



ecojudaism
OUR FAITH IN THE PLANET

Right to Food

Exploring new ways to talk about social justice

By Mia Hasenson-Gross, Executive Director of René Cassin



One of the Jewish Community's greatest strengths is its commitment to charity. For decades, synagogues, youth movements and Jewish businesses have been collecting food donations for those in need. These acts of *chesed* (loving kindness) are not just about practically fulfilling needs but have ingrained within them practices of compassion and community building.

Despite being one of the richest countries in the world, nearly eight and a half million adults and children living in the UK struggle to access the food they need. Unsurprisingly, the Covid-19 pandemic has driven up these numbers, causing a sharp rise in the number of families relying on food banks to feed themselves and their children.

Food sits at the heart of Judaism. We carry in our rich Jewish texts and values a duty to care for those who do not have access to food. Access to nutritious food is a human right. René Cassin, the Jewish voice for human rights, joined the Right to Food movement because the work honours the role of food collection and *zedakah* but takes it one step further.

Understanding the Right to Food as an issue of human rights and social justice requires us to make a commitment to look beyond the food bank for long-term, sustainable methods to inequality and growing food injustice. As the gap between wages, benefits and food costs continue to grow, we cannot permit food banks to become substitutes for a comprehensive social security system. We must find structural ways to ensure the Right to Food can be enjoyed by all.

In a world still grappling with both the causes and effects of the financial crisis, in the grip of a pandemic exposing deep-seated injustices, and yet properly to address the existential threat of climate change, now is the time to realise the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' vision of what constitutes a just society.

According to Article 25 of Declaration “*Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family...*” Ensuring everyone has access to food relies as much on acts of human kindness and *chesed* as it does on ensuring adequate, sustainable and viable means to produce and grow food.

Bringing together issues such as the right to food, climate and sustainability will aid a renewed focus on the relevance and importance of a social justice agenda that guides us in our day to day. It is by promoting this common ground, based on hope for a fairer and sustainable future, that real positive change will be achieved.

According to the *Rambam*, there are eight levels of giving to charity, with each level higher than the preceding one. The tallest step of the ladder is enabling those less fortunate to become self-sufficient, ensuring they no longer have to rely on other's gifts and donations. This vision helps inform our work, as we hope to achieve a world where the means to lead a fulfilling life are guaranteed to all.

René Cassin is committed to setting up a **Jewish Food Rights Alliance** that will champion a united Jewish voice on the right to access healthy and adequate food