

# FROM *LIBERATION* TO *FREEDOM*

A Passover Sourcebook



Pursuing Global Justice  
Through Grassroots Change



**AVODAH**  
THE JEWISH SERVICE CORPS

The following teachers were part of the original Exodus and Revolution series in the spring of 2008. We are grateful for their teaching and work in the world.

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Rabbi David Rosenn	AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps
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The original Exodus and Revolution series was a project of The AJWS-AVODAH Partnership. The AJWS-AVODAH Partnership sparks and sustains social change by building a vibrant community united at the intersection of Jewish and social justice values. We believe that collaboration, collective action, and leadership development lead to lasting change.



Dear Educator:

The liberation of the Israelites from Egypt stands at the core of the biblical conception of justice. It is the basis of the work that American Jewish World Service and AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps do in the United States and around the world. We offer this resource to help inspire vigorous discussion about freedom and justice in your Jewish community during this Passover season.

As Michael Walzer explains in his classic book *Exodus and Revolution*, the arc of the Exodus narrative, which sweeps from subjugation to aspiration to independence, has influenced Western politics for centuries. The *From Liberation to Freedom Sourcebook* is an accessible tool to help you prepare classes and lead *seders* that will introduce students to the complexities of this Jewish narrative and the political movements that have drawn inspiration from it.

The *Sourcebook* has its roots in a project led by our joint alumni partnership, which works to inspire, engage and support lifelong social justice agents who are rooted in and nourished by Jewish values. In the weeks leading up to Passover 2008, the AJWS/AVODAH Alumni Partnership, together with Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, brought together thinkers and teachers from some of New York's most innovative Jewish programs to discuss how the Exodus narrative echoes in our contemporary lives and politics. Over the course of six weeks, nearly 100 people explored together what the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt means to them and what it has meant for political thinkers and actors throughout history. We have created this sourcebook to support you in facilitating similar programs in your community.

As the introduction to this volume notes: "Judaism has a vision of earthly justice which prioritizes liberation from oppression, a covenanted community and an unending aspiration for a tomorrow that is better than today." Thank you for helping this generation of Jews join in the pursuit of this goal.

Wishing you and your loved ones a meaningful and liberating Passover,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ruth W. Messinger".

**Ruth W. Messinger**  
President  
American Jewish World Service

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Rosenn".

**Rabbi David Rosenn**  
Executive Director  
AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps



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וכל המרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים הרי זה משובח.

*And anyone who discusses the Exodus from Egypt at length is praiseworthy.*

*- Passover Haggadah*

Every year in this season, the Jewish People prepare to recall and relive our master story—the Exodus from Egypt. We return to this narrative year after year, every time rediscovering its radical assertions that oppression can and must end, and that people and the world can be redeemed. It is the Exodus story that roots the Jewish vision of how a just world might yet look.

In the spring of 2008, in an effort to explore some of the implications of the Exodus narrative, thinkers and activists from innovative Jewish institutions collaborated to teach Michael Walzer's *Exodus and Revolution* in the weeks leading up to Passover. Over the course of six weeks, nearly 100 people studied together with teachers from American Jewish World Service, AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps, Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, Encounter, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, Just Congregations (a program of the Union for Reform Judaism), Mechon Hadar, MyJewishLearning.com and Uri l'Tzedek. Together, they explored what the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt means for them and what it has meant for political thinkers and actors throughout history. That series of classes, and the conversations that emerged from it, are the inspiration for this *Sourcebook*. Those teachers each interpreted the Exodus story from their own perspectives; we hope this *Sourcebook* gives you the tools to do the same.

Walzer's book explicitly examines how the Exodus narrative, with its arc of liberation, backsliding, covenant and aspiration has shaped social and political revolutions from Latin America to Russia, and has also shaped how we conceive of political change in the West. Implicitly, it argues that the Exodus narrative is far more than a story, or the basis for a family dinner in the spring. Rather, the Exodus reflects a powerful ambition for a political order, and it can be an influential force for shaping the world. To read the story of the Exodus in the light of politics is to understand that the Jewish textual tradition is not now, nor was it ever, concerned *exclusively* with ritual observance or devotional prayer. Judaism has a vision of earthly justice that demands liberation from oppression, a covenanted community and an unending aspiration for a tomorrow that is better and more just than today. To engage with Judaism at that level is to engage with its fundamental building blocks.

We invite you to join this conversation, to explore these texts and others with your students, congregants, families and friends, and to investigate what it means for us to take the political demands of the Exodus seriously. We have designed this material to be used in six sessions, corresponding to the chapter themes in Walzer's book, but we also invite you to use the material any way you would like—in workshops, sermons and *seders*.

A few notes about the *Sourcebook*:

- The *Sourcebook* is an independent resource, and while it is loosely based on Michael Walzer's text of *Exodus and Revolution* it does not require familiarity with Walzer's work. However, *Exodus and Revolution* is an extraordinary and important work and you may want to read it and recommend it in connection to the *Sourcebook*.
- While Walzer describes some of the historical uses of the Exodus narrative as a model for social change, the *Sourcebook* uses his text as a prescriptive tool for inspiring social responsibility and Jewish global citizenship. The central thesis of the *Sourcebook* is that, much like the Israelites were freed in order to enter into a covenant with God and accept responsibility for their actions, our own freedom and power necessitate that we work for greater justice in the world.
- Each chapter of the *Sourcebook* includes a facilitator's guide, an introductory essay and a source sheet. The essay and source sheet are designed so that you can photocopy them for your students.
- The guide offers you, the facilitator, instructions for facilitating each session. These instructions reference the section headings in the source sheets and suggest ways to facilitate discussion around those sources.
- Each session is designed for a 60-90 minute block of time. The length of each session is noted in the instructions.
- Each set of instructions concludes with a closing message that reinforces and reminds participants of the central themes of the session. We do not expect you to read it as a script, but rather to use it as a tool to craft your own closing message, with the firm knowledge of what the session was intended to convey.
- At the conclusion of the *Sourcebook* is a *Seder Resource* that connects the themes of the middle four sessions to specific moments in the *seder* and can serve as a resource for discussion and enrichment of your own *seder*.
- There is no charge for the *Sourcebook*; we ask only that you fill out the electronic survey that we will send in a few weeks to get your feedback on this project. However, as always, we hope that you and your community will financially support AJWS and AVODAH's work for global justice, whenever you are able.
- If you have any questions about facilitating the material in the *Sourcebook*, please contact [education@ajws.org](mailto:education@ajws.org).

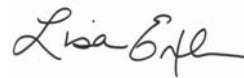
As we enter this season of our freedom, we invite you to engage your Jewish community in meaningful conversations about what the Exodus narrative, with its themes of liberation and justice, has to say to us today.



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## Instructions for Facilitator

### Introduction

This session lays the groundwork to explore how we can use the Exodus narrative as a basis for our own contemporary obligation to pursue greater justice in the world. It introduces the concept that freedom is not an end in and of itself but that it must lead to greater responsibility.

### Essential Question

- How can the Exodus narrative serve as a model for our own pursuit of justice?

### Goals

1. Explore the role of the Exodus narrative in Jewish history and tradition as well as its role as a paradigm for other liberation movements.
2. Explore the concepts of freedom and responsibility in the Exodus narrative.
3. Identify and share personal experiences of pursuing justice.

**Total Time: 90 minutes**

### 1. Part I: The Importance of the Story

**Texts Referenced: Texts 1-3**

**Activity Duration: 10 minutes**

Explore the role of the Exodus narrative in Jewish history and tradition as well as its role as a paradigm for other liberation movements. The texts in this section relate to the significance of the Exodus narrative and the commandment to retell the story. Use the questions on the source sheet to stimulate discussion about the central message of the Exodus narrative.

### 2. Part II: First Steps of Freedom

**Texts Referenced: Texts 4-5**

**Activity Duration: 15 minutes**

Explore the initial steps to freedom taken by the Israelites and their implications for other liberation movements. The texts in this section relate to the difficult work of the Exodus and acknowledge that the achievement of freedom is complicated, full of struggle and requires hard work. Use the questions on the source sheet to guide discussion on this topic.

### 3. Part III: Freedom Equals Responsibility

**Texts Referenced: Texts 6-9**

**Activity Duration: 40 minutes**

Investigate the connection between freedom and responsibility. The texts in this section suggest that the Exodus was merely the first step in the Israelites' journey and they raise the question of what the ultimate purpose of the Israelites' liberation was. Spend about 20 minutes discussing the questions on the source sheet. Then invite participants to personalize the previously discussed texts and to connect them to responsibility and justice in their own lives. Spend about 20 minutes discussing the following questions which do not appear on the source sheet:

- a. If the Israelites became free in order to pursue a greater goal, and we are the heirs to that tradition, what is the ultimate goal of the freedom and power that we enjoy?
- b. What kind of society are we striving to build and what actions do we need to take to get there?
- c. In pairs, share a story of a time when you either chose to take an action to pursue justice, or missed an opportunity to do so. For you, is this story connected in any way to your identity as an inheritor of the Passover story of slavery, liberation and freedom to pursue justice?

#### 4. Part IV: Global Justice Connection

**Text Referenced: Text 10**

**Activity Duration: 20 minutes**

Concretize the themes of this session using the example of global health which mirrors the Exodus narrative. The state of global health shows tremendous positive change that might have been unimaginable fifty years ago. However, the AIDS pandemic and the health gap between rich and poor remind us that we are far from reaching the Promised Land. Use the questions on the source sheet that follow Text 10 to connect the contemporary global health situation and the Exodus story.

#### 5. Closing Message

**Activity Duration: 5 minutes**

The Exodus narrative serves as a master story for the Jewish community and as a paradigm for other liberation movements. In addition, we can look back to it as a source of nourishment and use its lessons to inform our own contemporary social change work. Throughout the rest of the sessions, we will explore particular themes of the Exodus narrative and their implications for our own pursuit of justice.



## Introductory Essay

“Life imitates art far more than art imitates Life.” —Oscar Wilde

Michael Walzer’s *Exodus and Revolution* proposes a remarkable thesis—social revolutions throughout history are modeled after a pattern set down in the biblical narrative of Israelite liberation. Walzer’s argument establishes the Exodus text as a paradigmatic influence on the way we see ourselves and particularly the ways in which we engage in social change. Over the course of his four chapters, he maps the arc of the Exodus narrative onto some of the pivotal questions of social change. We understand his correlation in the following way:

Exodus narrative		Social change
What does Egypt represent, and why do the Israelites long for it?	→	Why is it so difficult to engage in social change?
What does the incident of the golden calf, and Moses’s complex response to it, represent?	→	In engaging in social change, is it necessary to overthrow the system, or is gradual reform possible?
What does the covenant at Sinai represent?	→	What are the contours of mutual responsibility that motivate the pursuit of social change?
What does the Promised Land, and the seemingly interminable journey to arrive there, represent?	→	How can we sustain a commitment to the ceaseless work of social change?

While Walzer provides a descriptive analysis of the historical uses of the Exodus as a model for social change, we propose to use his volume as a prescriptive tool for inspiring social responsibility and Jewish global citizenship in our time. The Exodus tradition offers us a template for embracing social responsibility. It introduces the notion that injustice need not be perpetuated and that human beings have within them the capacity to transform their circumstances.

The primary theme of this set of materials is the notion of responsibility. What is it? What about it attracts and repels? Why do we seek to avoid it and what obligations comprise it?

As you make your way through this study, you’ll explore these questions through a range of lenses—biblical and rabbinic texts, later Jewish scholarship, Walzer’s own words and a range of contemporary perspectives that complicate and apply Walzer’s thinking to other circumstances.

