



Taking Action for Justice: A Human Rights Prayer

by Rabbi Tirzah Firestone

Written for Human Rights Shabbat 2009

Mekor HaChayim! !מְקוֹר הַחַיִּים!

O Source of Life.

Lo al tzidkoteinu anachnu mapilim tachanuneinu lefanecha: It is not out of righteousness that we come before You in prayer before you now. For we know too much.

Ki al rachamecha harabim

Rather we pray to ask for Your immense compassion, as we grow in awareness about the vile acts of torture and enslavement that we, your human children, are engaged in.

Mah anachnu? Mah chayenu? Mah Chasdenu?

What are we? What are our lives about if not to struggle with these problems and act in love?

Mah tzidkenu? Mah yeshuatenu? Mah kochenu? Mah gevuratenu?

What is the path of righteousness, of healing, of strength if not with You?

As we grow beyond innocence, and break through the shield of ignorance to come face to face with our human crimes, O God, we pray for the strength not to take refuge in avoidance and denial, but to look at the terrible facts truthfully, and join with others fearlessly.

But we cannot do this work alone. And so we draw from Your infinite power, from Your Torah, and from each other. And we pray to you, *Adonai Eloheinu v'Elohai Horeynu:*

Empower us with your faith, to cry out as your prophets did, to act as your tzaddikim have throughout the ages, to cherish and guard the life of all beings which you have lovingly created in Your image. Help us to join together to act in the face of injustice; to defend the vulnerable against those who would exploit and abuse them; and uncover evil wherever it lies. You have taught us the path of justice and righteousness and it is your path that we follow. As the Prophet Isaiah said (62:1):

לֹא אֶשְׁקוּט עַד יֵצֵא כְּנֹגֵה צְדָקָה, וְיִשׁוּעָתָה כְּלֶפֶיד יִבְעָר.

Lo eshkot ad yetze cha-noga tzedakah v'yshuata k'lapid yiv'ar.

I will not rest until righteousness goes forth like a radiant star and salvation like a burning torch.