HANUKKAH: WHEN DO YOU TAKE A STAND?

CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR FACILITATORS

Note for Facilitators: This document is designed to be the centering point for a group conversation. You should plan for the conversation to last between 60 and 90 minutes, depending on group size. Most parts are meant to be read by members of the group, so you should plan to ask participants to take turns reading sections. Alternatively, you can choose the first reader of a section, and then that reader chooses the next reader. Additional guidelines and suggestions for planning and leading a successful conversation can be found at the end of this guide.
**WELCOME**

Before we begin, we need to agree on a few things:

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- Our aim is to create a space where we can understand others and understand ourselves, not to give advice or to argue ideas of objective truth. With that in mind, in this conversation we will agree to speak in the first-person, about our own truth.
- We will assume good faith in one another.
- We will open ourselves to listen and learn from one another.
- We won’t rush to fill the silence.

Can we all agree to these things? If you feel, for whatever reason, that you cannot agree to these things, then please take this opportunity to exit. By staying in the circle, we all signify our intention to abide by these commitments.

**ASK & SHARE**

Let’s begin by looking at some images. Below are a bunch of pictures. Each one can prompt you to think about taking a stand:

- What does each picture tell you about taking a stand?
- Which images speak to you?
- Which images challenge you?

Take a few moments to look at the pictures, and then we’ll share our responses. Use the empty space to write notes to yourself.

**Note for Facilitators:** Give people a moment to organize their thoughts before you start asking for volunteers.

It may be helpful to model this introduction for participants, so consider introducing yourself first. Be sure everyone states their name. You don’t need to go in order around a circle. Allow people to introduce themselves when the spirit moves them.
In the 2nd Century, B.C.E., the land of Judea was under the rule of the Seleucid Empire. The king Antiochus III allowed the Jews who lived there to maintain the customs of their ancestors. When his son, Antiochus IV, came into power, however, he outlawed practice of the Jewish religion and ordered the Jews to worship Greek gods. Some Jews went along with this edict, while others refused. In 168 B.C.E., his soldiers came to Jerusalem, massacred thousands of people, and looted and desecrated the Temple—the most sacred space in Judaism—by erecting an altar to Zeus and sacrificing pigs within its holy walls. A complex war erupted, involving the rebel Jews warring both the Seleucid army and, to some degree, the Hellenizing Jews. The Maccabees—the small, bandit guerilla army of traditionalists—were, against all odds, victorious, and the Temple was reclaimed and its altar rededicated. The festival of Hanukah was instituted to celebrate this rededication.

According to a story found in the Talmud (the principal body of Jewish civil and ritual law and legend, which dates to about 500 CE), the menorah in the Temple required a certain amount of ritually pure olive oil in order to burn. Although, as the Talmudic story goes, there was only one day’s worth of oil left in the Temple, it burned for eight days, long enough to prepare a fresh supply.

The author and playwright S. Bear Bergman writes about Hanukah and the holiday of Transgender Day of Remembrance—which takes place every year on November 20th—in the following essay, “Gathering Light out of Darkness,” from his book Blood, Marriage, Wine and Glitter.

Transgender Day of Remembrance [is] the day we gather to remember our dead – those trans people, mostly transwomen, mostly women of colour – who have been murdered in the previous year for the grave and terrible crime of being transsexual, or transgender. … The first vigil came two weeks after Rita Hester was murdered in Boston. Hundreds of people poured into the streets in outrage when the details were released – she had been stabbed more than twenty times, and left for dead. A robbery gone bad. Probably, the police said, the work of a john. Rita never having been a sex worker made as much difference to their conclusions as the fact that anything she was known to have to steal was still in her apartment, covered in her blood.

