

IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

HOW DO WE RESPECT THE DIGNITY OF THOSE WE SERVE?

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 give their name, and to tell a brief story (2 minutes at the most) about a time when they had to ask for help. What do they remember feeling at that time?

BIG QUESTION FOR THIS SESSION: HOW DO WE RESPECT THE DIGNITY OF THOSE WE SERVE?

Judaism goes to great lengths to protect the dignity (and at times the anonymity) of those in need of community support. In part, this is based on a recognition that each person is made "b'tzelem Elohim" – in the image of God – and that by honoring each individual, we honor the Divine in all of us. In this session we will explore the sources of this obligation, and think about how we can foster a sense of dignity among those we serve.

OPENING ACTIVITY¹

Supplies: Stack of index cards or small pieces of paper; pens; box or bag for collecting cards.

1. Give each participant a few index cards.
2. Ask each participant to write on each index card one way that s/he would finish the following sentence: "When I think about the poor, what comes to mind is _____." Participants may use as many or as few cards as they wish. Encourage participants to be as honest as possible and let them know that nobody will know what they wrote.
3. Collect all of the index cards in a box or bag and mix them up.
4. Pass the box around and have each participant, in turn, choose one card and read what is on it.
5. When the group has read all of the cards, ask the group what reactions they had to hearing these associations. What trends did they notice? What surprised them? What emotions did they feel when they heard these associations?

¹ Adapted from Rabbi Jill Jacobs, Teacher's Guide to *There Shall Be No Needy: Pursuing Social Justice through Jewish Law and Tradition* (Jewish Lights 2010), p. 16.

“JEWISH VOICES”

Attached is a text-study sheet entitled “Jewish Voices: In the Image of God” that you may use to facilitate a discussion about how to recognize and protect the dignity of those we serve.

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.

בָּרַךְ אֹתָהּ, יי
אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו
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.