

FOR WHOM ARE WE RESPONSIBLE?

CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR FACILITATORS

ASK **BIG**
QUESTIONS

Hillel
International

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.

Note: This guide is part of Hillel's initiative to promote deeper conversations about disability inclusion. We hope that it prompts some powerful thoughts and reflections about how we can be more open and welcoming as individuals and as a community.

WELCOME

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

- In order for our conversation to be as rich as it can be, we need everyone to feel safe to really share and really listen.
- Therefore, we agree not to share others' comments outside of this space.
- 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

When we say the word "responsible," what comes to mind? A person? A relative? A character? Use the space below to help you think about it, and we'll share a few responses.

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.

LEARN

The dictionary defines “responsible” as “having control or authority,” or “being accountable for one’s actions and decisions.” To be responsible for someone in this sense seems to mean using our power in good faith: not abusing it, and not failing to use it when called upon to do so, as in the Biblical verse, “Do not stand idly by while your neighbor’s blood is shed” (Leviticus 19:16).

A legal dictionary broadens the definition of ‘responsible’ to include, “trustworthiness, integrity.” In this sense, to be responsible is to be faithful—to our relationships with others, and to our own history and calling, as in the verse: “Do not oppress the stranger; you know the life of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 23:9).

Do these definitions resonate with you?

Below is a story written by Herbert Friedman, an American rabbi who died in 2008. Friedman grew up during the Great Depression. His family was poor. One night, his mother attended a meeting of her synagogue sisterhood, where a representative of the U.S. National Refugee Service made an urgent plea for Jewish families to “take into their homes German-Jewish children whose parents were willing to let them emigrate to the United States, not knowing if they would ever see those children again.” Here is the rest of the story:

Of the more than 100 women assembled, all mothers, no more than a dozen raised their hand. My mother stood and announced that she would take three children. God has been good to her, she said, giving her three healthy sons; this was her opportunity to repay. She added without embarrassment that her family was living in a small apartment, with only two bedrooms, because their house had been foreclosed by the bank during the Depression. Hence, she could take only boys, who could sleep mixed in with her sons.

Mother came home with the affidavit forms, placed them under my father's nose at the kitchen table, and told him of her commitment. Signing the forms, as far as she was concerned, was only a formality. He saw it differently, because of the legal obligations his signature would impose... He could not envision for an instant how they could handle the additional expense of food, clothing, school, etc., for three more persons.

My mother answered him quietly, but with great passion. Even though we were poor, how could we refuse to save Jewish lives if we were given the chance to do so? She was ashamed of the other sisterhood members. All of them should have volunteered, and she would not hesitate to tell them so at the next meeting. "If we have enough food for five of us," she asked, "why can't we simply make it enough for eight?" If I must wash shirts for six boys instead of three, what's the difference?...

The parental argument raged all night—the only time I remember my parents raising their voices in anger and disagreement. She won. In the morning, my father signed the affidavits, and she proudly took them back to the synagogue.

As I mulled over the matter, I decided that my mother's fight with my father symbolized the whole problem, and the only conclusion was therefore to act according to moral Jewish values, without permitting rationalization, delay, or any other diluting factor. "When history knocks, you answer."

~ Quoted in Noam Zion and Barbara Specter, *A Different Light* (2000), pp. 79-80

מתוך קהל של כמאה נשים שהתאספו, כולן אמהות, לא יותר מתריסר הרימו ידיהן. אמי עמדה והכריזה שהיא תיקח שלושה ילדים. אלוהים היטיב עמה, כך אמרה, כשנתן לה שלושה בנים בריאים; זו הייתה ההזדמנות שלה להזריר טובה. ללא בושא היא הוסיפה שמשפחתה חיה בדירה קתנה, עם שני חדרי שינה בלבד, בגלל שהבנק עיכל את ביתם במהלך השפל הכלכלי. לכן, היא יכולה לקחת רק בנים, שיוכלו לישון יחד עם בניה באותה המיטה

אמא חזרה הביתה עם תצהירים, הניחה אותם מתחת לאפו של אבי על שולחן המטבח, וסיפרה לו על התחייבותה. החתימה על הטפסים, ככל שהדבר היה תלוי בה, היה עניין פורמאלי לחלוטין. אך אבי ראה את העניין באור שונה, בגלל ההתחייבויות החוקיות שתגרום חתימתו... הוא לא הצליח לדמיין, אפילו לא לרגע, איך יוכלו לעמוד בהוצאות האוכל, הביגוד, החינוך וכן הלאה, שיתווספו בעקבות הצטרפותם של שלושה ילדים נוספים

אמי ענתה לו בשקט, אך בלהט רב. למרות עוניו, איך נוכל לסרב להציל נפשית יהודיות אם ניתנת לנו האפשרות לכך? היא התביישה בנשים האחרות בארגון. כולן היו צריכות להתנדב, והיא לא תהסס לומר להם זאת בפגישה הבאה. יאם יש מספיק אוכל לחמשתנוי שאלה, ימדוע שלא יספיק גם לשמונה? אם חייבת אני לרחוץ את חולצותיהם של שישה נערים במקום שלושה, מה ההבדל?"

