

HOW DO YOU RECHARGE?

ASK **BIG**
QUESTIONS

CENTRAL CONVERSATIONS
GUIDE FOR FACILITATORS

Note for Facilitators: This document is designed to be the centering point for a group conversation. You should plan for the conversation to last between 45 and 60 minutes, depending on group size. Most parts are meant to be read by members of the group, so you should plan to ask participants to take turns reading sections. Alternatively, you can choose the first reader of a section, and then that reader chooses the next reader. Additional guidelines and suggestions for planning and leading a successful conversation can be found at the end of this guide.

1. WELCOME

Before we begin, let's review the *brit*—the covenant—that animates our time together:

- *Accountability*: I'll show up for eight meetings over the next eight months. Or I'll let the host know the (good) reason I will be absent. I will also be punctual and respect everyone's time. Which means that meetings will start and end on time, no matter how good the schmoozing.
- *Presence*: When we're together, I'll be present and mindful. I will listen and share. Life (and our mobile devices) offer many distractions, but I will stay present and engaged.
- *Double Confidentiality*: I'll maintain complete confidentiality. What I hear and say stays here. That means that even when I see group member in another context,

like at Central or in the neighborhood, I won't bring up what has been shared in our group unless you open the conversation.

- *Vulnerability:* I'll stretch myself to be as open and honest as I can with my perspectives and experiences to create a safe environment that might encourage others to take risks, too.
- *Respect:* I will remember that all of us are here for a common purpose and I will respect and acknowledge everyone in my group.
- *No Fixing, Advising, Saving or Setting Straight:* I will give each person the gift of true attention without trying to "solve their problem." No advice unless it's asked.
- *Listening:* I understand that some of us are talkers and some of us are quieter, so I'll be aware to not dominate discussions or always leave the weight of it to others.
- *Curiosity:* Judaism is a religion of exploration; of questions more than answers. I will get the most out of my group by being open to our discussions and the people around me.
- *Ownership:* This is our group. This is our community to create. While we have guidelines and suggestions, it is ours to shape and form. We will get out of it what we put into it.

2. ASK AND SHARE

Welcome, and thank you for joining our conversation. Please think of one thing that helps you refill your sense of joy, restfulness and energy when you feel depleted or run-down. What helps you feel recharged? Take a moment to think about this question, and then we'll share our responses.

You can use the space below to write some notes to yourself.

Note for Facilitators: Give people a moment to organize their thoughts before you start asking for volunteers. It may be helpful to model this response for participants, so consider responding first. Be sure everyone states their name. You don't need to go in order around a circle. Allow people to respond when the spirit moves them.

3. LEARN

We live in hectic times. Our culture has shifted towards increased technological connection and, often with it, an expectation that people will respond to any kind of request even late at night and early in the morning. Between 1970 and 1990, the average worker put in an estimated 164 extra hours of paid labor a year, and it has gone up since then. One study suggests that 40% of American adults get less than 7 hours of sleep on weekdays, and another claims that about 60% of us are sometimes or often rushed at mealtimes. As a result of all this busyness, we don't often have a chance to rest or recharge—to stop *doing* so much and to just *be*.

The Jewish tradition has had a designated rest time since, well, the very beginning. In the Torah, the story of the creation of the world ends with a day of rest—a set-apart time. Later descriptions of Shabbat, the Sabbath day, make it clear that everyone in the community is meant to rest—not only those with privilege, but workers, the stranger passing through, and even the animals! Judaism considers it an important activity; elsewhere, the Torah talks about the act of *shabbat v'yinafash*, resting and restoring oneself. *Nefesh* means “soul” in Hebrew, so this kind of resting is a sort of a re-souling, a recharging of one's soul, or spirit. Many believe that doing so is indispensable; the secular Zionist essayist Ahad Ha-Am once wrote, “More than the Jewish people have preserved Shabbat, Shabbat has preserved the Jewish people.”

An organization called Reboot put together a “Sabbath Manifesto,” (sabbathmanifesto.org) with ten key principles designed to help people slow down and bring the spirit of Shabbat into their lives.

The ten principles are:

1. Avoid technology
2. Connect with loved ones
3. Nurture your health
4. Get outside
5. Avoid commerce
6. Light candles
7. Drink wine
8. Eat bread
9. Find silence
10. Give back

Please read through the above list twice.

