared histories, the seven session dialogue curriculum then takes participants through a closer look at common texts, the importance of Israel, and a commitment to a future of cooperation and understanding. For congregations interested in continuing this dialogue, *Open Doors, Open Minds II* is also available. Building on the relationships established in the first program, *Open Doors, Open Minds II* provides participants with the opportunity to dialogue about modern-day issues that affect their personal lives as well as the world at large. By focusing on shared values and a commitment to making the world a better place, participants gain a new understanding of both their own religion as well as that of the other.

## **Native American and Jewish Relations**

The legend of the Thanksgiving story is known by every American and is retold from generation to generation. Although the American Indians are a central part of the Thanksgiving lore, our relationship with Native Americans, or First Nations, is minimal. We know the Thanksgiving story, but we know very little about indigenous heritage, culture, or history. Few know of the atrocities inflicted upon native populations that resulting in diminishing their population by 90% -- from a high of about ten million in 1492 to a low of 250,000 at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (now back up to about four million). Jews and American Indians have much in common, including concerns regarding religious rights, assimilation, and the challenge of maintaining our own national languages and culture while being a part of American society. Thanksgiving can be a time that reminds us of the common challenges that Jews and Native Americans share. It gives us an opportunity to learn about each other today, rather than relying on legends of the past.

Although it might seem that the day of Thanksgiving is the perfect time to create new relationships with Native Americans, we should realize that Thanksgiving is a sensitive time for this community and, rather than a celebration, is for them a reminder of the long history of atrocities, persecutions, and discrimination forced upon their ancestors. Many Native Americans may feel that the rest of American society only wishes to meet with them during the time of Thanksgiving rather than year-round. Let the holiday be a catalyst to start new programs with the First Nations and Native Americans, but not as the only time that we wish to connect with them.

## Jewish Texts and Values

*The quotations below attempt to show similar challenges and traditions that Native American Indians and Jews share. The quotation from Leviticus 19:18 specifically speaks about kinsfolk [i.e. Israelite people]. However, it is worthwhile to compare this quotation with the Native American proverb to understand similar traditions that both cultures share.*

You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart. Reprove your kin but incur no guilt on their account. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Eternal. (Leviticus 19:18)

Do not wrong or hate your neighbor for it is not he that you wrong but yourself. (Native American Proverb, Pima)

It's hard being an Indian. You have to live three lives – the traditional one, the survival one, and the modern world that keeps coming at you all the time. (Rose Albert, member of the Taos Pueblo, 1986)

There is no greater sin than to cause one's nation to disappear from the world. (Levinsohn, *Zerubabel*, 1853)

Be a Jew in your tent, and a man outside. (J.L. Gordon, 1863)

## Programs

### Thanksgiving Meal Prayers and Readings

During your Thanksgiving meal, offer Thanksgiving prayers or readings, including those that come from indigenous traditions. Sample Native American prayers can be found on pp. 8-9)

### Visit a Native American Museum

Throughout North America there are many wonderful museums that explore the history and culture of Native Americans. An educational trip to these museums will allow individuals, children, and congregations to learn about the Native American society and will allow all to explore the Thanksgiving story in depth. For a list of the major museums

that are found throughout the United States, go to:  
[www.hanksville.org/NAresources/indices/NAmuseums.html](http://www.hanksville.org/NAresources/indices/NAmuseums.html).

#### Dialogue, Discussions, Concerts

The Native American and Jewish communities have much in common. By creating a dialogue series, the two communities could begin speaking about similar issues that affect both groups. Topics might include assimilation, religious rights, Holocaust/genocide, cultural survival or education. By beginning these dialogue sessions, Jews and American Indians can learn and work together to create a vibrant future for each community.

#### Jewish-First Nation Response to Homelessness

Temple Sinai Congregation (Toronto, Ontario) has a partnership with Na Me Res, a First Nations/Native Canadian organization that has reached out to thousands of Toronto's homeless and saved many lives. Through this partnership, the congregation helps staff and support a Street Help Van for one night a week. The program teaches life skills, restores dignity, and offers friendship and caring to those who need it most. Although this is primarily a program about homelessness, this partnership has helped nurture the relationship between the Jewish and First Nations communities.

#### Resources

**National Museum of the American Indian** ([www.nmai.si.edu](http://www.nmai.si.edu)) - On the Education tab of this site there is educational material about the Native American communities for both adults and children. Particularly, there is a handout called "The Thanksgiving Study Guide," as well as the history of different Native American tribes.

**"Listening to the Native American Story With Jewish American Ears"** by Gordon Bronitsky ([www.socialaction.com/11-2000/native\\_americans\\_jews1.phtml](http://www.socialaction.com/11-2000/native_americans_jews1.phtml)) - The Jewish community has many similarities with the American Indian communities. This article from **socialaction.com** features many of the similarities between the two communities and provides ways for the Jewish community to reach out to the Native American tribes.

#### **Don Solomon, Jewish Indian Chief**

([www.ajhs.org/publications/chapters/chapter.cfm?documentID=205](http://www.ajhs.org/publications/chapters/chapter.cfm?documentID=205)) - The American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS) has information about Don Solomon, a Jew who became the Chief of the Acoma Pueblo Indians. This fascinating story tells of the connections between a Jew and a Native American tribe.

**Indigenous Geography** ([www.indigenousgeography.si.edu](http://www.indigenousgeography.si.edu)) - This site of the Smithsonian Institution includes educational resources about the Native American communities of the Western Hemisphere today. It includes lesson plans for 4-8<sup>th</sup> grade and 9-12<sup>th</sup> grade, has resources about the indigenous way of life, and includes the contemporary issues that affect the indigenous people today.

