

THE NEEDY AMONG US

TO WHOM ARE WE OBLIGATED, IN A TIME OF RAPID GLOBALIZATION?

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:

Have everyone give their name, and identify one community to which they belong (aside from Central Synagogue) that is meaningful to them.

BIG QUESTION FOR THIS SESSION: TO WHOM ARE WE OBLIGATED, IN A TIME OF RAPID GLOBALIZATION?

Traditional Jewish texts concerning our obligation to help others in need are based on a very "local" sense of community. At the time they were written, one might need to balance his obligations to those in his town against those in the next town over, but would have no way of knowing if there were needier people half-way around the world. And even if he did, he would be in no position to assist them. Now, however, with the advent of 24 hour global news coverage, increased opportunities for travel, and other advances, we are aware of the needs of those outside our local communities, and so must balance our responsibilities to those in our cities against our duty to aid those in other parts of the world. This session will explore how place matters -- or doesn't -- in our decision-making about how and where to give.

OPENING ACTIVITY: WOULD YOU RATHER?

Supplies: One copy of the attached "Would You Rather" questions for each participant; pens.

- (1) Hand out a copy of the "Would You Rather" questions to each participant. Ask them to mark their own answer to each question.
- (2) Once everyone has completed the questions, read through each one, and ask for a show of hands for each of the two possible responses.
- (3) Discuss what you noticed about the group's answers. Were there any on which there was widespread agreement? Any on which you were evenly divided? What did members learn about their own priorities from asking these questions? Were there any surprises?
- (4) How do your answers to these questions relate to the social justice work you have chosen to do. Is your current work in line with your priorities?

"JEWISH VOICES"

Attached is a text-study sheet entitled "Jewish Voices: The Needy Among Us" 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. The blessing can be found at the top of the study sheet.

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

בָּרַךְ 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.