



## Jewish Resources for Children's Shabbat

Following you will find a range of Jewish resources for your Children's Shabbat:

- Suggestions for the services
- Passages related to children and poverty from traditional Jewish sources
- Readings, reflections, and prayers for the services
- Suggested music for the services
- A discussion guide for use with adults, in a sisterhood meeting, men's club, or other gathering convened especially for the Children's Shabbat
- Sermon notes on the torah portion for October 16, 2010, Lech-Lecha, will be available for download after September 1, 2010 at [www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths](http://www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths).
- Educational materials for use in religious school classes and youth groups will be available for download after September 1, 2010 at [www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths](http://www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths)

## Suggestions for the Services

Services on the Children's Sabbath are an excellent opportunity to help focus the congregation on the links between Torah readings, Jewish tradition, and the reminder that we are blessed to be a blessing and lift up the next generation. Children's Sabbath services also serve as a time to affirm the work of your congregation on behalf of children and to challenge members to continue and expand their responses to the needs of children locally and nationally.

The following suggestions may assist you in planning your own unique Children's Sabbath service or supplementing your congregation's weekly prayer and discussion.

- **There are several options for the services:**

- 1) Use or adapt the service readings provided in this section;
- 2) Develop your own Children's Sabbath that reflects the theme of children, justice, and the need for action; or
- 3) Use readings from the prayer books that include a social action theme.

- **Determine ways in which the children of your congregation can participate in the various services on this Sabbath.**

Involve children attending religious school, members of youth groups, and children who attend the day school. For example, religious school classes and youth groups could read prayers or Torah and Haftorah readings, lead songs or responsive readings, greet people as they arrive, or design and print the bulletin. Keep in mind, however, that this is a family event and should not be "given over" to children as "performers."

- **Focus the sermon, D'var Torah, or Torah discussion on children.**

Emphasize how we can use our blessings to be a blessing and lift up the next generation, especially the more than 14 million children in our nation who are living in poverty.

- **Invite a professional from the congregation or the community who works with or on behalf of children in poverty to give the sermon.**

For example, this might be a Head Start teacher, community organizer or child advocacy staff working for systemic change to help families in poverty, or a staff person from an agency or organization serving low-income families.

- **Bless the children.** On Friday night, incorporate the parental blessing for children into the service. Alternatively, incorporate the need to bless all children into the Sabbath morning blessing of Bar/Bat Mitzvah children.
- **Honor congregation members who are working to nurture and protect children.** This year, invite people who are working to improve the lives of children in poverty. Ask them to lead certain prayers or give them Aliyot during the Torah reading.
- **Collect Tzedakah in religious school to benefit a program serving children,** such as a community health clinic, Head Start program, mentoring or tutoring program, shelter for homeless families, or after-school program.
- **Distribute or insert the bulletin inserts** which can be found in Promoting Your Children's Sabbath at [www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths](http://www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths).
- **With the help of your Cantor, prepare some new music to be sung by the children at the service.**
- **Encourage families to invite grandparents and other relatives to join them for the service.** If you wish, plan a special recognition of grandparents during the service.
- **Arrange for a special kiddush/oneg Sabbath/ luncheon/ se'udah shlishit in honor of the occasion.** As a resource, see "Planning a Sabbath or Holiday Family Meal" and "A Family Shabbaton," both from the Youth/School Liaison Department of the Women's League for Conservative Judaism.
- **Continue the celebration of Children's Sabbath with a M'laveh Malkah during the Saturday evening or the Sunday morning minyan/religious school sessions.**

## Passages from Traditional Jewish Sources

### Related to Poverty and Children

Although the giving of charity is a sacred obligation, the ultimate aim of tzedakah is to abolish poverty and to enable the poor to help themselves.

*(Talmud, Shabbat 63a)*

If a community lacked a synagogue and a shelter for the poor, it was first obligated to build a shelter for the poor.

*(Sefer Chasidim)*

There is nothing in the world more grievous than poverty—the most terrible of sufferings. Our teachers said: All the troubles of the world are assembled on one side and poverty is on the other.

*(Midrash Rabbah Exodus 31:12)*

The highest form of charity is to help prevent a person from becoming poor. This includes offering a loan or employment, investing in a business, or any other form of assistance that will avoid poverty. This basis for this principle is the commandment in our passage: you shall strengthen the poor.

*(Maimonides' commentary to Leviticus 25:35-38)*

Do not neglect the children of the poor, for from them will go forth the law.

*(Nedarim 81a)*

Defend the poor and the orphan; do justice to the afflicted and needy.

*(Midrash Tehillim 82:3)*

Speak up, judge righteously, champion the poor and the needy.

*(Proverbs 31:9)*

You shall not subvert the rights of the stranger or the fatherless; you shall not take a widow's garment in pawn. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and that the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I enjoin you to observe this commandment...when you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not pick it over again; that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.

*(Deuteronomy 24:17-18, 21)*

Rabbi Abba said in the name of Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish: "He who lends money [to a poor person] is greater than he who gives charity; and he who throws money into a common purpose [to form a partnership with the poor person] is greater than either."

*(Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 63b)*

A small bit of bread may be life to the poor; one who deprives them of it sheds blood.

*(Ben Sira 34:21)*

Anyone who withholds what is due to the poor blasphemes against the Maker of all, but one who is gracious unto the needy honors God.

*(Proverbs 14:31)*

Domestic strife is due only to lack of food. When the bread basket is empty, strife knocks at the door.

*(Bava Metzia 59a)*

Neither shall you stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.

*(Leviticus 19:16)*

If one person is able to save another and does not save him he transgresses the commandment, "Neither shall you stand idly by the blood of your neighbor." *(Leviticus 19:16)* Similarly, if one person sees another drowning in the sea, or being attacked by bandits, or being attacked by wild animals, and, although able to rescue him either alone or by hiring others, does not rescue him; or if one hears heathens or informers plotting evil against another or laying a trap for him and does not call it to the other's attention and let him know; or if one knows that a heathen or violent person is going to attack another and although able to appease him on behalf of the other and make him change his mind, he does not do so; or if one acts in any similar way—he transgresses in each case the injunction "Neither shall you stand idly by the blood of your neighbor."

*(Maimonides, Code, "Laws Concerning Murder and the Preservation of Life," Chapter 1, Sections 14 and 16)*

"Therefore, man was created singularly to teach you that a) whoever destroys a single soul of Israel, is considered as if he destroys an entire world, and one who saves one soul of Israel, it is considered as if he saves an entire world; b)

## Jewish Resources for the Children's Sabbath

no one could say to their fellow that my father is better than your father; c) none of the heretics could say "There are many powers in Heaven"; d) again, to declare the greatness of the Holy One of Blessing, for man stamps out many coins with one die, and they are all alike. But the Ruler of all Rulers, the Holy One of Blessing, stamped each person with the seal of Adam, and not one of them is like his fellow. Therefore, each and every one is obliged to say, "For my sake the world was created."

