

t h r o u g h  
**work**  
we transform our  
work  
work  
world  
world  
**world**

## LABOR ON THE BIMAH:

A Toolkit for Jewish Congregations



# Labor on the Bimah:

A Toolkit for Jewish Congregations

## Contents

1. Introduction .....	1
2. Getting Started .....	2
3. Publicity and Media Outreach.....	3
4. Speaker’s Guide .....	5
5. Next Steps: What You Can Do for Workers .....	6
6. Torah Portion.....	7
7. Rabbis’ Reflections .....	12
8. Havdalah Service .....	19

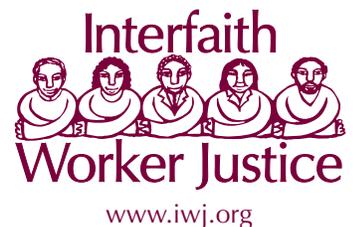
## Introduction

Interfaith Worker Justice believes that people of faith are an integral part of the effort to guarantee that all workers are treated with dignity and respect. As corporations, unions, worker advocates and workers seek to cooperate and build together, the religious community can urge and help them grow in a moral context.

Since 1996, thousands of congregations have spent Labor Day doing this important work. From San Diego to New York, religious communities focus Labor Day weekend services on the injustices facing low-wage workers and the religious community’s efforts to support those workers’ struggles for living wages, family-sustaining benefits, and for dignity and respect on the job. Participating congregations integrate worker justice themes into their services, and many invite a worker from within their congregation, a union member or worker advocate to be a guest on Labor Day weekend.

Through *Labor on the Bimah*, congregations have the opportunity to talk about the connections between faith, work, and justice. This toolkit offers some introductory resources to help celebrate Labor Day in your community. If your worship service or congregation’s tradition does not accommodate outside speakers, you could have someone speak before or after the service, or at adult or teen education classes. If you would like more information on how to become a speaker or host a speaker, please e-mail [info@iwj.org](mailto:info@iwj.org).

t h r o u g h  
**work**  
we transform our  
work  
work  
world  
world  
world



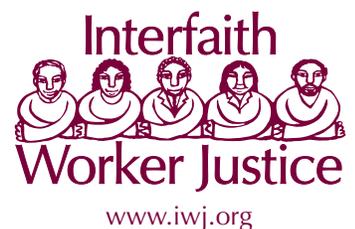
Labor Day Resources

## Getting Started

There are different ways to plan a Labor Day service that lifts up workers within your community and around the country. The suggestions below can help you get started. Many of these can be incorporated into groups and programs that already exist in your congregation.

- **Connect with your local federation of labor or Interfaith Worker Justice affiliate.** Many IWJ affiliates have strong Labor on the Bimah/in the Pulpits programs. Reach out to one in your area. A list of affiliates is available at [www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org).
- **Invite a speaker (worker, union leader, worker advocate).** Recruit someone from your community to speak on Labor Day weekend. If no one is available, IWJ and our affiliates can match your congregation with a guest speaker for Labor Day weekend. For more information, e-mail [info@iwj.org](mailto:info@iwj.org)
- **Focus on education.** Labor Day weekend offers congregations the opportunity to highlight and lift up issues that impact workers within the community. Immigration reform, minimum wage, health and safety, dignity at worker, low-wage worker organizing and wage theft are among the topics that your congregation can focus on. Issue and campaign-specific resources are included in this toolkit. Additional resources are also available at [www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org).
- **Get the word out.** Promote your Labor Day service in your congregation's bulletin and/or newsletter. IWJ will help promote events registered here: <http://bit.ly/2014labordayservice>
- **Develop a worship planning committee.** A worship committee can explore creative ways to integrate worker justice themes into the service either by using resources included in this toolkit or creating their own.
- **Lead a worker justice text study.** Throughout the month of September, have someone (maybe you!) teach a text study or lead a prayer group focusing on labor and faith.
- **Honor an outstanding congregation member (or members).** Lift up the good work of members of your community. Honor a congregation worker, volunteer or an outstanding member with a gift to IWJ. We will send you certificates to hand out.  
Honor a worker here: <http://bit.ly/2014honoraworker>

t h r o u g h  
**work**  
we transform our  
work  
work  
world  
world  
world



Labor Day Resources

## Publicity and Media Outreach

*Labor on the Bimah* provides a great opportunity for labor groups, worker advocates and faith communities to collaborate and lift up issues that impact workers, especially those in low-wage jobs. Below are a few tips on engaging the broader community.

- **Register your event with IWJ.** In the weeks leading up to Labor Day weekend, IWJ will actively promote services planned around the country. Include yours in the list: <http://bit.ly/2014labordayservice>
- **Promote your Labor Day service** in your congregation's bulletin and/or newsletter. Sample language is available below. Visit [www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org) to download Labor Day images.
- **Inform local media about the event.** Invite members of the media to your Labor Day event. Highlight issues – minimum wage, wage theft – that are already getting coverage.
- **Select a spokesperson from your congregation.** Have a “point person” for media interviews who might share personal stories about worker justice or reflections about Labor Day.

*For questions and more information, email [info@iwj.org](mailto:info@iwj.org).*

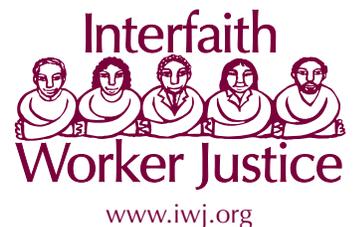
### Sample blurb for congregation newsletter or bulletin:

#### Celebrate The Sacredness of Work

On \_\_\_\_\_, we will join with congregations across the nation in lifting up and honoring the sacred link between work and faith. This is an opportunity to educate ourselves about the issues that impact workers, especially those in low-wage jobs, and reflect on the true meaning of Labor Day.

[Name of speaker] will join us to speak on what it means to be a person of faith and a [worker, worker advocate].

t h r o u g h  
**work**  
we transform our  
work  
work  
world  
world  
world



Labor Day Resources

## Sample News Advisory

(Print on your letterhead.)

### For Immediate Release

<Enter date here>

### Contact:

<Name, E-mail, Phone number>

## **Celebrating the Sacred Link Between Faith, Justice, and Work [Worker/Labor leader/worker rights activist] brings [issue] to the Bimah on Labor Day Weekend**

**WHAT:** [Congregation] will join more than 500 congregations across the country in honoring workers and lifting up worker struggles this Labor Day weekend. The service is part of the annual Labor in the Pulpits/on the Bimah/in the Minbar program hosted by national worker rights organization, Interfaith Worker Justice, and its network of affiliates.

Presentations will celebrate the ever-growing relationship between religion and labor and their efforts to not only uplift the efforts of past labor leaders and workers, but also to educate people shine light on the oppressive working conditions and poverty wages millions of workers are forced to endure, educate workers' about their rights in the workplace, give life to living wage ordinances throughout the country, highlight anti-wage theft efforts, and a host of other initiatives that honor and respect the innate dignity of all workers.

**WHO:** [Speaker] will talk about [issue].

**WHEN:** [Specific date and time of your service]

**WHERE:** [Your congregation's address]

**WHY:** [Include additional information regarding particular issues impacting your community and why it is important for people of faith to be involved.]

