

**Why We Must Act to Help the People of Darfur...**  
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Our haftarah this morning came from the Book of Micah. In Chapter 6 Micah presents us with the image of a tribunal. God is calling Israel to a hearing—ki rive ladonai em amo—For the Lord has a case against His people—v'im yisrael yitvakach—God has a suit against Israel.

What is God's case? The people have turned away from God. Why have the people rejected God and rebelled against God's teachings? Hasn't God only provided for Israel, taken care of Israel, and given Israel all that it needs?

(v.3) My people! What wrong have I done you? What hardship have I caused you? Testify against Me.

God continues with a list of God's acts of redemption and grace. God sent us great leaders in Moses, Aaron and Miriam. God thwarted the attempts of our enemies to destroy us and redeemed us from slavery.

In verse six, the narrative switches to the voice of Israel responding to God's pleas. "With what shall I approach the Lord, do homage to God on high? Shall I approach [God] with burnt offerings and gifts..."

The haftarah concludes with Micah's answer in verse 8 to Israel's attempt to please God.

v.8 [God] has told you, o human, what is good and what the Lord requires of you: Only to do justice, and to love goodness, and to walk modestly with your God.

Our commentary in the Eitz Hayyim humash cites Abravanel who understands this tripartite formula as referring to: "the demands of justice—the formalities and externals of civil and criminal law; the requirement of lovingkindness—actions performed in the spirit of the law, going beyond its formal, minimal demands and third, the inwardness of true piety hidden from the world at large." (p.917)

We are to follow the laws that are given to us and developed from within our legal system. We are to strive to understand the spirit of the law and extend that spirit beyond the written law when the situation demands and we are to take all our actions with modesty and piety.

What does this all have to do with the situation today in Darfur and what is required of us, according to our understanding of Jewish tradition and Jewish law and the teachings of Micah?

First, when I read the parashah and envisioned the tribunal, I imagined the people of Israel in our day, post-Holocaust and post-the formation of the State of Israel. I imagined

that we who live in a world filled with violence and fighting in many regions of the world, might have plenty to answer God's questions: What wrong have I done you? What hardship have I caused you?

Our case against God rises to the Heavens

How could God have allowed the Holocaust to happen? How could God have created a world in which human beings would seek to destroy communities of human beings—thousands, millions? How could God have created a world in which genocide is coined and practiced—and continues unstopped?

Each of us has these challenges that we bring before God.

Each of us can look at events in the world and suffering in our own lives and the lives of those around us. And each of us can then offer our own case against God.

And what is Micah's response:

v.8 [God] has told you, o human, what is good and what the Lord requires of you: Only to do justice, and to love goodness, and to walk modestly with your God.

The world is created and sustained by a covenant that engages God and Humanity. There are requirements of each of us. The world is not sustained by God's goodness alone. We must follow God's laws, unearth God's laws and bring them to light. We must plea the case of justice in the world. We must love goodness and promote goodness and seek to eradicate evil. As we walk modestly with God, we must realize that we may not understand the way God works in this world. Maybe God's promise to redeem the world is dependent on us. God's justice will be proven and witnessed only when we bring it to light. God's redemption will be experienced only when we bring God's teaching to the world and walk where we must to spread the message of Torah—the pursuit of justice, the promotion of goodness and peace, and the understanding of our human limitations that does not undermine our responsibilities.

We are not supposed to wait for God to act. We must act. And through us God acts.

It has been said that the Holocaust was allowed to occur because those who were in power and able to stop it did not know how dangerous and successful Hitler was becoming in his mission to destroy the Jewish people. People didn't know how bad things were. They didn't know what was happening.

How did Auschwitz continue surrounded by a Polish neighborhood and nobody knew? After America entered World War II and the European theater, how did America not know what was happening, not bomb the railroad tracks that carried cattlecars filled with people to the gas chambers?

After the Holocaust, we cannot say that genocide is impossible. And since the Holocaust we have seen genocide occur in numerous regions around the world. We cannot say: no people would ever seek to utterly annihilate another people. We know this is not true. We know the depths of human evil and the depths of human suffering.

