

SHABBAT

SUGGESTED PROGRAMS:

1. Chicken Soup for the “Sole”: A shoes and socks drive in the winter months.
2. Shabbat Under the Stars: Judaism and the Environment (Hillels of Philadelphia – Hillel’s Program Exchange)
3. Monthly Theme Shabbat – Each month choose a social justice issue to explore, invite a speaker for an oneg Shabbat and facilitate a discussion
4. A Teach-In on Labor → CASE It!



At the root of the word *Shabbat* are three letters: shin, bet, and tav. Together, these letters mean ‘to end’ or ‘to cease.’ Shabbat commemorates the way in which God created the world in six days and ceased working on the seventh. Likewise, on this day of rest, we are encouraged to make a break with our usual activities of the week. According to Exodus 20:9-10, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God: you shall not do any work.” Shabbat encourages us to think about what it means to work or not to work; in the absence of work, we gain an intense appreciation of rest. Do all those who work have an opportunity to rest? Is everyone receiving the blessing of having a Shabbat?

Some Words on Work

This Shabbat take a break from your regular workweek and make labor issues the focal point of discussion around your Shabbath table. Organize a day-long Shabbat teach-in on the connection between Judaism and labor movements.

- Begin by exploring the role of wealth, labor, and the fair treatment of workers in the Torah and Jewish literature. Invite a rabbi or Jewish Studies professor to discuss the history of “Jewish” professions and how Jews were systematically prohibited from most occupations during the Middle Ages.
- Invite a literature professor to discuss the many poignant descriptions of Jewish working people, from Shakespeare’s Shylock the moneylender, to Sholom Aleichem’s Tevya, to Arthur Miller’s Willy Loman, to the work of David Mamet.
- Invite Jewish senior citizens to discuss working conditions in their childhood, or during the lifetimes of their parents. What were “Jewish” professions then?
- Brainstorm different roles Jews have played in labor movements from their creation until today. Is promoting fair labor practices an inherently Jewish value?
- Bring in labor leaders, businesspeople, and academics to discuss how fair labor practices have been integrated into America law and business. Are labor unions still needed? Is American law biased against organizing unions and collective bargaining? What’s the difference between minimum wage and a living wage? Can and should American labor practices be extended globally?
- Address labor issues on campus. Can all workers – graduate students, custodians, cafeteria workers, groundskeepers – survive on their wages and benefits in your community? Is some work contracted out to avoid paying a living wage? To what extent does your school hire unionized employees and purchase union-made goods? Is child labor used in the manufacture of you school’s logo apparel?
- Come up with an Action Plan for Hillel’s involvement in advocating for labor rights on campus or in the surrounding community.

Issue: Labor

CASE It: A Teach-In On Labor

As you celebrate your day of rest, reflect on those who do not have the opportunity of fair labor practices. Learn about the issues in your communities and the change the ways of your campus and city.

Community Partners:

- National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice (www.nicwj.org)
- Jewish Labor Council
- National Labor Committee Student Action
- Business schools

Advocacy/Awareness:

- Invite local union members to attend a Shabbat dinner followed by a discussion of their lives and the importance of unions.
- In the d'var Torah for the week, have the students or Hillel staff tie in the issues of labor with the parsha.
- As students enter the building on Friday night, have material on unions as well as the living wage campaign.

Service:

- We learn that Shabbat is the day of rest; therefore, try not work on the Sabbath day. Use Shabbat to restore and inspire yourself for the service projects of the coming week.

Educate:

- Did you know?
 - ◆ In the Bible, the earth also receives a day of rest. According to Leviticus 25:4, “But in the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath of the Lord: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard.” The land sabbatical became the model for the idea of taking an academic sabbatical every seven years.
- Quotable Quotes:
 - ◆ Which is the road to happiness? Travel it, and find rest for your souls. — Jeremiah 6:16
→ *Do you take time to rest for your soul?*
 - ◆ Equality is the mother of Justice, queen of all virtues. —Philo (c.20 BCE-c. 40 CE, Jewish philosopher from Alexandria), *Noah's Work as a Planter*

→ *What connections can you see between equality and justice? Can you investigate the Jewish commitment to promoting equality in labor at the turn of the twentieth century?*

- ◆ Work, that you may have the right to live. Work, that you may perfect your body and soul. Work, that you may share in the common perfection. -A. Lieberman (c.1842-1880, Russian socialist)
→ *Does work perfect your body and soul? How many hours do you work a week?*
- ◆ The wealth of a country is its working people. –Theodor Herzl (1860-1904, founder of modern Zionism), *Altneuland*
→ *Does your country value its working people? Does your campus invest in its workers?*

- Try This:

- ◆ Examine Psalm 126 (the psalm before Birkat Hamazon, the blessing after the meal). See how many references to labor the psalm contains. Why would this psalm be appropriate to say on Shabbat and festivals when work itself is forbidden?

Psalm 126

A song of ascents: When the Lord restores the return to Zion, we will be like dreamers. Our mouths will be filled with laughter, our tongues, with songs of joy. Then shall they say among the nations, “The Lord has done great things for them!” The Lord will do great things for us and we shall rejoice. Restore our return O Lord, like streams in the Negev. They who sow in tears shall reap in joy. Though he goes along weeping, carrying the seed-bag, he shall come back with songs of joy, carrying his sheaves.

Resources:

Living Wage Campaign: www.livingwagecampaign.org

Student Labor Action Project: www.jwj.org/AboutJWJ/SLAP.htm