

ROSH HASHANA: WHAT WILL YOU DO BETTER THIS YEAR?

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, what is said in this conversation stays in this conversation, and may not be repeated outside it.
- 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 take a moment to think of someone who really changed themselves for the better. It could be you, someone you know personally, or a person or character you know from a story. How did the person change for the better?

Please take a moment to think about your story, and then introduce yourself and share it. Use the space below for notes or to draw a picture.

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

Let's begin with a poem, "Coming Up on September" by Marge Piercy (b. 1936). Please read it aloud as a group.

White butterflies, with single black fingerpaint eyes on their wings dart and settle, eddy and mate over the green tangle of vines in Labor Day morning steam.

The year grinds into ripeness and rot, grapes darkening, pears yellowing, the first Virginia creeper twining crimson, the grasses, dry straw to burn.

The New Year rises, beckoning across the umbrellas on the sand. I begin to reconsider my life.

What is the yield of my impatience?

What is the fruit of my resolve? I turn from frantic white dance over the jungle of productivity and slowly a niggun* slides, cold water down my throat.

I rest on a leaf spotted red.

Now is the time to let the mind search backwards like the raven loosed to see what can feed us. Now, the time to cast the mind forward to chart an aerial map of the months.

The New Year is a great door that stands across the evening and Yom Kippur is the second door. Between them are song and silence, stone and clay pot to be filled from within myself.

I will find there both ripeness and rot, What I have done and undone, What I must let go with the waning days and what I must take in. With the last tomatoes, we harvest the fruit of our lives.

**Niggun is a Hebrew word that means a song without words*

It's the late summer, the early autumn. We're coming back from vacations, going back to school, starting a new season. On the Jewish calendar, this is the season of the High Holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. For all of us, it's a chance to begin again.

It's a time to review our harvest—our accomplishments, our failures, our successes and our mistakes of the past year. We have the chance to learn from them. However we have fallen short of the life we could be living, however we have become inspired to do better in the coming year, the beginning of the year invites us to start again.

"I begin to reconsider my life," says Marge Piercy. "What is the yield of my impatience? What is the fruit of my resolve?" The image she weaves throughout the poem is of a gardener at harvest time. This is a moment to review the harvest, to see what has grown and what has failed. It is a time to plant for next year.

In Jewish tradition, the process of reviewing our lives and resolving to do better is called teshuva, which literally means 'return.' This is a time for us to return to ourselves, our family and friends, and to the things that are most important to us. It's a time to confront the the difficult conversations, with others and with ourselves, that we know we need to have but which we're often to afraid to have.

Marge Piercy's poem gives us a lot to reflect on as we work our way towards that returning. Take some time to read it again to yourself. As you do, here are some questions to consider:

- What comes up for you?
- Which images resonate with you?
- Which ones challenge you or make you feel uncomfortable?
- What do you sense the world needs from you this year?

Take some time to reflect. You may want to use the space below to draw an image, or to write some notes to yourself. When we're all ready, each of us will turn to our neighbor and share what we wrote.

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

For the ancient rabbis of the Talmud, the idea of teshuva, of repairing ourselves, wasn't simply remarkable—it was miraculous: "Rabbi Meir used to say, 'Great is teshuva, for on account of one person who sincerely resolves to change, the whole world is forgiven'" (Babylonian Talmud Yoma 86b). Our change, renewal, and resolve as individuals is what can and will change the world.

The inner work of change doesn't take place only on an individual level. While Rabbi Meir says that an individual's teshuva can change the world, we can also remember the words attributed to the twentieth-century thinker Margaret Mead: "Never doubt the power of a small group of committed citizens to change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Our individual teshuva is necessary, but not sufficient. In order for our teshuva to stick, we need other people. We need friends and family who will keep us honest and remind us of who we have resolved to be. We need community.

So here are some final questions to consider:

- What is one change you want to make in your life as a result of this conversation?
- Who can help you make that change stick?
- What will you do in the next 24 hours to begin the process of change?

Please take a moment to think about these questions and write down your answers in the space below.

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?

Thank you for being part of this conversation. Please share this conversation guide with others in your community. And join our conversation online at AskBigQuestions.org.

10Q

Also take a moment to visit our partners at doyou10q.com, a great project that helps people reflect every fall on ten questions about doing better this year—one question every day between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Hillel

Ask Big Questions is an initiative of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life in partnership with the Einhorn Family Charitable Trust. Visit AskBigQuestions.org to answer questions, learn from others, and join the movement.