We, of all people, know this. And we, of all people, must never allow the world to forget and we must never allow ourselves to forget about the destructive force of a tyrannical government bent on genocide; and we must not forget the human desires to look away so as not to admit that such horrors could really exist in our world. We want to believe that human beings would never do such things as torture, starve, rape and terrorize men, women and children...and yet, we are confronted with this reality in the world up until this very day.

Today, there is still an active campaign of genocide raging in the Darfur region of Sudan. Sudan has a population of 39 million people. In land area, it is the largest country in Africa. In the fifty years since Sudan gained independence from the United Kingdom, civil war has raged for all but ten of those years.

In January 2005, the government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army signed a peace accord ending the war between the north and the south, but genocide continues in the Darfur region and conflict has also erupted in the east. Since 2003, almost two million people have been displaced by a campaign of genocide undertaken by the Sudanese government against the people of Darfur. Estimates of those that have been killed range from 80,000 to 400,000. Additionally, it is estimated that 500 people are dying a day from the life-threatening conditions in the refugee camps.

Although there is a cease-fire signed by the government, there is no peace.  
Although there are aid organizations present in the region, there is not enough aid and the aid workers are not safe.

Although there is a no-fly agreement above camps, there are government-backed helicopters that terrorize refugee camps.

Although there are government troops standing to protect refugee camps, there are government-backed troops attacking camps and villages, raping women, castrating and killing men, destroying villages and burning crop-bearing fields.

We know about all of this.

The United Nations knows about all of this.

The United States government knows about all of this.

Colin Powell has visited the Darfur region and declared that genocide is occurring and must be stopped.

President Bush has also used the word genocide to describe the situation in Darfur.

When the international community knows of genocide it is compelled to take action by the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

So, why does the crisis in Darfur continue?

I believe it is because not enough of us know about it and not enough of us have spoken out about it.

There is not enough political pressure upon our government and the United Nations to expand their aid packages, to increase the number of troops protecting civilians and enforcing the ceasefire.

There is not enough pressure being put on the United Nations and the United States to prosecute the war criminals in the Sudanese government and bring sanctions against the government until it ceases its campaign of genocide.

There are many different political angles—as there are in every political or international conflict. The bottom line, however, must be that the lives, homes and livelihood of African men, women and children are being threatened.

Can we have an impact on our government and on the United Nations—and therefore on the Sudanese government? We can try through letter writing and phone calling campaigns, through candlelight vigils and marches.

And I'm here to tell you what Micah told us: what is demanded of us? Only to do justice, and to love goodness, and to walk modestly with our God. It is up to each one of us to figure out what that means in terms of the action that we must take.

What I am here to tell you as your rabbi this morning is:  
what we cannot do is sit back and watch in silence.

We cannot say we did not know.

We cannot say it is not our problem.

We are human beings. The people of Darfur who are being targeted with genocide are human beings.

No matter what their religion, no matter what the color of their skin, they are all b'tzelem elohim, created in God's image and therefore deserving of being treated with dignity and sanctity.

And, if they are unable to speak up for themselves, to advocate for themselves, to protect themselves, as they are....it is up to us—as human beings and as Jews. We Jews know what it is like to be a minority, to be threatened with violence and extinction and we know in the depths of our souls that we must never allow this to be fulfilled.

You decide what you are ready and willing to do.

Take home the informational sheets.

Read about the situation in Darfur.

And then choose how you are going to respond so that you are pursuing justice, promoting goodness and acting in the way we would expect God to act.

Donate to relief organizations that are working on the ground like the American Jewish World Service.

Write letters to your representatives and Senators.

Write and call President Bush.

Organize public events in your community to call attention to the plight of the Africans in Darfur.

Whatever you choose to do, you can no longer say you didn't know.  
And if you have friends who don't know, speak with them, so that **they** can no longer say that they didn't know.

Shabbat Shalom.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Committee on Conscience has declared a Genocide Emergency in Darfur. We can help the people of Darfur...each in our own way...we can work as God's partner and God's advocate as we seek justice and promote goodness and peace.

If I am not for myself who am I for  
And If I am only for myself who am I  
And if not now, when.