

# WHO IS IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

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 around 45-60 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.

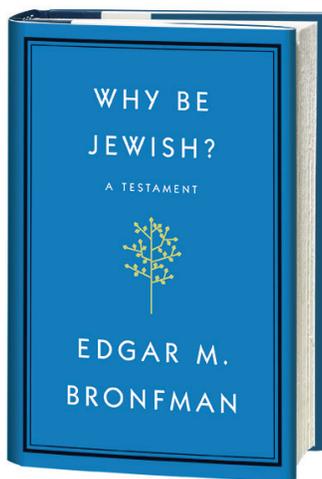
## About Ask Big Questions:

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# WELCOME

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- 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. When you hear the word "community," what comes to mind? Take a moment to sit with the question, and then we'll share our names and what we 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

It seems community is all the rage these days. We talk about "real" and "virtual" communities. We hear frequently—especially on college campuses—about the need to create community. Community is one of the buzzwords of our time.

But what makes a community? The dictionary reminds us that community is rooted in something we have in common: living in a common place, undergoing common experiences, sharing common language, values, or goals. Community implies communing—sharing life together. In a world increasingly defined by individualized, customized experiences—from the ads Facebook sends us based on our unique interests, to our ability to choose where we get our news or when and where we watch our favorite movies and shows—community is something we know we need, but also can seem hard to achieve.

In the following passage, Edgar M. Bronfman reflects on the meaning and experience of community in Jewish life.

One of the central assumptions of Judaism is that all Jews, whatever their cultural roots, are bound by shared history, stories, beliefs, and practices. This concept is traditionally referred to as *klal Israel* (all of Israel) and, more recently, as Jewish peoplehood. It includes those who join the Jewish people by choice as well as by birth.

Many have debated the best term for Judaism—is it a culture, an ethnicity, a religion, or a civilization? I would say all and none of the above. My own feeling is that Judaism is a big family of individuals with a common bond that has stayed strong through a long history and much hardship. Those who want to become part of this story are Jews too. I believe the tent should be open and welcoming to anyone who wishes to join.

For younger Jews today, choosing a particular ethnicity or culture may seem too narrow a form of self-identification. But I do not see Judaism as a form of tribalism that divides rather than unites. The Jewish people are one of the many vibrant patches on the richly diverse quilt of humanity. Each patch has its own design, and together they make a beautiful whole.

Embracing your heritage deepens your understanding of who you are and where you come from and brings you into a more meaningful relationship with the multicultural world. To identify with the Jewish people does not mean to care only for the fates of other Jews. In fact, the opposite is true. The Jewish tradition, from ancient to modern times, has always placed tremendous emphasis on protecting and caring for those who are different. Repeatedly, the Hebrew Bible assigns us the responsibility of taking care of the stranger, reminding us, “You shall not oppress the stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 23:9). The idea is so central to Judaism that it threads throughout the whole Hebrew Bible. We hear it in Leviticus and in the prophetic texts of Zechariah and Jeremiah. The Talmud, too, cites many cases where concern for non-Jews is just as important, and in some cases takes precedence over the care of one’s own people. Our sages taught, “We sustain the non-Jewish poor with the Jewish poor, visit the non-Jewish sick with the Jewish sick, and bury the non-Jewish dead with the Jewish dead, for the sake of peace” (Gittin 61a).

*(Why Be Jewish, p.99)*

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

### **What’s happening in the text?**

- Are there any terms that aren’t clear to you? If so, ask for clarification.
- Try to paraphrase the text. What did Edgar say?

## What's the author's intent?

- What does Edgar mean when he writes, "Jews, whatever their cultural roots, are bound by shared history, stories, beliefs, and practices?"
- What does he mean when he writes, "For younger Jews today, choosing a particular ethnicity or culture may seem too narrow a form of self-identification?"
- What does he mean by saying, "To identify with the Jewish people does not mean to care only for the fates of other Jews?"

## How does it resonate with us?

- Do you agree that it's hard for younger Jews to choose a particular identity? How do you feel about it?
- Do you consider yourself a member of multiple communities? How do you prioritize among them?
- Do you feel like a member of a larger Jewish People?

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."

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 is not good for humans to be alone." These words are attributed to God in the second chapter of Genesis in the Torah. Or as Aristotle put it, "Man is a social animal." We are pre-wired to seek and live in communities. Today, the options for community living are more numerous than ever before. And at the same time, it often feels like it's more challenging than ever to maintain communities, or to find a community where we feel at home. Edgar M. Bronfman suggests that we can simultaneously be proud members of the Jewish community and also members of other communities. Hopefully our conversation can inspire each of us individually, and all of us as a group, to work to make our communities more welcoming, and to find and build communities that will nurture us in return.

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

- What did you learn today?
- 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.

Thank you for being part of this conversation.



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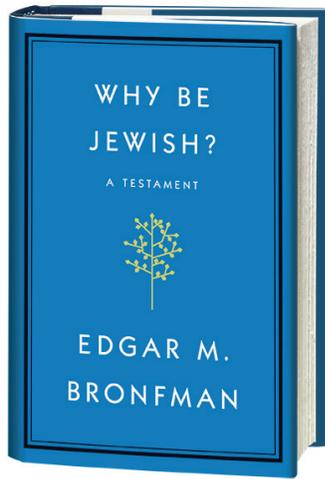
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