

# WHAT DOES THE WORLD NEED FROM YOU?

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.

# 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

Welcome, and thank you for joining this conversation. Let's take a moment to introduce ourselves. To do so, please take a moment to think about the words "give" and "need." What is a moment in your own life that comes to mind when you hear these words? Use the space below to write some notes to yourself or to draw or picture (or just think). When you're ready, please share your name, where you come from, and what you thought of.

**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

We are here in response to the question, What does the world need from you? Discerning our answer to this question is a key piece of developing our sense of purpose. 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). When we find the world’s deep hunger, we can answer it with what fuels our own passion. And when those two meet, we experience a sense of alignment, the deep gladness Buechner talks about.

But maybe the world doesn’t need us to identify needs. Maybe, in the words of Oprah Winfrey, the world just needs us to be our best selves. This way of looking at things is epitomized in a quote attributed to Australian Aboriginal activist Lila Watson. “If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us walk together.” In this view, it is more important to understand how our own needs are bound up in the needs of other people than to see ourselves as saviors providing for the others’ needs.

These are two different ways of approaching our question, “What does the world need from you?” They animate the work of poet Marge Piercy and Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz. Let’s read these two pieces together on the next page and take some time to unpack them.

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.

From "Power, Passion and Partnership"

by Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz

We should emphasize methods of social action that effect the most change, while also promoting multiple approaches, in order to make use of the diverse talents and careers found within the Jewish community. Some people choose to serve as great philanthropists, some as community organizers and lobbyists, while others are social workers, or clergy activists. We must encourage all of these options to build our power base of partnership while adhering to the famous Jewish education principle of "chanoch la-na'ar al pi darko," (Proverbs 22:6: "Educate the child in his way.") educating based on the path of the particular student. After identifying our core values and concerns, we must learn to actualize our spheres of influence and skills in the most effective way possible. If we are well-connected to power, to wealth, or armed with a particular kind of knowledge, these factors should be taken into account.

"Power, Passion and Partnership," by Shmuly Yanklowitz, from Jewish Choices, Jewish Voices: Social Justice, Edited by Elliot N. Dorff and Danya Ruttenberg. The Jewish Publication Society, 2010.

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

### Questions on “To Be Of Use”

- What does the narrator 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?

### Questions on “Power, Passion, & Partnership”

- What does Yanklowitz mean when he invokes the notion of educating the “child in his way”?
- How does he understand what social action is and how it’s achieved?

### Questions for reflecting on both pieces together

- Do you identify with one of the pieces more than the other? Why?
- Have you ever clearly known what the world, or part of the world, needed from you?
- What do you want to give the world?

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

Some people know what their purpose is all the time. Some of us know some of the time. Some of us may feel like we're perpetually searching. Like most Big Questions, this is one we're likely to come back to on a regular basis. Thank you for helping us to hold this conversation today.

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 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.

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# AIR-IT: A GUIDE TO FACILITATING CONVERSATION

## A: ASK BIG QUESTIONS.

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

## 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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