###

## Speaker's Guide

1. Call the pastor/rabbi/imam as soon as you are assigned. Ask him/her:

- What time does the service start?
- At what point in the service will I be speaking, and how long a talk is appropriate?
- How do I get there?
- Which scripture readings/texts the congregation will use.
- The justice activities, ministries and relevant history of the congregation.

2. Getting there:

- Dress appropriately.
- Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes before the service begins.
- Identify yourself to the pastor/rabbi/imam. Thank him/her.
- Ask where you should sit and where you will be speaking from.
- Get a sense of the sound system, acoustics, and lighting.

3. Final reminders for giving your presentation:

- Speak slowly, loudly and clearly.
- Be brief.
- Be well prepared.
- Be creative.
- Introduce yourself and clarify your relationship to labor.
- Keep your presentation within the allotted time frame.
- Talk about your own experiences. It is far more important to believe what you are saying than to be eloquent.

4. Once you have finished:

- Take a deep breath and smile!
- Thank the pastor, rabbi or imam.
- Greet people after the service. This is a great opportunity to chat informally with interested people.

## Sample Outline

1. Introduction and thanks to the congregation

2. Reason for speaking

- Labor Day is an opportunity for people of faith to recognize God's commitment to justice.
- Reminder that Labor Day is a hard-earned holiday coming out of the struggles of working people for the eight-hour day and the right to organize unions.

3. Tie Labor Day to other Torah readings, or the appropriate faith group statement on the right to organize.

4. Describe the importance of unions and worker centers in light of a current situation.

- Tell a personal story of how unions or worker centers have had a positive impact on you, your family and community.
- Offer up a historical perspective of unions and worker organizing: Unions are responsible for benefits we often take for granted, such as the eight-hour day, the end of child labor, the public school system and pensions.

5. Emphasize the importance of the religious community, unions and worker centers working together. Corporations and unions work most effectively when they can cooperate and build together. The religious community can urge them both and help them grow in a moral context.

t h r o u g h  
**work**  
we transform our  
work  
work  
world  
world  
world



[www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org)

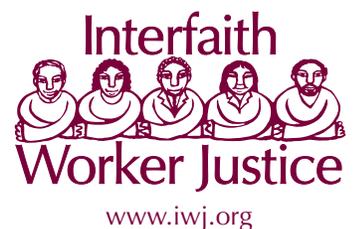
Labor Day Resources

## Next Steps: What You Can Do for Workers

- **PRAY** for all workers, especially those in low-wage and unsafe jobs. Pray also for employers and business owners, that they may all learn to value people over profit. Pray for our elected leaders, that they place those struggling on the margins at the center of their deliberations.
- **EDUCATE** yourself and other members of your community on worker and economic justice issues. Connect with a worker center in your area and visit [www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org) for resources on faith and labor.
- **ORGANIZE** a worker rights training at your congregation to learn how your Denomination's teachings apply to worker rights in your city.
- **PAY AND TREAT WORKERS WELL.** Seek to ensure that all the workers employed by your congregation are paid wages that can support families and provide family health coverage.
- **DEVELOP** a construction policy for your congregation that awards repairs and construction work to contractors and subcontractors that treat workers justly.
- **ADVOCATE** for public policies that seek justice for all workers, including decent wages and health care benefits for all workers.
- **SUPPORT** workers who are organizing for better wages and working conditions. Over the last few years, workers in the fast food, retail and service industries are standing up to demand dignity and respect on the job. Be inspired by the courage of Walmart, McDonald's and other workers in low-wage jobs.
- **SHOP ETHICALLY.** Make an impact with your dollars. Find out how your vendors treat their employees and support those with policies that promote fairness, fair wages and respect at the workplace
- **BECOME A WORKER JUSTICE CONGREGATION. Support IWJ's efforts to improve wages and working conditions for workers by joining our congregational membership program. As a member you will also receive discounts to ethical vendors and access to many of IWJ's education resource materials.**

*Take action on the ground and online. Join IWJ's e-advocacy team.  
Register at [www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org)*

t h r o u g h  
**work**  
we transform our  
work  
work  
world  
world  
world



Labor Day Resources

## Torah Portion

### Shoftim: Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9

*This translation was taken from the JPS Tanakh*

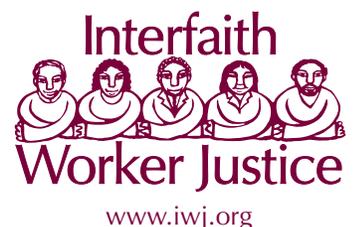
18 You shall appoint magistrates and officials for your tribes, in all the settlements that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall govern the people with due justice. 19 You shall not judge unfairly: you shall show no partiality; you shall not take bribes, for bribes blind the eyes of the discerning and upset the plea of the just. 20 Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you. 21 You shall not set up a sacred post – any kind of pole beside the altar of the Lord your God that you may make 22 or erect a stone pillar; for such the Lord your God detests.

Chapter 17 1 You shall not sacrifice to the Lord your God an ox or a sheep that has any defect of a serious kind, for that is abhorrent to the Lord your God. 2 If there is found among you, in one of the settlements that the Lord your God is giving you, a man or woman who has affronted the Lord your God and transgressed His covenant 3 turning to the worship of other gods and bowing down to them, to the sun or the moon or any of the heavenly host, something I never commanded 4 and you have been informed or have learned of it, then you shall make a thorough inquiry. If it is true, the fact is established, that abhorrent thing was perpetrated in Israel, 5 you shall take the man or the woman who did that wicked thing out to the public place, and you shall stone them, man or woman, to death. 6 A person shall be put to death only on the testimony of two or more witnesses; he must not be put to death on the testimony of a single witness. 7 Let the hands of the witnesses be the first against him to put him to death, and the hands of the rest of the people thereafter. Thus you will sweep out evil from your midst.

8 If a case is too baffling for you to decide, be it a controversy over homicide, civil law, or assault – matters of dispute in your courts – you shall promptly repair to the place that the Lord your God will have chosen, 9 and appear before the levitical priests, or the magistrate in charge at the time, and present your problem. When they have announced to you the verdict in the case, 10 you shall carry out the verdict that is announced to you from that place that the Lord chose, observing scrupulously all their instructions to you. 11 You shall act in accordance with the instructions given you and the ruling handed down to you; you must not deviate from the verdict that they announce to you either to the right or to the left. 12 Should a man act presumptuously and disregard the priest charged with serving there the Lord your God, or the magistrate, that man shall die. Thus you will sweep out evil from Israel: 13 all the people will hear and be afraid and will not act presumptuously again.

14 If, after you have entered the land that the Lord your God has assigned to you, and taken possession of it and settled in it, you decide, “I will set a king over me, as do all the nations about me,” 15 you shall be free to set a king over yourself, one chosen by the Lord your God. Be sure to set as king over yourself one of your own people; you must not set a foreigner over you, one who is not your kinsman. 16 Moreover, he shall not keep

t h r o u g h  
**work**  
we transform our  
work  
work  
world  
world  
world



Labor Day Resources

many horses or send people back to Egypt to add to his horses, since the Lord has warned you, "You must not go back that way again." 17 And he shall not have many wives, lest his heart go astray; nor shall he amass silver and gold to excess.

