

# World AIDS Day

## Sermon Starters

- The numbers and statistics may seem overwhelming, but we should not retreat. Instead, we should turn to our tradition that teaches: “The day is short and the work is great. It is not for you alone to complete the task but neither are you free to desist from it” (Avot 2:21).
- The AIDS crisis continues in part because of the inability of the peoples of the world, our governments, and our business leaders to see the millions struggling with HIV/AIDS as people of infinite value, each with their own spark of the divine. Let us look at people who are affected by HIV/AIDS, to see them as Judaism would have us see them, to recognize their divinity, to help them to the education, the medicines, the treatment, and the lives they deserve. After all, according to Jewish tradition, every person is created in the image of God. (Genesis 1:26).
- *Bikkur cholim* – the mandate to visit the sick – reminds us to attend to the needs of the sick in all areas, including creating a spiritual and emotional support system to complement the work of medical doctors (Talmud, Nedarim 39b-40a, Sotah 14a and Berakhot 5b, Maimonides, Hilkhhot Eivel 14.4-5, Shulkhan Arukh, Yore Deah, 235-238). We can also fulfill this mandate by supporting the work of health workers around the world who are assisting with HIV/AIDS care.
- Judaism takes very seriously the imperative *v’shinantam livanecha* (teach your children). We should continue to prioritize teaching the young people in our communities about prevention and about HIV/AIDS globally. As adults, one major thing we can do to combat stigma and ignorance surrounding this issue is to continue to educate and talk to one another.
- Those living with HIV/AIDS often face social stigmatization. The Talmud teaches *Halbanat Panim*, that the loss of personal dignity at the hands of others is considered one of the gravest wrongs in Judaism, akin to murder (T.B. Moed Katan 9b; T.B. Baba Mezia 58bff.; Tractate Kallah, Minor Tractates of the Talmud). By working at the individual and community levels can we address terrible burden on those living with HIV/AIDS.
- The divide between the developing and developed world is staggering. The amount of poverty, hunger, and disease in developing countries is greater now than ever before. The question for us as Jews in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is no longer simply, “should we respond?” but HOW can we most effectively respond using all of our resources?
- It is written, “In the days of prosperity, be joyful; in the day of adversity, consider” (Ecclesiastes 7:14). Further, Rabbi Tanchum ben Chiyya said: “In the happy days of your neighbors, be with them in their happiness; if an evil day befalls your neighbor, consider how you can show the neighbor loving kindness to deliver the neighbor from the veil” (Pesikta Kahana 191b). Many of us are living in an age of prosperity and have much about which to be joyful. Yet, as citizens of the world community, we must also remember that everyone in the world is

our neighbor. We must find ways to show our neighbors living with HIV/AIDS loving kindness, thereby helping to deliver them from evil.

- Our text says quite plainly that it is forbidden to live in a city where there is no physician. (Talmud Yerushalmi, Kiddushin 4:12) Yet, across the world, millions of people are denied access to the urgent education and care they need to prevent and fight the AIDS virus. Worldwide, the virus is killing people at a frightening speed - every minute, 320 people die of AIDS worldwide - and the lack of medicine and medical personnel shows little sign of improving. If, as we are told, any city, in order to be habitable, must have a physician, then we must ensure that expertise available - through donations of time and money, through legislative efforts, through education, through whatever means we can provide.

## Quotes for Sermons

- Former South African President and Nobel Laureate Nelson Mandela once said: "The vision which fueled our struggle for freedom; the development of energies and resources; the unity and commitment of common goals – all these will be needed if we are to bring AIDS under control. This is a war. We must not continue to be debating, to be arguing, when people are dying."
- During his speech announcing the creation of the Global AIDS Fund in April of 2001, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said: "...There has been a world-wide revolt of public opinion. People no longer accept that the sick and dying, simply because they are poor, should be denied drugs which have transformed the lives of others who are better off."
- On protesting injustice, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said: "When I marched in Selma, my feet were praying." It is important not only to protest against evil but to be seen protesting. Faith in the goodness and oneness of G-d is powerfully expressed through the language of the feet, hands, and spine.
- Former United States Secretary of State Colin Powell remarked in 2001 to the UN General Assembly, "No war on the face of the Earth is more destructive than the AIDS pandemic. I was a soldier. But I know of no enemy in war more insidious or vicious than AIDS. Will history record a fateful moment in our time, on our watch, when action came too late?"
- Rich Stearns, President of World Vision, US stated: "I believe that this could very well be looked back on as the sin of our generation. I look at my parents and ask, where were they during the civil rights movement? I look at my grandparents and ask, what were they doing when the holocaust in Europe was occurring with regard to the Jews, and why didn't they speak up? And when we think of our great, great, great-grandparents, we think how could they have sat by and allowed slavery to exist? And I believe that our children and their children, 40 or 50 years from now, are going to ask me, what did you do while 40 million children became orphans in Africa?"
- In an address at a World AIDS Day event on December 1, 2003, Rabbi David Saperstein, Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism said, "If even one person who we could have saved, dies on account of our failure to act,

we have not done enough. We come together to say we will not stand idly by. Together we have the capacity to save the lives of millions. We need only the will to ensure that those in need around the world have access to live-saving prevention programs and medications. For the sake of our shared humanity, we cannot afford to fail."

\*Sermon Starters and Quotes prepared with the help of American Jewish World Service.