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

ROSH HASHANA: WHAT WILL YOU DO BETTER THIS YEAR?

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, what is said in this conversation stays in this conversation, and may not be repeated outside it.
- 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 take a moment to think of someone who really changed themselves for the better. It could be you, someone you know personally, or a person or character you know from a story. How did the person change for the better?

Please take a moment to think about your story, and then introduce yourself and share it. Use the space below for notes or to draw a picture.

LEARN

Let's begin with a poem, "Coming Up on September" by Marge Piercy (b. 1936). Please read it aloud as a group.

White butterflies, with single black fingerpaint eyes on their wings dart and settle, eddy and mate over the green tangle of vines in Labor Day morning steam.

The year grinds into ripeness and rot, grapes darkening, pears yellowing, the first Virginia creeper twining crimson, the grasses, dry straw to burn.

The New Year rises, beckoning across the umbrellas on the sand. I begin to reconsider my life.

What is the yield of my impatience?

What is the fruit of my resolve? I turn from frantic white dance over the jungle of productivity and slowly a niggun* slides, cold water down my throat.

I rest on a leaf spotted red.

Now is the time to let the mind search backwards like the raven loosed to see what can feed us. Now, the time to cast the mind forward to chart an aerial map of the months.

The New Year is a great door that stands across the evening and Yom Kippur is the second door. Between them are song and silence, stone and clay pot to be filled from within myself.

I will find there both ripeness and rot, What I have done and undone, What I must let go with the waning days and what I must take in. With the last tomatoes, we harvest the fruit of our lives.

**Niggun is a Hebrew word that means a song without words*

It's the late summer, the early autumn. We're coming back from vacations, going back to school, starting a new season. On the Jewish calendar, this is the season of the High Holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. For all of us, it's a chance to begin again.

It's a time to review our harvest—our accomplishments, our failures, our successes and our mistakes of the past year. We have the chance to learn from them. However we have fallen short of the life we could be living, however we have become inspired to do better in the coming year, the beginning of the year invites us to start again.

"I begin to reconsider my life," says Marge Piercy. "What is the yield of my impatience? What is the fruit of my resolve?" The image she weaves throughout the poem is of a gardener at harvest time. This is a moment to review the harvest, to see what has grown and what has failed. It is a time to plant for next year.

In Jewish tradition, the process of reviewing our lives and resolving to do better is called teshuva, which literally means 'return.' This is a time for us to return to ourselves, our family and friends, and to the things that are most important to us. It's a time to confront the the difficult conversations, with others and with ourselves, that we know we need to have but which we're often to afraid to have.

Marge Piercy's poem gives us a lot to reflect on as we work our way towards that returning. Take some time to read it again to yourself. As you do, here are some questions to consider:

- What comes up for you?
- Which images resonate with you?
- Which ones challenge you or make you feel uncomfortable?
- What do you sense the world needs from you this year?

Take some time to reflect. You may want to use the space below to draw an image, or to write some notes to yourself. When we're all ready, each of us will turn to our neighbor and share what we wrote.

DO

For the ancient rabbis of the Talmud, the idea of teshuva, of repairing ourselves, wasn't simply remarkable—it was miraculous: "Rabbi Meir used to say, 'Great is teshuva, for on account of one person who sincerely resolves to change, the whole world is forgiven'" (Babylonian Talmud Yoma 86b). Our change, renewal, and resolve as individuals is what can and will change the world.

The inner work of change doesn't take place only on an individual level. While Rabbi Meir says that an individual's teshuva can change the world, we can also remember the words attributed to the twentieth-century thinker Margaret Mead: "Never doubt the power of a small group of committed citizens to change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Our individual teshuva is necessary, but not sufficient. In order for our teshuva to stick, we need other people. We need friends and family who will keep us honest and remind us of who we have resolved to be. We need community.

So here are some final questions to consider:

- What is one change you want to make in your life as a result of this conversation?
- Who can help you make that change stick?
- What will you do in the next 24 hours to begin the process of change?

Please take a moment to think about these questions and write down your answers in the space below.

Thank you for being part of this conversation. Please share this conversation guide with others in your community. And join our conversation online at AskBigQuestions.org.

10Q

Also take a moment to visit our partners at doyou10q.com, a great project that helps people reflect every fall on ten questions about doing better this year—one question every day between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Hillel

Ask Big Questions is an initiative of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life in partnership with the Einhorn Family Charitable Trust. Visit AskBigQuestions.org to answer questions, learn from others, and join the movement.

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