Then, please read this quote from 20th century theologian Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel from his landmark book, *The Sabbath*.

To set apart one day a week for freedom, a day on which we would not use the instruments which have been so easily turned into weapons of destruction, a day for being with ourselves, a day of detachment from the vulgar, of independence from external obligations, a day on which we stop worshipping the idols of technical civilization, a day on which we use no money, a day of armistice in the economic struggle with our fellow men and the forces of nature—is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for man’s progress than the Sabbath?

Here are some questions to consider:

Interpretive Questions

- Do you see any patterns emerge from the items on the list? Are there one or several unifying principles?
- What sort of experience do these actions seem to encourage?
- Which of these principles seem communal? Solitary?
- What does Heschel’s description of the Sabbath add to or change in your reading of the Reboot list?

Reflective Questions

- Which of the principles from the Reboot list or described by Heschel are you most drawn to? Why?
- Do any of them challenge you or make you feel uncomfortable? If so, what makes them uncomfortable or challenging?
- Is there something missing from the list that you think should be there?
- When do you feel that you need to recharge?

4. PERSPECTIVES FROM JEWISH TRADITION

Let’s go deeper into the Jewish tradition to better understand these questions around recharging. Here are two excerpts from the Bible—the Book of Psalms and the Book of Leviticus—that may offer some other possibilities for thinking about recharging. Please read them aloud together. You need not discuss both of the texts; feel free to choose those that speak to you. These texts are merely tools for reflecting on your own stories and experiences. Please use them in a way that organically continues or deepens the conversation you have been having so far.

וְאָמַר--מִי־יִתֶן-לִי אֲבָר, כִּי־וֹנָה: אֲעֹפֶה וְאֲשָׁכְנָה. הֲנֵה, אֲרַחֵק נָדָד; אֲלִין בְּמִדְבָּר סֵלָה.

I said, “Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. I would flee far away and stay in the desert; I would hurry to my place of shelter, far from the tempest and storm.”

--Psalm 55:7-8

- What is the psychological state of the narrator of this psalm?
- What does the narrator seek?
- When do you feel like the narrator in this psalm?
- Do you have a “place of shelter”? Do you get there by fleeing? Or can you reach it without flying away?

דָּבַר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם וְשָׁבַתָּהּ הָאָרֶץ שְׁבַת לַיהוָה: שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע שָׂדֶךְ וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמַר פְּרֹמְךָ וְאָסַפְתָּ אֶת־תְּבוּאָתָהּ: וּבַשְּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִית שְׁבַת שְׁבַתוֹן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ שְׁבַת לַיהוָה שָׂדֶךְ לֹא תִזְרַע וְכַרְמְךָ לֹא תִזְמַר: אֵת סְפִיחַ קִצְיֹרְךָ לֹא תִקְצֹר וְאֶת־עֲנָבֵי גִזְיֹרְךָ לֹא תִבְצֹר שְׁנַת שְׁבַתוֹן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ:

When you enter the land that I assign to you, the land shall observe a sabbath of Adonai. Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. But in the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath of Adonai; you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the after growth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your untrimmed vines; it shall be a year of complete rest for the land.
--Leviticus 25:2-5

This text describes *shmita*, a principle that the land, too, requires time to rest.

- Why did the Torah set forth this agricultural innovation?
- How would this principle impact landowners’ bottom lines?
- What kind of impact might it have had on landowners’ spiritual recharging?
- Have you ever prioritized well-being over financial gain or professional opportunity? What happened? How did it feel?

Use the space below to reflect.

Note for Facilitators: This is the heart of the conversation. Give people several minutes to re-read the texts and prepare their thoughts. Then invite people to divide into pairs or triads and share their responses. Give them a good amount of time for this: 15 to 30 minutes or longer, depending on how much momentum they develop. Then reconvene in the large group and ask people to share from their small-group conversations.

A few tips on facilitation:

- The large-group debrief should take another 20-30 minutes.
- Begin by asking for a volunteer to share an insight from their conversation. You might begin by asking, “What came up?”
- When each person is done, thank them for their comment.
- Don’t feel a need to rush or to fill silences.
- If someone begins to monopolize the time, you might say, “I want to be sure that everyone has a chance to speak, so let’s try to make room for another person.”