18 When he is seated on his royal throne, he shall have a copy of this Teaching written for him on a scroll by the levitical priests. 19 Let it remain with him and let him read in it all his life, so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God, to observe faithfully every word of this Teaching as well as these laws. 20 Thus he will not act haughtily toward his fellows or deviate from the Instruction to the right or to the left, to the end that he and his descendants may reign long in the midst of Israel.

Chapter 18 1 The levitical priests, the whole tribe of Levi, shall have no territorial portion with Israel. They shall live only off the Lord's offerings by fire as their portion, 2 and shall have no portion among their brother tribes: the Lord is their portion, as He promised them.

3 This then shall be the priests' due from the people: Everyone who offers a sacrifice, whether an ox or a sheep, must give the shoulder, the cheeks, and the stomach to the priest. 4 You shall also give him the first fruits of your new grain and wine and oil, and the first shearing of your sheep. 5 For the Lord your God has chosen him and his descendants, out of all your tribes, to be in attendance for service in the name of the Lord for all time.

6 If a Levite would go, from any of the settlements throughout Israel where he has been residing, to the place that the Lord has chosen, he may do so whenever he pleases. 7 He may serve in the name of the Lord his God like all his fellow Levites who are there in attendance before the Lord. 8 They shall receive equal shares of the dues, without regard to personal gifts or patrimonies.

9 When you enter the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations. 10 Let no one be found among you who consigns his son or daughter to the fire, or who is an augur, a soothsayer, a diviner, a sorcerer, 11 one who casts spells, or one who consults ghosts or familiar spirits, or one who inquires of the dead. 12 For anyone who does such things is abhorrent to the Lord, and it is because of these abhorrent things that the Lord your God is dispossessing them before you. 13 You must be wholehearted with

the Lord your God. 14 Those nations that you are about to dispossess do indeed resort to soothsayers and augurs; to you, however, the Lord your God has not assigned the like.

15 The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet from among your own people, like myself; him you shall heed. 16 This is just what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb, on the day of the Assembly, saying, "Let me not hear the voice of the Lord my God any longer or see this wondrous fire any more, lest I die." 17 Whereupon the Lord said to me, "They have done well in speaking thus. 18 I will raise up a prophet for them from among their own people, like yourself: I will put My words in his mouth and he will speak to them all that I command him; 19 and if anybody fails to heed the words he speaks in My name, I myself will call him to account. 20 But any prophet who presumes to speak in My name an oracle that I did not command him to utter, or who speaks in the name of other gods – that prophet shall die." 21 And should you ask yourselves, "How can we know that the oracle was not spoken by the Lord?" 22 if the prophet speaks in the name of the Lord and the oracle does not come true, that oracle was not spoken by the Lord; the prophet has uttered it presumptuously: do not stand in dread of him.

Chapter 19 1 When the Lord your God has cut down the nations whose land the Lord your God is assigning to you, and you have dispossessed them and settled in their towns and homes, 2 you shall set aside three cities in the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess. 3 You shall survey the distances, and divide into three parts the territory of the country that the Lord your God has allotted to you, so that any manslayer may have a place to flee to. 4 Now this is the case of the manslayer who may flee there and live: one who has killed another unwittingly, without having been his enemy in the past. 5 For instance, a man goes with his neighbor into a grove to cut wood; as his hand swings the ax to cut down a tree, the axhead flies off the handle and strikes the other so that he dies. That man shall flee to one of these cities and live. 6 Otherwise, when the distance is great, the blood-avenger, pursuing the manslayer in hot anger, may overtake him and kill him; yet he did not incur the death penalty, since he had never been the other's enemy. 7 That is why I

command you: set aside three cities.

8 And when the Lord your God enlarges your territory, as He swore to your fathers, and gives you all the land that He promised to give your fathers 9 if you faithfully observe all this Instruction that I enjoin upon you this day, to love the Lord your God and to walk in His ways at all times – then you shall add three more towns to those three.

10 Thus blood of the innocent will not be shed, bringing bloodguilt upon you in the land that the Lord your God is allotting to you.

11 If, however, a person who is the enemy of another lies in wait for him and sets upon him and strikes him a fatal blow and then flees to one of these towns, 12 the elders of his town shall have him brought back from there and shall hand him over to the blood-avenger to be put to death; 13 you must show him no pity. Thus you will purge Israel of the blood of the innocent, and it will go well with you.

14 You shall not move your countryman's landmarks, set up by previous generations, in the property that will be allotted to you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess.

15 A single witness may not validate against a person any guilt or blame for any offense that may be committed; a case can be valid only on the testimony of two witnesses or more. 16 If a man appears against another to testify maliciously and gives false testimony against him, 17 the two parties to the dispute shall appear before the Lord, before the priests or magistrates in authority at the time, 18 and the magistrates shall make a thorough investigation. If the man who testified is a false witness, if he has testified falsely against his fellow, 19 you shall do to him as he schemed to do to his fellow. Thus you will sweep out evil from your midst; 20 others will hear and be afraid, and such evil things will not again be done in your midst. 21 Nor must you show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

Chapter 20 1 When you take the field against your enemies, and see horses and chariots – forces larger than yours – have no fear of them, for the Lord your God, who brought you from the land of Egypt, is with you. 2 Before you join battle, the priest shall come forward and address the troops. 3 He shall say to them, "Hear, O Israel! You are about to join battle with your enemy.

Let not your courage falter. Do not be infear, or in panic, or in dread of them. 4 For it is the Lord your God who marches with you to do battle for you against your enemy, to bring you victory." 5 Then the officials shall address the troops, as follows: "Is there anyone who has built a new house but has not dedicated it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another dedicate it. 6 Is there anyone who has planted a vineyard but has never harvested it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another harvest it. 7 Is there anyone who has paid the bride-price for a wife, but who has not yet married her? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another marry her." 8 The officials shall go on addressing the troops and say, "Is there anyone afraid and disheartened? Let him go back to his home, lest the courage of his comrades flag like his." 9 When the officials have finished addressing the troops, army commanders shall assume command of the troops.

10 When you approach a town to attack it, you shall offer it terms of peace. 11 If it responds peaceably and lets you in, all the people present there shall serve you at forced labor. 12 If it does not surrender to you, but would join battle with you, you shall lay siege to it; 13 and when the Lord your God delivers it into your hand, you shall put all its males to the sword. 14 You may, however, take as your booty the women, the children, the livestock, and everything in the town – all its spoil – and enjoy the use of the spoil of your enemy, which the Lord your God gives you. 15 Thus you shall deal with all towns that lie very far from you, towns that do not belong to nations hereabout. 16 In the towns of the latter peoples, however, which the Lord your God is giving you as a heritage, you shall not let a soul remain alive. 17 No, you must proscribe them – the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites – as the Lord your God has commanded you, 18 lest they lead you into doing all the abhorrent things that they have done for their gods and you stand guilty before the Lord your God.

19 When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the ax against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down. Are trees of the field human to with-

draw before you into the besieged city? 20 Only trees that you know do not yield food may be destroyed; you may cut them down for constructing siegeworks against the city that is waging war on you, until it has been reduced.