Her people lit candles and they marched. They walked down the Allston, Massachusetts street from the bar where she was last seen alive to her apartment and they stood in a bright cluster under what had been her window, first chanting and then singing. Their display was unmistakable, their sorrow as huge as their resistance – here we are, they chanted, here we are. Here we are, Rita, come to soothe your restless ghost and pray you home to wherever your G-d is, so you can sit at her right hand and rest yourself a while. Here we are, you attackers, you cowards, come now and bring your knives, and let us just see whether you can stand the heat of all these flames. Let us see whether you could even extinguish one of them. Here we are, Boston Police, and there are more of us where this came from, and we are not going to stop calling and writing and pestering you for answers and behaving as though we are entitled to them, which we are.
Every year there are more candles to light as the annual count grows. I want to love any increase of brightness, but lighting a candle for every murdered transperson in the past year is not one of those times. I wish the number of flames would dwindle. I am in that moment of the House of Shamai, he who argued that Chanukah candles should start at eight and dwindle down to one. Hillel’s method, the increase of light, was adopted instead, and it seems correct to me even when I separate it from “tradition,” also known as “the way we’ve always done it in my family ever since we started having the holiday at our house instead of Bubbe Rochel’s.” Light should increase in times of joy, in times of sorrow, light should increase. I do not think these are contradictory positions. In the story of Chanukah, we’re brought over and over again to the understanding that the miracle of this jar of oil is only on the surface the fact that it burned longer than anyone expected that much oil to burn. That’s kind of cool, but we don’t make it a holiday. What happened in the Temple 2200 years ago is that the hearts of Jews – miserable in defeat, locked away from their source of religious observance – were in darkness. They were in despair. And when the light came back on, when they saw the international, wordless, perfect symbol of We Are Here, they rejoiced in it.

I hope that someday transpeople too have the moment to call light out of darkness, that we too can celebrate our resistance with friends and family. I would enjoy it very much. But until then, we are going to have resist, and we are going to have to get better and smarter and more cohesive and more compassionate and more resolute in our resistance. That is the light that we can call out of this darkness. We are the light that we can call out of this darkness.

And make no mistake, it will require all the qualities of a candle. It will require us to make ourselves visible, eyecatching even, when we might rather hide, as long as we think we can stay safe we will have to do it, and we will have to pay attention to how “safety” works and who gets it and why. We will need the candle’s brightness, especially when things are dark – metaphorically dark, I mean, when the next report of the next murder is announced we will have to let go of muttering “such a shame” and instead celebrate what would have been her birthday with a giant cake that has her right damn name on it and deliver slices to the police station and the newspaper. We may indeed need to burn, to allow ourselves to be a little consumed by our resistance, to give something of ourselves to the fight and assume that it may not be returned, that what we sacrifice will become worthwhile in the fullness of time but is unlikely indeed to be returned to us personally. On the other hand, resistance fighters are well-known to be smarter and sneakier and more nimble and better-looking than the soldiers of armies; resistance values the trickster above the blunt follower of orders.

Look for it in the wintertime, if you want to find The Light Of The Season – the real light, not the Hallmark one. Look for the location of resistance. Look for the darkness in which you can be a spark. Look for the opportunity to be bright, to light someone else’s way, to warm their hands, to shuttle them safely through the dark. Look for the crack you can fill or the shadow you can dispel by bringing a little bit of the light of resistance, carefully and precisely, to just the place where it is needed. Look for the place of being bright, of being bright and present outside your own house, or in the window, on the opposite side to the mezuzah, letting anyone who passes know.

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

**Interpretive Questions**
- What are the various responses to Antiochus IV's edicts? What do you think informs these responses?
- In what ways did those who began Trans Day of Remembrance take a stand?
- In what ways are the approaches Jews of the historical Hanukah story similar to or different from those of the various people in Bergman's piece?

**Reflective Questions**
- Where do you see yourself in these stories—in Bergman's piece, and/or in the historical story of Hanukah?
- What are the risks of taking a stand? The benefits?
- How do you decide when to take a stand, and when not to?
- Do your decisions to act or not reflect your ideals? Why or why not?

Use the space below to write some notes to yourself.

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**Note for Facilitators:** This is the heart of the conversation. Give people several minutes to prepare their thoughts. Then invite people to divide into pairs or triads and share their responses. Give them a good amount of time for this—10-20 minutes. It may be longer, depending on how much momentum they develop. Then reconvene in the large group and ask people to share from their small-group conversations.

A few tips on facilitation:

- The large-group debrief should take another 20-30 minutes.
- Begin by asking for a volunteer to share an insight from their conversation. You might begin by asking, “What came up?”
- When each person is done, thank them for their comment.
- Don’t feel a need to rush or to fill silences.
- If someone begins to monopolize the time, you might say, “I want to be sure that everyone has a chance to speak, so let’s try to make room for another person.”

