

GIVING LIFE TO THE NEEDY

ENGAGING IN ACTS OF SERVICE

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 tell a brief story (no more than two minutes at the most) about an act of kindness they have performed, received, or witnessed in the past week.

BIG QUESTION FOR THIS SESSION: "HOW CAN WE BEST USE OUR TIME TO SERVE THOSE IN NEED?"

Judaism envisions two distinct types of response to those in need: righteous giving (*tzedakah*) and acts of kindness (*gemilut chasadim*). This session will explore the latter category, and allow participants to reflect on the choices they make when giving of their time to provide direct service to others.

OPENING ACTIVITY:

Supplies: One copy of the attached "Whom are we Serving?" exercise for each participant; pens.

- (1) Hand out a copy of the "Whom are we Serving?" exercise to each participant, and have them take a few minutes to answer the questions on their own.
- (2) Once everyone has completed the questions, have participants break into groups of 2 or 3 and compare their answers.
- (3) Bring the full group back together and discuss what they discovered during the exercise. What value did they identify in direct service? How did they decide what advice to give? Was there general agreement or disagreement within their small groups? Have they made similar decisions in their own lives? If so, how did they resolve the issues raised by the exercise?

“JEWISH VOICES”

Attached is a text-study sheet entitled “Jewish Voices: Giving Life to the Needy” that you may use to facilitate a discussion about our obligations to address the needs of those in our community through both acts of kindness and charitable giving.

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.

Whom are we serving?

CONSIDERING THE EFFICACY OF “SERVICE”

Please consider the following description of the financial realities of a “service learning” program provided by the American Jewish World Service (AJWS):

An AJWS alternative spring break participant spends about 25 hours engaged in active volunteer work—usually performing manual labor—during his or her week of service. In the impoverished regions of Central America where most of our groups travel, hourly wages run about \$5 or \$6. That’s something like \$150 worth of labor. The direct cost of sending said college student—including airfare, room and board, insurance, group leaders, etc. (but leaving out, for simplicity’s sake, salaried staff and administrative overhead)—averages around \$1,800, a cost shared by funders and participants’ families. So, for an investment of \$1,800, we’re delivering about \$150 worth of manual labor to a poor community in the developing world.²

Now imagine that a college student comes to you in search of advice. (She knows that you are involved in social justice work, so she trusts your opinion). She is required to do 25 hours of “service” work in order to graduate. Her school will pay up to \$500 in support of her work, or as a charitable donation upon her completion of the requirement.

She is passionate about addressing issues of poverty, domestic violence, and women’s rights. She has the following options for her service “hours”:

- (1) Take part in an AJWS service trip to India, where she will meet with local activists who are counseling victims of domestic violence. She will also take part in repairing and painting a shelter for clients of the organization. The trip would cost her \$250, and she would need to commit to raising an additional \$1000 from friends and family when she returns. (As suggested above, the total cost of her trip would exceed the money she raises).
- (2) Volunteer at a local soup kitchen. This would allow her to donate the \$500 to the organization of her choice.

WHAT DO YOU ADVISE HER TO DO? WHY?

² Aaron Dorfman, “Beyond Good Intentions: A Values Proposition for Jewish Service Learning” (Nov. 17, 2010), available at: <http://zeek.forward.com/articles/117067/> .