The Exodus story is purpose-driven. The Israelites trudging through the wilderness are always focused on *Eretz Yisrael*. However, the story demonstrates an awareness that its purpose will never be fully realized. It does not end with liberation from Egypt or with the covenant at Sinai or even with the arrival in the Promised Land. The Passover chorus of *Dayenu* is in some ways incongruous. None of the discrete steps along the way would have been enough. The questions that confront us are: How does each of us, personally, make our contribution to the story? What our vision of a just society, and what is each individual’s responsibility in making that accomplishment a reality?



## Part I. The Importance of the Story

### 1 Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, pp. 7-8

But the story is more important than the events, and the story has grown more and more important as it has been repeated and reflected upon, cited in arguments, elaborated in folklore. Perhaps that was the intention of the authors: certainly, they urge the repetition often enough. The Exodus belongs to a genre of religious and legal texts designed for public reading and rereading and for analogical application.

### 2 Passover Haggadah

We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and Adonai our God took us out from there with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm. If the Holy One, blessed be God, had not taken our ancestors out of Egypt, then we, our children and our children's children would have remained enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. And even if all of us were wise, all of us understanding, all of us knowledgeable in the Torah, we would still be obligated to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt. And anyone who discusses the Exodus from Egypt at length is praiseworthy.

### הגדה של פסח

עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים ויוציאנו ה' אלהינו משם ביד חזקה ובזרוע נטויה. ואילו לא הוציא הקדוש ברוך הוא את אבותינו ממצרים הרי אנו ובנינו ובני בנינו משועבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים. ואפילו כולנו חכמים כולנו נבונים כולנו יודעים את התורה מצוה עלינו לספר ביציאת מצרים. וכל המרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים הרי זה משובח.

### 3 Michael Lerner, *Jewish Renewal: A Path to Healing and Transformation*, p.129

Every ruling elite of the ancient and medieval world, and many in the modern world, justified their rule by ideologies whose central message was that the world cannot be changed... Along came the Jews with a very different message: "The world can be fundamentally changed. Every system of oppression, no matter how powerful it appears to be, can be overthrown... We know it, because we did it ourselves."

#### Discussion Questions

1. How would you articulate the central message of the Exodus?
2. What is so compelling about the Exodus narrative that we are commanded to retell it and that other social movements have adopted it as a model for change?
3. Do you personally experience the story with the same power that Walzer and Lerner describe it?

## Part II. First Steps of Freedom

### 4 Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, p. 10

The Israelites are not, after all, magically transported to the promised land; they are not carried on the "eagle's wings" of Exodus 19; they must march to get there, and the march is full of difficulties, crises, struggles, all realistically presented, as if to invite human as well as divine resolution.



5 Mechilta Parshat Bo, Section 16

Another interpretation: Israel went out of Egypt by the strength of God, as it is said, “with a mighty hand, the Lord freed us from Egypt” (Exodus 13:16).

Another interpretation: with their own strength Israel went out of Egypt, as it is said, “and you shall eat it with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand” (Exodus 12:11).

מכילתא פרשת בא פרשה טז

ד"א בזריזות יצאו ישראל ממצרים שנאמר כי בחוזק יד הוציא ה' אתכם מארץ מצרים (שמות יג:טז).

ד"א בזריזות עצמן יצאו ישראל ממצרים שנאמר וככה תאכלו אותו מתניכם חגורים וגו' (שמות יב:יא).

**Discussion Questions**

1. What are the different opinions about who did/does the work of the Exodus? Which opinion resonates most powerfully for you?
2. Are the Israelites freed by the strength of God or by their own strength, and what are the implications of either understanding of the narrative?
3. Does your answer to the previous questions influence how you think about later liberation movements that use the Exodus as guiding story?

**Part III. Freedom Equals Responsibility**

6 Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, p. 12

... the Exodus is a journey forward—not only in time and space. It is a march toward a goal, a moral progress, a transformation.

7 Pirkei Avot 6:2

Furthermore, it is written, “And the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tablets” (Exodus 32:16). Do not read *harut* (graven) but rather *heirut* (freedom), for no person is free except one who engages in the study of Torah.

פרקי אבות ו:ב

ואומר והלוחות מעשה אלהים המה והמכתב מכתב אלהים הוא חרות על הלוחות (שמות לב:טז) אל תקרא חרות אלא חירות שאין לך בן חורין אלא מי שעוסק בתלמוד תורה.

8 Jerusalem Talmud Pesachim 32c

And what did he [Pharaoh] say? “Get up and leave from the midst of my people (Exodus 12:31). In the past you were slaves of Pharaoh. From now on you are slaves of God.” At that moment they said: Halleluyah [give praise slaves of God] (Psalms 113:1). It is written, “slaves of God” and not “slaves of Pharaoh.”

תלמוד ירושלמי פסחים לב:ג

ומה היה אומר קומו צאו מתוך עמי (שמות יב:לא) לשעבר הייתם עבדי פרעה מיכן והילך אתם עבדי ה' באותה השעה היו אומרים הללויה הללו עבדי ה' ולא עבדי פרעה תני.



9 Passover Haggadah

God has bestowed so many favors upon us.

Had God brought us out of Egypt and not executed judgments against the Egyptians, it would have been enough.

Had God executed judgments against the Egyptians and not their gods, it would have been enough.

Had God executed judgments against their gods and not slain their first born, it would have been enough.

Had God slain their first born and not given us their wealth, it would have been enough.

Had God given us their wealth and not split the sea for us, it would have been enough.

Had God split the sea for us and not led us through on dry land, it would have been enough.

Had God led us through on dry land and not drowned our oppressors, it would have been enough.

Had God drowned our oppressors and not provided for our needs in the wilderness for 40 years, it would have been enough.

Had God provided for our needs in the wilderness for 40 years and not fed us manna, it would have been enough.

Had God fed us manna and not given us Shabbat, it would have been enough.

Had God given us Shabbat and not led us to Mount Sinai, it would have been enough.

Had God led us to Mount Sinai and not given us the Torah, it would have been enough.

Had God given us the Torah and not brought us into the Land of Israel, it would have been enough.

Had God brought us into the land of Israel and not built us the Temple, it would have been enough.

הגדה של פסח

כמה מעלות טובות למקום עלינו.

אלו הוציאנו ממצרים ולא עשה בהם שפטים, דיינו.

אלו עשה בהם שפטים ולא עשה באלהיהם, דיינו.

אלו עשה באלהיהם ולא הרג את בכוריהם, דיינו.

אלו הרג את בכוריהם ולא נתן לנו את ממונם, דיינו.

אלו נתן לנו את ממונם ולא קרע לנו את הים, דיינו.

אלו קרע לנו את הים ולא העבירנו בתוכו בחרבה, דיינו.

אלו העבירנו בתוכו בחרבה ולא שקע צרינו בתוכו, דיינו.

אלו שקע צרינו בתוכו ולא ספק צרכנו במדבר ארבעים שנה, דיינו.

אלו ספק צרכנו במדבר ארבעים שנה ולא האכילנו את המן, דיינו.

אלו האכילנו את המן ולא נתן לנו את השבת, דיינו.

אלו נתן לנו את השבת ולא קרבנו לפני הר סיני, דיינו.

אלו קרבנו לפני הר סיני ולא נתן לנו את התורה, דיינו.

אלו נתן לנו את התורה ולא הכניסנו לארץ ישראל, דיינו.

אלו הכניסנו לארץ ישראל ולא בנה לנו את בית הבחירה, דיינו.

### Discussion Questions

1. Walzer argues that the Exodus is a march toward a goal. What is the goal of the Exodus?
2. In the context of working for justice, what are we meant to do with our freedom and our power?
3. Texts 7 and 8 suggest that the Israelites were freed in order to engage in Torah study and service of God. Does this claim, that the Exodus was not only a move away from Pharaoh, but toward God resonate with you? Why or why not?
4. Text 9, *Dayenu*, suggests different potential endpoints to the Exodus narrative, and while it claims that any of those endpoints would have been sufficient, the implication is that all of them were necessary. Do you agree with this analysis that all were necessary? Why or why not?
5. According to *Dayenu*, the Exodus narrative ends with the building of the Temple in Jerusalem, implying that the Temple represents the ultimate goal of the Exodus. Where do you think the Exodus story ends and what is the implication of reading the story that way?

### Part IV. Global Justice Connection

#### 10 “Millions Saved: Proven Successes in Global Health,” Policy Brief, Center for Global Development, 2007

Throughout Latin America, mothers no longer worry about their children contracting polio; vast regions of Africa are now habitable because river blindness is under control; China has made major inroads against tuberculosis; in Sri Lanka, women can give birth without fear of dying—in sharp contrast to women in most poor countries of the world. In the past 50 years, the developing world has benefited from tremendous improvements in health. Life expectancy has risen from 40 to 65 years. The chances that a child will survive to the age of five have doubled. In addition to directly improving people’s lives, this progress contributes to economic growth.

...[However,] Long-standing problems remain unsolved, such as the health gap between rich and poor. Newer ones—from the growing toll of cardiovascular disease to the AIDS pandemic—threaten future generations.

### Discussion Questions

1. How does this picture of global health relate to the Exodus narrative?
2. How do global health issues fit into your vision of an ideal world?
3. What responsibility do we, personally and as a Jewish community, have to address the AIDS pandemic?
4. How have we, personally and as a community, used our power to contribute to the improvement in global health over the past fifty years? What can we do to ensure that the newer global health issues are addressed?

### Instructions for Facilitator

#### Introduction

This session explores the Israelites' longing for slavery and equates it with anxiety about the responsibility that accompanies freedom. It compares the Israelites' nostalgia for slavery to the natural inclination some of us feel today to avoid taking responsibility for making social change.

#### Essential Questions

- What does Egypt represent, and why do the Israelites long for it?
- Why is it so difficult to engage in social change?

#### Goals

1. Understand why, after their liberation, the Israelites longed to return to Egypt.
2. Use our interpretation of the Israelites' experience to inform how we understand our own contemporary hesitations to take responsibility and pursue justice.

**Total Time: 80 minutes**

#### 1. Part I: The Attractions of Slavery

**Texts Referenced: Texts 1-5**

**Activity Duration: 30 minutes**

First, spend about ten minutes, as a group, telling an abbreviated version of the biblical narrative of the Exodus. As part of this review, brainstorm the negative aspects of slavery to provide a contrast with the bulk of this session which will focus on the attractive elements of slavery. This background will set the stage for the rest of the session which will focus on the idea that, after their liberation, the Israelites actually longed to return to Egypt.

Then, spend about 20 minutes using the texts in this section to explore several perspectives on the attractions of slavery and what Egypt (slavery) represents. The texts suggest that the Israelites longed for many aspects of their lives in Egypt, including the access to food and water, sexual immorality and freedom from the commandments. As you study these texts, discuss what these different things might represent. Text 5, in which the Israelites long for freedom from the commandments, provides a segue into the broader theme of the relationship between freedom and responsibility by suggesting that freedom entails responsibility, a responsibility that the Israelites may have preferred not to embrace.

#### 2. Part II: The Desire to Escape Freedom

**Texts Referenced: Texts 6-9**

**Activity Duration: 25 minutes**

Use the texts in this section to discuss the relationship between freedom and resistance to responsibility. These texts address people's preference for the posture of submission rather than acceptance of responsibility, the complexity of freedom of conscience and the potential to be overwhelmed by confronting truths of the world and one's place in it. Using the discussion



questions on the source sheet, ask participants to relate the texts to their own choices to claim or avoid responsibility for pursuing justice in the world.