*(Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5)*

[Why was there violence in Gilead?] Because they made what is primary secondary and what is secondary primary. How so? Because they loved their possessions more than their own children.

*(Midrash Tanhuma, Mattot)*

My chosen ones shall outlive the work of their hands. They shall not toil to no purpose; They shall not bear children for terror, but they shall be a people blessed by the Lord, and their offspring shall remain with them.

*(Isaiah 65:22-23)*

Rav once come to a certain town and ordered the people to fast and pray in order to bring down rain. But no rain fell.

The Reader of the congregation then went before the Ark and recited the words from the prayer book, "God who causes the wind to blow," and immediately the wind began to blow. He then recited, "God who causes the rain to fall," and rain began to fall.

Rav asked him, "What special deed have you done to merit such reward?"

The Reader answered, "I teach young children, those of the poor as well as those of the rich. I take no fees from anyone who cannot afford to pay. Also, I have a fish pond, and if a child does not want to study, I give him some fishes to keep and win him over in that way so that soon he becomes eager to learn. In his day, if one had a learned father, the father would teach, and if not, one did not learn. Then they instituted a publicly funded school in Jerusalem. But those without still did not learn. They then set up a school in each district, and the children were to enter at 16 or 17, but when the teachers tried to discipline them, they rebelled and left. They then instituted publicly funded schools for any child six or older. And if there was a long way, or a bridge to cross, they could compel the town to build another school."

*(BT Baba Batra 21a)*

Rabbi Hamnuna said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because the children did not attend school, and loitered in the streets.

*(Pesikta Rabbati 29b)*

"They that are planted in the house of the Lord," (Psalm 92:13). Rabbi Hanan ben Pazzi taught: "While they are yet saplings, they are in the house of the Lord; these are the children who are in school."

*(BT Baba Batra 21a)*

## Readings, Reflections, and Prayers for the Services

The following readings, reflections, and prayers may be incorporated into your services to focus attention on the Eternal's call to justice and care for children. Choose as many or as few as is appropriate for your congregation. Each reading suggests a particular point in the service for which it may be especially appropriate (in some instances, several options are offered), but there are, of course, many ways to incorporate these resources and you should do what works best for your service.

### Sample Opening

When God sent Abram from his country, kin, and father's house, God promised to bless him, saying, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you may be a blessing." The greatest blessing from God was children as numerous as stars in the sky.

Tonight, congregations across our nation join in a special Children's Shabbat, "Blessed to Be a Blessing: Lifting Up the Next Generation." We remember that the blessings we have received are not for our own benefit alone, but we are intended to use those blessings to *be* a blessing. With more than 14 million children in our nation living in poverty, may we respond to God's blessings by lifting up the next generation. When we work together for justice and compassion, we will discover true greatness and help each child to shine like a star.

### Sample Opening

In the Jewish tradition, the separation between prayer and action is slight. We're mindful of the admonition in Isaiah where God says, "I don't want your fast and your sacrifice. I want you to deal your bread to the hungry, tear apart the chains of the oppressed." And Leviticus 19 tells us that to be holy in the way God is holy means to set aside a corner of our fields for the poor and homeless, to pay the laborer a timely and fair wage, and to remove stumbling blocks. These are religious activities just as much as prayer is. They are all woven together.

After participating in the civil rights march in Selma, Alabama, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, one of this century's great religious figures and a close colleague of Martin Luther King, Jr., said "It felt like my feet were praying." Prayer is not just a communication we have with God; it is also the work we do to make God's values real to the world. I think God listens to both kinds of prayer with equal joy.

(Rabbi David Saperstein, Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism)

### Welcome

There are days when we seek things for ourselves and measure failure by what we do not gain.

On Shabbat, we seek not to acquire but to share.

There are days when we exploit nature as if it were a horn of plenty that can never be exhausted.

On Shabbat, we stand in wonder before the mystery of creation.

There are days when we act as if we cared nothing for the rights of others.

On Shabbat, we remember that justice is our duty and a better world our goal.

So we embrace Shabbat: Day of rest, day of wonder, day of peace.

*(Mishkan T'filah: The Siddur for Reform Jewish Prayer, Central Conference of American Rabbis)*

### Reflection Before the Candle Lighting

This Shabbat let us light candles of hope for all of our children, wherever they may live. Let us light them especially for children in the shadow of poverty. May each one of them feel cared for, safe, and loved and know that we are working to lift up the next generation. As we enter this sacred time of Shabbat, may each child feel the light of your justice, peace, and love.

### Reflection before the Candle Lighting

As the great doors of night are opening we come into the clean, quiet room of Shabbat.

Let us be thankful as we light these candles like eyes of holiness on this moment of peace.

Let us savor the fruit of the vine, the blood of the earth that quickens us.

## Jewish Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Let us be thankful for the grain, fruit of grasses that feed the cow, the gazelle, and us.

Let us be grateful for the children and the work of the week that are our own fruitfulness.

Let us as we eat never forget that food comes from the earth. We must cherish and heal through labor, we must respect and reward.

(By Marge Piercy from *Kol Haneshamah, Shabbat Vehagim*.  
Jewish Reconstructionist Federation.)

### Love of Children and Family

And we sing in chorus. I begin the song and the children come in on the refrain and the little ones, the grandchildren, pipe the second refrain in their high shrill voices. And then we get up and join in a dance. Who is equal to me then? What is Rothschild to me then? What is any other millionaire to me? I am a King. Look at me, King—that's what I am...A rich man, you understand, I am not. But one thing I can really boast of...my children! In that respect I am wealthier than the wealthiest man in Kasrilevka.

(From "The Joys of Parenthood", *Collected Stories of Sholom Aleichem: Tevye's Daughters*, by Sholom Aleichem, transl. Frances Butwin: New York, Crown Publishers, 1949, p.119)

### A Rebbi's Proverb (from the Yiddish)

If you always assume that the person sitting next to you is the messiah just waiting for some simple human kindness— You will soon come to weigh your words and watch your hands and attend to your responsibilities— And, if he so chooses not to reveal himself in your time— It will not matter.

### The Wonder of Life

Sing a new song to God,  
Give thanks for the wonders God has performed.  
When we are trapped in narrow places,  
Yet find strength to move forward  
With confidence and trust;  
When we could look the other way,  
Yet take a chance to reach out to one another  
With openness and compassion;  
When we experience great pain or sorrow,  
Yet find light in the midst of darkness;  
When we recognize the Wonder of Life,  
Ordinary moments become sacred.