## WINTER HOLIDAYS

(For Chanukah programs see the Social Action Chanukah Guide at [www.rac.org/chanukah](http://www.rac.org/chanukah))

### Community Outreach

Although Christmas is not a Jewish holiday, it is a designated “American” holiday and a day off when shops and offices are closed, children are off from school, and families are home together. Since the Jewish community has the day off but has no holiday to celebrate, Christmas is a perfect time for us to reach out and assist those who are most in need. Our rabbis teach that “for the sake of peace” it is our responsibility to provide support for the non-Jewish community, just as we help the Jewish community. We can use this day off as an opportunity to assist those in hospitals, homeless shelters, and in soup kitchens and provide Christian staff members a day off with their families.

Although many employees will be thankful to have the opportunity to take the day off, be sure to coordinate such projects with the staff of the local institutions (hospitals, nursing homes, etc) as well as the managers. For many employees, working on Christmas provides an opportunity for needed overtime pay. Be sure your good intentions don’t inadvertently harm low-income workers and will actually be appreciated.

### Jewish Texts and Values

If your neighbors become poor and their means fail them, then you shall strengthen them, be they strangers or settlers, they shall live with you. (Leviticus 25:35)

Give to the needy readily and have no regrets when you do so, for in return the Eternal your God will bless you in all your efforts and in all your undertakings. (Deuteronomy 15:10)

Our rabbis taught: We provide support to the non-Jewish poor along with the Jewish poor, and we visit the non-Jewish sick along with the Jewish sick. And we bury the non-Jewish dead along with the Jewish dead, because these are the paths of peace. (Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 61a)

### Programs

#### Tzedakah at Christmas

Several years ago Congregation Emeth (Gilroy, CA) became aware that the local soup kitchen, sponsored by the Catholic church, was unable to serve meals on Christmas day due to the volunteers’ desire to spend the day with their own families. The congregation stepped in and began a tradition of preparing and serving the meals in their place. This has been a highly successful venture and has created a great deal of good will between

the synagogue and the Catholic Church. The congregation also provides a Santa and all of the volunteers necessary to make the meal and serve it.

#### Forgetting Chinese Food and the Movies

Larchmont Temple (Larchmont, NY) along with two Girl Scout troops “adopted” forty-two needy families during the winter holidays by providing toys, clothing, and household items for the children and adults. Many of the children in the congregation helped pick out gifts and were involved in this program. In addition, the Temple helps lead an annual Christmas dinner at the YWCA in Brooklyn. Over 1,500 guests eat their holiday meal at the YWCA with more than 500 temple members helping out to make this program a success. In addition to dinner, the Temple also provides clothing, take-home meals, and new toys for the guests.

#### Institutional volunteering

Volunteering at local hospitals, nursing homes and other institutional settings allows Christian employees the ability to spend the holiday with their families. In this way, Jewish volunteers give back to the community when they have free time and it is most appreciated by others. Congregations can organize volunteers into multiple groups, thereby spreading the number of volunteers throughout their towns and cities. For example, members of Temple Beth Shalom (Austin, TX) volunteer to work at local hospitals during Christmas day. Similarly, members of Temple Israel (Tulsa, OK) volunteer every Christmas at a local homeless center. Volunteers sort clothes, distribute shower supplies, play musical instruments, and greet the guests.

#### Holiday Parties

Involve the youth group as well as families by helping to organize a Christmas party for a local orphanage, visiting the children’s ward at a hospital, or spending time at a nursing home. What better way to show the importance of outreach than by getting the next generation of the Jewish community involved in projects such as these?

# MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY

## Black-Jewish Relations

Since the 1950's, the Jewish and African-American communities have worked together to create a more just and equal society for all people. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel marched alongside Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Selma. Jewish leaders throughout North America worked collaboratively with others to end discrimination and to speak about issues of inequity and prejudice that affected both communities. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is a time that is ripe to begin new dialogues and renew our common interests. Through text study, interfaith prayer and action, Jews and people of color can work together to strengthen our current relationships and build new ones. Through these activities we will begin to create mutual understanding and will continue to make our world a better place.

### Jewish Texts and Values

God has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what the Eternal requires of you: Only to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

To act in the spirit of religion is to unite what lies apart, to remember that humanity as a whole is God's beloved child. (Abraham Joshua Heschel)

When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every tenement and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old spiritual, 'Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, we are free at last.' (Martin Luther King, Jr. "I Have a Dream" speech, August 28, 1963)

How can we love our neighbor when we flee from him and leave him abandoned? (Abraham Joshua Heschel)

### Programs

#### Interfaith Concert

Cantor Fran Goldman initiated a concert called "Sing Out for Freedom...Pray for Peace" at Congregation Beth Ahabah (Richmond, VA). The concert began as a response to September 11<sup>th</sup> and its goals were to bring a diverse group together and to celebrate choral music. The special concert occurred near MLK Day and was planned through a local committee. Ten choirs with a total of 300 performers sang pieces on universal themes of freedom and peace. The concert was followed by a dessert reception.

### The St. Louis Joint Venture

Central Reform Congregation (St. Louis, MO) set up the St. Louis Joint Venture over ten years ago with Cote Brillante Presbyterian Church. Together, the synagogue and the predominantly African-American congregation work to improve both inter-racial and inter-religious relations. They have commemorated Martin Luther King, Jr. Day through interfaith services, joint choir programs, marching alongside one another in a city parade, sponsoring political dialogues with mayoral candidates, attending theatrical performances, sponsoring speakers, and hosting picnics and celebrations with each of the congregations. The Joint Venture has supported a nationally recognized mentoring program and has built a community park and educational garden together.

### HEART – Help Educate And Renew Trust

Temple Sinai (Worcester, MA) has formed a partnership with Emmanuel Baptist Church, an African-American congregation in the most economically depressed area of the city. The congregations have worked together to create an after-school academic program for minority children to “level the playing field” and to give the children the skills that they need to succeed. The children are provided with tutoring and homework assistance, computer help, and field trips, which are educational and fun!