Chapter 21 1 If, in the land that the Lord your God is assigning you to possess, someone slain is found lying in the open, the identity of the slayer not being known, 2 your elders and magistrates shall go out and measure the distances from the corpse to the nearby towns. 3 The elders of the town nearest to the corpse shall then take a heifer which has never been worked, which has never pulled in a yoke; 4 and the elders of that town shall bring the heifer down to an everflowing wadi, which is not tilled or sown. There, in the wadi, they shall break the heifer's neck. 5 The priests, sons of Levi, shall come forward; for the Lord your God has chosen them to minister to Him and to pronounce blessing in the name of the Lord, and every lawsuit and case of assault is subject to their ruling. 6 Then all the elders of the town nearest to the corpse shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the wadi. 7 And they shall make this declaration: "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done. 8 Absolve, O Lord, Your people Israel whom You redeemed, and do not let guilt for the blood of the innocent remain among Your people Israel." And they will be absolved of blood-guilt. 9 Thus you will remove from your midst guilt for the blood of the innocent, for you will be doing what is right in the sight of the Lord.

### **Haftarah for Shof'tim: ISAIAH 51:12 - 52:12**

*This translation was taken from the JPS Tanakh*

12 I, I am He who comforts you! What ails you that you fear Man who must die, Mortals who fare like grass? 13 You have forgotten the Lord your Maker, Who stretched out the skies and made firm the earth! And you live all day in constant dread Because of the rage of an oppressor Who is aiming to cut [you] down. Yet of what account is the rage of an oppressor? 14 Quickly the crouching one is freed; He is not cut down and slain, And he shall not want for food. 15 For I the Lord your God – Who stir up the sea into roaring waves, Whose name is Lord of Hosts 16 Have put My words in your mouth And sheltered you with My hand; I,

who planted the skies and made firm the earth, Have said to Zion: You are My people! 17 Rouse, rouse yourself! Arise, O Jerusalem, You who from the Lord's hand Have drunk the cup of His wrath, You who have drained to the dregs The bowl, the cup of reeling! 18 She has none to guide her Of all the sons she bore; None takes her by the hand, Of all the sons she reared. 19 These two things have befallen you: Wrack and ruin – who can console you? Famine and sword – how shall I comfort you? 20 Your sons lie in a swoon At the corner of every street – Like an antelope caught in a net – Drunk with the wrath of the Lord, With the rebuke of your God. 21 Therefore, Listen to this, unhappy one, Who are drunk, but not with wine! 22 Thus said the Lord, your Lord, Your God who champions His people: Herewith I take from your hand The cup of reeling, The bowl, the cup of My wrath; You shall never drink it again.

23 I will put it in the hands of your tormentors, Who have commanded you, "Get down, that we may walk over you" – So that you made your back like the ground, Like a street for passersby. Chapter 52 1 Awake, awake, O Zion! Clothe yourself in splendor; Put on your robes of majesty, Jerusalem, holy city! For the uncircumcised and the unclean Shall never enter you again. 2 Arise, shake off the dust, Sit [on your throne], Jerusalem! Loose the bonds from your neck, O captive one, Fair Zion!

3 For thus said the Lord: You were sold for no price, And shall be redeemed without money. 4 For thus said the Lord God: Of old, My people went down To Egypt to sojourn there; But Assyria has robbed them, Giving nothing in return. 5 What therefore do I gain here?

— declares the Lord —

For My people has been carried off for nothing, Their mockers howl

— declares the Lord —

And constantly, unceasingly, My name is reviled.

6 Assuredly, My people shall learn My name, Assuredly [they shall learn] on that day That I, the One who promised, Am now at hand.

7 How welcome on the mountain Are the footsteps of the herald Announcing happiness, Heralding good fortune, Announcing victory, Telling Zion, "Your God is King!" 8 Hark! Your watchmen raise their voices, As one they shout for joy; For every eye shall behold The Lord's return to Zion.

9 Raise a shout together, O ruins of Jerusalem!  
For the Lord will comfort His people, Will redeem  
Jerusalem. 10 The Lord will bare His holy arm In  
the sight of all the nations, And the very ends of  
earth shall see The victory of our God.

11 Turn, turn away, touch naught unclean As you  
depart from there; Keep pure, as you go forth  
from there, You who bear the vessels of the Lord!  
12 For you will not depart in haste, Nor will you  
leave in flight; For the Lord is marching before  
you, The God of Israel is your rear guard.

### **Parshiot for Labor Day Weekends, 2014-2016 (5771-5776)**

#### **2014/5774—SHOFETIM**

“Tzedek tzedek tirdof” – “Justice, justice shall  
you pursue” (Deut. 16:20). Perhaps nowhere in  
Jewish tradition is our task put so succinctly as in  
the one line from Parshat Shofetim. And accord-  
ing to Bachya ben Asher, the 13th century Spanish  
author of the Kad HaKemach, the duplication of  
the word justice suggests the broadest possible  
interpretation: “Justice, whether to your profit or  
loss, whether in word or action, whether to Jew or  
non-Jew.”

Among the litany of more specific command-  
ments in this parsha, issues of profit and loss, and  
of the treatment of laborers, are not explicitly  
discussed. And yet, from what would appear the  
most unlikely place – a pesuk about not moving  
a boundary marker (Deut. 19:14) – the rabbis de-  
rived an injunction against infringing on another’s  
livelihood. Interestingly, this line also became the  
proof text for the rights of both business owners  
and tradespeople to form associations and fix  
prices. On this Labor Day weekend, we might  
turn to this line as both proof text and reminder  
of the basic rights of workers – in their own effort  
to pursue justice – to form unions and set fair,  
standard wages.

#### **2015/5775—KI TAVO**

Prior to issuing God’s promise and threat of bless-  
ings and curses to the community of Israel (in-  
cluding the blessings and curses over their means  
of production and the fruits of their labors), Moses  
announces that the Levites will issue a blanket  
curse to individuals who have violated certain

precepts. Many are stated quite plainly, and liter-  
ally: cursed are those who dishonor their parents;  
who pervert justice to the stranger, fatherless  
and widow; who engage in incest or bestiality,  
in murder undetected or murder for hire. One is  
also quite plain, though in the form of metaphor:  
cursed are those who lead the blind astray. The  
one remaining seems oddly out of place: “Cursed  
be he that removeth his neighbor’s landmark”  
(Deut. 27:17).

What does it mean to move a neighbor’s land-  
mark? The rabbis tell us that it is a form of steal-  
ing property. So, why wouldn’t Moses simply say  
“Cursed be he that steals”? In point of fact, when  
this injunction first appears – in Parshat Shofetim  
– the rabbis argue that it can’t mean “don’t steal,”  
because that would be redundant; we’ve already  
been told not to infringe upon one’s neighbor’s  
livelihood – whether by slashing prices to oust  
a competitor, or performing a particular kind of  
work for far below the wages of one’s fellow la-  
borers. Today, this line can be seen as a proof text  
to support the rights of workers to organize and  
set fair, standard wages for their industry.