Mark Frydenberg, "The Wonder of Life", in *Siddur*

*Chaveirim Kol Yisrael*, Ktav Publishing House, New Jersey, 2000, page 6. ([www.chav.net/siddur](http://www.chav.net/siddur)).

Used with permission of the author.

### Introduction to the Lecha Dodi

Traditionally during the last verse of "Lecha Dodi," the congregation turns around and faces the door to welcome the Shabbat spirit into the room. Tonight, as we join with congregations throughout the nation, celebrating the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths, let us also turn and symbolically welcome all of those who work to end child poverty and lift up the next generation.

### Responsive Reading (before the Bar'chu)

Leader: We come before the Eternal in a nation that is fractured by income, age, race, ethnicity, religion, and gender.

**Congregation: Praise the One who heals divisions and binds us together.**

Leader: We come before the Eternal with hearts broken by the wounds of children and families we advocate for and serve.

**Congregation: Praise the One who binds up the broken-hearted.**

Leader: We come before the Eternal with visions of justice that have been shattered, carrying in our hearts children whose hopes have been broken.

**Congregation: Praise the One who restores our hopes and dreams.**

Leader: Come, let us celebrate the Eternal's gift of children, and renew our commitment to cherish and protect them as we rise to be summoned and respond.

(Shannon Daley-Harris)

### Reflection (following the Maariv Aravim)

God of the generations, God of new beginnings, children are Your promise of tomorrow made in Your image, a reflection of Your divine love. Teach us to raise our children worthy of this sacred trust of life. Sustain us and our children in health and love. We are thankful for the beauty of our lives and the ability to bring new life. We are thankful to all those who help us to raise our children in love.

(Adapted from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association *Rabbi's Manual*)

### Reflection (following the Ahavat Olam)

When justice burns within us like a flaming fire, when love evokes willing sacrifice from us, when, to the last full measure of selfless devotion, we demonstrate our belief in the ultimate triumph of truth and righteousness, then Your goodness enters our lives and we can begin to change the world; and then you live within our hearts, and we through righteousness behold your presence.

*(Gates of Prayer)*

### Reflection (following the Ahavat Olam)

**Leader:** When Israel was about to receive the Torah, the Holy One said to them, "I am about to give you my Torah. Bring me worthy guarantors to ensure that you will uphold it, and I will give it to you."

**Congregation:** They said, "Let our ancestors be our guarantors."

**Leader:** The Holy One replied, "I find many faults in your ancestors. Bring me better guarantors, and I will give it to you."

**Congregation:** They said, "Ruler of the Universe! Our prophets will be our guarantors."

**Leader:** Said the Holy One, "With your prophets I also find many faults. Bring me better guarantors, and I will give you My Torah."

**Congregation:** They said, "Our children will be our guarantors."

**Leader:** The Holy One replied, "Truly they are good guarantors. For their sake I will give you the Torah."

**Congregation:** Therefore, parents are required to introduce their child to the study of Torah and to provide good grounding in the ways of the House of Israel in order that the child may live long and well in the world.

*(Shir HaShirim Rabbah,*

*Midrashic Commentary on Song of Songs)*

### Reflection (following the Ahavat Olam)

Let us affirm our faith in Torah, our people's legacy of learning and faith.

**There are no words more challenging than "You shall be holy!"**

**No command more basic than "You shall love!"**

There is no insight so fundamental as "In the beginning, God,"

No words so enhancing as "You shall rest!"

**No cry is more compelling than "Let My people go!"  
No consolation more comforting than "I am with you in your distress."**

There is no vision more hopeful than "They shall beat their swords into plowshares,"

And no summons more demanding than "Justice, justice shall you pursue!"

**These words have outlived monuments and empires;  
We want them to live through us, for all time.**

We owe it to our ancestors to keep Torah alive;  
They struggled and suffered to preserve our way of life,  
Knowing this to be their most precious gift to us.

**We owe it to our children to keep Torah alive;  
Why should they be spiritually impoverished  
When they can inherit the riches of this heritage?**

We owe it to the world to keep Torah alive;  
This is a message which the world needs to hear.  
For Judaism gave mankind its first civil rights program. It was expressed in the Sh'ma, the watchword of the Jewish faith: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One."

**As God is one, humankind is one, for each is created equally in the image of God.**

*(Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath)*

### Reflection on the Sh'ma

**Reader 1:** You shall love the Eternal your God with all your mind, with all your strength, with all your being.

**Reader 2:** The path to the love of God is through the love of others; we do not love God until we love our neighbors as ourselves.

**Reader 1:** Set these words, which I command you this day, upon your heart.

**Reader 3:** Faith unites mind and heart. Even as our minds seek to understand life's meaning, so may our lives show love for all created things.

**Reader 1:** Teach them faithfully to your children; speak of them in your home and on your way, when you lie down and when you rise up.

## Jewish Resources for the Children's Sabbath

**Reader 4:** We do not teach our children by words alone: May we make our lives and actions into good teachings.

**Reader 1:** Bind them as a sign upon your hand; let them be a symbol before your eyes; inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

**Reader 5:** Let our homes glow with the beauty of our faith in God. Let our doors be opened wide to wisdom and righteousness.

**Reader 1:** Be mindful of all My Mitzvot and do them: So shall you consecrate yourselves to Your God.

**Reader 6:** Each righteous act of loving kindness is a way to holiness. Righteous acts elevate our humanity. Let us learn to use them to magnify the divine in ourselves and in the world.

(Adapted from *Gates of Prayer*)

### Reflection after the V'a-havta

Love God with all the power of your heart,  
With its yearnings and passions.  
Love God with all you hold dear in life,  
And with the fullness of whatever the world offers you,  
Both joy and sorrow.

Teach children to cope,  
To dream and to stretch,  
To become their purpose,  
To live holy lives.

Wrap these words around every deed,  
A garment of holy expression.  
Let these words shape your home,  
A dwelling of peace.  
Wherever you go,  
Scatter the words as seeds,  
Or as drops of water into the thirsty earth.  
Nurture trees of life in your garden.

Seal these words upon your heart;  
Let them course through  
And cleave soul to body  
That the sacred permeates all your being.  
(*Mishnah T'filah*, p. 45)

### After the V'a-havta

Loving life and its mysterious source  
With all our heart and all our spirit,  
All our sense and strength,  
We take upon ourselves and into ourselves  
these promises:  
to care for the earth  
and those who live upon it,  
to pursue justice and peace,  
to love kindness and compassion.  
We will teach this to our children  
Throughout the passage of the day—  
As we dwell in our homes  
And as we go on our journeys,  
From the time we rise until we fall asleep.  
And may our actions be faithful to our words  
That our children's children  
May live to know:  
Truth and kindness have embraced,  
Peace and justice have kissed  
And are one.