### Multi-Generational MLK Day Program

Larchmont Temple (Larchmont, NY) has celebrated Martin Luther King, Jr. Day with Strait Gate Church for many years. In addition to joint Friday night and Sunday morning services on MLK weekend, the congregations have encouraged all age groups to take an active role in commemorating the holiday. There is a youth dance, a choir concert of celebration, and congregational trips to various historical sites around the city. These events have strengthened the relationship between the two congregations.

## Resources

### **Religious Action Center’s Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Resources**

(<http://rac.org/pubs/packets/mlk/>) - The Religious Action Center’s web-packet on MLK Day includes website addresses, samples of King’s writings and speeches, articles of interest, programming ideas for individuals and congregations, as well as videos. It is an ideal place to start your study about Martin Luther King and MLK Day.

### **Hillel’s Martin Luther King, Jr. “I Have a Dream” website**

(<http://www.hillel.org/jewish/textstudies/special/default>) - Hillel’s website includes texts from American history surrounded by Jewish writings from the Talmud, midrash and Bible. The website includes the entire “I Have a Dream Speech” alongside Jewish texts that serve as commentary. The site also includes helpful preparation material for the group leader. This website allows the Jewish community to study the “I Have a Dream” speech through the lens of Jewish tradition.

**Jews and Blacks: A Dialogue on Race, Religion, and Culture in America** by Michael Lerner and Cornel West (Plume Books, 1996) - This book speaks about the issues that are currently affecting the Black and Jewish communities. It is a dialogue between two

thinkers, Michael Lerner and Cornel West, who speak candidly about their communities and the relationship between Blacks and Jews throughout the last fifty years. It also addresses Black Nationalism and its impact within the Jewish community.

## **Prejudice, Racism, and Anti-Semitism**

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is a perfect opportunity to begin to address the discrimination and racism that has afflicted the African-American community for hundreds of years. Prominent Jews have spoken out about racism throughout the last fifty years and we need to continue to talk about these issues today. Many African-American ministers also have spoken out against the evils of anti-Semitism. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is an opportune time for the Jewish community to partner with African-Americans to address the evils of prejudice, discrimination, racism, and anti-Semitism. Hopefully we can teach society that we must love one another as we love ourselves.

### **Jewish Texts and Values**

You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart. Reprove your kin but incur no guilt on their account. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against members of your people. Love your fellow as yourself: I am the Eternal. (Leviticus 19:17-18)

*Although this quotation from Leviticus 19:18 specifically speaks about kinsfolk [i.e. Israelite people], it is worthwhile to push the limits of the text to understand our relationship with the people around us. Hopefully, we can use this quotation to speak about the issues of discrimination, racism, and anti-Semitism that are a part of our society.*

Racism is satanism, unmitigated evil .... You cannot worship God and at the same time look at man as if he were a horse. (Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel)

We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people. (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)

When I marched in Selma, my feet were praying. (Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel)

### **Programs**

#### **Breaking the Circle of Hate**

This program at Temple Har Zion (Thornhill, Ontario) began as a one-day event to speak about the issues of anti-Semitism and racism. Over 120 people participated in various workshops on such issues as anti-Semitism on campus, racism, Neo-Nazism and Holocaust Revisionism. In addition, the congregation reached out to other organizations in the area such as the Canadian Black Teachers Alliance and the J'Affari Islamic Center. The group wished to create a multicultural dialogue program to draw members from

various churches, mosques, and synagogues. The representatives from the various organizations attended a retreat, which continued these dialogues after the event.

### Dialogue Groups

Sinai Temple (Springfield, MA) began a partnership with the Alden Baptist church years ago when inter-racial tensions occurred in the community. They began a diversity workshop with materials from the National Coalition Building Institute ([www.ncbi.org](http://www.ncbi.org)), which included a six-week dialogue session led by the two clergy. In addition, during Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, the groups have a mini-movie festival, teen dialogue groups, pulpit exchanges, and Shabbat dinner.

### Jury Diversity Program

Temple Sinai (Rochester, NY) has participated in seders, picnics, prejudice reduction workshops and other programs with Baber A.M.E., an African-American church in Rochester. Because of this successful partnership, the Temple began a new program to address the statewide problem of the under-representation of poor and minority citizens in New York jury pools. The two congregations worked together with the Monroe County Bar Association to ensure quality and fairness in the jury selection process throughout the county. The program educated people about the importance of jury service and fairness in jury deliberation. They also helped to enroll hundreds of young people, poor people, and people of color who were not currently on the jury source list.

### Commemorative MLK Day Service

For many years, Temple B'nai Israel (Oklahoma City, OK) has hosted a commemorative service on the Sunday before Martin Luther King, Jr. Day along with the local chapter of the NAACP. The program includes a local choir and musical groups and a speaker who addresses issues of racism and Black/Jewish relations. Past speakers included 1960's integration activists and local historians. After the speaker, the entire group breaks into smaller groups to discuss the speech's themes and the program concludes with a light supper.

## Resources

**Anti-Defamation League** ([www.adl.org](http://www.adl.org)) – The ADL has many resources on Anti-Semitism and prejudice including background information, statistics, curricular material, books and films for adults and youth, and links for additional information.

**Teaching Tolerance** ([www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org)) is an online web resource of the Southern Poverty Law Center with curricular materials and program models to fight bigotry and creating, in hate's stead, communities that value diversity.

**From Swastika to Jim Crow** - This PBS movie speaks about the Jewish-Black relationship during the 1930's – 1960's, including the immigrant German Jewish academics that taught at Black colleges. The movie also has a discussion guide and other information about anti-Semitism, racism, and prejudice. For more information go to: [www.pbs.org/itvs/fromswastikatojimcrow/index.html](http://www.pbs.org/itvs/fromswastikatojimcrow/index.html).

# SUPER BOWL SUNDAY

## Hunger

The Super Bowl game is an event that many Americans celebrate regardless of their team allegiance. The event occurs on a cold wintry day, when many who need the most support are ignored because of the focus on the big game. Individuals and synagogues can turn Super Bowl Sunday into a day to pursue justice by helping out at a local soup kitchen or by raising money for hunger and homeless organizations. Our tradition teaches us that we are required to help the needy in our midst and to provide them shelter and sustenance. By reaching out on a day when most of these people are ignored, we will be doing a great service to humanity.

