

# SUKKOT: WHERE DO YOU FEEL AT HOME?

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

Welcome to our conversation. Let's take a moment to introduce ourselves. When you hear the word "home," what's the first thing that comes to mind?

You can use the space below to make some 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.

# LEARN

Of all the big questions of life, *Where is home?* may be one of the biggest. Home can be a physical place, like the home we grew up in. It can be defined by relationships we have—as in, “I feel at home with the people I love.” It can denote experiences, as in “I feel at home when I’m playing football,” or “I feel at home when I’m reading my favorite author.” Home is many things.

The American poet Robert Frost is known to have defined home as “the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.” Or as another poet, Maya Angelou put it, “The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.” Home is a place where we can be ourselves, according to these poets.

But perhaps we don’t want to be ourselves, or at least the selves we are at the place we call home. “Say there’s a white kid who lives in a nice home,” the rapper Eminem said in a 2000 interview. “He goes to an all-white school, and is pretty much having everything handed to him on a platter. For him to pick up a rap tape is incredible to me, because what that’s saying is that he’s living a fantasy life of rebellion.” Sometimes we feel a need to leave home in order to discern where and what our home really is.

The holiday of Sukkot invites us to step outside of our physical homes in order to ask, *Where and when are we truly at home?* The Talmud states, “All seven days of the festival, one must make the sukkah one’s permanent home, and one’s house a temporary dwelling.” In this temporary setting, we can reflect on what really makes someplace a home.

There are several images of or about home. Take some time to look at them. What images resonate with you? Which ones make you uncomfortable? Why? Use the space below the pictures to write some notes to yourself. When you are finished, we will divide into small groups to share our reflections.



Take some time to think about these questions. When we're all ready, each of us will turn to our neighbor and share our thoughts.

**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

As our conversation demonstrates, home is a powerful idea. In many ways it is fundamental to who we are.

The Talmud recounts that the second-century Rabbis Akiva and Eliezer disagreed about how to understand the Biblical verse, “You shall dwell in booths (sukkot)... so that your descendants may know that the Lord made the people of Israel live in sukkot when he led them out of Egypt” (Leviticus 23:42-43). Rabbi Akiva interpreted the sukkah referred to in the verse as a literal sukkah: a hut like the ones we build today. Rabbi Eliezer believed the sukkot in the verse were the “clouds of God’s glory”—and thus the sukkot we build are metaphors or symbols, not a literal re-enactment of the past. We could say that for Rabbi Akiva, the sukkah—home—is a physical structure; for Rabbi Eliezer, it is a state of mind.

Like the sukkah, home is an idea animated by paradoxes: it is both secure and vulnerable, real and metaphorical, at the same time. For some, home is a place of security. For others it is a place where we can make ourselves vulnerable—by inviting guests, by going to sleep. Home can be a physical location, and it can be a state of mind.

We can be at home in a house, but we can also be at home in a language or an activity. Probably for many of us, it is all of these things.

As we conclude the conversation, here are a few final questions to consider:

- Has this conversation helped you come to any new insights about your home?
- What is one thing you want to do in the next 24 hours to act something you discovered in this conversation?
- What could we do together to improve our community based on what we’ve talked about here?

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.

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?

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](http://AskBigQuestions.org).



If you enjoyed this conversation, we encourage you to check out our partners Moishe House at [moishehouse.org](http://moishehouse.org). Moishe House is pluralistic international organization that provides meaningful Jewish experiences to young adults in their 20s.



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](http://AskBigQuestions.org) to answer questions, learn from others, and join the movement.

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**ASKBIGQUESTIONS.ORG**  
**UNDERSTAND OTHERS. UNDERSTAND YOURSELF.**

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CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR PARTICIPANTS

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