(*Mishnah T'filah*, p. 157)

### Geulah

**Leader:** Those who raise children in their home are considered by Scripture as the ones who gave birth to them.

**Congregation:** In loving and protecting them, those who raise them, bless them with the shelter of their deeds and their name. Call their name beloved, for they are our inheritors.

**Leader:** The ones who teach children Torah are considered as the ones who gave birth to them.

**Congregation:** Call their name beloved, for they are our inheritors. By them we have been blessed and upon their lives we have laid our blessing.

(From the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association's *Rabbi's Manual*)

### Geulah/Redemption

Happy is the one whose trust is in God, who draws hope from hope's own Source.

## Jewish Resources for the Children's Sabbath

*God keeps faith forever: God will do justice for the oppressed, and give bread to the hungry.*

God will set the captive free, and open the blind eye,

*God will lift up the fallen, and take care of the stranger.*

The Lord's spirit is in us, the Eternal has called us,

*To bring hope to the oppressed, to bring healing to the broken, to proclaim liberty to the enslaved, freedom to those in shackles.*

When Israel saw your might displayed in Egypt, they put their faith in You, and in Moses Your servant. Now let all be free, and let them sing as Israel did at the shore of freedom's sea:

*(Gates of Prayer)*

### Reflection

Wherever we live, it is probably Egypt. There is, there really is, a better place, a promised land. And there is, there really is, a promised time. And there is no way to get from here to there, from now to then, except by joining together and marching—and sometimes stumbling—through the wilderness, watching, this time, not for signs and wonders, but for an opportunity to act.

*(Adapted from Michael Walzer, Exodus Revolution)*

### A Prayer

O God, we give thanks to You for the gift of our child, who has entered into the Covenant of Abraham. Keep this child from harm, and grant that our child will be a source of joy to us and all who love him/her. Be with us and give us health and length of days. Teach us so to raise our child with care and affection, with wisdom and understanding, to be a faithful child of our people and a blessing to the world. We give thanks to You, O God, the Source of life.

*(From Rabbi's Manual, Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1988, p. 40)*

### After V'shamru

O God of Israel  
May our worship on this day help us to grow  
In loyalty to our covenant with you  
And to the way of life it demands:  
The way of gentleness and justice,  
The path of truth and of peace.

*(Mishnah T'filah, p. 53)*

### G'vurot

Eternal God, the power of Your spirit pervades all creation. When we open our hearts to You, we are filled with Your strength: the strength to bear our afflictions, the strength to refuse them victory, the strength to overcome them.

And then our will is renewed: to lift up the fallen, to set free the captive, to heal the sick, to bring light to all who dwell in darkness. Add your strength to ours, O God, so that when death casts its shadow, we shall yet be able to say: O source of blessing, You are with us in death as in life!

*(Gates of Prayer, p. 356)*

### Reflection

One Yom Kippur, the great Hasidic master Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev announced that at the conclusion of the fast day he would reveal the secret phrase that would finally usher in the messianic age. With the end of the service, the congregation was enthusiastic as the Rabbi mounted the rostrum. But just as he was about to begin, a child cried out in hunger. So it was that Levi Yitzhak declared, "Feed the child. The Messiah can wait. A hungry child can't wait."

*(From Children's Shabbat sermon by Rabbi Emeritus Michael Zedek, Temple B'nai Jehudah, St. Louis, MO)*

### Response to the Gevurot

Your might, O God, is everlasting;  
*Help us to use our strength to help the weak, especially the children.*

You are the Source of life and blessing;  
*Help us to nurture the lives of children and to be a blessing.*

You are the support of the falling;  
*Help us to reach out to those who stumble and lift up the next generation.*

You are the Author of freedom;  
*Help us to set free the families trapped in poverty.*

You are our hope in death as in life;  
*Help us to keep faith with those who sleep in the dust.*

Your might, O God, is everlasting;  
*Help us to use our strength for good from our first days to our last.*

*(Adapted from Gates of Prayer)*

## Jewish Resources for the Children's Sabbath

### Avodah

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end war;  
For we know that You have made the world in a way  
So that all of us must find our own path to peace,  
Within ourselves and with our neighbors.

*We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end hunger;  
For you have already given us the resources  
With which to feed the entire world,  
If we would only use them wisely.*

We cannot merely pray to You, O God,  
To root out our prejudice;  
For You have already given us eyes  
With which to see the good in all people,  
If we would only use them rightly.

*We cannot merely pray to you, O God, to end despair;  
For You have already given us the power  
To clear away slums and to give hope,  
If we would only use our power justly.*

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end disease;  
For You have already given us great minds  
With which to search out cures and healing,  
If we could only use them constructively.

*Therefore, we pray to You instead, O God,  
For strength, determination, and courage,  
To do instead of just to pray,  
To become instead of merely to wish.*

Praised are You, O God,  
You bless our people of Israel,  
And all peoples, with peace.

(Adapted from Rabbi Jack Riemer)

### Reflection (following the Shalom Rav)

#### *Shabbat Bereshit: A Reflection on Creation*

When God created the world, God made everything a little bit incomplete. Instead of making bread grow out of the earth, God made wheat grow so that we might bake it into bread. Instead of making the earth of bricks, God made it of clay so that we might bake the clay into bricks. Why? So that we could become God's partner in the task of completing the work of creation.

### Reflection (following the Shalom Rav)

True, we are often too weak to stop injustices; but the least we can do is protest against them.

True, we are too poor to eliminate hunger; but in feeding one child, we protest against hunger.

True, we are too timid and powerless to take on all the guards of all the political prisons in the world; but in offering our solidarity to one prisoner, we denounce all the tormentors.

True, we are powerless against death; but as long as we help one man, one woman, one child live one hour longer in safety and dignity, we affirm a human's right to live.

*(Sages and Dreamers: Biblical, Talmudic, and Hasidic Portraits and Legends by Elie Wiesel. Copyright © 1991 by Elirion Associates, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Georges Borchart, Inc., on behalf of the author.)*

### Alternative Aleinu: It Is Up To Us

And then all that has divided us will merge  
*And then compassion will be wedded to power*  
And then softness will come to a world that is harsh and unkind

*And then both men and women will be gentle*  
And then both women and men will be strong  
*And then no person will be subject to another's will*  
And then all will be rich and free and varied  
*And then the greed of some will give way to the needs of many*

And then all will share equally in the Earth's abundance  
*And then all will care for the sick and the weak and the old*  
And then all will nourish the young  
*And then all will cherish life's creatures*  
And then all will live in harmony with each other and the Earth  
*And then everywhere will be called Eden once again.*

(Alternative "Aleinu" by Judy Chicago as cited in *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Eve*, Wyncote, Pa: The Reconstructionist Press, 1989, p. 137)

### Reflection

God, please forgive and transform our powerful nation where toddlers and school children die from guns sold quite legally.