### Jewish Texts and Values

If there is among you a poor person, one of your kin, in any of your towns within your land which God gives you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against them, but you shall open your hand to them, and lend them sufficient for their needs, whatever they may be. (Deuteronomy 15:7-8)

This is the fast I desire: to unlock fetters of wickedness, and untie the cords of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free; to break off every yoke. **It is to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house;** when you see the naked to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh. (Isaiah 58:7-8)

God says to Israel, “My children, whenever you give sustenance to the poor, I impute it to you as though you gave sustenance to Me.” Does God then eat and drink? No, but whenever you give food to the poor, God accounts it to you as if you gave food to God. (Midrash Tannaim on Deuteronomy 15:10, citing Numbers 28:2)

There is nothing in the world more grievous than poverty—the most terrible of sufferings. Our teachers said: All the troubles of the world are assembled on one side and poverty is on the other. (*Midrash Rabbah*, Exodus 31:12)

### Programs

#### Super Bowl Party for the Homeless

Congregation Kol Am (Chesterfield, MO) has been working together with a church in St. Louis to feed hundreds of homeless people on Super Bowl Sunday. Guests are first served lunch by the congregations and other volunteers. Afterwards guests are able to watch the game on big screen TVs in the church. Just before the game, dinner is served, with second helpings during halftime. The congregations bring used clothes to hand out to the guests and also buy gloves and socks to be passed out as well.

Souper Bowl of Caring ([www.souperbowl.org](http://www.souperbowl.org))

Souper Bowl of Caring is an organization that encourages faith-based and school organizations to get kids involved in fighting hunger on Super Bowl Sunday. They encourage churches and synagogues to do research about different poverty, homeless, or hunger organizations and afterwards to donate funds that are collected on Super Bowl Sunday to those organizations. More information can be found on their website including online resources and registration information.

**Resources** (See above, pp. 5-6)

# MOTHER'S AND FATHER'S DAY

## Honoring Our Elders

As one of the Ten Commandments, “Honor your mother and father” is one of the most well known mitzvot in the entire Torah. Although we are required to honor and respect our parents each and every day, Mother’s and Father’s Day provides a special opportunity to show our relatives the joy that they bring into our lives. In addition, we also have the responsibility to show reverence to the elderly in our society, to those seniors in our congregations, and to our wise and respected elder family members. By creating programming that reaches out to seniors, we will be able to create an extended family that welcomes all into our synagogues. Whether or not we have children of our own, we all can become role models and teachers to the youth in our congregations and we all have the ability to become students of the elders in our community.

### Jewish Texts and Values

**Honor** your father and your mother, that you may long endure the land the Eternal your God is assigning to you. (Exodus 20:12)

You shall each **revere** your mother and your father, and keep My Sabbaths: I the Eternal am your God. (Leviticus 19:3)

The Rabbis taught: What is **reverence** to one’s parents and what is **honor** to one’s parents? Reverence means one may not stand in his parents’ place, or contradict her parents’ words, and may not offer an opinion (about Jewish law). Honor means to give one’s parents food and drink, to dress and cover one’s parents, and to bring them in and out. (Babylonian Talmud 31b)

Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel said: All my life I attended upon my father, yet I did not do for him a hundredth of service which Esau did for his father. I used to attend upon my father in soiled garments and go out in the street in clean ones; but when Esau attended on his father, he came upon him in royal robes. (Beresheit Rabbah 65:16)

Be careful with the honor of an elderly scholar who has involuntarily forgotten his or her learning. For we say that the second set of Tablets and the broken pieces of the first Tablets both rest in the Ark. (Babylonian Talmud, Brachot 8b)

### Programs

#### Kever Avot: Visiting the Graves of Our Loved Ones

Many of the elderly individuals in the Jewish community find it difficult to visit the gravesites of their loved ones. Temple Israel (West Bloomfield, MI) came up with a straight forward and simple answer. They scheduled a day of visitation to the area Jewish cemeteries. Volunteers were given information about the participants and the cemeteries.

The graves were marked off in advance, golf carts were made available to those who had difficulty walking, and air-conditioned tour buses were hired. A local funeral home sponsored the cost of the program. In addition to the direct service that was provided to the participants, new friendships formed between the elderly and the volunteers.

### Blankets For Bubbies

Temple Israel (London, Ontario) participates in a program called Blankets for Bubbies in which congregants knit or crochet lap blankets for the elderly residents of various nursing homes. A Temple could launch such a project around Mother's or Father's Day and/or could visit the nursing homes and drop off the blankets at this time. This multi-generational program allows for various age groups to meet and socialize with one another and encourages congregants to use their artistic talents to create a blanket for those in need.

### Phone Companions for Seniors

Temple Shalom (Succasunna, NJ) has partnered with local social service organizations to make weekday morning calls to seniors. Congregants meet at the synagogue and make reassurance phone calls to homebound elderly people. Thus it provides a social opportunity for the callers as well. Although Temple Shalom's program is ongoing, synagogues could make special calls to elderly congregants or senior citizens in their community on Mother's and Father's Day. This is a time when many elderly people are separated from their families and friends and need reassurance from a cheerful voice on the phone.

### Senior Activities in a Jewish Environment (SAJE)

The Community Synagogue (Rye, NY) has implemented this program for the seniors of their community. SAJE (Senior Activities in a Jewish Environment) will have an adult center with activities such as Tai Chi, writing workshops, painting, trips, discussion groups, and more. In addition, the group had a SAJE Shabbat service, where the seniors read many of their personal reflections and stories to the congregation. This allowed for the "personal midrash" of the older generations to be shared in a worship setting.

## Resources

**Sacred Aging** (<http://urj.org/jfc/olderadults/>) - The Department of Jewish Family Concerns has an entire section of their website related to issues of sacred aging. The website includes resources to assist seniors in Reform congregations, new studies about the future Jewish community, websites to look for more information, and program ideas that congregations can implement.

