

A lasting peace must be based on justice

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Jews around the world began our new year, Rosh Hashana, with 10 days of self-examination and repentance, culminating in the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur.

Unlike the self-scrutiny that takes place in many highly individualistic forms of psychotherapy, our prayers confess to the sins of our community. We take collective responsibility for each other, our community and society. We affirm our fundamental interdependence and inter-connectedness. We have allowed others to be victims of incredible suffering, have turned our backs on others and their well-being. That's why our prayers talk in the plural: "We have sinned before You." The ritual then goes on to articulate a set of sins. Most of them are not really applicable in personal terms, but we nevertheless take collective responsibility because we have not yet healed and repaired the distortions in our world that make these sins likely.

The National Council of Churches, the Network of Spiritual Progressives (including "spiritual but not religious" atheists as well as many people involved in churches, mosques, synagogues and ashrams), the Christian Peace Witness, the Board of Church and Society of the United Methodists, The Islamic Society of North America, Pax Christi and other groups have called for a day of fasting and atonement around the theme that the Iraq war and violence must end. We believe we need to create a "Global Marshall Plan" to end once and for all domestic and global poverty, homelessness, hunger, inadequate health care and inadequate education, and to repair the Earth's environment. The day of atonement is Monday.

We are asking people to join us in that fast by creating public gatherings that day at which we acknowledge our sins as a society and discuss what we might do together to make fundamental change.

Mass anti-war demonstrations have an important role, but imagine how much impact there would be if we had mass public gatherings of tens of thousands of people in American cities coming together for mass repentance and atonement. You don't have to believe in God or be a practitioner of any religion to understand that we in the United States have created a moral and spiritual imbalance that needs to be rectified.

Here's where we can start. We Americans have sinned by:

- Invading Iraq and letting loose violence that has caused death and injuries to hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and tens of thousands of Americans.
- Torturing prisoners around the world and in American detention centers, denying habeas corpus and other fundamental human rights and allowing morally challenged and spineless politicians to reject the electoral mandate of 2006 to end the war in Iraq.
- Hoarding the world's wealth rather than sharing it with the 2 billion people who live on less than \$2 a day.
- Supporting forms of globalization that have increased the gap between rich and poor and squandered the world's resources, while simultaneously imposing trade conditions that have progressively destroyed rural agriculture, pushed peasants into huge urban slums and created a world in which 20,000 to 30,000 children die every day of hunger or disease related to malnutrition and inadequate health care and sanitation.
- Refusing to reduce American consumption to levels that would be ecologically sustainable.
- Not caring enough to get involved in social change movements or electoral activity.
- Being cynical about the possibility of building a world based on love and generosity.
- Accepting societal arrangements in which the "bottom line" is money or power, and not insisting on changing our societal institutions and corporations to a new bottom line of love, cooperation, ecological sustainability and caring for others.

To make atonement "real," the Network of Spiritual Progressives is asking city councils and state legislatures to endorse a global Marshall Plan in which the United States and other major industrialized nations dedicate from 1 to 2 percent of their gross domestic product each year for the next 20 years to finally end domestic and global poverty, homelessness, hunger, inadequate health care and inadequate education. Instead of just saying "out of Iraq," a peace movement that combined atonement with a campaign for a global Marshall Plan might reach those tens of millions of Americans who know that the Iraq war is wrong, but who want a more positive vision of where to go from here.