### 3. Part III: Global Justice Connection

**Text Referenced:** Text 10

**Activity Duration:** 20 minutes

Concretize the themes of this session using the example of Zell Kravinsky, an American real estate developer who donated the majority of his substantial wealth to charity and made a non-directed donation of one of his kidneys. The example of Kravinsky can open a conversation about where the acceptance of our responsibility to live justly will lead us. Kravinsky is certainly an extreme model, but exploring the question of, “Where does it end?” and expressing our fears about accepting any level of responsibility can help give us permission to embark on the journey towards greater responsibility without knowing its ultimate outcome.

### 4. Closing Message

**Activity Duration:** 5 minutes

We often assume that people prefer freedom to slavery; however, we frequently overlook how overwhelming that freedom can be. This was true of Egypt and it is true in our lives today. Sometimes when faced with the myriad of choices for how to behave, what kind of work to do, and how to spend our money and our time, many of us would prefer for someone to tell us what to do. Freedom is complicated and full of moments of decision. It behooves us to anticipate these moments of limitless possibility so that when they arrive, we can make ethical choices and act in accordance with our values.

#### Introductory Essay

Repeatedly during their journey through the wilderness, the Israelites shock Moses (and us) with their bizarre yearning for Egypt—they long for the fleshpots, the fish, the melons, the leeks. They have somehow come to believe that slavery and oppression are preferable to the day-to-day challenges of desert life. What is this about? Is it some kind of weird “grass is always greener” sentiment, or is there something so discomfiting about their newfound freedom that they have come to feel nostalgia for the taskmaster and the whip?

The nature of the desert itself suggests an answer. There is no place more wide open, more full of possibility and more unstructured than the desert. Its directionless emptiness forces its inhabitants to make decisions with almost no guidance. They are confronted with a kind of moral agoraphobia—where to go, what to do and how to behave are all up-for-grabs in a way that must have bred existential paralysis if not terror in these former slaves, people who had until very recently lived lives of total predictability, control and order.

In the absence of that order, the Israelites were asked to take responsibility for shaping their own fates. In this sense, they are like us—Americans in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century who are confronted daily with nearly limitless choices about how to behave, what kind of work to do, how to spend our money and time. In the face of these limitless possibilities, however, we tend to shy away, to make predictable decisions, not to rock the boat, to settle for the comfortable, to avoid responsibility—in effect, we gravitate toward the decisionlessness of Egypt.

Particularly in the context of an unjust world, many of us seek to avoid accepting agency and responsibility. We prefer the slave-like posture in which we believe that we lack power or control over many aspects of our lives. We claim to be oppressed or enslaved by social values and norms that conflict with the pursuit of justice. We are slaves to efficiency and productivity; to fashion and consumerism; to money, power and ambition.

This session suggests that we might actually prefer to view ourselves as slaves to these things because such a self-perception absolves us of responsibility for the actions we take that conflict with our values. And yet, a commitment to the pursuit of justice requires us to recognize our power and control, to claim responsibility to make ethical choices and to act in accordance with our values.



Part I. The Attractions of Slavery

1 Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, p. 33

No old regime is merely oppressive; it is attractive, too, else the escape from it would be much easier than it is.

2 Exodus 16:3

The Israelites said (to Moses and Aaron): If only we had died by the hand of Adonai in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, when we ate our fill of bread! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to starve this whole congregation to death.

שמות פרק טז:ג

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִי יִתֵּן מוֹתֵנוּ בְּיַד ה' בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּשִׁבְתֵּנוּ עַל סֵדֶר הַבָּשָׂר בְּאֲכִלְנוּ לֶחֶם לֶשֶׁבַע פִּי הוֹצֵאתָם אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹתֵינוּ אֶל הַמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה לְהָמִית אֶת כָּל הַקְּהָל הַזֶּה בְּרָעָב:

3 Numbers 11:4-5

The riffraff in their midst felt a gluttonous craving; and then the Israelites wept and said, "If only we had meat to eat! **We remember the fish that we used to eat free in Egypt**, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic."

במדבר יא:ד-ה

וְהַאֲסֹפְסֹף אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבּוֹ הִתְאוּוּ תִאֲוָה וַיִּשְׁבוּ וַיִּכְבּוּ גַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ מִי יֵאָכְלֵנוּ בָּשָׂר: זָכַרְנוּ אֶת הַדָּגָה אֲשֶׁר נֹאכַל בְּמִצְרַיִם חֲנָם אֶת הַקִּשְׁאִים וְאֶת הָאֲבִטְחִים וְאֶת הַחֲצִיר וְאֶת הַבְּצָלִים וְאֶת הַשּׁוּמִים:

4 Babylonian Talmud Yoma 75a

"We remember the *dagim* that we used to eat free in Egypt (Numbers 11:5)."

Rav and Shmuel (disagreed). One said (*dagim* means): fish. The other said: sexual sins.

For the one who said fish, that is because it says: "We used to eat."

For the one who said sexual sins, that is because it says: "free."

And for the one who said sexual sins, how does he explain: "we used to eat"? It is a euphemism, as it says, "[Such is the way of the adulterous woman:] she ate and wiped her mouth, [and says: I have done no sin]" (Proverbs 30:20).

And for the one who said fish, how does he explain "free"? They would bring (the fish) in from ownerless property, as it says: when Israel drew water, the Holy One would put small fish in their jugs...

תלמוד בבלי יומא עה.

זכרנו את הדגה אשר נאכל במצרים חנם (במדבר יא:ה), רב ושמואל; חד אמר: דגים, וחד אמר: עריות.

מאן דאמר דגים - דכתיב נאכל,

ומאן דאמר עריות - דכתיב חנם.

ולמאן דאמר עריות - הא כתיב נאכל! - לישנא מעליא נקט, דכתיב אכלה ומחתה פיה ואמרה לא פעלתי און (משלי ל:כ). ולמאן דאמר דגים, מאי חנם? דהווי מייתין להו מהפקירא. דאמר מר: כשהיו ישראל שואבין מים הקדוש ברוך הוא מזמין להם בתוך המים דגים קטנים בכדיהן.



5 Sifrei Bemidbar 87

“We remember the fish that we used to eat free in Egypt.” (Numbers 11:5) Could it be that the Egyptians gave them free fish?! Doesn’t it say, “Go work, and don’t give them straw!” (Exodus 5:18) If they didn’t give them straw, would they have given them fish for free?! What does free mean? Free from the commandments.

ספרי במדבר פז

זכרנו את הדגה אשר נאכל במצרים חנם (במדבר יא:ה), וכי יש בענין שהיו המצריים נותנים להם דגים בחנם והלא כבר נאמר ועתה לכו עבדו ותבן לא ינתן לכם (שמות ה:יח). אם תבן לא היו נותנים להם בחנם ודגים היו נותנים להם בחנם ומה אני אומר חנם, חנם מן המצוות.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What did the Israelites miss about Egypt?
2. What might these Egyptian attractions represent?

**Part II. The Desire to Escape Freedom**

6 Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*, p. 5

Is there not also, perhaps, besides an innate desire for freedom, an instinctive wish for submission? If there is not, how can we account for the attraction which submission to a leader has for so many today? Is submission always to an overt authority, or is there also submission to internalized authorities, such as duty or conscience, to inner compulsions or to anonymous authorities like public opinion? Is there a hidden satisfaction in submitting, and what is its essence?

7 Youssef M. Ibrahim, “Algerian Election Tests Government,” *New York Times*, 12/26/91

Algeria's parliamentary elections, scheduled to start on Thursday, will be the first open challenge in free voting by Islamic fundamentalists to a secular Arab government.

In Algeria, which has made the greatest strides toward multiparty democracy in the region over the past two years, the biggest opposition party and major contender for power is the Islamic Salvation Front, a militant fundamentalist group whose leaders oppose constitutional rule.

The Algerian elections, which are scheduled to be completed with a second round of voting on Jan. 16, may well define a major quandary throughout the Middle East: how to move toward democracy when free elections bring to the fore fundamentalists who are hostile to the notion of democracy.

8 Rabbi Harold Schulweis, “Judaism Without Authoritarianism”<sup>1</sup>

The Grand Inquisitor [in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*] has a cynical shrewdness about human nature that pierces our naiveté. He asks "What do you think people really want? Do you think that what they want is what they say? They say they want freedom and they go to wars under the banners of freedom and liberty. But don't you understand that men really dread freedom, that they will do anything to escape from freedom, that they want nothing more than to be free of freedom? Nothing is more seductive for man than his freedom of conscience but nothing is a greater cause of suffering."

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.vbs.org/rabbi/hshulw/judwtath.htm>

9 Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, *Honey From The Rock*, p. 22

The wilderness is not just a desert through which we wandered for forty years. It is a way of being. A place that demands being open to the flow of life around you. A place that demands being honest with yourself without regard to the cost in personal anxiety. A place that demands being present with all of yourself.

In the wilderness your possessions cannot surround you. Your preconceptions cannot protect you. Your logic cannot promise you the future. Your guilt can no longer place you safely in the past. You are left alone each day with an immediacy that astonishes, chastens, and exults. You see the world as if for the first time.

Now you might say that the promise of such spirited awareness could only keep one with the greatest determination in the wilderness but for a moment or so. That such a way of being would be like breathing pure oxygen. We would live our lives in but a few hours and die of old age. *It is better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness* (Exodus 14:12). And indeed, that is your choice.

**Discussion Questions**

1. When do you retreat from responsibility and why?
2. What is daunting about claiming responsibility in the context of justice?
3. What is one instance in which how you currently refrain from taking responsibility but could instead choose to embrace it? What would embracing responsibility look like?
4. Share an experience when you had a choice about whether or not to take responsibility and you chose to take it. What caused you to do so and what did you learn from the experience?

**Part III. Global Justice Connection**

10 Ian Parker, "The Gift," *The New Yorker*, August 2, 2004

By the spring of 2003, Zell Kravinsky had become a man with no such illusion. "It seems to me crystal clear that I should be giving all my money away and donating all of my time and energy," Kravinsky said, and he speculated that failure to be this generous was corrosive, in a way that most people don't recognize. "Maybe that's why we're fatigued all the time," he mused—from "the effort" of disregarding the greater need of others. "Maybe that's why we break down and suffer depressions: we have a sense that there's something we should be remembering and we're not. Maybe that's what we should be remembering—that other people are suffering."

... At that moment [after donating his kidney], Kravinsky recalled, "I really thought I might have shot it with my family." His parents were also appalled. When Reeda Kravinsky visited her son in the hospital, she recalled, "I was so filled with anger that I didn't speak." Meanwhile, Kravinsky's mind was still turning on philanthropic questions. "I lay there in the hospital, and I thought about all my other organs. When I do something good, I feel that I can do more; I burn to do more. It's a heady feeling." He went home after four days, and by then he was wondering if he should give away his other kidney.

... According to Kravinsky, his family was living on about sixty thousand dollars a year, from Emily's part-time medical practice and from interest derived from Zell's remaining capital. The children were in public schools; the minivans were paid for. "The real test of my vanity would be if I gave everything away," Kravinsky said. "Not just to the point of a working-class existence but to the point of poverty."

### Discussion Questions

1. Zell Kravinsky, an American real estate developer, donated the majority of his substantial wealth to charity. In addition to his philanthropic largesse, Kravinsky also made a nondirected donation of one of his kidneys, undergoing elective surgery to remove the kidney and give it to someone he did not previously know. Applying utilitarian philosophy, Kravinsky weighed the risks to himself and his family against the need for kidney transplants and came to the conclusion that he had a moral obligation to donate his kidney. What do you think of Kravinsky's acceptance of his moral responsibility? Does it frighten or inspire you? Why?
2. What challenges of accepting greater moral responsibility does Kravinsky highlight? How can you respond to these challenges?