God, please forgive and transform our rich nation that lets children be the poorest group of citizens quite legally.

God, please forgive and transform our rich nation that lets the rich continue to get more at the expense of the poor quite legally.

*(Gates of Prayer)*

God, please forgive and transform our rich nation that thinks security rests in missiles rather than in mothers, and in bombs rather than in babies.

God, please help us never to confuse what is quite legal with what is just and right in your sight.

Help us to do what is just and right in Your sight for all the children of America and the world so that peace with justice will prevail and no child is left behind.

(Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund)

### Reflection Before the Kaddish

Eternal God, the generations come and go before You. Brief is their time. Passing, they leave many of their tasks unfinished, their plans unfulfilled, their dreams unrealized. It would be more than we could bear, but for the faith that our little day finds its permanence in your eternity, and our work its completing in the unfolding of Your purpose for humanity.

At this sacred moment we turn our thoughts to those we love who have gone from life. We recall the joy of their companionship. We feel a pang, the echo of that intense grief when first their death lay before our stricken eyes. Now we know that they will never vanish, so long as heart and thought remain within us. By love are they remembered and in memory they live.

O God, grant that their memory may bring strength and blessing. May the nobility in their lives and the high ideals they cherished endure in our thoughts and live on in our deeds. And may we, carrying on their work, help to redeem Your promise that life shall prevail.

### Blessing of the Children

*(Children and child advocates or those who work for children may be called up to the bimah.)*

As we reach out to bless the children in our midst, let us also reach out with our hearts to bless the children we cannot see and do not know but whom the Eternal knows and loves, as they wait and long for care, protection, and guidance.

May you live to see your world fulfilled,  
May your destiny be for worlds still to come,  
And may you trust in generations past and yet to be.  
May your heart be filled with intuition  
And may your words be filled with insights.  
May songs of praise ever be on your tongue,  
And may your wisdom be on a straight path before you.  
May your eyes shine with the light of holy words  
And your face reflect the brightness of the heavens.  
May your lips ever speak wisdom  
And your fulfillment be in righteousness even as you yearn  
To hear the words of the Holy Ancient One of Old.

*(Berachot 17a)*

### Final Blessing

May we go forth to celebrate the gifts of each child.  
May we go forth to heal the hurts of each child.  
May we go forth to seek justice for each child.  
This we ask as ones who are claimed as God's children.  
Amen.

(Shannon Daley-Harris)

## Suggested Music for the Services

The following pieces of music are suggested by the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism for incorporation into social action-focused services because of their social justice themes. Several are based on liturgical or other Jewish texts. Many of the songs are available in *Gates of Song* or *The Complete Shireinu*, both available from Transcontinental Music ([www.etranscon.com](http://www.etranscon.com)). They also have included music from new, well-known and less well-known Jewish songwriters and have given information about how to acquire their music directly from the composer.

- 1) And the Youth Shall See Visions – Friedman, *Shireinu* p. 20
- 2) *Ani v'Atah* – Arik Einstein and Miki Gavriellov, *Shireinu* p. 28
- 3) *Bayom Hahu* – Lisa Silverstein Tzur, Shir p. 32, Barry Kanarek, *Shireinu* p. 33
- 4) Blessing for Social Justice: *Lirdof Tzedek* – Jeff Klepper, sheet music in pdf available for download at <http://www.totshabbat.com/kleppersocialjustice.pdf>
- 5) *B'makom* – Michael Isaacson, *Shireinu* p. 39
- 6) Down by the Riverside – spiritual, *Shireinu* p. 56
- 7) Dreamer – Lorre Wyatt, *Shireinu* p. 57
- 8) *Hinei Mah Tov* – folksong, *Shireinu* p. 89, Steve and Marni Dropkin, *Shireinu* p. 89, M. Jacobson-Drozi, *Shireinu* p. 90, folksong, *Shireinu* p. 91
- 9) Hold Fast to Dreams – music by Jeff Klepper, lyrics by A.B. Yehoshua, Langston Hughes, *Shireinu* p. 99
- 10) If I Had a Hammer – Lee Hays and Pete Seeger
- 11) *Im Ein Ani Li Mi Li* – folksong, arr. Davidson, *Gates of Song* #146, Debbie Friedman, *Shireinu* p. 106
- 12) *Khillah Kedoshah* – Dan Nichols, from his CD, *My Heart is in the East*, sound clip and ordering information available at [www.jewishrock.com](http://www.jewishrock.com)
- 13) Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream – Ed McCurdy
- 14) Laugh at All My Dreams – Friedman, M. Samuels on Sachki, *Shireinu* p. 122
- 15) Let Peace Shine – Lynn Metrik, available for purchase by contacting the composer at [lrmetrik@yahoo.com](mailto:lrmetrik@yahoo.com)
- 16) *Lo Alecha* – Klepper and Frelander, *Shireinu* p. 135
- 17) *Lo Yarei'u/V'chit'u* – William Sharlin and Ezri Gabbai, *Shireinu* p. 136
- 18) *Lo Yisa Goi* – folksong, arr. Davidson, *Gates of Song* #149, folksong *Shireinu* p. 137, Shalom Altman, *Shireinu* p. 138
- 19) Make Those Waters Part – Doug Mishkin, *Shireinu* p. 144
- 20) *Nefesh Achat* – Jon Gold, Natalie Hutner, Leslie Kane, Alicia Katzman, *Shireinu* p. 154
- 21) One People – Debbie Friedman, sheet music available for purchase at [www.debbiefriedman.com](http://www.debbiefriedman.com)
- 22) Open Your Hand – Karen Daniel, sound clip and ordering information available at <http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/karendaniel>
- 23) Peace & Love & Understanding – Lynn Metrik, available for purchase by contacting the composer at [lrmetrik@yahoo.com](mailto:lrmetrik@yahoo.com)
- 24) *Pit'chu Li* – Shlomo Carlebach, *Gates of Song* #156 or *Shireinu* p. 166, Steve Dropkin, *Shireinu* p. 167
- 25) Joe Black on his CD *Leave a Little Bit Undone*, sound clip and ordering information available at [www.rabbijoeblack.com](http://www.rabbijoeblack.com)
- 26) The Prophet You – Julie Silver, *Shireinu* p. 168
- 27) *Shir LaShalom* – music by Yair Rosenblum, lyrics by Ya'akov Rotblitt, *Shireinu* p. 183
- 28) *V'yashvu Ish* – Jeff Klepper and Dan Frelander, *Shireinu* p. 213
- 29) *Yad b'Yad* – Craig Taubman, *Shireinu* p. 216
- 30) *Yib'yeh Shalom* – Rick Recht, *Shireinu* p. 222
- 31) We Choose Peace – Tracy Friend, available for purchase by contacting the composer at [tracy.friend@acnielsen.com](mailto:tracy.friend@acnielsen.com)

## Jewish Adult Discussion Guide

This discussion guide may be used or adapted to guide a one-hour discussion among adults on the Children's Shabbat weekend, during a sisterhood meeting or men's club, or with another gathering convened just for this purpose.