#### **2016/5776—RE’EH**

“Do not shut your heart against your needy kins-  
man,” we read in Parshat Re’eh. “Rather you must  
open your hand and lend him sufficient for what-  
ever he needs . . . Give to him readily and have no  
regrets when you do so, for in return the Lord your  
God will bless you in all your efforts and in all  
your undertakings. For there will never cease to be  
the needy ones in your land, which is why I com-  
mand you: open your hand to the poor and needy  
kinsman in your land.” Elsewhere, we are told  
to provide not only for our kinsman, but for the  
stranger and others left vulnerable in our society.

And how must we provide? According to Mai-  
monides, the highest form of tzedakah is to offer  
someone a job, or to train someone in a liveli-  
hood, so that person can then support himself  
or herself. Maimonides’ position, of course, is  
based on a presumption that having a job or trade  
enables one to support oneself. But can one really  
support oneself on minimum wage, for instance?  
How, in our society, can we make sure that there  
are decent-paying jobs for all – or that the most  
needy, both kinsman and stranger, are adequately  
trained for the jobs that exist?

## Rabbis' Reflections

### THE COMMANDMENT FOR A LIVING WAGE

by Rabbi Mordechai Liebling

For Jews around the world the bible reading for the week of this Labor Day contains the following passage from Deuteronomy 24:14-15. "You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow countryman or a stranger in one of the communities of your land. You must pay him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets, for he is needy and sets his life on it; else he will cry to God against you and you will incur guilt."

This is a clear call for a living wage and treating workers justly. The phrase "he sets his life on it" has always been interpreted as the worker needing the wage to pay for the necessities of life for self and family. The law is designed to protect a worker's dignity and physical needs. The workers must be paid on the same day (read in a timely fashion) so that they and their families do not go hungry and do not have to beg for food.

There are many jobs in our economy that do not pay a living wage – forcing workers to take two or even three jobs or work great amounts of over-time. In some cities there are movements to pass living wage bills. The bills would provide that the city does not contract with anyone who does not pay a living wage to its employees. Churches and synagogues have a biblical basis for supporting these campaigns.

The language of the text makes it clear that we have to give special attention to poor workers. We are not to abuse them. In this economy it is poor workers who are the most exploited. They are the ones that do not have health benefits, job security, or pension plans. They receive the least amount of respect, yet God hears their voice. We too need to hear their voice and fight on their behalf.

The rabbinic commentary on this text stresses the seriousness of this law. Anyone violating it is considered guilty of oppressing a neighbor, stealing, and oppressing the poor in addition to violating the expressed laws about paying wages promptly. These are very serious offenses.

We don't often think of underpaying workers as stealing, but the rabbis rightly understood it as theft. They say it as stealing one's life. I think that it can be understood as theft on three levels. If someone is not being paid a living wage, then he or she is not able to provide for the essentials of life – food, shelter and clothing – robbing them of being able to lead a normal life. It is also stealing money from them, by profiting from their labor and not giving them their due share. It is, also, a theft of their dignity, their hard work is not good enough to support themselves.

The rabbis underlined the gravity of this law by reversing normal contract law. Normally the burden of proof is on the one who is owed money; in this case the burden of proof is on the employer. The worker is assumed to be owed the money unless the employer can prove otherwise. Workers' wages are given higher rights than other types of debts.

Christian and Jewish religious institutions – nursing homes, hospitals,

t h r o u g h  
**work**  
we transform our  
work  
work  
world  
world  
world



Labor Day Resources

schools – need to heed the principles of a worker's right to a living wage that their traditions teach. And we as faith members need to remind them of their responsibilities.

As we take the time to acknowledge and celebrate the contribution that all workers have made let us also take the time to make sure that all workers have the dignity of a living wage.

*Rabbi Mordechai Liebling is the Director of Social Justice Organizing Program for Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. He is former Executive Vice President of the Jewish Fund for Justice and a former community organizer.*

### **MY FATHER WAS A WANDERING GARMENT WORKER...**

*by Rabbi Marc Israel and Rabbi David Saperstein*

One of the hallmarks of Passover is when we read each year at the Seder that "My father was a wandering Aramean." In this passage, we recall our people's meager roots, our history as slaves in Egypt and God's great redemption.

Today in America, as the generations that are the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the great wave of immigrants from the turn of the 20th Century, we would do well to say each year at Labor Day that "My father was a garment worker, who came over from Europe with nothing but the clothes on his back. He came to America and worked in sweatshops and there he helped to form unions which fought for the rights of all workers and redeemed them from their bondage." In America, the Jewish community's connection to the history of the labor movement could not be stronger. But this is only because we have a long history of protecting the rights of workers.

The Torah's mandate to protect workers' rights is clear:

You shall not defraud your fellow. You shall not commit robbery. The wages of a laborer shall not remain with you until morning. (Lev. 19:13)

You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow countryman or a stranger in one of the communities of your land. You must pay

him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets, for he is needy and urgently depends on it; else he will cry to the Lord against you and you will incur guilt. (Deut. 24:14-15)

The Talmud expounds on these passages to teach that employers who withhold wages are guilty of six violations: oppressing a neighbor, stealing, oppressing the poor, delaying payment of wages, failing to pay wages at the due date and failing to pay wages before sunset. It continues to teach that "one who withholds an employee's wages is as though he deprived the worker of his life." (Baba Metzia 111a; 112a)

Our tradition clearly recognizes the value of hard work, but it also demands that the rights of the workers be protected. As we celebrate Labor Day, we must remember, as we do on Passover, our own ancestors' hard toil. More importantly, we must take the additional step of using our collective memory as a reminder of our obligations – both as a community and as individuals – to work for the rights of all workers, "whether a fellow countryman or a stranger in one of the communities of your land," and to seek positive actions to protect the rights of unions and laborers.

What does this mean? For starters, it means enacting a real national minimum wage increase so that a family with a full-time wage earner is not struggling below the poverty line. It means working to pass livable wage ordinances in our communities. It means speaking out in our communities, our synagogues and our companies to demand that workers are treated fairly and compensated justly.

We, who know well what it means to be oppressed and, thank God, what it means to be free and prosperous, must continue to strive towards a society in which all its inhabitants, and especially the most vulnerable, are able to live their lives free of the shackles of poverty and the bondage of slavery.

*Rabbi Marc Israel is the Director of Congregational Relations at the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, and Rabbi David Saperstein is the Director and Counsel of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.*

## BLESSING, STEALING, AND LABOR DAY

by Rabbi Toba Spitzer

The Talmud teaches that a Jew should say 100 blessings a day. Many of the blessings we say are simple and short – a blessing over a piece of fruit, or a cup of tea, or a sandwich. The formula is simple: “Blessed are You, YHWH, our God, Source of Life, who creates the fruit of the tree,” or “by whose word all comes into being” or “who brings forth bread from the earth.” What is the point of these blessings? Why say them?

The Talmud records a fascinating discussion on exactly that question. After a debate in which the rabbis attempt (and fail) to find a Scriptural basis for saying a blessing before one eats, we find the following teaching:

Rabbi Judah said in the name of Samuel: Whoever has enjoyment of something from this world without [saying] a blessing, it is as if s/he had [improper] enjoyment of things sacred to Heaven...Rabbi Hanina bar Pappa said: Whoever has enjoyment from this world without [saying] a blessing, it is as if s/he has robbed the Holy One and the community of Israel. (Brachot 35a-b)

According to this text, what is a blessing over food? It is an acknowledgment of the ultimate Source of that food – of the One who made the earth, who created the tree, who makes all things. This acknowledgment allows us to make use of something which would otherwise be off-limits to us. Eating something without acknowledging its source is, therefore, tantamount to stealing from God. But why does Rabbi Hanina add that it is also like stealing from the community?