## **Family Support**

No one celebrates Mother's and Father's Day with more energy and excitement than new parents. As new mothers and fathers begin to rejoice in their parenthood, synagogues can educate and aid them to create strong families. In addition, Mother's and Father's Day is

a perfect time for more established parents to consider their relationships with their elementary and teenage children. Synagogues can use biblical and rabbinic texts to speak about parent's obligations to their children, and visa versa. By focusing on our responsibility to the next generation, we can allow parents to devote a special time to build on their relationships with their children.

## Jewish Texts and Values

Now Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age; and he had made him an ornamented tunic. And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him. (Genesis 37:3-4)

A Father is obligated to circumcise his son, to redeem him (if he is firstborn), to teach him Torah, to provide him a wife, and to teach him a craft. Some say: he must teach him how to swim. (Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 29a)

Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar said: With a child, the left hand should push away, but the right hand should draw them close. (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 107b)

One who brings up a child is to be called its parent, not one who gave birth. (Shemot Rabbah 46:5)

## Programs

### Hevra Mishpacha (Family Support Group)

The *Hevra Mishpacha* committee at Congregation Beth El (Sudbury, MA) helps serve as an extended family for those congregants who are facing a personal crisis. They support their congregational families by providing meals, rides, visits, and phone calls. They also help create confidential support networks (i.e. identification of a congregant who has been through a similar crisis and can provide a listening ear).

### HIPPY Read Week

Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) was developed by Hebrew University to help immigrants in Israel prepare their children for Israeli public school. Temple Beth Israel (San Diego, CA) adapted this program in their area to read to children, help parents make bookmarks, assist parents in helping read to their children, and distribute books to both parents and children.

### Mitzvah Crib

Temple Sinai (Summit, NJ) created a site in their synagogue where congregants can drop off infant formula, disposable diapers and wipes, new infant and toddler clothes and toys. These items are then distributed to needy children through area Jewish Family Services or other area organizations. What better way to celebrate Mother's or Father's Day than by supporting a new parent? Using an actual baby crib as a drop-off point within the congregation creates a great visual effect!

### Bridging the Gap: A Teen-Parent Dialogue

University Synagogue (Los Angeles, CA) created a program in which parents and teens talk to one another and begin to form effective communication channels. Through a partnership with Jewish Family Services, the synagogue explored value systems, free speech, and each side gained insight of the other. The program was a success for both parents and kids and allowed for the growth of their relationship.

### Daddy and Me

Children of Israel (Augusta, GA) created a program where fathers and children gather together for quality time. The program occurs once a month for children aged 3-6 and includes lunch and other programming such as trips to the park, miniature golf and synagogue programming. This idea could include Mommy and Me or Parents and Me – any variation that allows parents to have quality time one-on-one with their children.

### Resources

**Family Outreach Resource Guide** ([www.urj.us/family/](http://www.urj.us/family/)) - This website from the Union for Reform Judaism's Pacific Southwest Council includes information that individuals can use to support the many types of families that are part of the Jewish community. The website includes 18 different ways to help our families, approaches to create a committee on the changing Jewish family, as well as new rituals that can be used for the many members of our congregations.

# MEMORIAL DAY/VETERANS DAY

In every major conflict our country has faced, Jews have proudly served in the military alongside millions of other Americans. Many individuals in our community are currently serving as part of the United States and Canadian Armed Services in such places as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Europe. During Memorial Day and Veterans Day, the Jewish community should honor and thank both Jewish and non-Jewish military personnel who currently protect our country as well as the veterans who served in past wars. Our Jewish servicemen and servicewomen are often ignored and forgotten, so it is our duty to make sure that each and every individual is welcomed into our community. By recognizing their bravery as well as their service, we will be able to give support and show them our appreciation of a job well done.

## Jewish Texts and Values

Before you join battle, the priest shall come forward and address the troops. He shall say to them, "Hear, O Israel! You are about to join battle with your enemy. Let not your courage falter. Do not be in fear, or in panic, or in dread of them. For it is the Eternal your God who marches with you to do battle for you against your enemy, to bring you victory. (Deuteronomy 20:2-4)

Is there anyone who has built a new house but has not dedicated it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another dedicate it. Is there anyone who has planted a vineyard but has never harvested it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another harvest it. Is there anyone who has paid the bride-price for a wife, but who has not yet married her? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle, and another marry her." (Deuteronomy 20:5-7)

When do these instructions of [Deuteronomy 20:5-7] apply? In a discretionary war, but in a commanded war all must go forth, "even a bridegroom from his chamber and a bride from her bridal pavilion" (Joel 2:16). Rabbi Yehudah says: When do these instructions of [Deuteronomy 20:5-7] apply? In a commanded war, but in a war of duty all must go forth, "even a bridegroom from his chamber and a bride from her bridal pavilion" (Joel 2:16). (Mishnah Sotah 8:6-7)

Hillel taught: Do not separate yourself from the community. (Pirke Avot 2:5)

## Programs

### Care For Our Troops

Woodlands Community Temple (Greenburgh, NY) organizes care packages for US military personnel who are currently serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Temple encourages congregants to gather items such as breakfast foods, canned foods, hard candy, gum, powdered drinks, toiletries, CD's and DVD's and the items are sent to the troops serving overseas. This supports our troops and shows them that we appreciate their hard work and diligence in protecting our country.

### Outreach to Families of Jewish Military Personnel

Temple Emanu-El (Honolulu, HI) encourages active duty military personnel to become affiliated with the Temple. Their children are invited to attend the religious school and are tutored by the professional staff. This allows the children of Jewish military personnel to become involved with the Jewish community. There are as many as 15,000 Jews in the American armed forces that are isolated from the Jewish community. These families tend to be at least 75% intermarried and are in need of a Jewish community that supports them.

