

## Making a Difference

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having chaired the San Diego Walk for Darfur in November 2006, in which nearly 2,000 walkers—400 from our synagogue alone—raised almost \$100,000 for medical supplies in the Darfur and Chad refugee camps.

There is so much to be done....

**Jennifer Warriner:** Each of us has a moral obligation to try to set right what is wrong in the world. I remember the phrase Theodor Herzl placed on the cover of his 1902 novel about a Jewish state in *Eretz Yisrael, Altneuland (Old New Land)*: “*Wenn ihr wollt, ist es kein Märchen*” (“If you want, it is no fairytale”). If people really want change and are willing to work together and make sacrifices for the common good, they can make the fairytale a reality—as any map produced after 1948 demonstrates.

**Ellen Morrow:** I feel both commanded to engage in social action and guilty that I’m not more involved in a regular way, though I do take small individual steps, inspired by the Hillel quote: “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?”

**Marjorie B. Green:** As a secular Jew, I didn’t turn to Jewish sources to inspire my commitment to *tikkun olam*, but I was thrilled to find in Torah texts a message that reinforced my commitment to social justice, or what I now call my Sinai consciousness. My rationale for why I care so much for the stranger is right there in Exodus 22:21: “For I was once a stranger in the land of Egypt.”

I was raised in a secular household by politically progressive parents, but my views were also shaped by beloved grandparents whose world was still influenced by the *shtetl* and the cautionary “*sha, sha, don’t speak out.*” And, after my father was blacklisted during the McCarthy era, he too urged me to be careful and “for Heaven’s sake, don’t sign anything.” But I seemed to have a nerve that jangled whenever I perceived injustice. Perhaps Rabbi Sidney

Schwarz was right when he said: “The concern for the stranger, the pursuit of justice and peace, the empathy for the poor, and the commitment to truth and fairness is buried deep in the soul of every Jew.”

When the Civil Rights Movement began—not with preachers, but with students just a bit older than I was sitting in at lunch counters—I suddenly had role models. No, I did not have the courage to do as I longed to, to participate in Mississippi Freedom Summer. But I was able to march—for fair housing, for women’s rights, and against the Vietnam War.

And when the courts ordered Los Angeles schools to desegregate, I spoke out across the community, urging parents to comply and concluding my remarks by saying my 3rd grader would be riding the bus in the fall. He did. And because the fear that not all children would be receiving a quality education kept me up at night, I became an activist.

A year ago, I read Sue Fishkoff’s article, “Social Justice Moves to Front of Some Congregational Agendas,” and learned that others were sharing my feeling that temple *mitzvah* days are not enough. Although feeding the hungry is an act of lovingkindness and makes the *mitzvah* doer feel good, it doesn’t make the hunger vanish. That’s why our temple is taking the first steps toward congregation-based community organizing. We’re part of a collective that crosses lines of race, class, and religion to “extend the boundaries of righteousness and justice in the world” (Genesis 18).

**Barbara K. Shuman:** Social action is not central to my identity as a Reform Jew. I recognize this as an area where I fall short of the mark, but I continue to be drawn to other ways of experiencing and

expressing my Judaism. While I try to support a number of causes financially, and do not deny the obligation of Jews to repair our broken world, I myself am just not called to do this politically.

**Abbey Shepard-Smith:** These days social action is more important to me than it once was, mostly due to my greater awareness of injustices and my rabbi’s deep, intense, unwavering commitment to making a difference in the world. I formed a committee at my temple which, in November 2006, led our first annual community Mitzvah Mall, a unique, alternative holiday shopping experience that featured local, national, and international charities. Approximately 40 tables were set up like a traditional holiday bazaar—but instead of representing different retailers, each table represented an organization that provides assistance to those in need. Rather than buying yet another tie or bottle of perfume, shoppers honored friends and family by purchasing groceries for a hungry local family, a juvenile diabetes testing kit, a therapeutic outing for a child affected by terrorism, or a cell phone for a battered woman. The 250 shoppers of all ages raised nearly \$7,000.

**Dawn Mollenkopf:** What’s important to me is encouraging people to become more accepting of those whose beliefs and cultures differ from theirs. At the university campus where I teach, I persuaded the administration to add Chanukah and Kwanza symbols to the Christmas displays, and introduced a policy allowing faculty and students to take time off to celebrate religious holidays not recognized by the state. In my department, I bake foods for different Jewish holidays and put them out with a description of the food and the holiday; people have been very appreciative. I’ve also encouraged local stores to carry Jewish cards and displays for other ethnic groups.

**Martin Graffman:** In my view, Judaism is a 5,000-year-old conversation between God and the Jews about what is the right thing to do and how to do it. Doing the right thing defines the Jew. □

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