היזכור בין הוריי נמשך לאורכו של הלילה - הפעם היחידה הזכורה לי בה שמעתי את הוריי מרימים את קולם בכעס ובחוסר הסכמה. היא ניצחה. בבוקר, אבי חתם על ההצהרות, ואמי צעדה, גאה, לבית הכנסת

כשההרתי באותם המאורעות, החלטתי שהריב בין הוריי סימל את הבעיה כולה. המסקנה היחידה הייתה שיש לנהוג לפי ערכי המוסר היהודי, בלי להתעכב בשל סיבות שכלתניות-רציונאליות או אחרות. יכשההיסטוריה דופקת בדלת, ענה לה."

מצוטט מספרם של נעם ציון וברברה ספקטר "אור אחר" -

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

Interpretive Questions

- How do the characters in this story—the mother, the father, the son, the women who didn't raise their hands—understand who they are responsible for?
- How do they act on their sense of responsibility?
- Are there people they feel more responsible for than others? How do they prioritize?
- How does Rabbi Friedman's mother's sense that "God has been good to her" impact her sense of responsibility?

Reflective Questions

- If you were in the same situation, would you do the same?
- What factors would influence your decision?
- How do you decide for whom you are responsible?

Use the space below to write some notes to yourself.

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.

DO

The Talmud offers us a memorable line: kol Yisrael areivim zeh bazeh, All Israel are bound up with, responsible for, one another. The sense of solidarity among Jews, across time and space, is one of the most remarkable elements of Jewish life. Being in Israel, meeting Jews from around the world, comparing our situations in life, where some of us are in the Israeli army and others are in college—these experiences all prompt us to ask, again and again, who are we responsible for? And how do we act out that responsibility?

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 thing you want to change based on this conversation?
- What's one obstacle to you making that change, and how can you overcome it? Who might you need help from in order to make this change?

Note for Facilitators: Give people a minute to reflect on the questions. 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.

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

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?

This conversation is powered by Ask Big Questions®, which was developed, launched, and scaled by Hillel International, and is a registered trademark of Hillel International.



Hillel International is the largest Jewish student organization in the world, building connections with emerging adults at more than 550 colleges and universities, and inspiring them to direct their own path. During their formative college years, students are challenged to explore, experience, and create vibrant Jewish lives.

©2017 Hillel International. All rights reserved. Ask Big Questions® is a registered trademark of Hillel International.

FOR WHOM ARE WE RESPONSIBLE?

CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR PARTICIPANTS

ASK **BIG**
QUESTIONS

Hillel
International

WELCOME

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

- In order for our conversation to be as rich as it can be, we need everyone to feel safe to really share and really listen.
- Therefore, we agree not to share others' comments outside of this space.
- 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

When we say the word “responsible,” what comes to mind? A person? A relative? A character? Use the space below to help you think about it, and we’ll share a few responses.

LEARN

The dictionary defines “responsible” as “having control or authority,” or “being accountable for one’s actions and decisions.” To be responsible for someone in this sense seems to mean using our power in good faith: not abusing it, and not failing to use it when called upon to do so, as in the Biblical verse, “Do not stand idly by while your neighbor’s blood is shed” (Leviticus 19:16).

A legal dictionary broadens the definition of ‘responsible’ to include, “trustworthiness, integrity.” In this sense, to be responsible is to be faithful—to our relationships with others, and to our own history and calling, as in the verse: “Do not oppress the stranger; you know the life of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 23:9).

Do these definitions resonate with you?

Below is a story written by Herbert Friedman, an American rabbi who died in 2008. Friedman grew up during the Great Depression. His family was poor. One night, his mother attended a meeting of her synagogue sisterhood, where a representative of the U.S. National Refugee Service made an urgent plea for Jewish families to “take into their homes German-Jewish children whose parents were willing to let them emigrate to the United States, not knowing if they would ever see those children again.” Here is the rest of the story:

Of the more than 100 women assembled, all mothers, no more than a dozen raised their hand. My mother stood and announced that she would take three children. God has been good to her, she said, giving her three healthy sons; this was her opportunity to repay. She added without embarrassment that her family was living in a small apartment, with only two bedrooms, because their house had been foreclosed by the bank during the Depression. Hence, she could take only boys, who could sleep mixed in with her sons.

Mother came home with the affidavit forms, placed them under my father's nose at the kitchen table, and told him of her commitment. Signing the forms, as far as she was concerned, was only a formality. He saw it differently, because of the legal obligations his signature would impose... He could not envision for an instant how they could handle the additional expense of food, clothing, school, etc., for three more persons.

