

You Give Them Something to Eat | Horizontal Transcendence & Two Slips of Paper!  
[Jeremiah 23](#) & [Mark 6](#) | Knox-Metropolitan United Church  
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There is a Rabbinic teaching

That one should carry in one's pockets

Two slips of paper

One in the right

One in the left

On one should be written

*I am but dust and ashes*

Which if it this sounds very Lenten, one might note that Christianity did emerge from shared religious lineage with Judaism

On the other should be written

*For my sake, the world was created*

I heard this first from Rabbi Sharon Brous, the founder of IKAR, and a leading voice among a Jewish renewal seeking to respond to the moral crisis of this moment.

[https://www.ted.com/talks/sharon\\_brous\\_it\\_s\\_time\\_to\\_reclaim\\_religion](https://www.ted.com/talks/sharon_brous_it_s_time_to_reclaim_religion)

Rabbi Brous suggests that this teaching embodies one commitment of a shared religious ethos that is now emerging in the form of revitalized religion in the US.

A commitment to mightiness.

A revitalized religious movement requires a commitment to mightiness.

*In a world that conspires to make us believe that we are invisible and that we are impotent, religious communities and religious ritual can remind us that for whatever amount of time we have here on this Earth, whatever gifts and blessings we were given, whatever resources we have, we can and we must use them to try to make the world a little bit more just and a little bit more loving.*

These two slips of paper which embody a commitment to mightiness suggests an acceptance of one's limitations but also a refusal to simply spectate in a world which calls for engagement.

I have complicated feelings about the word might/mighty/mightiness, but I like what Brous suggests

I feel it reflects the reading from the Gospels

Jesus' apprentices look at him.

They are in a deserted place

Far from the villages

And they are surrounded by an absolute multitude

And the multitude is hungry (as, I am sure, are Jesus' apprentices)

Best guesses that it would be 200 denarii (200 average daily wages) to buy bread for everyone

Jesus' apprentices

Daunted by the scope of what they see

Want the problem to go away

Literally

They want the hungry people to go somewhere else

They want not to be reminded of the great need.

What they struggle to recognize, but what creeps through the text is that they are daunted

Not only by the greatness of the need

But their own sense of insufficiency

They have, after all, only five loaves and two fish

But Jesus throws a wrench in their plans

*'You give them something to eat.'*

Rabbi Yeshua Ben Myriam offers a teaching that reflects a quote often attributed to the Talmud:

*"Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief.*

*Do justly now, love mercy now, walk humbly now.*

*You are not obligated to complete the work,*

*but neither are you free to abandon it."*

I note that this is attributed to the Talmud, but in fact instead of being Talmudic, is really Talmud(ish) in that it is in fact a mash-up of ideas from Rabbinic wisdom and the prophet Micah.

<https://twitter.com/Delafina777/status/1024317315620294657>

Jesus' apprentices certainly begin daunted, if not by the world's grief, at the very least by the hunger of the crowd.

And equally daunted by the insufficiency of their own gifts... 5 loaves and 2 fish!

When I was doing my undergraduate degree I took a sociology course looking at Latin American Liberation Theology, and one of my assignments was to present on transcripts from coursillos, conducted amongst Guatemalan women who were reading from the Christian Gospels with an aim to better understand their own context and struggles.

One of the transcripts dealt with this story.

The women conducting the study offered a take on the story borne of their experience living in a context of constant lack, but with a commitment to mutual care and responsibility for the well-being of the community.

They were convinced that what really happened here was not a super-natural multiplication, but a classic example of the ingenuity of peasants to make a way where there is no way!

Who goes to a deserted place without any food, they insist?

They were convinced that in fact there was food in the crowd, but what was needed was the first show of generosity, that vulnerable first person who would bring forth their contribution that would rouse the courage of the crowd to bring forth their own.

Once the first contribution of 5 loaves and 2 fish was brought forward, soon after would come the second and third and then thousandth until everyone ensured that each one among them was filled.

Our source text for that assignment wryly suggested that more affluent readers were prone to reading this as a miracle story because in their experience enticing the wealthy to participate in such acts of communal solidarity often felt to them an act of God!

This sort of reading brings the text into the realm of what the late Zen Buddhist teacher Michael Stone called a spirituality of horizontal transcendence and a deeper materialism.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqFgGpoLINg>

Horizontal transcendence refers to that experience of connection to that which is bigger than one's atomized existence, but instead of a vertical transcendence whose object is an personal union with an unchanging other-worldly reality or deity, but instead relationship, materiality – the natural, the human, the built, the technological even.

Stone speaks of a deeper materialism, suggesting that culture (even secular) that is formed in a operating system of personal vertical transcendence needs to more deeply connect with, and love the material.

It is about awakening to the presence of the impermanent, the imperfect, the unreliable.

Yet, Stone insists, it is of this in its impermanence, imperfection, and unreliability that we carve our existence.

I mentioned earlier that Rabbi Sharon Brous' teaching of the two slips of paper embodied mightiness, one of four commitments.

Interconnectedness and Wakefulness are two more.

The final one is hope.

Jesus' apprentices bring forth their imperfect offering and it is a risk.

It is a hopeful act.

This is what I might offer in the face of the world's hunger.

The words of the Hebrew Scriptures from the prophet Jeremiah, likewise locate the Eternal in the voices of those who long for compassion.

Does our practice of the way of Jesus open us up to these cries?

Rouse us to wakefulness?

Confront us with our own mightiness?

Compel us to bring forth of that which we have been given, and in gratitude offer it outward?

I am sure that many of us have heard the saying

*It does not matter what you believe*

*As long as you're not hurting anyone.*

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/op-ed-religion-not-hurting-not-good-enough-1.4988229>

What if that is just far too low to set the bar

What if instead we asked,

Whatever our beliefs, how do they animate our efforts to answer the call of great suffering.

Whatever our beliefs, are they calling us to attend to the beauty around us

Whatever our beliefs, are they drawing us into healing relationships?

Opening us to new possibilities?

Inviting us into expanding conversations?

Where is the call of the world hunger hitting you right now?

If you're up for putting it in the comments for others to ponder, you are so welcome to do so.

I wonder what it would mean

I wonder what it might take

To be build a culture in community

Where we regularly spoke like this to one another

Spoke of how we felt moved within by situations or circumstances in our world

In our communities

Perhaps those structures are episodes which bring us harm/hurt

That grieve our hearts for the suffering of others

Or those that come from a sense of gratitude and a longing for all to know the blessings of that which we have received

A community that speaks this way to one another

Who bolsters one another in our nudges that we have something to offer

Who practice discernment, seeking the intersection of the world's great need

And our great joy and passion

Knowing that in there we might find that particular gift which we have to bring

Following from a spirituality that exists

Not to insulate us from the roughness of the world

But to open ourselves up to receive and respond

Sharon Brous shares the Rabbinic teaching of two slips of paper.

Michael Stone being a teacher of mindfulness offers that our breath, thoughtfully brought in and sent back forth, with such attention, such awareness of the shared oxygen upon which each other person, the trees, the prairie grasslands, the fragile Sask wetlands, all rely upon.

Breath can awaken us to our connectedness.

Rabbi Yeshua Ben Myriam, the itinerant teacher from the hill country of Galilee offered bread.

Harkening back to his communities' ancient story of manna in which the goodness and grace of the earth proved to be enough when thoughtfully shared.

Scattered grain gathered into one loaf and then broken and shared until all may be filled.

Be it words upon paper.

The breath in your belly.

Or the one loaf for the hunger of the world.

May you carry within that which will draw you into deeper connection.