

Our Mission, Now

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

The prophets speak ceaselessly about care for the needy and the poor. The call originates in the Torah. Deuteronomy 15:7, tell us that "if there is a poor person among you...do not harden your heart and shut your hand." On Yom Kippur we read from Isaiah, reminding us that the fast God wants is this: "To let the oppressed go free; to break off every yoke. To share your bread with the hungry, and to take the wretched poor into your home. When you see the naked, clothe him..." (Is. 58:6, 7).

Increasingly in modern society we do not see the poor in our daily lives. Wealth insulates and allows us to live among others who are doing well. There are still numerous challenges to life, but the grinding poverty that is a feature of so much of the world (and was prevalent throughout the ancient world) plays an increasingly small role in our everyday reality.

That separation is call to conscience. Our good fortune should be a spur to empathy and compassion. We who are so blessed must be more beneficent; we who have more gifts must show more gratitude. God has "grasped you by the hand...and appointed you... to bring prisoners from the dungeon." (Is. 42:6,7). Our mission is goodness and the right time is always now.