### Adopt A Soldier

The Children of Israel (Augusta, GA), works to “adopt” enlisted Jewish personnel. The congregants connect to the soldiers who are at an area base through word of mouth and through advertisements in the base newspaper. Soldiers are invited to their homes for Jewish holidays and for various temple functions. The families serve as both hosts and confidants for the enlisted soldiers.

### Gifts of Love: Adoption of a US Military Unit

Once Operation Iraqi Freedom began, members at Congregation Emanu El (Houston, TX) “adopted” a unit of 1000 Jewish and non-Jewish soldiers who currently serve in Iraq and Afghanistan. The congregation received donations of several thousand dollars and consulted with area doctors, dentists, and food distribution companies to learn what type of donations should be sent to the military personnel. Volunteers packed over 600 care packages and shipped items such as food, coffee, magazines, Rosh HaShana cards, and a Temple CD to the military personnel. Other congregations such as Temple Beth HaSholom (Williamsport, PA) have “adopted” a Temple member or relatives of a congregant, which helps create a more personal connection.

## Resources

**In the Midst of a Conflict: Congregational Resources** (<http://urj.org/worldconflict/>) – This web guide of the Union for Reform Judaism contains educational resources, worship materials, congregational programs and other resources to help congregations wrestle with issues of war and peace, at the same time they open their congregations and reach out to military personnel.

**Support Our Troops** (<http://rac.org/pubs/packets/sos/>) - Support Our Troops is an informational guide from the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism which provides multiple opportunities for individuals and congregations to offer support to our troops.

**Jewish War Veterans** ([www.jwv.org](http://www.jwv.org)) - The Jewish War Veterans has a program that helps support Jewish military personnel. They accept donations in order to send packages to Jewish troops currently serving in the Armed Forces. They also are looking for names of troops where packages can be sent.

**JWB Jewish Chaplains Council** ([www.jcca.org/jwb](http://www.jcca.org/jwb)) – JWB Jewish Chaplains Council accepts funds, which can be used to buy holiday supplies, prayer books, and other vital support for Jewish troops. They also assist Jewish chaplains who serve in the United States Armed Services.

# INDEPENDENCE DAY

## Freedom and Liberty

“We hold these truths to be self-evident...” are powerful words that send a chill down our backs. During Independence Day, we remember our nation’s fight for freedom that occurred long ago. This holiday allows us to reflect on the freedom that we personally possess and pushes us to realize that people all over the world lack many basic rights. Judaism teaches us that every fifty years, slaves would gain their freedom during the Jubilee Year. As Jews, we must remember that ancient call for freedom as we continue that call of liberty throughout the four corners of the world.

### Jewish Texts and Values

You shall proclaim liberty throughout the land for all its inhabitants. (Leviticus 25:10)

The essence of being cursed is being enslaved; the essence of blessing is liberty. (Sefat Emet on Leviticus 25:10)

Rabbi Yehudah said: What does the term liberty mean? It connotes “one who dwells in a dwelling place and transports merchandise to any land.” This means that a person can live wherever they want and is not under the authority of others. (Rashi’s commentary on Leviticus 25:10)

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. (Declaration of Independence)

### Programs

#### Independence Day Parade Float

Every year Temple Israel of Alameda (Alameda, CA) marches in the town’s annual Fourth of July parade. They are accompanied by a traveling klezmer band and many of the synagogue members from old to young wear t-shirts with Hebrew script. The Temple became involved with the parade after some racist and anti-Semitic incidents occurred in the town a few years ago. By marching in the parade, the Temple represents the Jewish community and is able to reach out to the wider Alameda society. In addition, the Temple has been able to do some outreach with many unaffiliated Jews in the area through this event.

#### Torah and Haftarah Reading

Rabbi Arthur Waskow of the Shalom Center has encouraged a special Torah and Haftarah reading on Independence Day. He suggests reading Perek HaMelech (Passage on the King) from Deuteronomy 17:14-20, which speaks about the power of the King and the role of a leader to his/her people. As the Haftarah, he reads the main parts of the

Declaration of Independence. Afterwards congregations can have a discussion about these texts and their meanings to our lives today. These experiences allow for a deeper understanding of the Declaration of Independence and give richer meaning to the Fourth of July for the Jewish community.

## Resources

**American Historical Texts Through a Jewish Lens** - The Hillel website ([www.hillel.org/jewish/textstudies/special/default](http://www.hillel.org/jewish/textstudies/special/default)) includes texts from the Declaration of Independence, US Constitution preamble, and the First Amendment. The texts are surrounded by Jewish texts from midrash, the Bible and the Talmud that focus on similar ideas from Jewish tradition. By reading the texts of our American historical tradition side by side with writings from Judaism, one can connect Jewish values to their celebration of Independence Day.

**American Jewish World Service** ([www.ajws.org](http://www.ajws.org)) - Bring justice and freedom to the rest of the world by assisting the American Jewish World Service in their work in Africa, Asia, and South America. Work hand-in-hand with AJWS through fundraising, educational programs, or study trips throughout the world.

**Human Rights Campaign** ([www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org)) - The Human Rights Campaign was established to assist the Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, and Transgender communities. They wish to end all discrimination against the GLBT community and work to create fundamental freedom and fairness for all people. Further information about GLBT rights and advocacy can be found as part of the Shavout Holiday Guide: [www.rac.org/shavuot](http://www.rac.org/shavuot).

## Immigrant Rights

Although Independence Day might seem to be a strange time of year to welcome immigrants into our community, the aspects of freedom and patriotism that pervade Independence Day makes this a wonderful time to begin thinking about immigrant rights. Judaism addresses the rights of strangers throughout the Bible and Rabbinic Literature. The mitzvah “you shall not oppress the stranger, for you were a stranger in the Land of Egypt” is actually the most common commandment in the entire Torah. These words push us to think about the rights of refugees and help us understand our duty to these new immigrants.