### Instructions for Facilitator

#### Introduction

The path from oppression to freedom is complicated. This session looks at a variety of approaches to this journey, drawing on the Exodus story as well as other communities' narratives of change. It focuses specifically on the models of revolution (abrupt and total overthrow of the system) and reform (gradual change over time).

#### Essential Questions

- What does the incident of the golden calf, and Moses's complex response to it, represent?
- When engaging in social change, is it necessary to overthrow the system, or is gradual reform possible?

#### Goals

1. Explore Moses's different approaches to helping the Israelites move from oppression to freedom.
2. Compare the Israelites' experience to different perspectives on how to effectively enact change.
3. Draw some personal conclusions about how participants think social change is best achieved.

**Total Time: 80 minutes**

#### 1. Part I: Purging or Teaching

**Texts Referenced: Texts 1-4**

**Activity Duration: 20 minutes**

Use these texts to examine the two ways in which Moses tried to mold the Israelites into responsible partners in the covenant with God during their journey through the desert—purging and teaching. You may want to refer to the following examples to emphasize the magnitude of his challenge.

Examples of purging:

- the golden calf (Text 3 – Exodus 32:26-28)
- the Korach rebellion (Numbers 16)
- the plague in response to the worship of Ba'al Pe'or (Numbers 25)
- the plague at Kivrot HaTa'avah (Numbers 11)

Examples of teaching:

- In discussing Moses's role as teacher and lawgiver, the primary example that Walzer cites is Exodus 18:20 (Text 4), in which Moses's father-in-law Jethro suggests that he develop a system to judge and teach the Israelites.
- There are numerous other examples of Moses acting as teacher, throughout the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

As you review these models of purging and teaching, discuss how effective each was in helping the Israelites make their transition from slaves to free, responsible partners in the covenant.

### 2. Part II: Revolution or Reform

**Texts Referenced:** Texts 5-10

**Activity Duration:** 25 minutes

This section maps the biblical models of purging and teaching onto the debate over revolution vs. reform as strategies for achieving social and political change. Texts 5 and 6 can also be used to discuss the process of personal change and whether abrupt, drastic change or gradual evolution is the more successful approach. Use the questions on the source sheet to guide a discussion about the pros and cons of revolution vs. reform on a social/political level as well as a personal level.

### 3. Part III: Global Justice Connection

**Text Referenced:** Text 11

**Activity Duration:** 25 minutes

Concretize the themes of this session using the contemporary example of FMLN to further explore these two approaches to achieving social change—gradual reform and radical revolution. Refer to the source sheet to learn about The Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (in Spanish: Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional, FMLN), a left-wing political party in El Salvador, that moved from the tactic of revolution to the strategy of reform in working for justice and change. Use the discussion questions on the source sheet to explore the possibility of using the two approaches of revolution and reform in support of one another.

### 4. Closing Message

**Activity Duration:** 5 minutes

Social change and personal growth can be achieved through revolution or through reform. Usually people ally themselves with one method, though sometimes, as we saw in this lesson, they view them as building on one another. In thinking about applying these approaches to social change, it is important to consider which method seems most likely to work, whether the methods can be combined and what the people seem to need most.



#### Introductory Essay

The incident of the golden calf is the pivotal reactionary moment in the Exodus narrative. The Israelites, unwilling to accept the responsibility of freedom, seek to reinstate slavery to a god that is as incapable of inspiring empathy, compassion or justice as the cold currency from which it is forged.

It is Moses's reaction to the incident, however, that concerns us here. He uproots the social blight of the golden calf by unleashing terrible violence upon its creators, never even considering their reintegration into the community. Moses's reaction to this incident is reminiscent of other such violent responses to sins committed by the Israelites in the desert. Complaints about food, challenges to Moses's authority and idol worship all result in plagues, death and destruction being wrought upon the Israelites.

Purging the Israelite community of those who would influence it to regress is certainly one way to ensure that the community continues to move forward on its path to freedom and responsibility. In his relationship with the Israelites, however, Moses offers another model for ensuring their evolution into free people. Moses is traditionally referred to as *Moshe Rabeinu*, Moses our Teacher, and throughout the desert experience, in his role as lawgiver and teacher, Moses affirms the importance and value of education as a tool for the long-term reform of the community to rid itself of its retrograde impulses.

The purging model represents transformation through revolution, while the education approach proposes a reformist model, allowing for gradual change over time. Which is the better model for social change in our time? When we are confronted with our own golden calves—the elevation of consumption over compassion, the belief in violent means to justify seemingly virtuous ends—should we pursue the total upending of the systems that make these injustices possible, or should we seek to work within those systems to reform them from the inside? Similarly, when we attempt to make changes in our personal lives, should we choose the course of abrupt, drastic change or that of gradual evolution?

Popular history is littered with polarizing debates between these perspectives: Leninist revolution in Russia vs. Western European social democratic reform; Martin Luther King's reform mapped against Malcolm X's revolution; full civil rights for gays and lesbians vs. "don't ask, don't tell." Each of these cases is, of course, more complicated than the superficial dichotomy between revolution and reform suggests. But the question remains relevant as we attempt to chart the most effective path to justice.

Part I. Purging or Teaching

1 Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, p. 58

Physically the escape from Egypt is sudden, glorious, complete; spiritually and politically, it is very slow, a matter of two steps forward, one step back.

2 Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, p. 69

Was it the purging or the teaching that made the decisive difference? The text can be read either way; that is why it has been read so long and so often ... [A]t some point, I suppose, the counterrevolution must be defeated if Egyptian bondage is ever to be left behind. It is important to stress, however, what the text makes clear, that the counterrevolution has deep roots; it cannot be defeated by force alone... The promise is for the people, and the people can only move in gradual stages from bondage to freedom.

3 Exodus 32:26-28

Moses stood up in the gate of the camp and said, "Whoever is for Adonai, come here!" And all the Levites rallied to him. He said to them, "Thus says Adonai, the God of Israel, 'Each of you put sword on thigh, go back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay brother, neighbor and kin.'" The Levites did as Moses had bidden; and some three thousand of the people fell that day.

שמות לב:כו-כח

וַיַּעַמַד מֹשֶׁה בְּשַׁעַר הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיֹּאמֶר מִי לַיהוָה אֵלַי וַיֵּאָסְפוּ אֵלָיו כָּל בְּנֵי לֵוִי: וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם כֹּה אָמַר ה' אֵלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁימוּ אִישׁ חֶרְבּוֹ עַל יָרְכוֹ עֲבְרוּ וְשׁוּבוּ מִשַּׁעַר לְשַׁעַר בְּמַחֲנֶה וְהָרְגוּ אִישׁ אֶת אָחִיו וְאִישׁ אֶת רֵעֵהוּ וְאִישׁ אֶת קָרְבּוֹ: וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְנֵי לֵוִי כַדְבָר מֹשֶׁה וַיָּפֹל מִן הָעָם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא כְּשָׁלֹשׁ אֲלָפֵי אִישׁ:

4 Exodus 18:20

And enjoin upon them the laws and the teachings, and make known to them the way they are to go and the practices they are to follow.

שמות יח:כ

וְהִזְהַרְתָּה אֹתָהֶם אֶת הַחֻקִּים וְאֶת הַתּוֹרָה וְהוֹדַעְתָּ לָהֶם אֶת הַדֶּרֶךְ יֵלְכוּ בָּהּ וְאֶת הַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּן:

**Discussion Questions**

1. What two approaches does Moses employ to guide the Israelites in their transition from slaves to free people?
2. What are the pros and cons of each approach?
3. If you were in Moses's position, how would you have tried to guide the Israelites in this transition from slaves to free people?

Part II. Revolution or Reform

5 Maimonides, Guide to the Perplexed, 3.32  
(Walzer's translation, p. 54)

For a sudden transition from one opposite to another is impossible ...

It is not in the nature of man that, after having been brought up in slavish service ... he should all of a sudden wash off from his hands the dirt [of slavery] ...

The deity uses a gracious ruse in causing [the people] to wander perplexedly in the desert until their souls became courageous ... and until, moreover, people were born who were not accustomed to humiliation and servitude.

רמבם מורה הנבוכים ג:לב

... והוא שא"א לצאת מן ההפך אל ההפך פתאום ...  
כי כמו שאין בטבע האדם שיגדל על מלאכת  
עבדות ... ואחר כן ירחץ ידיו לשעתו מלכלוכם ...  
וכמו שהיה מחכמת השם להסב אותם במדבר עד  
שילמדו גבורה ... ונולדו גם כן אנשים שלא  
הרגילו בשפלות ובעבדות.

6 Rabbi Yosef Yosel Hurwitz, *Madreigat Ha-Adam*, "Darkei ha-Teshuvah"

If someone has a *treif* kitchen and wants to repent and make it *kosher*, he might say, "How can I repent all at once and break all my dishes? It will cost a great deal of money! I'll do it gradually. I'll break one dish, and replace it with a *kosher* one; later I'll replace a second dish, later a third, and later a fourth, until it is completed." Such a person would be considered a fool. For as soon as the [first] *kosher* dish mixes with the rest, it is all *treif*. He can live as long as Methuselah—breaking one dish and replacing it, breaking one dish and replacing it—they will be *treif* forever. If he wants to repent he must break all the dishes at once, and buy entirely new ones.

7 Peter J. Stanlis, *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law*, p. 113

But nothing was more delusive and pernicious, nor more in violation of prudence and the fulfillment of Natural law through historical prescription, than a radical attempt to reconstruct the social order on any abstract rational theory.

8 Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution?*

That is why people who pronounce themselves in favour of the method of legislative reform *in place and in contradistinction to* the conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer and slower road to the *same* goal, but a *different* goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new society they take a stand for surface modifications of the old society. If we follow the political conceptions of revisionism, we arrive at the same conclusion that is reached when we follow the economic theories of revisionism. Our program becomes not the realisation of *socialism*, but the reform of *capitalism*; not the suppression of the wage labour system but the diminution of exploitation, that is, the suppression of the abuses of capitalism instead of suppression of capitalism itself... In the first place, it is impossible to imagine that a transformation as formidable as the passage from capitalist society to socialist society can be realised in one happy act.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/reform-revolution/ch08.htm>, first published in 1900

9 **Mario Savio, speech at Sproul Hall as part of the Free Speech Movement, University of California-Berkeley, December 2, 1964**

There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part; you can't even passively take part, and you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all!

10 **Dan Brook, "A Politics of Politics: Routine and Insurgent Tactics," *Politicalaffairs.net*, October 24-30, 2005<sup>3</sup>**

There are high barriers to change inherent in the routine political processes of American society, as there are very narrow limits to what racial and ethnic minorities, women, poor people, and others who desire progressive change can accomplish through routine politics. The system is heavily biased towards tradition, wealth, status, and privilege. Ordinary people are relatively powerless, except when they disrupt the system or there exists some other structural crisis—whether it be financial, political, labor, environmental, military, or otherwise. These are the only times when the power élite pay any attention to the serious problems that chronically plague our society. The lesson is that progressive social change in America has never been achieved without massive and sustained social disruption—whether legal or illegal, violent or peaceful, organized or spontaneous, proactive or reactive—instigated or led by people on the Left.

### Discussion Questions

1. Some thinkers, like Edmund Burke (quoted in Text 7) and Maimonides, advocate gradual change, while others, like Hurwitz and Luxemburg call for more revolutionary change. Which do you find to be more rhetorically powerful? Which do you find more compelling as an actual framework for change?
2. Revolutionaries often argue that advocates of reform are simply trying to make cosmetic changes in the existing, oppressive system in order to assuage their own guilt for being part of that system. What do you think of this critique? Can you think of a concrete contemporary or historical example in which this critique is borne out?
3. Reformers often argue that revolutionaries are either naïve—because the changes they propose are unrealistic—or dangerous—because revolutionary change is always accompanied by social dislocation and violence. What do you think of this critique? Can you think of a concrete contemporary or historical example in which this critique is borne out?
4. When in your own life have you attempted to implement an abrupt, "revolutionary" change? A gradual, "reformist" change? How do these two instances compare?
5. Imagine instituting some changes in your life that would enable you to use your freedom and power to work for justice. What would these changes be and how would you implement them—revolution-style or reform-style?

