

WHAT DOES THE WORLD NEED FROM YOU?

A GUIDED CONVERSATION



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 take 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 minute to think about a gift, ability, or talent you have that you have not yet found a way to share in this community. Once everyone is ready, we will each be invited (but not required) to share our answer with the group.

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

LEARN

The following poem by Marge Piercy considers the question we are considering today: “What does the world need from us?”

Take a minute to read the poem out loud, together.

To Be of Use
by Marge Piercy

The people I love the best
jump into work head first
without dallying in the shallows
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.
They seem to become natives of that element,
the black sleek heads of seals
bouncing like half submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,
who do what has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along,
who stand in the line and haul in their places,
who are not parlor generals and field deserters
but move in a common rhythm
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums
but you know they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.

“To be of use” by Marge Piercy © 1973, 1982.

From *Circles on the Water*, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. and Middlemarsh, Inc., 1982.

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

Interpretive Questions

- What does the narrator of Piercy's poem mean in the last lines, when she says, "The pitcher cries for water to carry / and a person for work that is real?"
- What is "real" work, to Piercy?

Reflective Questions

- Have you ever clearly known what the world, or part of the world, needed from you?
- American writer Frederick Buechner observed, "The place God calls you to is where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet," (Wishful Thinking, 1973). What deep hunger do you sense in the world, and how does it relate to your own passions and gifts?

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

PERSPECTIVES FROM JEWISH TRADITION

Below is a Hasidic story that may deepen our understanding of what the world needs from each of us.

The following is a Hasidic tale about Rabbi Meshulam Zusya of Annopol, in Poland (1718-1800). As the story goes, one day he did not arrive to the study house as usual, so his students went to his home to see what had happened.

The students entered Rabbi Zusya's house. In the far corner of the room they saw the old rabbi lying huddled in bed, too ill to get up and greet them. "Rabbi Zusya!" his students cried. "What has happened? How can we help you?"

"There is nothing you can do," answered Zusya. "I'm dying and I am very frightened."

"Why are you afraid?" the youngest student asked. "Didn't you teach us that all living things die?"

"Of course, of course, every living thing must die some day," said the Rabbi. The young student tried to comfort Rabbi Zusya saying, "Then why are you afraid? You have led such a good life. You have believed in God with a faith as strong as Abraham's. and you have followed the commandments as carefully as Moses."

"Thank you. But this is not why I am afraid," explained the rabbi. "For if God should ask me why I did not act like Abraham, I can say that I was not Abraham. And if God asks me why I did not act like Moses, I can also say that I was not Moses." Then the rabbi said, "But if God should ask me to account for the times when I did not act like Zusya, what shall I say then?"

Discussion Questions:

- Why is Rabbi Zusya afraid?
- What does it mean to “act like Zusya”?
- What does Zusya think the world—or God—requires of him? Does he think of those as the same thing, or different things? Do you?

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.



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