Rabbi Hanina seems to understand the act of blessing as acknowledging not only the divine source of that which we consume, but the human source as well. To consume without acknowledging the people who have helped to bring a particular item to our table is to “steal” from them, and from the community at large, just as it is “stealing” from the Holy One when we fail to acknowledge the ultimate Source of all things. While the traditional food blessings do not explicitly refer to human labor, Rabbi Hanina infers the human dimension of the act of blessing.

In this understanding, saying a blessing is an op-

portunity for a particular kind of awareness. If I were really to think about all that it has taken to bring a plate of vegetables to my table – all the natural elements of sun and earth and rain, and all the human elements of planting and harvesting and transporting and selling, as well as the Godly power that underlies the whole process – I would feel a profound connection every time I sat down to eat. I would have a better realization of the myriad ways that my life is intertwined with people all over this planet – the people who farm my food and make my clothes, who assembled my computer and built my home. At the same time, somewhere else on this globe, there may be someone saying a blessing over the product of the work of my hands.

Jewish tradition affirms, in more explicit ways, that human labor is sacred and essential, and Jewish law affords workers many protections. But there was no need for a “Labor Day” in the time of the Torah and Talmud, for in those days the work that it took to sustain a community was far more visible to all who shared its fruits. The farmer, the shoemaker, the butcher, the teacher, the seamstress – all were community members and were known to one another. In our modern, global economy, work and workers are hidden from us as consumers. As workers, we are isolated from one another. The act of blessing, in this context, is a way of making the invisible visible, and a way of reconnecting ourselves both to God and to a human community that makes our existence possible. Labor Day is, like the traditional food blessings, also a way to remind ourselves not to “steal” from others in the human community. As consumers or as stock-holders we are often pitted against workers – if wages go up, then so do prices; if workers are laid off, it’s good for Wall Street. But ultimately we are just “stealing” from ourselves, whether we consider ourselves workers or not. To understand the meaning of blessing is to understand that my well-being is dependent, ultimately, on the well-being of all workers – that is, on all residents of this planet. And acknowledging my dependence on the labor of others also means acknowledging those laborers’ rights: to a decent wage, to safe and sanitary working conditions, to dignity and the right to organize.

And so perhaps Labor Day can be the occasion,

as we pick up something to eat or as we shop at a Labor Day sale, to stop for a moment and think about how this particular item arrived in our hands. Who worked the soil or the machinery that produced this? Was it a small farmer, a factory worker or a migrant laborer, a child in a sweatshop? In what conditions did that person work, and how much were they paid? How did this food item get from the farm to the store, and who were the people who handled it along the way – the packers, the truckers, the stock person at the supermarket? How did this shirt arrive on my shelf, and who were the people who helped it get there? What are their lives and their work like?

And, finally, what is the blessing I can say, and what are the actions that I can take, to honor each of these people, and in so doing to give proper due both to the Creator and the community of which we all are a part?

*Toba Spitzer is rabbi of Congregation Dorshei Tzedek, a Reconstructionist synagogue in West Newton, Massachusetts. She is the former President of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association.*

## **JEWES AND THE U.S. LABOR MOVEMENT**

*by Morton Bahr*

The history of the U.S. labor movement is very much a part of the history of Jewish life in this country. In fact, at the start of the last century many of the sweatshop workers who built unions to improve their lives and their families' lives built those unions in Yiddish. The Jewish immigrant success stories that dot the last one hundred years of our history provide thread that weaves a common fabric with the successes of the US labor movement over the same period of time.

Prior to this recent history we find Jewish text and tradition spills over with everything from interpretation of parables that suggest a pro-union predisposition to explicit instruction to be fair and just in dealings with workers. From the earliest passages of Genesis up through the interpretations of the 20th century Conservative Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel we see the basis for why Jews and the labor movement have consistently made common cause. What follows are a few of the textual gems where Jewish tradition provides spiritual

context and grounding for labor's movement and for my 40 years in this tikkun olam vocation. We read in the earliest passages of the Bible that God created this world in six days and on the seventh day God rested. "Three acts of God denoted the seventh day: He rested, He blessed and He hallowed the seventh day (Gen. 2:2-3)." Heschel, building on this, links the vision of the labor movement to the commandment to honor the Sabbath when he writes, "Labor without dignity is the cause of misery; rest without spirit the source of depravity."

This fundamental connection between work and rest has long been at the forefront of labor's agenda. In fact the struggles of the 1930's for the eight-hour day and the forty-hour week were struggles for the dignity of both work and rest. Today's struggle to create full-time family-supporting jobs rather than part-time low-wage jobs is the contemporary terrain for the same struggle to honor work and rest. The Jewish contribution of the Sabbath to our society cannot be overstated and labor has heeded this call as we say of ourselves: "Unions – the folks that brought you the weekend."

Jumping forward to the Book of Exodus we find in our people's liberation story a story that strikes me as a wonderful union organizing analogy. In addition to Moses' courageous leadership and the power of the plagues, we bear witness to the first work stoppage in recorded history. When the slaves choose to withhold their labor and walk off the pyramid-building site we can imagine that they are in essence going on strike; and offering a tremendous liberation story that generation after generation will rejoice in. As important as the decision to withhold their labor because the working and living conditions were intolerable, I find noteworthy two other characteristics of this liberation story. Characteristics that I see year in and year out as working women and men build unions in their workplaces.

First, the decision to walk away from the known, no matter how bad it is, for an unknown future and the terrible risks and hardships that may await you is a tremendous act of faith. Although conditions in Egypt were abysmal, they were known; as compared to the distant "promised land" for which the Israelites were leaving their lives

behind. To join Moses and choose this unknown future is a brave and faithful choice and that spirit carries thousands of working people out of “tight spots” today. Tragically, for many working people when they put their faith into action pursuing an unknown “promised land” by building their union they often face aggressive attacks.

Eight in ten employers hire consultants to advise them on how to defeat workers’ organizing efforts. Half of employers threaten to shut down if workers organize. Over three in ten fire workers who are active in organizing with their fellow employees.

But win or lose, the choice to leave is liberating in and of itself and this is the second characteristic to which I’d like to draw attention. In fact as the Exodus story teaches, when the Israelites came upon the Red Sea it didn’t part immediately. It was only when Nachshon acted as a free man and stepped into the sea that it parted and allowed safe passage. This liberated action is what we see with each new group of workers who organize into our union. By choosing the unknown future, with its promises of improvements and security, working people come to act as free people. They daily then step into the sea and see it part. At our best, our union is a vehicle that harnesses people’s faith in a better future and provides them with the tools they need to act effectively and powerfully as free people.