### Suggested Format

#### ■ Welcome

- Welcome participants. Introduce yourself and provide a brief overview of the purpose of the discussion and the context of the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend.
- If this is not a group that regularly meets together, provide a time for participants to introduce themselves and say what about the topic interested them. If numbers don't permit time for each participant to introduce themselves, have participants introduce themselves to each other in pairs or groups of four.

#### ■ Introduce the theme, "Blessed to Be a Blessing: Lifting Up the Next Generation," and the focus on raising our nation's more than 14 million poor children out of poverty, and connect them to Jewish teachings.

- Summarize the theme, "Blessed to Be a Blessing: Lifting Up the Next Generation," and briefly note the focus on our nation's more than 14 million children living in poverty.
- Connect the theme to Jewish teachings. Options for doing this include:
  - Make copies of the passages from traditional Jewish sources on poverty and children. Invite participants to discuss how these readings inform their feelings about and actions to address children's needs.
  - Discuss the Jewish concept of *tikkun olam*. How does it speak to the focus of this Children's Shabbat? Where do they see themselves or the congregation carrying out the work of repairing the world, especially for disadvantaged children? Where do they see new opportunities to repair the world for children in poverty, without health care, and in the pipeline to prison?
  - Link the Torah portion for October 16, 2010 (the Children's Sabbath weekend), *Lech Lecha*, with the Children's Sabbath theme. The portion begins with God's call to Abram

to leave his county, kindred, and father's house and God's promise "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." Invite participants to respond: How do you connect the understanding of being blessed to *be* a blessing with the current situation in our nation of more than 14 million children in poverty? How do you relate the context of being called to leave behind country, kindred, and father's house, to the promise of blessing? How do you relate it to our task today to be a blessing to children in poverty?

#### ■ Engage with the material in A Child Poverty Primer

- Depending on numbers, divide into several smaller groups or remain in one group. Give each participant a photocopy of the A Child Poverty Primer. Ahead of time, have a facilitator for each small group who is prepared to lead the small group through the following steps:
- Introduce the story of one child affected by poverty, by reading the following passage from *Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5*:

"Therefore, man was created singularly to teach you that a) whoever destroys a single soul of Israel, is considered as if he destroys an entire world, and one who saves one soul of Israel, it is considered as if he saves an entire world; b) no one could say to their fellow that my father is better than your father; c) none of the heretics could say "There are many powers in Heaven"; d) again, to declare the greatness of the Holy One of Blessing, for man stamps out many coins with one die, and they are all alike. But the Ruler of all Rulers, the Holy One of Blessing, stamped each person with the seal of Adam, and not one of them is like his fellow. Therefore, each and every one is obliged to say, "For my sake the world was created."

(*Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5*)

## Jewish Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Ask for a volunteer in each small group to read aloud the “snapshot” of one child for whose “sake the world was created” in their material, and offer their responses to what they heard.

- In each small group, take turns reading paragraphs about “the Big Picture.” (Alternatively, the facilitator of each small group may want to summarize the overview provided in this section.) If the discussion is being held at a time when participants may write, you may want to invite group members to mark their copies as the information is read, with a check mark by information they already knew, an exclamation mark by information that surprised them, and a question mark by information that raised questions for them. When the material has been read, invite participants to identify the information that was most surprising, or to raise the questions that the reading generated. (Reassure facilitators that they don't have to have the answers to every question. Some questions will serve as prompts for participants to seek more information when they return home.)
- Blessed to Be a Blessing: Prepare to move the discussion to how each participant individually, or a group or the congregation collectively, can be a blessing and lift up the next generation by reading the following passage from Maimonides.

If one person is able to save another and does not save him he transgresses the commandment, “Neither shall you stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.” (*Leviticus 19:16*) Similarly, if one person sees another drowning in the sea, or being attacked by bandits, or being attacked by wild animals, and, although able to rescue him either alone or by hiring others, does not rescue him; or if one hears heathens or informers plotting evil against another or laying a trap for him

and does not call it to the other's attention and let him know; or if one knows that a heathen or violent person is going to attack another and although able to appease him on behalf of the other and make him change his mind, he does not do so; or if one acts in any similar way—he transgresses in each case the injunction “Neither shall you stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.”

(Maimonides, *Code, “Laws Concerning Murder and the Preservation of Life,” Chapter 1, Sections 14 and 16*)

Read through the list of suggested actions. Invite participants to add additional ideas of their own. What do they think they could do individually, or a group or the congregation could do collectively, to address the problem? You may want to consider different categories of action, including *tzedakah*, *gemilut hasadim*, and *mipnei tikkun ha-olam*. (If the discussion is being held at a time when you may write, you could write the brainstormed ideas on flip chart paper.)

■ **Conclusion:** Reconvene as one large group. If time permits, have someone from each small group summarize their discussion. Invite participants to share their vision of the world repaired and made safe for our children. Invite one member of each group to read aloud the vision of a better tomorrow at the end of their material. If appropriate, find out which participants are interested in continuing to meet and work together in the coming weeks or year to create change for children, and make arrangements to be in contact about a next gathering. Be sure to coordinate this session and any follow-up that springs from it with the rabbi/s and your synagogue's social action leadership.

## A Child Poverty Primer

### A Snapshot of One Child Living in Poverty

Five year-old Herardo peeks out from behind his mother's protective arm with a sweet and playful grin. His brothers, Alfonso, 10, and Eduardo, 9, stand beside them, looking down with more bashful gazes. Another brother, eight-year-old Antonio, stands off to the side, not wanting to be photographed. Behind them is their home, a cramped weather-beaten trailer, its rusting metal sides a patchwork of paint that reflect efforts at various times to fix it up. The "stairs" in front of the trailer door are an uneven stack of wooden beams, making it more difficult and unsteady to get out than through a traditional home's wide, smooth doorway. The battered, peeling tires of the trailer home have sunken into the dusty dirt—the trailer has been there for quite some time and will be challenging to move. The trailer's buckling sides are somewhat steadied by wood propped against one end while cinderblocks under the trailer help support the worn tires. The trailer is, in many ways, a metaphor for the circumstances of poverty that grip the Torres family.

