

Not Ours

“*W*ith all due respect, Rabbi,
why spend energy, time, urging us to shout protest
to lift up people ground mercilessly into the parched soil
that grows only ghosts?

“They are a different fate and faith
They own a different geography and history
Theirs is a different language, a different culture
Have we not burdens enough?
Theirs are not ours.”

How respond?
What answer would satisfy?
There is no utilitarian benefit that will accrue to us for the spending of our passions
Would it not be wiser to turn a blind eye and to seal lips to silence?

The question is honestly presented
the answer must not be less forthright
It is not a quick and simple answer
but one that lies deep at the core of our being
We are Jews, and we have been raised as Jews
And we have faith in our God who is the God of the entire globe
who plays no favorites but embraces all His children
especially the lame and the poor and the sick and the frightened
and the pariah the lepers of our society.



Are God's children not ours?
If a child not the color of my skin is tormented by savage hate
if a child not my own is beaten by men on horseback
smitten with whips and swords and hacked to pieces
can our Jewish faith say to us,

"Sorry, but they are not ours" ...?

If a woman Black, Muslim, Christian, Animist
is frightened and raped and humiliated, her future wiped out
will our Jewish soul say,

"They are not ours" ...?

If starvation hovers over the emaciated skeletal forms of those I do not know
does our Jewish heart merely sigh, with our hands neatly folded,

"Sorry, they are not ours" ...?

Can we live with ourselves, can we sleep the slumber of peace when the shrieks
pierce our pretended deafness?

Can we shrug with regret and whisper when an entire people is hemorrhaging
and their dreams are drained away, can we say,

"They are not ours" ...?

When we pray to the God of ha-olam
the God of the entire universe
whose children must be protected
whose orphans and widows must be lifted up from the depths
can we mutter,

"Sorry"

and then conclude, "Amen" ...?



The Rabbis taught us to pray not with lips alone, not with eyes shut
We are taught to pray with hands, minds and spines
Build hospitals, water wells, latrines.

Send aluminum solar cookers, that little girls and trembling women
are not forced to forage for wood with which to fuel their fires
and become vulnerable to predators
who burn deep brands into the skins of the shamed
Are they not ours?

Do you know of any Jewish prayer that concludes with the words
“*Sorry, but they are not ours*” ... ?



We have been better taught by our prophets
and our patriarchs and our sages:
Be the fathers and mothers of the fatherless and motherless
And if they are abandoned by the world, exposed to all kinds of
diseases, gather our children close.

Prepare knapsacks with mosquito netting, shoes, medication and
colored pencils along with a note in a language not our own
— in Arabic —

“You are not alone.”

We have memories deeper than the ravines
in which they threw our people
The noblest vindication of our dead is that their children
and children’s children
will staunch the wounds of innocent men, women and children
We’ll never allow the genocide of others.

The Prophet answered the question:

*“Is such the fast I desire?
A day for men to starve their bodies? Is
it bowing the head like a bulrush And
lying in sackcloth and ashes? No, this is
the fast I desire:
To unlock fetters of weakness.
And untie chords of the yoke To
let the oppressed go free; To
break off every yoke.
It is to share your bread with the hungry,
And to take the wretched poor into your home;
When you see the naked, to clothe him,
And not to ignore your own kin.”*

Not an easy faith, ours.

Not a faith set to dogmas
but a faith that offers no excuse
whoever, wherever, whenever.