WHERE DO YOU GIVE?

A GUIDED CONVERSATION

ASK **BIG** QUESTIONS

UNION *for* **REFORM JUDAISM**

WELCOME

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

1. **Accountability**: I'll show up to our agreed-upon meetings. I'll let the host know the (good) reason I will be absent. I will also be punctual and respect everyone's time.

2. **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.

3. **Double Confidentiality**: What I hear and say stays here. If I see another group member in a different context, I will not bring up anything they said here unless they do first.

4. **Vulnerability**: I'll stretch myself to be as open and honest as possible with my perspectives and experiences in order to create a safe environment that might encourage others to takes risks as well.

5. **Respect**: I will remember that all of us are here for a common purpose and I will respect and acknowledge everyone in my group.

6. **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.

7. **Stepping Up & Stepping Back**: I understand that some of us are natural talkers while others are quieter. I'll pay attention to how much I am contributing, and will seek to balance how much I am talking with how much I'm listening

8. **Curiosity**: Judaism is a religion of exploration; of big questions more than answers. I will get the most out of my group by being open to our discussions and the people around me.

9. **Ownership**: 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.

ASK & SHARE

Take a few minutes to fill out the following chart, which asks you to reflect on what causes you choose to support financially, and why. When everyone is ready, we will break into pairs to compare our answers, and then join together as a group to share what we learned.

WOULD YOU RATHER GIVE TO			NOTES
An organization that fights poverty?	or	An organization that protects the environment?	
An organization that helps homeless people in your city?	or	An organization that helps homeless people in Israel?	
An organization that sends doctors to clinics in villages in India to perform surgery and train health workers?	or	A local clinic that provides medical care to low-income residents of your city?	
Your local public library, which runs an after-school program that helps low-income elementary school students improve their reading and writing skills?	or	Your synagogue's scholarship fund that helps Jewish students in your community go to Hebrew school, day school or Jewish summer camp?	
An organization that fights hunger by providing people with hot meals at a soup kitchen?	or	An organization that fights hunger by teaching people job skills so that they can get jobs and earn a living?	
An organization that tutors low-income high school students in math?	or	An organization that tries to convince the government to give more money to public high school math programs?	
Your cousin who is participating in a walk-a-thon to raise money for cancer research?	or	An organization that runs a camp for children with cancer?	
An organization that provides new sports equipment to children who live in the slums in Kenya?	or	Your friend who is raising money for new uniforms for his/her basketball team?	

LEARN

The following poem is by Berthold Brecht (as translated by George Rapp). Take a minute to read it out loud, together.

A Bed for the Night

I hear that in New York
At the corner of 26th Street and Broadway
A man stands every evening during the winter months
And gets beds for the homeless there
By appealing to passers-by.

It won't change the world
It won't improve relations among men
It will not shorten the age of exploitation
But a few men have a bed for the night
For a night the wind is kept from them
The snow meant for them falls on the roadway.

Don't put down the book on reading this, man.

A few people have a bed for the night
For a night the wind is kept from them
The snow meant for them falls on the roadway
But it won't change the world
It won't improve relations among men
It will not shorten the age of exploitation.

Published in *Poetry and Prose: Bertolt Brecht* (Continuum, 2003), Reinhold Grimm and Caroline Molina Y Vedia, eds.

As we reflect on this text, here are a few questions to consider:

Interpretive Questions

- Why does Brecht say "Do not put the book down on reading this, man."?

- Do you imagine that the narrator approves of the actions of the man who solicits people on behalf of those who need beds? Does it matter to him that these actions will not change the larger system of inequality?

Reflective Questions

- What is your approach to giving to those who solicit donations on the street?

- How do you balance your ability to alleviate the immediate suffering of those in need with the need to address larger systems of inequality?

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

PERSPECTIVES FROM JEWISH TRADITION

Because participation in a self-sustaining Jewish community was central to our Rabbis' understanding of what it meant to live a Jewish life, most of our traditional texts concern our obligations of Jews to support one another. But even our earliest Rabbis were not living in isolation; Jews have always lived in and among other communities and have had to consider what obligations they have to members of the surrounding community.

Consider the following texts from the Babylonian Talmud:

R. Joseph learnt: "If you lend money to any of my people that are poor with you" [Quoting Exodus 20:2]: [this teaches, if the choice lies between] a Jew and a non-Jew, a Jew has preference; the poor or the rich, the poor takes precedence; your poor [i.e. your relatives] and the [general] poor of your town, your poor come first; the poor of your city and the poor of another town, the poor of your town have prior rights.

— Bava Metzia 71a

Our rabbis taught: We sustain the non-Jewish poor with the Jewish poor, visit the non-Jewish sick with the Jewish sick, and bury the non-Jewish dead with the Jewish dead, for the sake of peace.

— Gittin 61a

Discussion Questions:

- What do you think "for the sake of peace" in the second reading meant at the time it was written? How might you understand it now?

- There is a tension between the first text's suggestion that we care for Jews first and the second text's instruction to care for both Jews and non-Jews. Do you feel this tension in your own life?

- Which of these approaches more closely represents your own priorities in giving or serving?

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

DO

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?

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

Thank you for being part of this conversation.

Portions of this guide were originally developed by Rabbi Nicole Auerbach for Central Synagogue.

The Union for Reform Judaism leads the largest and most diverse Jewish movement in North America. We strengthen communities that connect people to Jewish life. Visit https://urj.org/ for more information.

Ask Big Questions was developed, launched, and scaled by Hillel International: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life. Ask Big Questions is a national initiative to help people deepen understanding, strengthen community, and build trust through reflective conversation. Visit AskBigQuestions.org to learn more.