### Jewish Texts and Values

You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt. (Exodus 23:9)

You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor. (Leviticus 19:16)

If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when? (Pirkei Avot 1:14)

Rabbi Nathan said: Do not reproach your fellow man with a fault which is also your own. (Mechiltah, Nezikin 18)

Constantly informed by our history of oppression, we strive to always remember our commitment to “love the stranger as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Leviticus 19:34) According to our Torah, we must be the champions of the stranger, in remembrance of our own oppression. While we as North American Jews are not faced with the oppression of being a stranger, we must continue, as we promise in our Passover Seder, to fight for the rights of others who are. (CCAR Resolution, “Religious Persecution in China,” adopted by the Board of Trustees, 2001)

## Programs

### Jewish-Latino Immigrant Trip

The Jewish community of Tucson worked together with the Latino community to create a teen weekend retreat in Washington, DC. The trip focused on issues of immigration and education and the teens were able to meet with representatives from HIAS, La Raza, American Jewish Committee, and other organizations to be educated on these matters. What better way to learn about the issue of immigration than to have a retreat or discussion in an inter-faith setting.

### Invite a New Immigrant to Speak

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) has been active for over 120 years and has facilitated the arrival of Jewish immigrants from all over the world. It has resources to connect you with new immigrants to America to speak about the issues and difficulties that occur when moving to a new country. They can be contacted at [www.hias.org](http://www.hias.org).

### New Citizen Welcome Ceremonies

Many communities hold swearing-in ceremonies for new citizens on Independence Day. Congregations can partner with the local INS office and other faith and ethnic groups to host the event and/or a celebration for the new citizens by providing welcome gifts, national flags and a celebratory collation. Contact your local INS office to find out how to be of assistance.

### Welcome Refugees and Immigrants

[www.refugeesusa.org/participate.aspx](http://www.refugeesusa.org/participate.aspx)

The United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) provides immigrants and refugees with guidance, assistance, and educational programs to help them in their move to the United States. Throughout the country, synagogues can work with USCRI and their local partners to welcome immigrants, to assist them in food planning and to fund literacy projects.

## Resources

**Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)** ([www.hias.org](http://www.hias.org)) - For generation after generation, HIAS has provided essential lifesaving services to world Jewry, through its mission of rescue, reunion and resettlement. As an expression of Jewish tradition and values, HIAS also responds to the migration needs of other people who are threatened and oppressed.

**Jews for Equal Rights for Immigrant Communities (JERICO)** ([www.iwfr.org/jerico.pdf](http://www.iwfr.org/jerico.pdf)) - JERICO organizes to protect the rights of immigrants in the workplace, to allow for citizenship for foreign workers, and to reunite workers with their families. The organization is based in the Bay Area and has bike rides and other rallies to help immigrants. They can be contacted at [www.iwfr.org/jerico.pdf](http://www.iwfr.org/jerico.pdf)

**Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ)** - JFREJ has created a Jewish Immigrant Justice campaign that works with the Jewish and non-Jewish immigrant groups in New York City to help them organize their communities. They also work to support or oppose legislation that helps or hinders immigrants' rights. Information can be found at [www.jfrej.org/jewishimmigrantjustice.html](http://www.jfrej.org/jewishimmigrantjustice.html).

# LABOR DAY

## Worker Rights and Employment Issues

Labor Day is often viewed as the last official day of summer and is filled with picnics, trips to the beach, and one last dip in the pool. Although it is important to take a day off before fall begins, many in our society forget that the intent of the holiday is to honor workers. Judaism teaches us that it is our responsibility to be honest in our business dealings and fair to those in the workforce. Labor Day is a time when we can re-evaluate our dealings with employees and be reminded of the challenges faced by low-wage workers and by those unable to obtain employment. Through education and assistance, we can help the unemployed and under-employed and help provide the necessary tools for those who wish to better their circumstances.

### Jewish Texts and Values

You shall not defraud your neighbor. You shall not commit robbery. The wages of a laborer shall not remain with you until morning. (Leviticus 19:13)

You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow Israelite or a stranger in one of the communities of your land. You must pay out the wages due on the same day, before the sun sets, for **the worker is needy and urgently depends** on it; else a cry to the Eternal will be issued against you and you will incur guilt. (Deuteronomy 24:14-15)

Like most day laborers, “he is needy and urgently depends” on this wage so he can buy food and stay alive. The intention here is that we should pay him at the end of the first day, for if we do not pay him immediately when he leaves from his work, he will go home and he will die of hunger at night. (Nachmanides, Commentary on Deuteronomy 24:14-15)

Rava said, At the time a person enters into final judgment, they will ask him: In your business dealings, were you truthful? (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31a)

### Programs

#### Labor Unions and the Anti-Sweatshop Movement

Various Hillels have been organizing to urge universities to treat their workers fairly. They have created Shabbat dinners and labor rallies that inform the Jewish community about workers’ rights. Other Hillels and organizations have taken steps to support anti-sweatshop activists. The University of North Carolina Hillel donated food to students who had a sit-in and Penn Hillel made in-kind donations to activists. Congregations can also become involved in both workers’ rights and in the anti-sweatshop movement by inviting speakers on these issues, having a Labor Day Shabbat program, and reaching-out

to anti-sweatshop organizations. See also: “Labor on the Bima” and “Sweatshops: Raising Awareness in Congregations” (<http://rac.org/pubs/guidemanuals/>).

#### Employment Network/Job Banks

Temple Emanu-El of Lynbrook (Lynbrook, NY) is involved in a local interdenominational effort to find jobs for those in need. Through their project they help clients prepare resumes, develop interview skills, and learn job prospecting models. By working alongside two Roman Catholic Churches and a Methodist Church, the Temple has built strong interfaith relationships and has helped over fifty people each year find jobs during periods of high unemployment. See also: “Assisting the Unemployed Through Congregational Job Banks and Networks”

(<http://rac.org/pubs/packets/network/>).