The father works hard—toiling in the fields as a migrant worker as soon as the school year ends, and caring for people's yards whenever he can get the work. It is hot, sweaty, physical work that is unforgiving should ill health strike and that fluctuates with the season. When he can find yard work, he earns about \$90 a week. Each month, \$75 is spent renting their trailer space. The family does not own a car so the father must rely on co-workers to pick him up and get him to his job. The lack of transportation poses other daily challenges for the family, from accessing supermarkets with the best prices to taking the children to appointments. They live in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, in Hidalgo County, one of the poorest counties in the nation. There is no public transportation where the family lives—the nearest public transportation is in the neighboring city of McAllen, which is approximately 12 miles away. They rely on neighbors or relatives to get around. Fortunately, the father's meager salary is augmented by the food stamps the family receives, so they are able to purchase more food than his salary alone would have provided. When the children were asked recently if they had enough food, they all replied yes, although it is not known if their diet was bulked up with cheaper, less nutritious food. The boys, all born in the United States, previously received

health care through Medicaid, but were recently denied coverage. Their mother does not know why and has embarked on the difficult task of working through the system to reestablish that they are eligible and secure their coverage once again. She is trying to work through the school district social worker, but even the social worker has not returned her calls. She has asked the Children's Defense Fund's Rio Grande Valley office to assist. In the meantime, she has not taken the children for medical care. There are no books or a computer in their home. Still, so far the children are doing well in school. But one of their older male cousins who lives nearby was recently sent to a boot camp for continuously missing school. His grades are now improving, according to his mother, but it remains to be seen what influence his choices—bad and good—will have on the young cousins.

### The Big Picture: Children in Poverty Today

More than 14 million children in America live in poverty. Poverty casts long shadows throughout their lives in many different areas – among them health, nutrition, early development, and education. Multiple barriers associated with poverty build upon one another and unjustly deprive children of the opportunity to reach their full potential. Poverty hurts children, and poverty hurts all of us. Poverty affects the entire nation through its drag on the economy, loss of productivity and earnings, and greater crime and public health demands. And it exacts a high moral cost when we, as a rich nation blessed with an abundance of resources, fail to do what we can to protect the youngest and most vulnerable among us.

However, there is hope; child poverty is not inevitable or an act of God. Rather, it is the result of the decisions and actions we take—or fail to take—as individuals and as a society. Many factors and programs can reduce a child's chances of growing up poor or reduce poverty's impact on them. We can make a difference—as individual people of faith, as houses of worship, as communities, states, and as a nation; each of us can take a step to help lift children out of poverty and improve their lives.

### What is Poverty?

Many would consider a family “poor” if that family cannot afford to meet its basic necessities such as housing, food, child care, health care, and education. Officially, a family is considered poor if it has an income below the official poverty threshold, which is established annually by the U.S. Census Bureau, and is based on the number of family members and children. In 2009, the most recent year for which poverty data are available, a four-person family including two children was classified as poor if their income was less than \$22,050 and as extremely poor if their income was less than half the poverty line, or \$11,025.<sup>i</sup> These amounts are generally considered well below what is actually needed to cover a family's basic expenses; consequently the number of children whose families are unable to meet their basic needs is underestimated by the official poverty measure.

### Who is Poor? Basic Facts about Child Poverty<sup>ii</sup>

*Note: Facts in this section refer to 2008, the most recent year of available data, unless otherwise noted.*

- **A total of 14.1 million children, or one in five of all children in America, live in poverty.** Of these children, almost half – 5.6 million – live in extreme poverty. The number of poor children increased by 1.6 million between 2000 and 2008.
- **Most poor children have working parents.** Seven out of 10 poor children are in working families where someone works full- or part-time for at least part of the year.
- **Children of color suffer disproportionately from poverty.** Black and Hispanic children are more likely to be poor than White children. In fact, approximately 1 in 3 Black children and more than 1 in 4 Hispanic children are poor, compared to 1 in 10 White children.
- **Other factors also increase a child's odds of being poor:** being young; having parents who have not completed high school, living in a one-parent family, or

living with a caregiver who is not a parent, such as a grandparent.

### How Does Poverty Affect Children?

Poverty is not simply about lack of income security. It affects a family's ability to provide for their children in many areas. Poor children lag behind their peers in ways beyond material well-being. The challenges they face accumulate and interact, giving poor children an unfair start in life.

**Health:** Poor children are less likely to have access to health care or to be in good health.

**Food Security:** In 2007, poor children were almost four times as likely to live in homes with low food security, where not everyone had enough food all of the time, as higher income children.<sup>iii</sup>

**Early Development:** Much research has found income-related disparities in children's learning and behavior which start early in life and tend to last later in life.

**Home and Family Environment:** Stress and conflict related to low income can undermine the strength of a family. Lower income parents report feeling more economic pressure, argue more about money, and use more harsh and inconsistent discipline with their children.<sup>iv</sup> Low-income women are also twice as likely to report depression, which is linked to infants' limited language ability and poor performance on cognitive and behavioral tasks.<sup>v</sup>

Home and family activities differ by income as well, with lower-income children having fewer books in the home, being read to less, watching more television, and being less likely to have a computer or visit a museum or library.

**Education:** Poor children tend to do worse in school and are less likely to graduate from high school; low-income youths and young adults drop out of high school at more than seven times the rate of high income peers.<sup>vi</sup>

<sup>i</sup> Federal Register, Vol. 74, No. 14 (January 23, 2009), pp. 4199-4201. Calculations by Children's Defense Fund.

<sup>ii</sup> Estimates in this section (“Basic Facts About Child Poverty,”) unless otherwise noted, are from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, 2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement. Calculations by the Children's Defense Fund.

<sup>iii</sup> Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews, and Steven Carlson, United States Department of Agriculture, Household Food Security in the United States 2007, Table 3 “Prevalence of food security and food insecurity in households with children by selected household,” Economic Research Report No. (ERR-66), November 2008.

<sup>iv</sup> Arloc Sherman, “Poverty Matters: The Cost of Child Poverty in America,” (Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund, 1997).

<sup>v</sup> Jane Knitzer, Jane Suzanne Theberge, Kay Johnson, National Center for Children in Poverty, Project Thrive, Issue Brief No. 2, Reducing Maternal Depression and Its Impact on Young Children, Toward a Responsive Early Childhood Policy Framework, January 2008.

<sup>vi</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics: 2009 (August 2009), Table 109.

