

## Fasting in Prayer

May 27, 2011

“Earth,” the reading says, “teach me to remember kindness as dry fields weep with rain.” This evening, as we come to the end of one day of fasting, I ask us to reflect upon what kindness, *true* kindness, means to us as a religious people. How can we bring to the world the kind of kindness which, like rain, makes dry fields weep? How can we learn from the earth and all her inhabitants that our call is not to feed our hunger for power or money or material belongings, or intoxicating sweets and spirits and fats and salts, but to feed the soul?

Perhaps a bit ironically, in order to feed the soul, emptying ourselves of routine, shifting our lives long enough to feel a pang of hunger and to sit with that hunger, becomes a primary way in which we are able to *reach* the soul. That is why there are such days as Yom Kippur, Lent, and Ramadan. They call us out of the ordinary rush and routine, and into the inner workings of our bodies, our hearts, and our minds. And, without the quick reach for whatever it is we are used to reaching for, we begin to experience a tenderness, a softness, even a fragility. And in that fragility, we begin to feel compassion.

We begin to actually feel the hunger that others are forced to experience, because of poverty, homelessness, oppression, and war. We begin to understand, well beyond and below the understanding of the intellect, the true suffering of the world. It is from that place of *soulful* understanding, that we are compelled to alleviate the suffering of others. It is from *that* place that we begin to ask ourselves, what can I let go of? What can I offer up to someone who is really in need?

It is from that soulful understanding, that our prayers begin to be authentic, rather than merely eloquent or clever or obligatory. We *authentically* seek connection and transformation, both for ourselves, and for the homeless man sleeping in the woods. Through prayer, we seek ways to step into the world where those seek refuge find it in our offerings.

By emptying ourselves for a time of the usual, the filling, the slightly sinfully delicious, we discover the fullness of our souls. "Friend," the poet says, "listen: the God whom I love is inside."

Friends of this community, as we come to the end of our fasting, may the God whom your love, inside you and inside each one of us, be with us. As we break bread and offer nourishment to one another, may we understand, from within our very souls, what a true act of kindness is, what the source and the path of true compassion is, and may we take in food humbly and gratefully, never assuming this hungry world will work itself out, but knowing we are stewards of compassion, agents of change, kindred to all life on earth.

In that spirit, I invite us to form two lines. The first person in each line will break the bread offered to him or her and eat. Then that person will in turn offer the plate to the next person in line, who will take and eat, and so on, until all are fed. Now, let the communion begin. And let us share communion in silence.