

International Literacy Year - 1989

Issue

The high rate of illiteracy in industrialized as well as developing nations, particularly among women, increases poverty, produces inequality in employment and citizenship participation, and denies opportunities for self-development and self-realization.

Background

Judaism, the faith of the "People of the Book," has long been dedicated to support for education and knowledge as a guiding principle of life. In the words of the prayer book we pray, "You favor us with knowledge and teach mortals understanding. May you continue to favor us with knowledge, understanding and insight."

The world of learning is a closed book to many people. There are almost one billion adult illiterates in the world. The majority of adult illiterates are women, the illiteracy rate being 34.9 percent for women as compared to 20.5 per cent for men. Both developing and industrialized countries are affected. According to the U.S. 1980 census, 26 million American adults are functionally illiterate. One out of five Americans lack literacy skills and knowledge needed to cope successfully with day-to-day living.

In industrialized countries there are more than 50 million adults who possess limited ability to read, write, and handle numbers. The lack of skills necessary to participate fully and effectively in society is termed functional illiteracy. The problem of functional illiteracy has become a serious issue, related to family health, nutrition, housing and environmental concerns. There is a close association between illiteracy and poverty.

The United Nations has proclaimed 1990 as International Literacy Year to contribute to greater understanding of the various aspects of the problem of illiteracy and to intensify efforts to spread literacy and education. Among the objectives are increasing action by governments, greater public consciousness, and widespread participation through non-governmental organizations and voluntary agencies.

Resolution

NFTS, Women of Reform Judaism, is dedicated to education as a fundamental human right, is particularly well-equipped to alert public opinion regarding the significant problem of illiteracy. Therefore, it is proposed that its members:

- 1) Sponsor and participate in programs for congregations and communities to increase awareness and understanding of the totality of functional illiteracy and its impact on employment, health, nutrition, responsible parenthood and effective citizenship.
- 2) Encourage support of and active participation in tutoring programs and other literacy projects in the community.
- 3) Encourage all levels of government to develop, support, and provide adequate funding for literacy programs whether undertaken solely by public agencies or in partnership with voluntary organizations.