



## Is This the Fast I Desire? | The Intersection of Racial Justice and Hunger on Yom Kippur

*"Is not **this** the fast that I desire? to loosen the fetters of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? **Is it not to deal your bread to the hungry**, and that you bring the poor that are cast out to your house? when you see the naked, that you cover them, and that you hide not yourself from your own flesh?" (Isaiah 58:6-7)*

Why is the Yom Kippur fast such a widely-observed Jewish tradition? There are many less challenging rituals that are far less practiced. Perhaps we are drawn to this ritual because it makes us feel something unique. For many Jews, Yom Kippur's demand that we reflect on ourselves also serves as a call to action.

Yom Kippur involves fasting for one day, yet millions of Americans feel this hunger regularly. Last year, 48.1 million Americans lived in food-insecure households. In these families, parents skip meals to care for their children, families seek out food banks and community meals and all experience the pain and fear of hunger. After we break our Yom Kippur fast, if we feel nothing, we have missed the meaning of this ritual; we have not taken on the fast that the prophet Isaiah calls us toward.

We should be particularly mindful of the racial disparity that exists within those that are food insecure:

- **One in four black households are food insecure as compared with one in 10 white households.**
- **One third of all black children live in food-insecure households as compared to one in seven white children.**
- **Of the 10 counties with the highest food-insecurity rates in the nation, they are all at least 70 percent African American.**

People of color experience hunger at disproportionately higher rates. Much of this can be attributed to the higher poverty rate for black Americans compared to the entire population. Other factors include the lack of supermarkets and healthy food options in low income communities made up predominately of people of color. Surely, mass incarceration also contributes to child hunger: it takes parents away from their children and makes it harder for families to provide food for their children as they grow. The problems are complex, but that cannot enable us to be silent.

### **A Prayer for the Yom Kippur fast:**

God of our generations past, present, and future, let this Yom Kippur fast move us from complacency and awaken us to the hunger within our midst and in all of the hidden places yet unseen. May we, who act in your image, use this year to walk in your ways, and feed the hungry within our community and within our world. May we all recognize that hunger disproportionately affects communities of color, but that our compassion will never discriminate. May our next Yom Kippur fast occur in a world where fasting is not a necessity for millions of families of color. Where all have what they need so their children can thrive. May it be your will that all Americans have the food to break their fast together, regardless of race. May none of us experience hunger any longer.