For other ideas on facilitation, please refer to the AIR-IT guide at the end of this document. When you sense that the group has finished sharing its responses to these questions, invite people to share any further insights or reflections from the conversation, before moving to the conclusion.
Taking a stand for something you believe in can be frightening, risky, and challenging for a myriad of different reasons. And yet, as Rav Kook, the first chief rabbi of Israel, wrote, “Everyone must know that within them burns a candle—and that no one's candle is identical with the candle of another, and that there is no human being without a candle. One is obligated to work hard to reveal the light of one's candle in the public realm for the benefit of the many. One needs to ignite one's candle and make of it a great torch to enlighten the whole world.”

As we close our conversation today, here is one final question to consider. Use the space below to reflect on it, and then we’ll share our answers: What is one thing you can do to take a stand for something you believe in?

Feel free to use the space below to write some notes to yourself.

**Note for Facilitators:** Give people a minute to reflect on the question. Then ask anyone who wants to share to do so. When you sense that the group has finished sharing its response to this question, invite people to share any further insights or reflections from the conversation, before moving to the conclusion.
AIR-IT: A GUIDE TO FACILITATING CONVERSATION

A: ASK BIG QUESTIONS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BIG QUESTION</th>
<th>HARD QUESTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anyone can answer it. Example: “For whom are we responsible?”</td>
<td>Experts will answer it best. Example: “What’s the best economic policy for the United States?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focuses on wisdom and experience. Example: “What’s the best advice you’ve ever received?”</td>
<td>Focuses on intelligence and skill. Example: “Are human beings naturally good or evil?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses plain language.</td>
<td>Uses technical language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directed at a subject (me, you, us). Example: “What could we sacrifice to change the world?”</td>
<td>Directed at an object (it). Example: “Is it better to cut spending or raise taxes to balance the federal budget?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opens up space and invites people in as participants.</td>
<td>Closes space and leads people to feel like spectators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leads to sharing personal stories.</td>
<td>Leads to debates about truth claims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasizes a both/and approach.</td>
<td>Emphasizes an either/or approach.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I: INVITE PERSONAL STORIES.
Big questions lead to sharing personal stories. The facilitator acts to support this by:

- Creating the space (physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual) of trust in which these stories can be shared and honored.
- Weaving: Summarize, reflect back, and keep the stories and observations tethered to the big question. This helps the group to maintain integrity and not feel that it is fragmenting or fraying.

R: REALLY LISTEN.
Ask Big Questions conversations are marked by real listening. The facilitator’s reflecting back and weaving is crucial to this. Participants should be able to answer questions like: “What did so-and-so say? What do you think they meant when they said it? What did it evoke in you?”
IT: USE INTERPRETIVE THINGS.

Ask Big Questions conversations often use a text, poem, artwork, song, natural object or other “interpretive thing” to help center the conversation and create a common point of access for all participants.

QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN PREPARING FOR A DISCUSSION

Where?

- Does the place where you’re having the conversation create a space in which people can feel safe?
- Is it a closed space? Does it have a door you can close to ensure privacy and confidentiality when needed?
- What can you do to make the space visually appealing or lovely? Does it have windows to let in light? Do you want to play some music?
- Can everyone sit comfortably in a circle?

When?

- Are you scheduling the conversation at a time when everyone can be physically awake and present?
- Will people be hungry? Will you provide food or drink?
- Will they be tired or sleepy after a meal?
- How long will the conversation be?
- How will you break up the time if necessary?

Who and How?

- How many people will participate? Will there be enough to sustain diverse conversation? Will there be too many to keep the conversation centered?
- How will you get the word out and then remind people?
- Do you need to make any special arrangements for people with special needs (i.e. physical disabilities)?
- Greetings – Who will welcome people to the conversation and how will they do it?
- How will you have everyone introduce themselves? (Big Questions are great for introductions!)
- How will you close the conversation?
- How will you follow up with people?
- How will you capture their contact information?

What About You?

- What will you do to get yourself ready?
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