Clearly the prophets echo this impassioned justice sentiment when Amos says, “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.” He is not calling on us to consider lightly the injustices around us and seek out cautious change. The prophets are outraged and they are outraged because of the world around them. Heschel writes:

*Why should religion, the essence of which is the worship of God, put such stress on justice for man? Does not the preoccupation with morality tend to divest religion of immediate devotion to God? Why should a worldly virtue like justice be so important to the Holy One of Israel? Did the prophets overrate the worth of justice?*

*Perhaps the answer lies here: righteousness is not just a value; it is God’s part of human life, God’s stake in human history. Perhaps it is because the*

*suffering of man is a blot on God’s conscience; because it is in relations between man and man that God is at stake.*

*Or is it simply because the infamy of a wicked act is infinitely greater than we are able to imagine? People act as they please, doing what is vile, abusing the weak, not realizing that they are fighting God, affronting the divine, or that the oppression of man is a humiliation of God.*

It was our righteous indignation at injustice that led us, in 1987, to help found an organization called Jobs with Justice. Jobs with Justice builds local coalitions among religious and secular institutions, clergy, concerned citizens, students and union members, and mobilizes them to stand up for worker’s rights, and against the worst abuses of corporate greed. In 1996, the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice was founded, which has extended the ties with the religious community.

And it is in this spirit of righteous indignation that our union constantly strives to bring to economic injustices and violations of workers’ rights. In a booming economy which requires that many people work 60 hour weeks and more, when they are working two and three jobs to try to make ends meet and still millions of children are living in poverty – how can we help but hear the prophets warning us that we affront God and undervalue and stunt the great potential in all of us?

We must demonstrate day in and day out that we stand in solidarity with others, we are not just for ourselves. This too is in the great Jewish tradition identified most famously with Rabbi Hillel. In Pirke Avot 1:14, Hillel is remembered to have said, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am for myself alone, then what am I? And, if not now, when?” It is this phrase more than any other – and the values behind it – that inspire us to work as allies in building a strong movement. By being there for one another’s struggles, let each of us never have to answer the ignoble question, “...then what am I?”

*Morton Bahr is the President Emeritus of the Communications Workers of America and former President of the Jewish Labor Committee.*

## REMEMBRANCE AND LABOR

by Rabbi Saul J. Berman

The central event of Biblical history is the Exodus. More space is devoted to it than to the narrative of creation. It is referred to more frequently than the revelation at Sinai. It is used as the rationale of many other Mitzvot of the Torah – of Shabbat and the Holidays, of Tefillin and tzitzit, and of many interpersonal Mitzvot. God identifies Himself as the Deity of the Exodus, and it is the only Biblical event which the Torah itself commands to be verbally affirmed daily (Deut. 16:3).

What precisely is it that we are required to remember in our daily verbal expression about the Exodus?

Deuteronomy 7:18 instructs us that we are to remember that God was the one who took us out of Egypt. Exodus 13:3 suggests that we are to remember that we, the Jewish People, chose to leave when God offered us the opportunity. Then, in five separate passages in the Book of Deuteronomy, the Torah implores us to remember that we were slaves in the land of Egypt (Deut. 5:15; 15:15; 16:12; 24:18 and 24:22.) In the first of these instances, the Torah uses this remembrance as a motive for the observance of Shabbat. In the other four, the remembrance of what it was like to be slaves in Egypt, is to serve as the vehicle through which we shape our ethical behavior in relation to the poor, the oppressed and the disadvantaged.

So long as we clearly recall the character of our own oppression at the hands of our Egyptian taskmasters, the Torah expects that we will be moved in our personal conduct to emancipate slaves, to include the poor in our rejoicing on our Holydays, to avoid bias against the weak, and to make our gleanings available to the stranger, the orphan and the widow. In sum, the memory of our own pain will be a constraint on our causing similar pain to other vulnerable persons.

What then was the character of the oppression and pain which we suffered, the vivid recollection of which will impact so directly on our own behavior? The Torah refers to that labor as “*avodat perach*”, rigorous or ruthless work (Ex. 1:13,14.) The horror of such ruthless labor is so intense in the Torah that later verses explicitly forbid a Jewish person from assigning “*avodat perach*” to his

or her bondsmen, servants or laborers (Lev. 25:43 and 46.) But what is the nature of such labor?

The Sifra, the Midrash Halakhah to the Book of Leviticus (commenting on Lev. 25:43), offers a definition of this horrendous and evil form of work, by illustration. “*Avodat perach*”, says the Sifra, is telling a laborer to bring you a cup of water when you don’t really intend to drink it, or telling him to rake leaves in this area until you return to instruct him to stop. This is ruthless labor? This is the paradigm of evil in the relationship to vulnerable people?

The Rabbis are here teaching us a profound lesson. The most demeaning form of oppression of a laborer is to assign to him meaningless work. The most ruthless form of abuse of a laborer is to have him engage in an activity which serves no productive purpose and, therefore prevents him from having any pride in his achievement.

The measure of proper treatment of labor is not simply the physical rigors to which the employee is exposed. The employer has a responsibility to preserve the dignity of the employee through assuring that he or she can achieve a sense of meaning in the labor which she performs.

The remembrance of the Exodus calls to our consciousness not only the physical protection of laborers, but their emotional and spiritual protection as well.

*Rabbi Saul J. Berman is the Director of Edah, a Modern Orthodox organization. He is Associate Professor of Jewish Studies at Stern College and Adjunct Professor at Columbia University Law School where he teaches seminars in Jewish Law. He is a well-respected thinker and teacher.*

## LABOR ON THE BIMAH, 2000

by Rabbi Jack Moline

There is a temptation to justify every effort of social conscience by a verse from the beginning of Parshat Shofetim (Deut. 16:20).

Rabbi David Saperstein calls it the “Justice, justice shalt thou pursue” rationale, that is, “We are commanded to pursue justice, therefore, we must... (insert your favorite cause here).”

When it comes to supporting fair labor practices, no such manipulation of text is necessary.

Throughout the Torah there are specific instructions on the proper treatment of workers. They are generally framed by a reminder from God that we know how it is to be slaves, and we must therefore show both justice and compassion for those who labor on our behalf. Wages must be fair and promptly paid (Deut. 24:14-15). A garment given in pledge must be returned each evening (Deut. 24:12). "Slaves" (really indentured servants) must be fed and sheltered, paid a wage and eventually released (Ex. 21:2, Deut. 15:12-14).

While it is true that Torah and subsequent tradition does not endorse a specific economic system, it is pretty clear from the very beginning – the story of Eden – that productive labor, designed to improve the lot of the worker and the community, is part of the dignity and purpose of human existence. When the first human beings are expelled from the garden and sent into the world, God instructs them, "by the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread" (Gen. 3:19). Far from being a curse, it is a manual for survival. And that which we value for the individual should be reflected in the practices of the society in which we live.

At the risk of falling subject to my own parody, I return to the verse first cited above. If we have a contribution to make to America as Jews, it is to share the wisdom of our system of values – including the protections afforded by Jewish tradition to those who earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brows (See Lev. 5:20-23, 19:13, Deut. chapters 15, 24). Honest work should produce, at a minimum, adequate results. Just as the Biblical slave-owner was obligated to provide for the needs of his workers before meeting his own, so should contemporary employers place the living wages of their workers ahead of any but the most necessary profit margins. Our just society should expect no less.