**Crime:** Youths from low-income households have an increased likelihood of participating in serious crimes compared to those from higher-income households.<sup>vii</sup>

### What Are the Economic, Social, and Moral Costs of Child Poverty?

In addition to affecting children themselves and the adults they become, child poverty takes a heavy toll on the United States as a whole. The most recent estimates indicate that the social and economic cost of child poverty totals *half a trillion dollars each year* - or the equivalent of nearly 4 percent of GDP - in loss of productivity, higher crime, and poorer health.<sup>viii</sup>

Taxpayers ultimately pay for higher expenditures on social services, medical care, and criminal justice or in the diversion of government attention and resources from other pressing needs. Taxpayers also pay when a poor child needs special education or must repeat a grade and when a poor child suffers mental and physical disabilities that require costly care. Businesses pay when poor children grow up with less education and become less productive workers—workers who require more training, cannot work as fast or learn new machinery and techniques, cannot understand an instruction manual, or make costly mistakes with customer orders or valuable equipment. Everyone pays when a child grows up in poverty.<sup>ix</sup>

As people of religious faith, is there a moral cost when we as individuals or members of a house of worship don't act to ease or end child poverty? Is there a moral cost to us, as a nation founded on the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, when we allow one in every five children to start life on such an uneven playing field?

### What Works?

#### Selected Public Programs that Combat Child Poverty

Children can't move out of poverty on their own, but there are effective ways that we, as a nation, can help lift children and their families out of poverty or at least protect them from poverty's worst effects. Programs that reduce child poverty by providing cash or near-cash

assistance include the Food Stamp Program, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (TANF), and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). There also are other programs, such as Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Head Start, and Early Head Start that provide important support to low-income children such as health care and early childhood care and education. (See Glossary below for more information about these programs.)

Government benefits – both federal and state, including Earned Income Tax Credits – have made great strides in easing child poverty over the years. However, the current recession threatens those already poor and will increase their ranks for the longer term.

Much work remains to be done to ensure that all poor children have access to the health care, child care, early education, and income support they need.

### Blessed to Be a Blessing: What Can We Do to Alleviate Poverty and Stabilize Families?

#### 1. Connect with your concern and commitment.

In whatever way is most appropriate and helpful for you—whether it is through prayer, meditation, conversation, journaling, or some other way—connect with your own deepest desire to do whatever you can to end child poverty and improve the lives of children, our sacred charge. Identify the role that your religious faith plays in calling you to act on behalf of children and sustaining you when it is challenging. Look honestly at what gets in the way of your making the difference you want to make, whether it's discouragement, feeling busy, not knowing where to start, or something else. Consider your gifts, talents, and resources that you can bring. Discern what kind of action will be most fulfilling, satisfying, sustainable, and effective. What are you called to do?

**2. Learn more about child poverty.** Visit the Children's Defense Fund's website, [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org), for more online resources about child poverty. CDF's new *State of America's Children 2010* is now available on the

<sup>vii</sup> David Bjerck, "Measuring the Relationship between Youth Criminal participation and Household Economic Resources," (Springer, October 2006).

<sup>viii</sup> Harry Holzer et al., "The Economic Costs of Poverty in the United States: Subsequent Effects of Children Growing up Poor," (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, January 2007).

<sup>ix</sup> Arloc Sherman, "Poverty Matters: The Cost of Child Poverty in America," (Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund, 1997).

## Jewish Resources for the Children's Sabbath

website. Check out the bibliography in the Religious Action section of the website for resources that you can use in your place of worship. Look for opportunities to learn from low-income families themselves and from the people who serve them most directly.

- 3. Inform others.** Start a small group or class in your synagogue to find out more and come up with ways to take action to ease and end child poverty.
- 4. Get involved in hands-on service.** Volunteer with a program, organization, or agency serving children and families who are poor.
- 5. Start a program in your synagogue to fill an unmet need of poor families in your community** or one near it. Organize trips using your synagogue's van to help poor families reach supermarkets where their money can go furthest. Tutor children to help combat educational disadvantage. Start a book club to foster a love of reading. Host a parents-night-out to ease the stress of low-income parents. Make sure your community has a site during the summer that offers the federally funded breakfast and lunch program. The CDF Freedom Schools® program is a summer and after school enrichment program that provides meals through the federally funded breakfast and lunch program. See [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org) for more information about supporting or starting a Freedom School site in your community.
- 6. Help connect poor families with the programs that work.** People just like you are trained to be volunteer income tax preparers to help low-income families claim the Earned Income Tax Credit or the Child Tax Credit they are due. Others are helping spread the word about how to enroll all eligible children in Medicaid and CHIP. Visit CDF's website and [www.tax-coalition.org](http://www.tax-coalition.org) to find out how you can help.
- 7. Be a voice for change and for justice.** The change children need won't come until members of Congress hear a broad, relentless demand from their constituents. Children's needs are easy to ignore because they don't vote or make campaign contributions. Figure out how to get your representative's and senators' attention. Start a letter-writing group or have a letter-writing table after services once a month. Join an advocacy

group. Sign up for emails from the Children's Defense Fund so you'll know when action is needed. Make an appointment to visit your representative when she or he is in their district office. Write a letter to the editor and send a copy to your elected officials. Invite your elected officials to come speak to your synagogue (or a coalition of places of worship in your community) about children's needs. Be prepared with good questions. Even though our lives are busy, we must make time to work for justice. We don't have a moment or a child to waste.

### Lifting Up the Next Generation

Imagine our nation in five years. We have cut child poverty in half, and are on our way to ending it. Hard-working families are earning a living wage and have the needed tax credits so that they are bringing in enough income to put nutritious food on the table and provide a safe home for the family. The children leave the table nourished, and don't worry whether there will be enough to eat at the next meal. The youngest children are engaged and stimulated from their earliest days on, exposed to the world of books through their parents or caregivers or Head Start teachers, readying their eager minds for a lifetime of learning. Every school age child is expected and supported to achieve. Teachers, administrators, parents, and community members work together for the success of every child. Young people are hopeful and strong, equipped with academic skills to expect and achieve success. Opportunities in the future are real enough to young people that they call forth the self-discipline and effort to reach them. Crime rates have plummeted, and there's a greater sense of community as adults and young people are connecting with each other with mutual respect. Every place of worship has found its role in supporting the success of all children. Some are nurturing children's school success, others are supporting positive parenting, while others help with work readiness and connections. Some places of worship house child care programs while others send volunteers to enroll children in health coverage. Members of Congress know that vocal, visible people of faith will stand up and speak out for justice for children, and so the elected officials look for ways to be a champion for children.

What's your vision? What is your role in making it real?