

In Pursuit

TZEDEK COMMITTEE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER: AUGUST 2023



THE 15TH OF AV

Wednesday, August 2

ASSISTANCE DOG WEEK

August 6 to 12

Did you know? TBA hosts assistance dog training classes in its shul space!

IMMUNIZATION

AWARENESS MONTH

צדק צדק תרדוף
Justice, justice shall you pursue.

LOOKING AHEAD

September includes Hispanic Heritage Month. On the Jewish calendar, the month of Elul includes Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

PLUS: Make sure to read page 3 of this newsletter for our new monthly social justice column.

Tu B'Av: The 15th of Av

The 15th of Av is a most mysterious day. The Talmud tells us that many years ago the “daughters of Jerusalem would go dance in the vineyards” on the 15th of Av, and “whoever did not have a wife would go there” to find himself a bride.

There are, however, no specific customs for this date except to omit the usual festival portions from daily prayers and to study the Torah. Now known as the “Jewish Valentine’s Day,” Tu B’Av reminds us that love should champion equality. [Read how Tu B’Av applies to social justice here.](#)



INTERNATIONAL PEACE MONTH

Declared in 1926, International Peace Month (August) honors the tragic lives lost in World War I, also known as the Great War. The war not only set the stage for a century of violence and conflict but forever altered the human mindset, ushering in an age of cynicism, fatalism and lowered expectations for the future.

Use the time leading into Yom Kippur to contemplate “world peace,” the sacrifices of those who came before us, and what atonement on such a global scale would look like.

With that in mind, consider the current state of Israel as we all hope for peace.

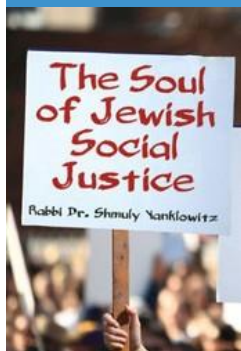
Watch this video addressing the crisis from JStreet: [Emergency Briefing: Israeli Democracy in Crisis](#)

Look forward to the International Day of Peace on Sept. 21.

Word of the Month: Ally

A person who is not a member of a marginalized or disadvantaged group but who expresses or gives support to that group.

TZEDEK FOR THE SOUL: BOOK CLUB



The Soul of Jewish Social Justice by Rabbi Dr. Shmuly Yanklowitz

This book offers a novel intellectual and spiritual approach for how Jewish wisdom must be relevant and transformational in its application to the most pressing moral problems of our time. The book explores how spirituality, ritual, narratives, holidays, and tradition can enhance one’s commitment to creating a more just society. Readers will discover how the Jewish social justice ethos can help address issues of education reform, ethical consumption, the future of Israel, immigration, prison reform, violence, and business ethics. *The Soul of Jewish Social Justice* can be read from cover to cover, or used as a resource for the individual topics it addresses.

Labor Justice Is a Jewish Value

By Liz Macedo

Labor organizers are affectionately referring to the present moment in time as “Hot Labor Summer”—a heated fight for workers’ rights across multiple industries in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic that saw increased hours for “essential” workers without increased compensation.

As I write this, the Writers Guild Association (WGA), The Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA), and the hospitality workers of United Here Local 11 are on strike in Southern California, demanding to be heard on a number of issues from fair pay to career advancement to better benefits and working conditions. Last week, the UPS Teamsters negotiated a Tentative Agreement that would impact approximately 340,000 workers nationally, if ratified, narrowly avoiding what could have been the largest private sector strike in recent United States history. Amazon warehouse workers and drivers across the country have been organizing to unionize and the past year has seen publicized efforts by Starbucks employees to do the same.

Amidst all the news coverage and the messages coming directly at us on social media from folks who are on the picket lines, I can’t help but think about the way my solidarity with these workers flows directly from my Jewish values. I’m the daughter and granddaughter of union workers, on both my mother and father’s side. My paternal grandfather was one of a group responsible for organizing the workers in his rubber factory in Rhode Island in the 1950s, and both of my parents retired from union jobs in the school district one town over from where I grew up. It’s fair to say that even without the Jewish imperative to support laborers, I’d be in support of these worker’s demands; but what makes my support a matter of morality, rather than one of learned political ideology, is my Judaism.

Halacha requires that employers pay their workers fairly. One of the first stories we read about our forefather, Jacob, is [the one where his father-in-law, Laban, tricks him into 14 years of labor](#) to earn permission to marry Rachel after marrying her sister, Leah, first, after which he still has to beg for resources to support his own family. In total, he serves Laban 20 years for essentially no wages except a flock of goats and sheep and the permission to marry Laban’s daughters. The whole story reads like a contentious contract negotiation, where Jacob is a hardworking laborer and Laban, a shady and deceitful employer, even chases Jacob into the desert when he finds out Jacob left his employ without notice.

This story is the foundational text from which the law code, the *Shulchan Aruch*, lays out the obligations of employers to act fairly. There exists in our sacred texts not only an imperative to create a just relationship between workers and employers, but a fundamental agreement that labor that is not justly rewarded harms a community.

Laban cheats Jacob out of his original, agreed-upon reward for his labor (i.e., Rachel’s hand in marriage) by blaming community norms, such as “We don’t marry off older daughters before their younger sisters have been married.” Setting aside the idea that these are two men negotiating a “fair price” for a woman’s value without a clear indication that either one of them ever asked the woman in question how she felt about it all (that’s a topic for a different article), Laban’s willingness to cheat Jacob “because that’s just how we do things around here” sounds eerily similar to modern CEOs saying “We have a fiduciary responsibility to our shareholders to maximize profits.” Laban’s efforts to keep the fruits of Jacob’s labor for himself prevent Jacob as well as, by extension, his family and community from being able to benefit from the work he completed.

Laban’s actions are a cautionary tale of how not to be an employer and the text is clear in the way it describes how Hashem blesses Jacob after his unfair dealings with Laban, bringing him back to the land of his ancestors and commanding Laban to have no more dealings with Jacob, good or bad. The way I read it: Hashem is clearly not on the side of shady, nefarious employers who don’t treat their workers fairly. Labor justice is a Jewish value, a halachic requirement, and basic standard for a strong, safe, and healthy community.