We look around our cities today, large or small, and we see that the ideal has not been met. Not a one of us wishes for workers to be exploited, for honest people to be forced to live in poverty. Yet, we are shielded from both cause and solution by layers of bureaucracy and confusion. As individuals, our temptation is to reduce the problem to cases: we help to stock food banks, we write checks to legal aid services, we offer a dollar to the unemployed person on the street corner –

well-intentioned and commendable actions, to be sure, but actions which address the symptoms and not the causes of poverty. Who, after all, can be held responsible?

One answer is at the end of the Torah portion with which I began – Shofetim – discussing not labor, but, of all things, murder. The discussion concerns the discovery of a murder victim in the fields between two cities. With no evidence at hand, it might be possible for people to throw up their hands in all innocence, decry the crime and go on with their lives. But Torah demands instead that the leaders of the nearest city, representing all of the residents, go through a complex ritual assuming responsibility for the crime and seeking God's forgiveness. Presumably, they will be inspired to take steps to ensure the safety of residents and strangers alike so that their regret will not be hollow.

Workers are most often victimized not in fields between cities, but in the netherworld between competing interests, decentralized corporations and geographically scattered investors. With no one at hand to take responsibility for low wages or inadequate benefits, we might reasonably throw up our hands in all innocence, decry the crime and go on with our lives. But until we take responsibility for our neighbors and strangers alike, seeking for them the protections from this anonymous neglect, we have not fulfilled the mandate of Torah.

We all know that not every worker is righteous and not every employer is evil – and vice versa. But we who live in privilege know the lengths to which we go to provide for ourselves and the ones we love. We hope to be rewarded for our effort and intention, fairly and adequately, whether we meet an ideal of righteousness or not. Gathered here as we are to offer thanks for God's blessings, we must earn those blessings by pursuing a just society in which all people can depend on the dignity of their work as a reflection of the purpose for which they were created.

*Jack Moline is rabbi of Agudas Achim Congregation, a Conservative synagogue in Alexandria, VA. He is also the chair of the board of The Interfaith Alliance, a national advocacy organization, and vice-president of the regional Rabbinical Assembly.*

# Havdalah Service for Labor Day

by Rabbi Robert J. Marx



**Responsive Reading:** (Adapted from Psalm 141)

**Lord I call unto you; answer my call, O God**

**Let my prayer be as a sweet offering unto you; the deeds of my hands as a willing offering.**

**O Lord, guard my mouth that it not speak evil; my lips that they bless and not hurt.**

**Turn my heart away from evil; the exploiting of friends and those who work.**

**Keep me far from those who would exploit the weak; take advantage of the powerless.**

**From their table may I not eat; from their abuses may I not prosper.**

**Keep me far from those who gain from their iniquity, spare me from the snare which they would spread before me.**

**For you are my refuge and my hope, my joy and my salvation.**

(The leader lights the candle)

**S**habbat begins with the lighting of candles and it ends with the lighting of candles.

How different they are. Two separate candles inaugurate Shabbat. One intertwined candle marks its close. These candles speak of those who work. Justice for the worker calls us to listen to the message of the candles.

The Shabbat candles tell us that it is time to rest, that it is time to turn from our daily routine, and set a limit to our labors. The Havdalah candle lights our way back to the tasks that lie before us. Both candles are to be blessed. It is a mistake to take either work or rest for granted. Both are to be sanctified by light. Both are to be blessed.

O God, Creator of us all, bless us with the memory of Shabbat rest. May we remember how precious is the calming presence of Thy spirit. Despite our worries and problems, the peace of Shabbat has been a calming presence in our trou-

bled lives. And for those who labor, that calming presence offers the blessed promise that the eternal Shabbat for which we pray will tolerate no exploitation of works, no seizing of pensions, no revoking of health care benefits or time to rest. For who can really look back upon a Shabbat where these injustices were allowed to remain unquestioned, allowed to stand unchallenged?

(The cup of wine is raised)

This wine is the symbol of joy and of life. But the grapes which produced this wine were not always the harbingers of either joy or of life. How many of those who produced this wine received too little of wages and too much of pesticides. Just as we look to grapes that are clean and called kosher, so we would demand, no we would expect that the working conditions, the health conditions, the salary conditions, the life conditions of those who produced these grapes be clean and kosher.

**בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַיַּיִן.**

Blessed is the Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

(The spice box is raised)

This moment brings its sweet scent into our fading day. The spices of Havdalah remind us of life itself and its many promises. But can we inhale the sweet spices of Havdalah without remembering those whose nostrils are clogged with scents of a more threatening origin, the choking odor of dangerous industrial waste, the fumes of noxious fertilizers sprayed upon those who harvest our grapes or glean our fruit trees? O Holy One, let there be sweetness for all Thy children. Keep far from them both the odors of life threatening pollutants and the odorous practices of those who would rob them of the dignity of their labor.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מִיְנֵי בְּשָׂמִים.

Blessed Is the Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, Creator of all the spices.  
(The spice box is circulated)

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מְאוֹרֵי הָאֵשׁ.

Blessed is the Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, Creator of the light of fire.  
(The candle is raised)

And now as we prepare to extinguish this intertwined candle, we pause for a moment to think of those whose lives are intertwined with our own, whose labor makes our life more meaningful. (Pause for a moment to mention those whose work we all too often take for granted, and those who may be exploited through our indifference. Workers in sweatshops, men and women in the poultry industry, those overseas who are obliged to work long hours at minimal pay, day laborers, etc.)

May we never take these children of God for granted. Have we done all we can to make their future a promise of hope and joy rather than of oppression and desperation?

With clean hands, with pure hearts, may we come before our Creator as this new week begins. We will not rest, we cannot rest until there is justice; justice for those who are near; justice for those who are far away; justice in our homes, and in our factories and in our fields. Justice! Justice! Thou shalt pursue.

(The candle is extinguished)

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמְבַדִּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ  
לְחֹל, בֵּין אֹר לְחָשֶׁךְ, בֵּין יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי לְשֶׁשֶׁת יָמֵי הַמַּעֲשָׂה.  
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי, הַמְבַדִּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחֹל.

Blessed is the Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who separates sacred from profane, light from darkness, the seventh day of rest from the six days of labor.  
Blessed is the Lord, who separates the sacred from the profane.

(The candle is extinguished)

El-li-ya-hu ha-na-vi, El-li-ya-hu

ha-tish-bi; El-li-ya-hu, El-li-ya-hu,

El-li-ya-hu ha-gil-a-di.

Bim-hei-ra ve-ya-mei-nu, ya-vo

el-lei-nu; im ma-shi-ach ben

Da-vid, im ma-shi-ach ben

David. El-li-ya-hu....

אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַנּוֹבֵיא, אֱלֹהֵינוּ  
הַמְשַׁבֵּי: אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ,  
אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַגּוֹלְעֵדִי.  
בְּמַהֲרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ, יָבֹא  
אֱלֵינוּ: עִם מְשִׁיחַ בֶּן  
דָּוִד, עִם מְשִׁיחַ בֶּן  
דָּוִד. אֱלֹהֵינוּ . . .

A good week. A week of peace. May gladness reign and light increase....

Sha-vu-a tov....

שבוע טוב . . .

Robert Marx is Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Hakafa, a Reform synagogue in Glencoe, Illinois.