#### Jacob’s Ladder: Job Training

Temple Emanu-El (Dallas, TX) created a tuition-free adult learning center to provide the working and non-working poor assistance in personal, social growth, and academic training. The Temple allows at-risk people to receive the skills that they need to succeed. The training that is available tuition-free includes GED preparation, math and reading remediation, English as a Second Language (ESL), and Social Growth Training by a licensed social worker. The clients also receive childcare for their children, mentoring, and referrals to community agencies for help with rent, food purchases, and health care.

#### Job Search and Employment Opportunities

Congregants at Temple Sinai (Oakland, CA) created a networking group that provided a place where professionals facing a job search could speak with one another. Meetings included lectures by employment professionals on topics such as health insurance for the unemployed, resume training, and emotional challenges of being unemployed. Participants also worked on networking tips and interviewing skills, and learned how to help each other locate employment opportunities. The congregation also set-up a job bank where congregants could add information about job openings and contact information at various companies. See also: “Assisting the Unemployed Through Congregational Job Banks and Networks” (<http://rac.org/pubs/packets/network/>).

## Resources

**Labor on the Bima** (<http://rac.org/pubs/guidemanuals/>) - This program guide from the Religious Action Center (RAC) and Interfaith Worker Justice includes resources for synagogues for Labor Day activities. It includes essays by rabbis of three denominations, *d’vrei Torah*, and programming suggestions to get congregations and individuals involved on labor issues during Labor Day. It also includes a list of organizations that can help you begin your planning.

**Sweatshops: Raising Awareness in Congregations** (<http://rac.org/pubs/guidemanuals/>) - This programming guide from the Commission on Social Action is designed to educate ourselves and our community about the sweatshops that exist in our country and around

the world. The guide includes programming ideas for religious schools, youth, adults, as well as text study, adult education programs, and *d'vrei Torah*.

### **Assisting the Unemployed Through Congregational Job Banks and Networks**

(<http://rac.org/pubs/packets/network/>) - This packet includes information about poverty and unemployment in North America and outlines programs such as job banks and networking that synagogues can use to assist the unemployed. Further, there are Jewish texts on unemployment, Reform Movement resolutions, and advocacy information.

## **Education**

Labor Day is often the last day of 'freedom' for millions of American schoolchildren. It's during this long weekend that school supplies are bought, new clothes are washed, and the schedule for classes is double-checked. However, many children aren't prepared to start the school year and don't have the supplies needed to succeed. Labor Day is a time of year when congregations can begin thinking about the importance of education. The Rabbis during the time of the Talmud heavily emphasized the importance of study and explained that it was a duty of the entire community to educate the youth. It is incumbent upon each of us to help families struggling to educate their children as well as those troubled schools that need our assistance to make the school year a success.

### **Jewish Texts and Values**

And you shall teach them to your children. (Deuteronomy 6:7)

At first if a child had a father, his father taught him, and if he had no father he did not learn at all. By what [verse of scripture] did they guide themselves? –By the verse, “And you shall teach them to your children” laying the emphasis on the word ‘you’. They then made an ordinance that teachers of children should be appointed in Jerusalem. By what verse did they guide themselves? –By the verse “For from Zion shall Torah go forth.” Even so, however, if a child had a father, the father would take him up to Jerusalem and have him taught there, and if not, he would not go up to learn there. They therefore ordained that teachers should be appointed in each prefecture, and that boys should enter school at the age of sixteen or seventeen. (Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra 21a)

Rav Hamnuna said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because they neglected [the education of] school children; for it said, pour it out [God's wrath] because of the children in the street. Why pour it out? Because the child is in the street. (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 119b)

It is a commandment on each and every wise person, to teach every student even though they are not their children...since the students that one teaches are called one's children. (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, The Laws of Talmud Torah, Chapter 1 Law 2)

## Programs

### Back to School Projects

A member of Temple Hesed (Scranton, PA) remembered that various needy children did not have school supplies on the first day of school. At her suggestion, the Temple began a “Back to School Project” so that all children could feel pride when the school year begins. During the month of May, students from the religious school bring in various supplies such as paper, markers, and pencils. In addition, members of the Temple volunteer to sponsor a needy child from the Scranton public schools. In July, the ages and sizes of the “adopted” children arrive from Jewish Family Service and the families purchase new clothing, underwear, socks, book bags, and other supplies for the children. The gifts are wrapped and presented to the Jewish Family Service and other social service organizations in time for the first day of school.

### Back to School Drive

Every August, families from Woodlands Community Temple (Greenburgh, NY) provide school supplies for the *Friends of Karen*, an organization that provides emotional, financial, and advocacy support to children with life-threatening illnesses and their families. The Back to School Drive provides new school supplies and clothing because parents often do not have the energy, time, or monetary resources to shop when caring for their children. Items that are donated include notebooks, folders, pens, pencils, backpacks, erasers, and gift certificates to Sears and Old Navy.

### After-School Tutoring

Rodeph Sholom (Youngstown, OH) provides after-school tutoring to students from area inner city elementary schools. The tutoring occurs two days a week and both adults and youth in the synagogue participate as tutors. In addition to academic tutoring, the synagogue sets up events such as softball games and talent shows, which allow the students and tutors to become acquainted.

### Book Connection Literacy Project

Congregation Beth Israel-Judea (San Francisco, CA) worked together with the city of San Francisco to build a library in a children’s center located near the Sunnydale housing project. In addition to the establishment of the library, the synagogue became connected with many of the area schools. The synagogue trains volunteers, mostly senior citizens, to tutor on a weekly basis at the schools. They also established a birthday club where congregants send birthday packages to students of these schools.

## Resources

**For the Sake of the Children: A Synagogue Guide to Public School Partnerships** (<http://rac.org/pubs/guidemanuals/partnership/>) - This educational guide produced by the Commission on Social Action provides information about how synagogues can partner with local public schools. It gives examples of successful synagogue programming, speaks about the challenges facing public schools in America, and gives examples of resources from the Reform Movement as well as from other secular organizations.

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