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.politicalaffairs.net/article/view/2103/1/127/>



### Part III. Global Justice Connection

The Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (in Spanish: Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional, FMLN) is a left-wing political party in El Salvador. The FMLN was formerly a revolutionary guerrilla organization. During the civil war in El Salvador, the FMLN led military actions against the dictatorship. After peace accords were signed in 1992, all armed FMLN units were demobilized and the organization became a legal political party. At the time, many asked how the goals of the FMLN could still be achieved from within the formal political structures.

#### **11 Interview with Gerson Martínez, member of the Political Commission of the FMLN, August 1992<sup>4</sup>**

From the conceptual and theoretical viewpoint, we needed an economic democracy, a social democracy and a political democracy in El Salvador. To create political democracy we needed to reverse the militarism. In my opinion, we're not going to be able to demilitarize El Salvador, but we can get past militarism. And what does that mean? It means making a political revolution. What does it mean to reverse economic injustice in El Salvador? It means somehow overturning the country's economic structures. That is a revolution. We're making democracy in a revolutionary way. I'm a democrat, but I'm also a revolutionary; that's the adjective that distinguishes me. I'm a revolutionary because I'm a democrat. It's something indivisible in El Salvador. These structures had to be overturned to make democracy, and that's a revolution. That's where the identity between democracy and revolution resides in this country. For this reason I believe that the organizations of the FMLN must reaffirm their democratic concepts, they must define themselves in their essence as democratic organizations, with democratic ideology and politics, and with a functioning internal democracy.

#### **Discussion Questions**

1. The FMLN used a revolutionary model for social change during the Civil War. After the peace process, it chose to enter formal politics and enact change from within that arena. What could be the benefits of this approach? What could be the pitfalls?
2. When Martínez says, “these structures had to be overturned to make democracy, and that’s a revolution,” he implies that revolution was necessary in El Salvador in order to achieve democracy. Does this mean that some changes cannot be accomplished without revolution? Does it mean that there comes a point where revolution is no longer necessary? How can radical change be achieved within in a democratic context?
3. Consider other historical revolutions, especially the American Revolution, in which a revolution was necessary in order to create a democracy. Once the democracy exists, however, how should participants in that democracy continue to pursue justice—through revolution or reform?

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/2538>

### Instructions for Facilitator

#### Introduction

The liberty that the Israelites experienced upon the Exodus from Egypt was “negative liberty” (freedom *from* oppression). Upon accepting the covenant at Sinai, they achieved “positive liberty” (the freedom of affirmative responsibility for moral and ethical behavior). This session explores the nature of the Israelites’ and our responsibility to act morally and ethically as delineated in the Sinaitic covenant. It frames our obligations to others in terms of a continuum from “do no harm” to “prevent all possible dangers” and asks how we understand our covenantal responsibility to other human beings.

#### Essential Questions

- What does the covenant at Sinai represent?
- What are the contours of mutual responsibility that motivate the pursuit of social change?

#### Goals

1. Identify the distinctions between positive and negative liberty.
2. Identify and explore the distinctions between “do no harm” and “duty to assist.”
3. Explore where on the continuum of obligation participants understand themselves to be.

**Total Time: 65 minutes**

#### 1. Part I: Accepting the Covenant

**Texts Referenced: Texts 1-2**

**Activity Duration: 15 minutes**

Introduce the session by explaining the concepts of positive and negative liberty in the context of the biblical Exodus narrative. After escaping Egypt, the Israelites achieved negative liberty in which they were free from oppression. Once they accepted the covenant at Sinai, they achieved positive liberty, a state in which they freely chose to commit themselves to building a moral society.

The texts in this section describe the Israelites’ acceptance of the covenant, a necessary step in their journey to freedom. Use the questions on the source sheet to guide a discussion about what the Israelites committed to when they accepted the covenant at Sinai.

#### 2. Part II: The Contours of the Covenant – Do No Harm or Duty to Assist

**Texts Referenced: Texts 3-10**

**Activity Duration: 25 minutes**

Continue your discussion about the responsibilities the Israelites accepted by entering into the covenant by exploring the nature and extent of our responsibilities toward one another. The texts in this section offer different perspectives on the extent of these responsibilities and whether or not they can be legislated. Use the discussion questions on the source sheet to frame a conversation about the implications of legislating different levels of responsibility to one another. Encourage participants to consider what actions they take to fulfill their responsibilities to others.

### 3. Part III: Global Justice Connection

Text Referenced: Text 12

Activity Duration: 20 minutes

The previous texts in this session explored the nature and extent of our responsibilities to one another, from doing no harm to actively providing aid and protection to people in danger. The example of Girl Child Network helps concretize these categories by illustrating an organization that works not only to aid and protect girls in Zimbabwe but also to empower them and provide them with more opportunity. Use the discussion questions on the source sheet to explore whether participants believe that their obligations to others extend to this level and how they fulfill these obligations in their own lives.

### 4. Closing Message

Activity Duration: 5 minutes

Jewish tradition distinguishes between negative and positive liberty and articulates the importance of positive liberty through the requirement that the Israelites commit to God and justice once they left Egypt. For the contemporary Jew, positive liberty involves not only personally acting justly, but also working to make the world a just place. In a globalized society, we must look both within and beyond our own geographic community in order to fulfill this obligation. We also must consider the extent of our obligation to those around the world—certainly not to harm one another and ideally to proactively provide aid and protection to one another.

### Introductory Essay

The escape from Egypt represents only one part of the necessary liberation process for the Israelites. They achieve “negative liberty”—freedom from oppression—but have not replaced their slavery with a commitment to something new. It is only when they voluntarily enter into a covenant with God that they begin to experience “positive liberty”—the freedom of affirmative responsibility for moral and ethical behavior.

In American society, we talk about covenants between people and each other (rather than between people and God). These covenants are the rules (aka, social contracts) that govern our society—the Constitution, statutory law, social convention. Generally, in American jurisprudence and practice, these covenants focus on a narrow conception of our responsibility to one another—we are responsible not to harm one another and not to interfere with one another’s liberties.

The Sinaitic covenant offers another, far more expansive and demanding approach, one in which we are bound to aid and protect one another. Instead of being obligated only to avoid hurting other people, we’re expected to proactively provide aid and protection to each other. The implications of this are daunting. In Walzer’s words, “Is the individual bound only to observe the laws himself or is he bound to see to it that they are collectively observed? Is he bound to act justly or to make sure that justice is done?”<sup>5</sup>

Ultimately, it is this charge, this covenant, that underlies the whole enterprise of justice, since it matters little to the poor, disenfranchised and oppressed how justly we act if their lot does not improve. How do we interpret our covenantal responsibility to other human beings, and how do we act on that interpretation?

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, p. 84.



Part I. Accepting the Covenant

1 Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, p. 53

True freedom, in the rabbinic view, lies in servitude to God. The Israelites had been Pharaoh’s slaves; in the wilderness they became God’s servants—the Hebrew word is the same; and once they agree to God’s rule, He and Moses, His deputy, force them to be free. This, according to Rousseau, was Moses’ great achievement; he transformed a herd of “wretched fugitives,” who lacked both virtue and courage, into “a free people.” He didn’t do this merely by breaking their chains but also by organizing them into a “political society” and giving them laws. He brought them what is currently called “positive freedom,” that is, not so much (not at all!) a way of life free from regulation but rather a way of life to whose regulation they could, and did, agree. That this latter condition is properly called freedom is an idea much criticized in recent philosophical literature, and sometimes rightly, but it contains a deep truth nonetheless about the process of liberation. The Israelite slaves could become free only insofar as they accepted the discipline of freedom, the obligation to live up to a common standard and to take responsibility for their own actions.

2 Exodus 19:3-8

And Moses went up to God. Adonai called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Me. Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel.” Moses came and summoned the elders of he people and put before them all that Adonai had commanded him. All the people answered as one, saying, “All that Adonai has spoken we will do!” And Moses brought back the people’s words to Adonai.

שמות יט:ג-ח

וּמִן הַיּוֹם הַהוּא יִקְרָא אֱלֹהֵי ה' מִן הַהַר  
 לְאֹמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבֵית יִעֲקֹב וְתִגִּיד לְבְנֵי  
 יִשְׂרָאֵל: אַתֶּם רְאִיתֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְמִצְרַיִם  
 וְאֲשָׂא אֶתְכֶם עַל פְּנֵי נְשָׁרִים וְאָבָא אֶתְכֶם אֵלָי:  
 וְעַתָּה אִם שְׂמוּעַ תִּשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וְשָׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת  
 בְּרִיתִי וְהָיִיתֶם לִי סֻגְלָה מִכָּל הָעַמִּים כִּי לִי כָל  
 הָאָרֶץ: וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מְמַלְכֶת כֹּל הַיָּמִים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ  
 אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תְּדַבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: וַיָּבֹא  
 מֹשֶׁה וַיִּקְרָא לְזִקְנֵי הָעָם וַיְשִׂם לִפְנֵיהֶם אֵת כָּל  
 הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּהוּ ה': וַיַּעֲנוּ כָל הָעָם  
 יַחְדָּו וַיֹּאמְרוּ כֹל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע  
 מִן הַיּוֹם הַהוּא אֵת דְּבָרֵי הָעָם אֵל ה':

**Discussion Questions**

1. Walzer argues that a necessary component of the Exodus was the acceptance of the covenant at Sinai. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
2. What do the Israelites commit to when they accept the covenant?



Part II. The Contours of the Covenant—Do No Harm, or Duty to Assist

3 Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 73a

How do we know that if a person sees another person drowning, mauled by beasts or attacked by robbers, he is bound to save him? From the verse, “You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor” (Leviticus 19:16).

תלמוד בבלי סנהדרין עג.

מניין לרואה את חבירו שהוא טובע בנהר, או חיה גוררתו, או לסטין באין עליו, שהוא חייב להצילו - תלמוד לומר לא תעמד על דם רעך (ויקרא יט:טז).

4 Maimonides, Book of Mitzvot, Negative Commandment 297

The 297<sup>th</sup> commandment is that we cannot be passive in saving the life of one who is in danger of dying or being lost if we are in a position to save him or her.

רמבם ספר המצוות מצוה רצז

והמצוה הרצ"ז היא שהזהירנו מהתירשלות בהצלת נפש אחד מישׂראל כשנראהו בסכנת המות או ההפסד ויהיה לנו יכולת להצילו.

5 Deuteronomy 22:8

When you build a new house, you shall make a fence around your roof, because you should not allow blood to be spilled if anyone should fall from it.

דברים כב:ח

כִּי תִבְנֶה בַּיִת חֲדָשׁ וְעָשִׂיתָ מִעֲקָה לְגַגְךָ וְלֹא תִשְׂאִים דָּמִים בְּבֵיתְךָ כִּי יִפֹּל הַנֶּפֶל מִמֶּנּוּ:

5a Maimonides, Laws of the Murderer and Protecting Life 11:4

Both the roof and any other object of potential danger, by which it is likely that a person could be fatally injured, like a well or a pit in one's yard, whether or not it has water in it, the owner is required to make a wall ten handbreadths high or make a cover for it so as to prevent a person from falling into it and dying. And so, too, regarding any obstacle that could cause mortal danger, one has a positive obligation to remove it and to guard against it [causing harm] and to be meticulously careful with it as it says, “Take utmost care and guard your life” (Deuteronomy 4:9). And if one does not remove it but leaves those obstacles constituting potential danger, one transgresses a positive commandment and transgresses the negative commandment, “You should not allow blood to be spilled.”