For other ideas on facilitation, please refer to the AIR-IT guide at the end of this document. When you sense that the group has finished sharing its responses to these questions, invite people to share any further insights or reflections from the conversation, before moving to the conclusion.

5. DO

We all need time to pause and to recharge. Reflective time allows us to restore our energy, to gestate on questions rather than to react immediately to them, to see the bigger picture, to give our creativity a little bit of breathing room. Then when we move forward into our regular lives, we do so with a renewed sense of vigor, excitement, perspective, and insight. But, especially these days, it’s rare that reflective time just lands in our laps. We have to make the decision to give it to ourselves. We have to choose to recharge.

As we conclude the conversation, here are a few final questions to consider.

- What’s one insight that you’ve gained from this conversation?
- What is one action you might take, or practice you might try, before we meet next time, based on what you’re taking from this conversation?
- What’s one obstacle to taking that action? How can you overcome it? Who might you need help from in order to do so?
- What could we do together as a community based on what we talked about today?

Please take a moment to think about these questions, and if you'd like, to share them with the group.

Note for Facilitators: Give people a minute to reflect on the questions, then ask those who want to share to do so. When you sense that the group has finished sharing its responses to these questions, invite people to share any further insights or reflections from the conversation, before moving to the conclusion.

Thank you for being part of this conversation.



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Ask Big Questions is an initiative of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life in partnership with the Einhorn Family Charitable Trust. Visit AskBigQuestions.org to answer questions, learn from others, and join the movement.

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AIR-IT: A GUIDE TO FACILITATING CONVERSATION

A: ASK BIG QUESTIONS.

Big Questions are different than Hard Questions.

Big Question	Hard Question
Anyone can answer it. Example: “When have you been a stranger?”	Experts will answer it best. Example: “What is the history of racism on campus and what can be done to promote greater inclusion?”
Focuses on wisdom and experience. Example: “What’s the best advice you’ve ever received?”	Focuses on intelligence and skill. Example: “Are human beings naturally good or evil?”
Uses plain language.	Uses technical language.
Directed at a subject (me, you, us). Example: “What could we sacrifice to change the world?”	Directed at an object (it). Example: “Is it better to cut spending or raise taxes to balance the federal budget?”
Opens up space and invites people in as participants	Closes space and leads people to feel like spectators.
Leads to sharing personal stories.	Leads to debates about truth claims.
Emphasizes a both/and approach.	Emphasizes an either/or approach.

I: INVITE PERSONAL STORIES.

Big questions lead to sharing personal stories. The facilitator acts to support this by: Creating the space (physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual) of trust in which these stories can be shared and honored.

Weaving: Summarize, reflect back, and keep the stories and observations tethered to the big question. This helps the group to maintain integrity and not feel that it is fragmenting or fraying.

R: REALLY LISTEN.

Ask Big Questions conversations are marked by real listening. The facilitator’s reflecting back and weaving is crucial to this. Participants should be able to answer questions like: “What did so-and-so say? What do you think they meant when they said it? What did it evoke in you?”

IT: USE INTERPRETIVE THINGS.

Ask Big Questions conversations often use a text, poem, artwork, song, natural object

or other “interpretive thing” to help center the conversation and create a common point of access for all participants.

QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN PREPARING FOR A DISCUSSION

WHERE?

Does the place where you're having the conversation create a space in which people can feel safe?

Is it a closed space? Does it have a door you can close to ensure privacy and confidentiality when needed?

What can you do to make the space visually appealing or lovely? Does it have windows to let in light? Do you want to play some music?

Can everyone sit comfortably in a circle?

WHEN?

Are you scheduling the conversation at a time when everyone can be physically awake and present?

Will people be hungry? Will you provide food or drink?

Will they be tired or sleepy after a meal?

How long will the conversation be?

How will you break up the time if necessary?

WHO AND HOW?

- Do you need to make any special arrangements for people with special needs
- (i.e. physical disabilities)?
- How will you have everyone introduce themselves? (Big Questions are great for introductions!)
- How will you close the conversation?

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

What will you do to get yourself ready?