

*Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself?...Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?*

—Isaiah 58:5-6



SATURDAY, APRIL 8

I chose this passage from the prophet Isaiah because it is a core reading for Jews during Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Much of the structure of this day and the prayers focus on the individual's relationship with God. However, the litanies of sins all begin with the word "we," recognizing that the community is coming together to acknowledge its wrongdoings.

In this reading, we hear a powerful reminder that repentance is not just about the individual: It is an exhortation to come together to make social change, to improve the world. As the text unfolds, we are instructed to feed and clothe those in need, to do work that can only be done in community and to act together with righteousness to create a more just world.

At American Jewish World Service we do this work of repentance together with Episcopal Relief & Development and other partner organizations in places that are hurting around the world. We recognize that the people we serve have firsthand experiences of oppression and their own visions of justice. We believe that our responsibility is to bring our communities together to support these social change efforts around the world. This will, as the prophet goes on to say, let our light break forth like the dawn and the glory of the Almighty encompass us.

—Ruth W. Messinger