רמב"ם הלכות רוצח ושמירת הנפש יא:ד

אחד הגג ואחד כל דבר שיש בו סכנה וראוי שיכשל בו אדם וימות כגון שהיתה לו באר או בור בחצירו בין שיש בהן מים בין שאין בהן מים חייב לעשות להן חוליה גבוהה עשרה טפחים או לעשות לה כסוי כדי שלא יפול בה אדם וימות. וכן כל מכשול שיש בו סכנת נפשות מצות עשה להסירו ולהשמר ממנו ולהזהר בדבר יפה יפה שני השמר לך ושמור נפשך (דברים ד:ט). ואם לא הסיר, והניח המכשולות המביאין לידי סכנה, ביטל מצות עשה ועבר על לא תשים דמים.

6 **Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, p. 108**

What is required of a holy nation is that its members obey divine law, and much of that law is concerned with the rejection of Egyptian bondage. In such a nation, then, no one would oppress a stranger, or deny Sabbath rest to his servants, or withhold the wages of a worker.

7 **“Duty to Assist” law from the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms (Part I, Chapter 1:2)**

Every human being whose life is in peril has a right to assistance...

Every person must come to the aid of anyone whose life is in peril, either personally or calling for aid, by giving him the necessary and immediate physical assistance, unless it involves danger to himself or a third person, or he has another valid reason.

8 **A Penal Code by Thomas Babington Macaulay, Indian Law Commission, London: 1838, p. 105**

It is, indeed, most highly desirable that men should not merely abstain from doing harm to their neighbours, but should render active services to their neighbours. In general however the penal law must content itself with keeping men from doing positive harm, and must leave to public opinion, and to the teachers of morality and religion, the office of furnishing men with motives for doing positive good. It is evident that to attempt to punish men by law for not rendering to others all the service which it is their duty to render to others would be preposterous.

9 **Rabbi David Hartman, “Auschwitz or Sinai”<sup>6</sup>**

Sinai calls us to action, to moral awakening, to living constantly with challenges of building a moral and just society which mirrors the kingdom of God in history. Sinai creates humility and openness to the demands of self-transcendence . . .

Sinai requires of the Jew that he believe in the possibility of integrating the moral seriousness of the prophet with the realism and political judgment of the statesman. Politics and morality were united when Israel was born as a nation at Sinai. Sinai prohibits the Jewish people from ever abandoning the effort of creating a shared moral language with the nations of the world...

10 **Seinfeld—The Finale, Part 2, Screenplay<sup>7</sup>**

Chiles: It is a travesty of justice that these four people have been incarcerated ... You know what these four people were? They were innocent bystanders. Now, you just think about that term. Innocent. Bystanders. Because that's exactly what they were. We know they were bystanders, nobody's disputing that. So how can a bystander be guilty? No such thing. Have you ever heard of a guilty bystander? No, because you cannot be a bystander and be guilty. Bystanders are by definition, innocent. That is the nature of bystanding. ... Good Samaritan Law? I never heard of it. You don't have to help anybody. That's what this country's all about.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://old.hartmaninstitute.com/davidhartman/teachings/archive/sinai.html>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.seinfeldscripts.com/TheFinale.htm>

### 11 Thane Rosenbaum, *The Myth of Moral Justice*, pp. 250-251

Under our legal system, rescue amounts to an unrequited, one-sided risk: The rescuer puts his body and his life on the line, and, at the same time, exposes himself to possible liability. The law essentially says: “Be careful when you take your first step toward rescuing a fellow human being, because you’re not required to do so, and the choice is not without consequence.” Once the rescuer announces his intentions, his conduct comes under close scrutiny. The law will be checking for flaws. So why would anyone aspire to become a good Samaritan? The innocent bystander is ultimately better off; morally questionable, but at least safe from the law’s harsh judgment.

Few would question whether responding to someone in distress is a morally virtuous act. But the law doesn’t require that we model ourselves on being moral. Instead of encouraging humanitarian interventions, the legal system sends an implicit message that rescue is risky and indifference is safe. It isn’t rational for citizens to come to each other’s aid when the law doesn’t require it and penalizes those who try but in some manner fail.

#### Discussion Questions

1. How do these texts define the extent of our obligations to others? It may be helpful to think in terms of a continuum (i.e. what’s the minimum level of obligation we can imagine and what’s the maximum?).
2. What are the benefits and problems that might crop up at different points along an extent of obligation continuum (e.g. a standard of “do no harm” would allow me to casually walk past a child drowning in a shallow pond while a standard of “prevent all potential dangers” might quickly become overwhelming and be difficult to legislate and enforce)?
3. Many of these texts establish the obligation to save someone in mortal danger. How expansively (or narrowly) would you interpret this obligation?
4. Some of these texts obligate us to respond when we see someone in danger. How do you understand “seeing” in the context of this obligation? What if you don’t see the person in danger but you know that s/he exists?
5. Who are the people to whom you are covenantally responsible—family, friends, neighbors, fellow Americans, Jews, everyone in the world? What actions do you take to fulfill these covenantal responsibilities and where do those actions fall along a continuum from “do no harm” to “provide aid and protection”?

### Part III. Global Justice Connection

#### 12 Darren Ressler, “Girl Power.” *AJWS Reports*, Spring 2008, p. 11<sup>8</sup>

The societal ills that plague Zimbabwe include a rampant HIV/AIDS outbreak, skyrocketing inflation (at roughly 100,000%), a staggering 80% unemployment rate and years of drought. In the process, women have become susceptible to rape and domestic violence. According to the *Zimbabwe Guardian*, over 40,000 women are raped every year. In 2006, 3,112 minors were raped and many acts of violence go unreported.

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<sup>8</sup> [http://ajws.org/who\\_we\\_are/publications/ajws\\_reports/ajws\\_reports\\_spring\\_2008.pdf](http://ajws.org/who_we_are/publications/ajws_reports/ajws_reports_spring_2008.pdf)



That’s where Girl Child Network steps in to fill the void. Founded in 1999 by [Betty] Makoni, then a second grade teacher, GCN’s mission is to support young girls in their schools, communities and homes. The network has blossomed and consists of 690 girls’ clubs (which are run by girls and volunteers), three girls’ empowerment villages for rape survivors and over 35,000 members around the country. GCN provides safe spaces while advocating for children’s rights, the prevention of sexual abuse and enforcement of current laws to protect women and children.

. . . As Zimbabwe struggles, GCN’s girls’ empowerment villages, funded by AJWS grants, are making a difference. In fact, Makoni reports that truancy among girls in her district has fallen from 20% to 10%. “It’s a one-stop shop where girls come to receive counseling, acquire economic skills and understand their rights. A number of girls have been empowered.”

Makoni is happy to report on GCN’s many other success stories. “There are so many that I am particularly proud of,” she beams. “One of the girls we have supported has become the first rural girl to attain an engineering degree thanks to AJWS funds. Another is now a regional director in West Africa after she managed to access an education thanks to Girl Child Network. One girl six months ago was walking in the rich streets of New York after coming from a slum area. That transformation of an individual from a victim into a survivor and into a leader is one of our many success stories.”

### Discussion Questions

1. GCN provides many forms of support to girls in Zimbabwe. On a continuum of “do no harm” to “prevent all possible dangers” where would you place GCN?
2. What are ways in which you do, and can, help people in the world improve their lives?

### Instructions for Facilitator

#### Introduction

The Israelites' journey from slavery to freedom was a long and complicated one. In fact, Moses and original generation of slaves never reached the Promised Land, and throughout the journey through the wilderness the Israelites rebelled and reverted to behavior unbecoming to free people. These characteristics of the elusiveness of the destination and the uneven progress during the journey are equally true of social change work. Understanding these challenges can help us, as contemporary activists, gird ourselves to pursue justice for the long haul.

#### Essential Questions

- What does the Promised Land, and the seemingly interminable journey to arrive there, represent?
- How can we sustain a commitment to the ceaseless work of social change?

#### Goals

1. Explore the ways in which the Exodus story, with its emphasis on never reaching the Promised Land and the backsliding of the generation that was liberated from Egypt, can impact our understanding of our own contemporary social change work.
2. Identify the obstacles to maintaining a commitment to justice work and brainstorm strategies for overcoming these obstacles.

**Total Time: 70 minutes**

#### 1. Part I: The Struggle to Move Forward

**Texts Referenced: Texts 1-5**

**Activity Duration: 25 minutes**

Before looking at the texts from this section, ask participants to loosely reconstruct Jewish history from the time of Joshua onward, focusing on the quality of life in the Land of Israel as well as the repeating pattern of exile and return. The texts in this section emphasize the slow and difficult journey to reach the Promised Land. Use the questions on the source sheet to explore the idea that in the Exodus narrative, and in our own lives, the effort to achieve a better world is always characterized by setbacks, backsliding, very slow progress and then setting our sights on the next goal.

#### 2. Part II: Obstacles to Maintaining a Commitment to Justice Work

**Texts Referenced: Texts 6-9**

**Activity Duration: 25 minutes**

Use the texts in this section to connect the challenges the Israelites faced as they attempted to build a society in Canaan to those obstacles we encounter in our efforts to pursue justice. These obstacles can include compassion fatigue, geographical or relational distance from the problems and the seemingly insignificant impact of our work. You might note when introducing this section that while Chapter 1 addressed the question of why we hesitate to claim our responsibility to do justice work in the first place, this chapter addresses the problem that once we have made the



commitment, maintaining our dedication can be very difficult. The model of *keva* and *kavannah* can be a helpful paradigm for how we can maintain our dedication. Although we may not always feel personally fulfilled by the justice work we do, we must make that work part of our daily routines.

### 3. Part III: Global Justice Connection

**Text Referenced:** Text 10

**Activity Duration:** 15 minutes

Concretize the themes of this session with the text by Nelson Mandela, anti-apartheid activist and the first President of South Africa to be elected in a fully representative democratic election. Mandela provides an example of someone who persisted in the pursuit of justice despite numerous challenges and setbacks. Use this text and the discussion questions on the source sheet to examine South Africa as another example of the slow and uneven march to the Promised Land and the importance of continuing to work for global justice even in places in which we believe that progress has been made.

### 4. Closing Message

**Activity Duration:** 5 minutes

The Exodus story teaches us that the road from slavery to freedom is difficult. Along the way, individuals and communities often experience setbacks; this is a natural and important part of the journey. Anticipating the obstacles that can impede progress, however, can help us strategize ways to avoid or overcome them. We also learn from the Torah and contemporary examples that the journey towards our goals is ongoing. We celebrate along the way what we have already achieved, and recommit ourselves to our work to achieve justice.

#### Introductory Essay

He [Rabbi Tarfon] used to say, “You are not required to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from it.” –Pirke Avot 2:16

Walzer posits that, despite crossing the Jordan, the Israelites (and we, by association and inheritance) never actually reach the Promised Land. Instead, we always hold that utopian ideal ahead of ourselves as a goad and a challenge to push ourselves to do better. Rabbi Tarfon’s statement above is often quoted in relation to this idea of an always evolving goal. He is usually understood as offering us permission to do as much work as we can or the best job we can without worrying about finishing the job or being perfect. In other words, the Promised Land will always be ahead of us, so we shouldn’t worry or feel bad if we don’t arrive there; the important thing is that we’re working and journeying in its direction.