My mother answered him quietly, but with great passion. Even though we were poor, how could we refuse to save Jewish lives if we were given the chance to do so? She was ashamed of the other sisterhood members. All of them should have volunteered, and she would not hesitate to tell them so at the next meeting. "If we have enough food for five of us," she asked, "why can't we simply make it enough for eight?" If I must wash shirts for six boys instead of three, what's the difference?..."

The parental argument raged all night—the only time I remember my parents raising their voices in anger and disagreement. She won. In the morning, my father signed the affidavits, and she proudly took them back to the synagogue.

As I mulled over the matter, I decided that my mother's fight with my father symbolized the whole problem, and the only conclusion was therefore to act according to moral Jewish values, without permitting rationalization, delay, or any other diluting factor. "When history knocks, you answer."

~ Quoted in Noam Zion and Barbara Specter, *A Different Light* (2000), pp. 79-80

מתוך קהל של כמאה נשים שהתאספו, כולן אמהות, לא יותר מתריסר הרימו ידיהן. אמי עמדה והכריזה שהיא תיקח שלושה ילדים. אלוהים היטיב עמה, כך אמרה, כשנתן לה שלושה בנים בריאים; זו הייתה ההזדמנות שלה להזדיר טובה. ללא בושא היא הוסיפה שמשפחתה חיה בדירה קתנה, עם שני חדרי שינה בלבד, בגלל שהבנק עיכל את ביתם במהלך השפל הכלכלי. לכן, היא יכולה לקחת רק בנים, שיוכלו לישון יחד עם בניה באותה המיטה

אמא חזרה הביתה עם תצהירים, הניחה אותם מתחת לאפו של אבי על שולחן המטבח, וסיפרה לו על התחייבותה. החתימה על הטפסים, ככל שהדבר היה תלוי בה, היה עניין פורמאלי לחלוטין. אך אבי ראה את העניין באור שונה, בגלל ההתחייבויות החוקיות שתגרום חתימתו... הוא לא הצליח לדמיין, אפילו לא לרגע, איך יוכלו לעמוד בהוצאות האוכל, הביגוד, החינוך וכן הלאה, שיתווספו בעקבות הצטרפותם של שלושה ילדים נוספים

אמי ענתה לו בשקט, אך בלהט רב. למרות עונינו, איך נוכל לסרב להציל נפשית יהודיות אם ניתנת לנו האפשרות לכך? היא התביישה בנשים האחרות בארגון. כולן היו צריכות להתנדב, והיא לא תהסס לומר להם זאת בפגישה הבאה. "אם יש מספיק אוכל לחמשתנו"י שאלה, "ימדוע שלא יספיק גם לשמונה? אם חייבת אני לרחוץ את חולצותיהם של שישה נערים במקום שלושה, מה ההבדל?"

היזכור בין הוריי נמשך לאורכו של הלילה - הפעם היחידה הזכורה לי בה שמעתי את הוריי מרימים את קולם בכעס ובחוסר הסכמה. היא ניצחה. בבוקר, אבי חתם על ההצהרות, ואמי צעדה, גאה, לבית הכנסת

כשההרתי באותם המאורעות, החלטתי שהריב בין הוריי סימל את הבעיה כולה. המסקנה היחידה הייתה שיש לנהוג לפי ערכי המוסר היהודי, בלי להתעכב בשל סיבות שכלתניות-רציונאליות או אחרות. יכשההיסטוריה דופקת בדלת, ענה לה."

מצוטט מספרם של נעם ציון וברברה ספקטר "אור אחר" -

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

Interpretive Questions

- What does Sacks mean when he writes that a nation or community “is created through the act of creation itself?”
- What does he mean when he says that “society is the home we build together?”
- How would you paraphrase Sacks’s phrase “orchestrated diversity?” What does he mean?

Reflective Questions

- Does Sacks’s description of community-building resonate with you? Have you ever had an experience like the one he describes?
- Have you ever felt embedded in a community? Left out of a community? What were those experiences like?
- What does it take to become a member of a community?
- Do you have to personally like, or feel connected to, everyone in your community?
- How do you know who is in your community?

Use the space below to write some notes to yourself.

DO

The Talmud (Taanit 11a) teaches, “One who accepts affliction with the community will live to see the consolation of the community.” That is, when we throw our lot with others, and allow what happens within our community to impact us, we reap the reward of connection and caring during the times when we might need it most.

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 thing you want to change based on this conversation?
- What’s one obstacle to you making that change, and how can you overcome it? Who might you need help from in order to make this change?

This conversation is powered by Ask Big Questions®, which was developed, launched, and scaled by Hillel International, and is a registered trademark of Hillel International.



Hillel International is the largest Jewish student organization in the world, building connections with emerging adults at more than 550 colleges and universities, and inspiring them to direct their own path. During their formative college years, students are challenged to explore, experience, and create vibrant Jewish lives.

©2017 Hillel International. All rights reserved. Ask Big Questions® is a registered trademark of Hillel International.

ASKBIGQUESTIONS.ORG
UNDERSTAND OTHERS. UNDERSTAND YOURSELF.