

#Lamentations with Larry & Sandy Feldman

Pray

In the Jewish tradition, Tikkun Olam – repairing the world – is a fundamental responsibility. Today, our world is badly in need of repair.

Our hearts are breaking over the most recent in a long line of senseless killings of African-American men, women, and children by police officers. We pray for a clear understanding of what we can do to change this terrible reality and we pray for the strength to persevere in our efforts to bring about urgently needed social change.

Racism has been deeply embedded in the fabric of our nation for hundreds of years. Slavery, lynchings, segregation, prejudice, and discrimination have all taken a toll on people of color. Institutional and individual racism continue to have a devastating impact on Black and Brown America. Police brutality is one manifestation of the enduring legacy of racism in these “United” States.

Jewish theologian Martin Buber taught us that the Divine can be experienced through “I-Thou” relationships. When we recognize “the other” as a person created in the image of God, as an individual deserving of recognition, respect, and caring, we can feel the presence of the Divine. But when the “I-Thou” relationship is distorted by stereotypes and prejudice, “Thou” becomes “It” and “the other” is stripped of his or her humanity. When we enter into “I-It” relationships, terrible things can happen – exclusion, exploitation, discrimination, aggression, murder, genocide. Dr. King often cited the link between experiencing “the other” as an “It” and systemic racism.

In our prayers today, we ask for divine guidance to help us reject the kind of thinking that leads to “I-It” interactions, and to help us commit to recognizing the “Thou” in our relationships with our brothers and sisters.

Fast

In the Jewish faith, our most significant experience of fasting is during the High Holy Day of Yom Kippur. We abstain from eating and drinking from sunset the night before until the sun sets on the day itself. Fasting frees our mind to focus on introspection, on taking a spiritual inventory of how we’ve lived our lives in the year that just concluded. It also allows us to experience in a limited way the feelings of deprivation that are constant companions in the lives of marginalized people.

For all of us today, may our fasting help us to let go of our more superficial concerns and make room for a deep dive into the world of those whose lives are impacted by racism. May our fasting help us to honestly face our own implicit and explicit biases and to acknowledge institutional racism in every aspect of our society. May our fasting help us to make a strong and lasting commitment to do everything we can to eliminate racism in ourselves and in our institutions.

Act

Consider the words of Rabbi Hillel: “If I am not for myself, who will be for me. If I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?”

What can we do today to help repair this broken world? We suggest the following possibilities:

- When injustice occurs, speak out against it, loudly and persistently, privately and publicly, in our homes, our neighborhoods, our houses of worship, our work environments, and in the public square.
- Insist on better pre-hiring evaluations, more effective training, and greater transparency for all police officers.
- Join organizations that are committed to creating a more equitable and just world. Stay involved and stay active, commit for the long haul.
- Work for the election of governmental officials, at every level, who are strong advocates for the elimination of racial injustice.
- Communicate with your elected representatives and demand that they take action against injustice.

Systemic racism has plagued our nation for much too long. The time for Tikkun Olam, for repairing ourselves and our society, is *now*! Together, we can and must make this happen.