And yet, there is a darker side to Rabbi Tarfon’s statement, namely that it’s not even possible for us to complete the task, but still, we must persist. Instead of inspiring or hopeful, this reading seems demoralizing. If the task is too great to complete, and may never be completed, what joy or fulfillment will we find in continuing to work on it? If no one will ever reach the Promised Land, isn’t the imperative to continue marching there a recipe for endless frustration?

In the face of the world’s overwhelming problems, how do we sustain the commitment to accept responsibility and work for justice? While the danger exists that we will become paralyzed by the enormity of the task, there is also the risk that by engaging in a few acts of justice work, we will applaud ourselves for having done our part. How can we ensure that we don’t become complacent, self-satisfied or self-congratulatory about the responsibility that we have taken on, but rather, continue to challenge ourselves to take on more?

And beyond the nature of the problems, how do we maintain our willingness to engage in justice work that is sometimes deeply satisfying, but more often tedious and difficult. The language of *keva* (structure and predictability) and *kavannah* (intentional meaning and spontaneity) can be a useful model for understanding our social justice obligations. Like so many *keva* obligations, social justice work—calling and writing elected representatives, sitting down to make *tzedakah* allocations, investigating the working conditions which created our clothes, serving one more meal at the local soup kitchen—can be rigid, repetitive and unsatisfying. These actions don’t necessarily provide us with the *kavannah* that we expect from our good works. Giving *tzedakah* can feel transactional and superficial. Regular volunteering (e.g. at a homeless shelter) can be boring and repetitive. What a *keva* commitment offers, however, is a guarantee that the work gets done, regardless of the vagaries of our day-to-day emotional/psychological fulfillment in doing it.

Part I. The Struggle to Move Forward

1 Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, p. 103

Though the phrase “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” provides no geographical reference, it has a temporal reference. The promising verbs in Exodus 19 are future/conditional. They can refer to the immediate future: if, *right now*, you obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be, *now*, a kingdom of priests. In fact, however, obedience is a struggle that extends over many years; holiness lies ahead in time as Canaan does in space.

2 Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, p. 108

Conceived in territorialist terms, the promise of milk and honey has a temporal end point: sooner or later, the people will cross the Jordan and enter the land. Conceived in ethical terms, the promise is temporally uncertain, for its achievement is not a matter of where we plant our feet but of how we cultivate our spirits.

3 Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, p. 120

[T]he Exodus texts ... almost seem designed to teach that the promises will never definitely be fulfilled, that backsliding and struggle are permanent features of human existence.

4 Hosea 4:1-2

Hear the word of Adonai, O people of Israel! For Adonai has a case against the inhabitants of this land, because there is no honesty and no goodness and no obedience to God in the land. [False] swearing, dishonesty, and murder, and theft and adultery are rife; crime follows upon crime!

הושע ד:א-ב  
 שָׁמְעוּ דְבַר ה' בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי רִיב לָהּ עִם יוֹשְׁבֵי  
 הָאָרֶץ כִּי אֵין אֱמֶת וְאֵין חֶסֶד וְאֵין דַּעַת אֶל הַיָּם  
 בְּאָרֶץ: אֶל־הַ נְכַחֵשׁ וְרָצַח וְגַנְבֵי וְנָאֵף פְּרָצוּ  
 וְדָמִים בְּדָמִים נִגְעוּ:

5 Paraphrased from Eliyahu E. Dessler, *Strive for Truth: The Selected Writings of Rabbi E.E. Dessler, Part Two*, translated into English and annotated by Aryeh Carmell, pp. 52-57

When two armies are locked in battle, the place where the struggle takes place is called the front line. This line is drawn at the place where the two forces meet. On either side, there is territory that belongs to that side and is thus not the location of battle. The front line moves and changes, but battle, generally speaking, occurs only where the two sides meet.

Our moral choices can be thought of in a similar way. There are decisions that we have made in our lives so many times that they are no longer decisions. It is obvious to us that we will respond in particular ways to particular events. Those choices are within our territory. There are also choices we have never had to make and likely will never have to make. They are beyond the realm of our experience. They are firmly out of our territory. The place where these territories meet is the place of choice—*bechirah*. On the spectrum of what we know to be ethical and what we know to be unethical, we make choices only at the *bechirah* point. This is the point where our values come into conflict and thus the choices are not obvious. Each individual’s *bechirah* point is unique, and it moves as we grow and change. By recognizing the *bechirah* points in our lives, we are able to set our sights on expanding our moral territory and thus becoming better people.



### Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the Exodus narrative is constructed in such a way that the Promised Land is never fully realized?
2. Text 3 refers to the tendency of communities to backslide along the way to justice, and Text 4 gives an example of backsliding. Does reading these accounts have any impact on the way you think about the contemporary fight for justice? If so, how?
3. Text 5 emphasizes the always-evolving goals, framing our moral choices in terms of battles, some of which we've won and others of which we're still struggling to conquer. As a Jewish community that pursues justice for all people, which battles do you think we have won, and with which do we still struggle?
4. Text 5 also claims that there are some choices that we have made so many times that they have become second nature to us; they are no longer choices. Are there any choices that we have made as an American Jewish community that, although we treat them as second nature, you think we should reevaluate them? If so, what are they and why?

### Part II. Obstacles to Maintaining a Commitment to Justice Work

#### 6 Annie Dillard, "The Wreck of Time: Taking Our Century's Measure," *Harper's Magazine*, January 1998, pp. 52-56

We see generations of waves rise from the sea that made them, billions of individuals at a time; we see them dwindle and vanish. If this does not astound you, what will? Or what will move you to pity?

. . . HEAD-SPINNING NUMBERS CAUSE MIND TO GO SLACK, the *Hartford Courant* says. But our minds must not go slack. How can we think straight if our minds go slack? We agree that we want to think straight.

Anyone's close world of family and friends composes a group smaller than almost all sampling errors, smaller than almost all rounding errors, a group invisible, at whose loss the world will not blink. Two million children die a year from diarrhea, and 800,000 from measles. Do we blink? Stalin starved 7 million Ukrainians in one year, Pol Pot killed 1 million Cambodians, the flu epidemic of 1918 killed 21 or 22 million people . . . shall this go on? Or do you suffer, as Teilhard de Chardin did, the sense of being "an atom lost in the universe"? Or do you not suffer this sense? How about what journalists call "compassion fatigue"? Reality fatigue? At what limit for you do other individuals blur? Vanish? How old are you?

. . . One small town's soup kitchen, St. Mary's, serves 115 men a night. Why feed 115 individuals? Surely so few people elude most demographics and achieve statistical insignificance. After all, there are 265 million Americans, 15 million people who live in Mexico City, 16 million in greater New York, 26 million in greater Tokyo. Every day 1.5 million people walk through Times Square in New York; every day almost as many people—1.4 million—board a U.S. passenger plane. And so forth. We who breathe air now will join the already dead layers of us who breathed air once. We arise from dirt and dwindle to dirt, and the might of the universe is arrayed against us.

7 **Nicholas Kristof, “Save the Darfur Puppy,” *The New York Times*, May 10, 2007**

Finally, we’re beginning to understand what it would take to galvanize President Bush, other leaders and the American public to respond to the genocide in Sudan: a suffering puppy with big eyes and floppy ears.

That’s the implication of a series of studies by psychologists trying to understand why people – good, conscientious people – aren’t moved by genocide or famines. Time and again, we’ve seen that the human conscience just isn’t pricked by mass suffering, while an individual child (or puppy) in distress causes our hearts to flutter.

. . . Even the right animal evokes a similar sympathy. A dog stranded on a ship aroused so much pity that \$48,000 in private money was spent trying to rescue it – and that was before the Coast Guard stepped in. And after I began visiting Darfur in 2004, I was flummoxed by the public’s passion to save a red-tailed hawk, Pale Male, that had been evicted from his nest on Fifth Avenue in New York City. A single homeless hawk aroused more indignation than two million homeless Sudanese.

Advocates for the poor often note that 30,000 children die daily of the consequences of poverty—presuming that this number will shock people into action. But the opposite is true: the more victims, the less compassion.

In one experiment, people in one group could donate to a \$300,000 fund for medical treatments that would save the life of one child – or, in another group, the lives of eight children. People donated more than twice as much money to help save one child as to help save eight.

. . . So maybe what we need isn’t better laws but more troubled consciences—pricked, perhaps, by a Darfur puppy with big eyes and floppy ears. Once we find such a soulful dog in peril, we should call ABC News. ABC’s news judgment can be assessed by the 11 minutes of evening news coverage it gave to Darfur’s genocide during all of last year—compared with 23 minutes for the false confession in the JonBenet Ramsey case.

If President Bush and the global public alike are unmoved by the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of fellow humans, maybe our last, best hope is that we can be galvanized by a puppy in distress.

8 **Michael Pollan, “Why Bother?” *The New York Times Magazine*, April 20, 2008**

Why bother? That really is the big question facing us as individuals hoping to do something about climate change, and it’s not an easy one to answer . . . The immense disproportion between the magnitude of the problem . . . and the puniness of what [we seem to be able] to do about it was enough to sink your heart.

9 **Abraham Joshua Heschel, “Toward an Understanding of Halachah,” *Conservative Judaism and Jewish Law*, 1977, p. 134**

How grateful I am to God that there is a duty to worship, a law to remind my distraught mind that it is time to think of God, time to disregard my ego for at least a moment! It is such happiness to belong to an order of the divine will. I am not always in a mood to pray. I do not always have the vision and the strength to say a word in the presence of God. But when I am weak, it is the law that gives me strength; when my vision is dim, it is duty that gives me insight.

### Discussion Questions

1. Compassion fatigue, the enormity of the problems in the world and the tediousness of many forms of activism are obstacles that stand in the way of our ability to sustain the day-to-day work of justice. What are the ways that we can overcome these obstacles?
2. What are the other obstacles to this sustained commitment in your life? How do you or could you overcome them?
3. How do we appropriately balance our need for meaning in the justice work we do with the need of those on whose behalf we work?
4. Text 9 distinguishes between that which we feel moved to do (motivated by intentional meaning—*kavannah*) and that which we feel obligated to do (motivated by fixed structure—*keva*) in the context of prayer. In this text Heschel asserts that his obligation to pray has the capacity to give him strength and insight, when he lacks the desire to pray. Can you apply this model to developing a personal practice around justice work that you do regardless of whether or not you feel like doing it? If you were to develop such a practice, how might you structure it and why?

### Part III. Global Justice Connection

#### 10 Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, pp. 623-625

We took up the struggle with our eyes wide open, under no illusion that the path would be an easy one. As a young man, when I joined the African National Congress, I saw the price my comrades paid for their beliefs, and it was high. For myself, I have never regretted my commitment to the struggle, and I was always prepared to face the hardships that affected me personally. . . .

When I walked out of prison, that was my mission, to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both. Some say that has now been achieved. But I know that that is not the case. The truth is that we are not yet free; we have merely achieved the freedom to be free, the right not to be oppressed. We have not taken the final step of our journey, but the first step on a longer and even more difficult road. For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others. The true test of our devotion to freedom is just beginning.

I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom come responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended.



### Discussion Questions

1. How does Mandela’s reflection on the struggle to end apartheid in South Africa parallel the Exodus narrative in terms of the march towards the Promised Land?
2. In May, 2008, xenophobic violence in South Africa killed dozens and displaced thousands. In 2004 (ten years after the end of apartheid and the first democratic elections in South Africa), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) reported that Blacks constituted 90% of the 21.9 million poor people in South Africa.<sup>9</sup> What does the contemporary reality of South Africa reveal about the process of achieving social change?
3. How does your knowledge of the history and current reality of South Africa affect your commitment to work for justice?

