

Isaiah - A Modern Prophet

Modern Midrash Based on Isaiah 57:14 - 58:14
 Edited For Yom Kippur 5781 by Rabbi Dana Benson

- *Isaiah as The Divine:*
 - The Divine speaks: “Build up, build up a highway! Clear a road now! Remove all obstacles that are scattered on the pathways of all Humankind!¹ I’ve struck You, people of the Earth, I’ve turned away from you in My Wrath. You follow the way of Your hearts.”²
- *Isaiah as Modern Prophet:*
 - We have “become discouraged about the injustice we see everywhere. But God did not promise us that the world would be humane and just. God gives us the gift of life and allows us to choose the way we will use our limited time on earth.”³
 - We are deeply and properly bewildered. “Human rights are being violated on every continent. More people are oppressed than free. How can we not be sensitive to their plight? Human suffering anywhere concerns people everywhere.”⁴
 - Ours is a time of almost daily astonishment over the latest degradations of what matters most to civilized, visionary people.⁵
- *Isaiah:*
 - We scream into the void with full voice, without any restraint. Wail and cry out like the sound of the *shofar*.⁶

“Why when we fasted did You not see? Why when we starved during Your fast day did you not take notice?”
- *Isaiah as Divine Voice:*
 - “Because you fast due to your own strife. Your fast is not one to make your voice heard! Is this what you think I want? A day for people to starve their bodies?”⁷
 - I saw your fast. But I also have seen: **YOU**
 - **You** sat by while your highest leaders have spoken racist words of hate, have put down the rights of all-genders and sexes, and mocks those with different abilities!
 - “Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”⁸
 - “The history of progress is written in the blood of people who have dared to espouse an unpopular cause, as, for instance, the black man's right to his body, or woman's right to her soul.”⁹

¹ Isaiah 57:14, Adapted by Rabbi Dana Benson

² Isaiah 57:17, Adapted by Rabbi Dana Benson

³ [Cesar Chavez](#)

⁴ [Elie Weisel, Nobel Prize Speech](#)

⁵ [Clarissa Pinkola Estes, *Letter To A Young Activist During Troubled Times: Do Not Lose Heart, We were Made for These Times* \(2016\)](#)

⁶ Isaiah 58:1, Adapted by Rabbi Dana Benson

⁷ Isaiah 58:3-5, Adapted by Rabbi Dana Benson

⁸ [Elie Weisel, Nobel Prize Speech](#)

⁹ [Emma Goldman](#)

- The work is ongoing, “Racist and antiracist are not fixed identities. We can be a racist one minute and an antiracist the next. What we say about race, what we do about race, in each moment, determines what -- not who -- we are.”¹⁰
 - “No, this is the fast I desire: Actively pursue freedom and equality for the oppressed, Work at Food pantries and help feed the hungry, Build shelters for the homeless.”¹¹
 - Protect the bodies of those who are wrongly attacked and killed in the street because of their skin color.
 - Honor the pronouns, sexuality, gender identity and gender expression of all peoples.
 - Amplify the voices that have been stamped out by years of intentional systemic oppression.
 - Actively dismantling fascist, racist, and biased systems wherever, whenever they occur.
 - People of color don’t need to twist themselves into knots trying to navigate us as painlessly as possible. It is [our] white people’s responsibility to be less fragile.¹²
 - “Get over the fear of facing the worst in yourself. You should instead fear unexamined racism. Fear the thought that right now, you could be contributing to the oppression of others and you don't know it. Do not fear those who bring that oppression to light. Do not fear the opportunity to do better.”¹³
 - And most importantly - do not lose heart.
 - I urge you, I ask you . . . do not lose hope. Look out over the prow; there are millions of boats of righteous souls on the waters with you.¹⁴
 - Do not grow overwhelmed by all that is unmended, all that needs fixing.
 - Do not feel weakened by all the sadness and brokenness that is too far beyond your reach. Do not lose heart.
 - Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world all at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach.
 - Any small, calm thing that one soul can do to help another soul, to assist some portion of this poor suffering world, will help immensely
 - Then when You call out You will be answered,
 - When men share with women, and all peoples, the responsibility of bringing up the next generation¹⁵
 - When our lives no longer belong to us alone; they belong to all those who need us desperately.¹⁶

¹⁰ Ibram X Kendi, [How To Be An Anti-Racist](#)

¹¹ Isaiah 58:6, Adapted by Rabbi Dana Benson

¹² Robin DiAngelo, White Fragility

¹³ [Ijeoma Oluo, So You Want to Talk About Race](#)

¹⁴ Clarissa Pinkola Estes, [Letter To A Young Activist During Troubled Times: Do Not Lose Heart, We were Made for These Times \(2016\)](#)

¹⁵ Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Z”L

¹⁶ [Elie Wiesel, Nobel Prize Speech](#)

- Then you will have honored the heritage of all your ancestors and the generations past and future, will be proud of you.
 - When you have done just a handful of the small, calm things that one soul can do to help another soul,¹⁷
 - Then your soul will shine bright, even in the darkness, and your love will lift the darkness of others.
- *Isaiah as Modern Prophet:*
 - There is no feel-good reward at the end other than the knowledge that you are doing this because it's the right thing to do. You will not be congratulated for it. You won't get any ally cookies for it. You won't be celebrated for it. You will have to learn to wean yourself off the addiction to instant gratification and instead develop a consciousness for doing what is right even if nobody ever thanks you for it.¹⁸
 - The most powerful actions you can take to intervene in a stormy world, is to stand up and show your soul.¹⁹

¹⁷ Clarissa Pinkola Estes, [Letter To A Young Activist During Troubled Times](#): *Do Not Lose Heart, We were Made for These Times* (2016)

¹⁸ Layla F. Saad, *Me and White Supremacy: Combat Racism, Change the World, and Become a Good Ancestor*

¹⁹ Clarissa Pinkola Estes, [Letter To A Young Activist During Troubled Times](#): *Do Not Lose Heart, We were Made for These Times* (2016)