

JUSTICE, JUSTICE SHALL YOU PURSUE

WHAT IS JEWISH ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE WORK?

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

NAME TAGS:

Please ask everyone in the group to wear a name tag. Even if most people know one another, it is important that no one feel uncomfortable for not remembering everyone else's name.

INTRODUCTION AND ICE-BREAKER:

Ask each person to introduce themselves, and to share with the group:

- (a) their name;
- (b) what kind of social justice work they do on a regular basis; and
- (c) their earliest memory of engaging in social justice or community service work.

GOALS FOR THIS GROUP

Before you begin, please take a few minutes to review the two primary goals of this group:

- (1) This group will allow you to build a community of congregants who are engaged in social justice work. It is our hope that through study, reflection, and sharing of individual stories, you will build lasting relationships that will sustain you as you do this important work.
- (2) Thoughtful engagement in social justice work raises many difficult questions: Do you give money, or time? Do you give primarily to Jewish causes, or simply to those in greatest need? How should you balance your obligation to do this work with the many other demands on your time and resources? These 8 sessions will allow you to explore your own approach to these issues, and will offer a range of potential answers, drawn from Jewish tradition. The ultimate goal is for you to see these questions from a Jewish perspective, and for Judaism to enrich and add meaning to your work.

BIG QUESTION FOR THIS SESSION: WHAT IS JEWISH ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE WORK?

This session will help you explore the question: "What is Jewish about Social Justice work?" One answer, of course, is that EVERYTHING is Jewish about social justice work – it is one of Judaism's strongest core values. But we hope the exercises provided will help you dig deeper and to think about what particular aspects of Jewish tradition speak to you most strongly, and perhaps motivate the work that you do.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Attached, you will find 10 pages with statements that describe why some Jews feel compelled to do social justice or community service work. Before the session begins, post these statements around the room (or place them around the table).

- (1) Ask everyone to walk around the room (or table), read each statement, and then stand next to the statement that they find the most compelling. You should acknowledge that it will be difficult to choose only one statement, but that for the sake of the conversation, participants should commit to only one.
- (2) When everyone has chosen a statement, go around the room and ask one volunteer from each group to read the first line of their selected statement, and then to explain why he or she finds this statement compelling.
- (3) Ask participants to find a partner (or two) who chose a different statement. Once every participant has found a partner, ask the pairs (or trios) to talk about the following questions:
 - a. Why did you find this statement compelling? Does it reflect your own approach to social justice work? How or how not?
 - b. Were there other statements to which you also felt drawn? Why?
 - c. Were there other statements that you found entirely unconvincing or even offensive? Why?
- (4) Bring the group back together and ask a few volunteers to share any insights or questions that emerged from their conversations. Did they learn anything from their partners? Did anything in the conversation surprise them?

“JEWISH VOICES”

Attached is a text-study sheet entitled “Jewish Voices: Justice, Justice Shall You Pursue” that you may use to facilitate a discussion about balancing our responsibilities to our local communities with our obligations to the larger world.

Here are some things to consider:

- (a) It is customary to recite a blessing before studying Torah.

BARUCH atah, Adonai
Eloheinu, Melech haolam,
asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav
v'tzivanu laasok b'divrei Torah.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי
אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתַי
וְצִוָּנוּ לְעִסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

BLESSED ARE YOU, Adonai our God,
Sovereign of the universe,
who hallows us with mitzvot,
commanding us to engage with words of Torah.

- (b) Our tradition teaches us that Torah study can be a source of healing and blessing. You may want to ask members of the group if they would like to dedicate their study to anyone in

particular. This is a nice way to help the group get to know one another, and to learn about significant events in each other's lives.

- (c) Depending on the preferences of your group, you may choose to distribute this sheet the week before the meeting, so that participants will be familiar with the texts, and can begin to think about their own responses.
- (d) You can choose to either work through the texts as one group, or to break up into pairs ("hevruta") for an initial period of discussion, and then allow the pairs to share something they learned with the group.
- (e) The ultimate goal of these groups is not for participants to master a particular number of Jewish texts, but to connect with one another. If group members are sharing their own stories and experiences in a way that seems fruitful, there is no need to cut off that conversation in order to make sure you "finish" the text sheet. If you are unsure, you can always poll the group to decide whether it is time to move on.

CONCLUSION

We recommend that you wind down the text study about 15 minutes before the end of the session, to allow for a meaningful conclusion. This conclusion may take any shape you wish. Some possibilities are:

- (a) Ask each person to name one insight they have gained, or one question that they are taking with them.
- (b) Ask each person to offer a blessing to the group, drawn from your learning together.
- (c) Ask each person to say one word to represent how they are feeling coming out of your discussion.