

HOW DO WE CONNECT?

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

Let's take a moment to introduce ourselves. Please tell us your name and where you call home. And please also tell us about a time you connected deeply with someone else in a way that surprised you.

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

From one perspective, it's impossible to ever really know someone else. No matter how profoundly we can connect, we'll never have full access to another person's memories, assumptions, experiences, or ways of thinking. Add in our attempts to come together with someone of a different culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, class status, gender, ability level, or any one of a myriad of other things, and there are even more layers of perspective and assumption to untangle.

But from another point of view, we can know one another. We can use the power of language and shared experience to understand who the other in front of us really is. We can find the places of illumination in our shared humanity. When we work to understand one another, we forge the tools to create caring communities and build a world of kindness and love.

The trio of stories below are from the Talmud, the 3,000-page collection of Jewish law and lore dating from the first several centuries of the common era in the ancient near east. These stories are about how humans connect—and when, and why, we don't.

A note: These stories appear in the context of illness and healing, not disability per se. For some in the disability community, the language of "healing" is fraught; as disability rights activist Eli Clare writes, focusing on healing "ignores the reality that many of us aren't looking for cures but for civil rights." We offer these stories, nonetheless, as a powerful lens for thinking about hearing, understanding and connection. Please read them out loud.

Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba fell ill and Rabbi Yochanan went in to visit him. He said to him: "Are your sufferings welcome to you?" (That is, are you enjoying being sick?) He replied: "Neither they nor their reward." (That is, I don't want to be sick, and I'd even pass on any future spiritual reward that I might possibly get for being sick, if I could get better.) He said to him: "Give me your hand." He gave him his hand and he raised him.

Rabbi Yochanan once fell ill and Rabbi Hanina went in to visit him. He said to him: "Are your sufferings welcome to you?" He replied: "Neither they nor their reward." He said to him: "Give me your hand." He gave him his hand and he raised him. Why couldn't Rabbi Yochanan raise himself? They replied: The prisoner cannot free himself from jail.

Rabbi Eleazar fell ill and Rabbi Yochanan went in to visit him... Thereupon he noticed that Rabbi Eleazar was weeping, and he said to him: "Why do you weep? Is it because you did not study enough Torah? Surely we have learned: The one who [studies] much and the one who [studies] little receive the same transcendent reward, as long as their heart was directed towards heaven [when they studied]. Is it because you did not have a lot of material comfort? Not everybody has the privilege to enjoy two tables (that is, a rich life). Is it perhaps because of [the lack of] children? This is the bone of my tenth son [who has died!]" (That is, we all have hardship!) He replied to him: "I am weeping on account of this beauty that is going to pass into dust." He said to him: "For this you certainly have a reason to weep!" And they wept together. Eventually he said to him: "Are your sufferings welcome to you?" He replied: "Neither they nor their reward." He said to him: "Give me your hand." And he gave him his hand and he raised him.

(Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Brachot, 5b)

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

Interpretive Questions

- What does it mean when the stories say, “Give me your hand, and he gave him his hand, and he raised him”?
- Why can't Rabbi Yochanan heal himself?
- What is Rabbi Yochanan doing that's not working in the last story? What assumptions does he make about Rabbi Eleazar?
- Why is Rabbi Eleazar crying?
- What is Rabbi Yochanan's response when he finally understands why?
- What happens when they weep together?

Reflective Questions

- Have you ever made the same mistake that Rabbi Yochanan did in the third story? What happened?
- Have you ever been able to really listen to someone else's experience with empathy? To weep, or celebrate together with them? What happened?
- When was a time when someone made the time to understand you? What made it possible? What were some impediments?
- Is it easier or more difficult to connect deeply with people whose experiences are very different from your own?
- How could we create Jewish communities in which people are able to connect deeply with one another? In which people feel connected to the community as a whole?

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

It’s not easy to see, to really see another person. And it’s important to enter into the attempt with humility about the possibilities and limitations of really understanding another person’s feelings and perspective. But engaging in the sometimes difficult work of connecting with someone else—even, maybe especially, someone different from ourselves in significant ways—can be transformational. It can change how understand the world, and it can expand our capacity for creating community.

As we close this conversation today, please consider a few more questions:

- What did you learn today?
- How did this conversation impact your thinking around connection and inclusion in your Jewish community?
- What is one change that you want to make based on this conversation?
- What’s one obstacle that might get in the way of you making that change? How can you overcome that obstacle? Who can help you get there?

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.

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. It is part of a series of conversations supported by the Ruderman Family Foundation, which believes that inclusion and understanding of all people is essential to a fair and flourishing community.



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.

HOW DO WE CONNECT?

CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR PARTICIPANTS

ASK **BIG**
QUESTIONS

Hillel
International

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

Let's take a moment to introduce ourselves. Please tell us your name and where you call home. And please also tell us about a time you connected deeply with someone else in a way that surprised you.

LEARN

From one perspective, it's impossible to ever really know someone else. No matter how profoundly we can connect, we'll never have full access to another person's memories, assumptions, experiences, or ways of thinking. Add in our attempts to come together with someone of a different culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, class status, gender, ability level, or any one of a myriad of other things, and there are even more layers of perspective and assumption to untangle.

But from another point of view, we can know one another. We can use the power of language and shared experience to understand who the other in front of us really is. We can find the places of illumination in our shared humanity. When we work to understand one another, we forge the tools to create caring communities and build a world of kindness and love.

The trio of stories below are from the Talmud, the 3,000-page collection of Jewish law and lore dating from the first several centuries of the common era in the ancient near east. These stories are about how humans connect—and when, and why, we don't.

A note: These stories appear in the context of illness and healing, not disability per se. For some in the disability community, the language of "healing" is fraught; as disability rights activist Eli Clare writes, focusing on healing "ignores the reality that many of us aren't looking for cures but for civil rights." We offer these stories, nonetheless, as a powerful lens for thinking about hearing, understanding and connection. Please read them out loud.

Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba fell ill and Rabbi Yochanan went in to visit him. He said to him: "Are your sufferings welcome to you?" (That is, are you enjoying being sick?) He replied: "Neither they nor their reward." (That is, I don't want to be sick, and I'd even pass on any future spiritual reward that I might possibly get for being sick, if I could get better.) He said to him: "Give me your hand." He gave him his hand and he raised him.

Rabbi Yochanan once fell ill and Rabbi Hanina went in to visit him. He said to him: "Are your sufferings welcome to you?" He replied: "Neither they nor their reward." He said to him: "Give me your hand." He gave him his hand and he raised him. Why couldn't Rabbi Yochanan raise himself? They replied: The prisoner cannot free himself from jail.

Rabbi Eleazar fell ill and Rabbi Yochanan went in to visit him... Thereupon he noticed that Rabbi Eleazar was weeping, and he said to him: "Why do you weep? Is it because you did not study enough Torah? Surely we have learned: The one who [studies] much and the one who [studies] little receive the same transcendent reward, as long as their heart was directed towards heaven [when they studied]. Is it because you did not have a lot of material comfort? Not everybody has the privilege to enjoy two tables (that is, a rich life). Is it perhaps because of [the lack of] children? This is the bone of my tenth son [who has died!]" (That is, we all have hardship!) He replied to him: "I am weeping on account of this beauty that is going to pass into dust." He said to him: "For this you certainly have a reason to weep!" And they wept together. Eventually he said to him: "Are your sufferings welcome to you?" He replied: "Neither they nor their reward." He said to him: "Give me your hand." And he gave him his hand and he raised him.

(Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Brachot, 5b)

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

Interpretive Questions

- What does it mean when the stories say, “Give me your hand, and he gave him his hand, and he raised him”?
- Why can't Rabbi Yochanan heal himself?
- What is Rabbi Yochanan doing that's not working in the last story? What assumptions does he make about Rabbi Eleazar?
- Why is Rabbi Eleazar crying?
- What is Rabbi Yochanan's response when he finally understands why?
- What happens when they weep together?

Reflective Questions

- Have you ever made the same mistake that Rabbi Yochanan did in the third story? What happened?
- Have you ever been able to really listen to someone else's experience with empathy? To weep, or celebrate together with them? What happened?
- When was a time when someone made the time to understand you? What made it possible? What were some impediments?
- Is it easier or more difficult to connect deeply with people whose experiences are very different from your own?
- How could we create Jewish communities in which people are able to connect deeply with one another? In which people feel connected to the community as a whole?

Use the space below to write some notes to yourself.

DO

It's not easy to see, to really see another person. And it's important to enter into the attempt with humility about the possibilities and limitations of really understanding another person's feelings and perspective. But engaging in the sometimes difficult work of connecting with someone else—even, maybe especially, someone different from ourselves in significant ways—can be transformational. It can change how understand the world, and it can expand our capacity for creating community.

As we close this conversation today, please consider a few more questions:

- What did you learn today?
- How did this conversation impact your thinking around connection and inclusion in your Jewish community?
- What is one change that you want to make based on this conversation?
- What's one obstacle that might get in the way of you making that change? How can you overcome that obstacle?
Who can help you get there?



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. It is part of a series of conversations supported by the Ruderman Family Foundation, which believes that inclusion and understanding of all people is essential to a fair and flourishing community.



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.