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2004/may2004/safr-m21.shtml>

### Instructions for Facilitator

#### Introduction

Throughout this study, we have explored how the Exodus narrative can serve as a model for our own pursuit of justice. We considered deep philosophical questions about the benefits of slavery and the challenges of wilderness; the critical decision to rebel or reform; the nature of our obligations to one another; and the complex and slow journey to reach the Promised Land. This exploration must now lead us to action, and this session provides the framework for committing to taking concrete action in the pursuit of justice.

#### Essential Question

- What concrete actions can we take to engage in the pursuit of justice?

#### Goals:

1. Introduce Walzer’s concept that we are all on journeys, marching from Egypt to the Promised Land.
2. Identify and share how participants understand Egypt, the Promised Land and the march in the context of their own lives.
3. Consider the variety of ways in which individuals and communities can respond to injustice and make personal commitments about how they will take action.

**Total Time: 90 minutes**

#### 1. Part 1: Marching

**Text Referenced: Text 1**

**Activity Duration: 25 minutes**

In his conclusion to *Exodus and Revolution*, Walzer asserts that we are all on a journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. Use this text and the questions on the source sheet to inspire a conversation about the ways in which the themes of Egypt, the Promised Land and the march through the wilderness play out in our own lives and our own pursuit of justice.

#### 2. Part 2: Jewish Global Citizenship

**Texts Referenced: Texts 2-10**

**Activity Duration: 60 minutes**

Present AJWS’s six-pointed Jewish global citizenship star as a trigger to explore different modes of action. Explain that each of the six points on the star (learn, teach, serve, advocate, spend and give) is a different way to take action to pursue global justice. AJWS and AVODAH believe that to be a Jewish Global Citizen, Jews should engage in some combination of these methods of social change. At different stages of life individuals can often act on different methods more effectively and with greater ease and talent. However, it is useful to remember that all of the points are necessary to achieve social change and participants can be encouraged to combine methods when possible.

Use the texts and the questions on the source sheet to examine each of the forms of activism included in the Jewish global citizenship star. You may want to look at each form of activism or you



may want to focus on only a few that you think will particularly resonate with your participants. Alternatively, you could ask participants to find a *chavruta* and invite each *chavruta* pair to focus on the action areas that are most resonant for them. Most of the texts provided in this section encourage participants to both analyze the importance and efficacy of a particular form of activism, as well as to commit to engaging in that kind of action. Please encourage participants to articulate their commitments to action and discuss ways that they can hold themselves accountable to these commitments.

*Challenge: Ask participants to create a 10 year strategy for how they might make some concrete change on an issue that concerns them, using each method at least once, and trying to combine methods when possible. Invite them share their plans either in pairs or with the whole group when they are finished.*

### 3. Closing Message

**Activity Duration: 5 minutes**

As this final session draws to a close, place the commitment to action back in the context of Passover and the Exodus narrative. If, as this course has tried to do, we want to use the Exodus narrative as a model or prescription for achieving social change, the road to the Promised Land requires marching. As we approach the holiday of Passover and celebrate the freedom and power that we have to make change in the world, ask participants to consider and write down:

1. One action they will take to pursue justice as a result of having participated in these sessions.
2. How their personal celebrations of Passover this year will help strengthen their commitments to social change.

### Introductory Essay

This study has explored some of the fundamental questions that underlie the pursuit of justice:

- Why is it so difficult to engage in social change?
- When engaging in social change, must we overthrow the system, or is gradual reform possible?
- What are the contours of responsibility that motivate the pursuit of social change?
- How can we sustain a commitment to the ongoing work of social change?

Having considered these deep philosophical questions, what should we do? Any exploration of questions of injustice should be accompanied by a structured opportunity for changes in perspective and behavior. This focus on concrete, practical action is based on the belief that the failure to act in the face of injustice fosters apathy and cynicism, and that, alternatively, commitment and action build hope.

This session offers a framework for taking action and the tools to put it into practice. AJWS identifies six aspects of Jewish global citizenship, or six areas in which one can take action to pursue global justice:

#### **Learn**

The more we know, the more we can effect change. Learning about the events of the world, about why things are the way they are and how we can make them better, will help us work for change. Knowledge is the foundation upon which all of the other forms of activism rest.

#### **Teach**

When we know about an issue and have a plan of action, we can teach others about it and invite them to get involved. Teaching others is a vital way to maximize the impact of our justice work.

#### **Serve**

Service means doing direct volunteer work. This involves meeting people affected by the issues we care about and working with them to address the challenges they face.

#### **Advocate**

Political advocacy is about taking a position on issues in order to change the systems of injustice. In the U.S., this usually means putting pressure on our elected representatives in government. Governments work on local, state, national and international levels. By raising our concerns with those in elected office, we can influence government policies that can have enormous impacts.

#### **Spend**

Ethical consumption means spending money in ways that reflect our values. By making choices about how much we buy (quantity) and what we buy (products and services), we demonstrate with our money what we think is right. For example, if we buy clothing that was made by child labor in factories that do not abide by international labor laws, we effectively support those values. If, instead, we buy food, clothing, goods and services that are produced in ways that respect labor laws, trade practices and environmental impacts, we push the market to move in that direction.

#### **Give**

Giving *tzedakah* means giving money to help people—both money of our own and money raised from others. Jewish tradition calls on us to give 10% of our earnings to *tzedakah*, which can be donated directly to those in need or given to organizations that reach people we may not meet.



### Part I. Marching

#### 1 Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, p. 149

So pharaonic oppression, deliverance, Sinai, and Canaan are still with us, powerful memories shaping our perceptions of the political world. The “door of hope” is still open; things are not what they might be—even when what they might be isn’t totally different from what they are. This is a central theme in Western thought, always present though elaborated in many different ways. We still believe, or many of us do, what the Exodus first taught, or what is has commonly been taken to teach, about the meaning and possibility of politics and about its proper form:

—first, that wherever you live, it is probably Egypt;

—second, that there is a better place, a world more attractive, a promised land;

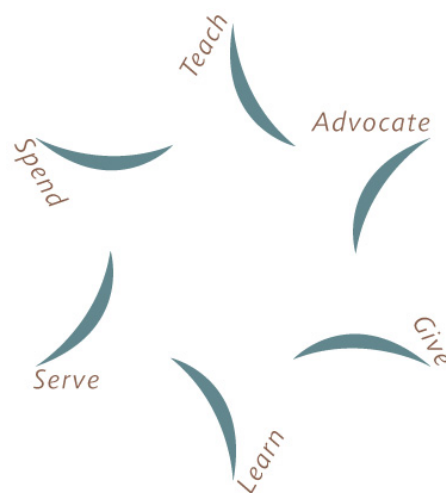
—and third, that “the way to the land is through the wilderness.” There is no way to get from here to there except by joining together and marching.

#### Discussion Questions

1. What aspects of the world you live in are “Egyptian”?
2. What is your vision of the “promised land”?
3. With whom are you marching? Are there people with whom you think you should march and with whom you are not yet in relationship? Who are they and what might help you march together?
4. What concrete actions would you like to take as you continue your march?

### Part II. Jewish Global Citizenship

As we look at the Egypts that face us around the world and plan our march towards the promised land, AJWS offers a framework that identifies six types of activism that constitute Jewish global citizenship. These six categories of activism are distinct yet mutually beneficial and mutually reinforcing.



### Learn

#### 2 Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 40b

Study is great because it leads to action.

תלמוד בבלי קידושין מ:  
תלמוד גדול, שהתלמוד מביא לידי מעשה.

#### Discussion Questions

1. In what ways are study and action complementary?
2. Why is study/learning a necessary component of Jewish global citizenship?
3. What global justice issues would you like to learn more about?
4. How will you learn about these issues?

### Teach

#### 3 Rambam, Laws of Temperament 6:7<sup>10</sup>

If one observes that another committed a sin or walks in a way that is not good, it is the person's duty to bring the erring one back to the right path and point out that he/she is wronging him/herself by this evil course, as it is said, "You shall surely rebuke your neighbor" (Leviticus 19:17). One who rebukes another, whether for offenses against the one who rebukes him/herself or for sins against God, should administer the rebuke in private, speak to the offender gently and tenderly, and point out that the rebuke is offered for the wrongdoer's own good, to secure for the other life in the World to Come. If the person accepts the rebuke, well and good. If not, the person should be rebuked a second, and a third time. And so one is bound to continue the admonitions, until the sinner assaults the admonisher and says, "I refuse to listen." Whoever is in a position to prevent wrongdoing and does not do so is responsible for the iniquity of all the wrongdoers whom that person might have restrained.

רמבם הלכות דעות ו:ז  
הרואה חבירו שחטא או שהלך בדרך לא טובה מצוה להחזירו למוטב ולהודיעו שהוא חוטא על עצמו במעשיו הרעים שנאמר הוכח תוכיח את עמיתך (ויקרא יט:יז), המוכיח את חבירו בין בדברים שבינו לבינו, בין בדברים שבינו לבין המקום צריך להוכיחו בינו לבין עצמו, וידבר לו בנחת ובלשון רכה ויודיעו שאינו אומר לו אלא לטובתו להביאו לחיי העולם הבא, אם קיבל ממנו מוטב ואם לאו יוכיחנו פעם שניה ושלישית, וכן תמיד חייב אדם להוכיחו עד שיכהו החוטא ויאמר לו איני שומע, וכל שאפשר בידו למחות ואינו מוחה הוא נתפש בעון אלו כיון שאפשר לו למחות בהם.

<sup>10</sup> Translation from *Teaching Jewish Virtues* by Susan Freeman

### Discussion Questions

1. How do you decide when to educate or rebuke others, especially related to social justice?
2. When do you hold back?
3. How do you respond when being rebuked?
4. What methods do you find most effective? Least effective?
5. What are some global justice issues about which you would like to educate others?
6. How will you approach people about these issues?

### Serve

#### 4 Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, “Personal Service: A Central Jewish Norm for Our Time,” *Contact* Vol. 4 No. 1, p. 3

But the most powerful statement of human value is not made by giving money or transferring goods from one person to the other. However valuable, such gifts are of finite value. The deepest confirmation of the preciousness of a human life comes when a person gives his or her own infinitely valuable life to the other. Normally, this is not done by literally giving one life for the other—say in dying to protect or save another. The fundamental, ongoing communication of human value takes place when one person spends a piece of his or her life—some unique and irreplaceable amount of time—in relationship and service to the other.

### Discussion Questions

1. Do you agree that “the deepest confirmation of the preciousness of human life comes when a person gives his or her own infinitely valuable life to the other”? How have your personal experiences of service supported or challenged this assertion?
2. In contrast to advocacy or *tzedakah*, service is often criticized as a “band-aid” solution, one that addresses the symptoms of injustice and poverty rather than the causes. Do you agree? Do you think service is an important component of global citizenship?
3. Later in this article, Greenberg imagines a future in which “every Jew should set aside a portion of his/her life for *gemilut chassadim* (acts of lovingkindness).” Do you agree with this vision? If so, how do you or will you embrace that responsibility?

### Advocate

#### 5 Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 54b

Whoever can prevent his household from committing a sin but does not, is responsible for the sins of his household; if [he can prevent] his fellow citizens, he is responsible for the sins of his fellow citizens; if [he can prevent] the whole world, he is responsible for the sins of the whole world.

תלמוד בבלי שבת נד:

כל מי שאפשר למחות לאנשי ביתו ולא מיחה נתפס על אנשי ביתו, באנשי עירו נתפס על אנשי עירו, בכל העולם כולו נתפס על כל העולם כולו.

#### Discussion Questions

1. What are the implications of the word “can/אפשר” in this text?
2. What does the text suggest about the relationship between power and responsibility?
3. What does the text suggest about a person’s sphere of influence?
4. Who are the people you can influence?
5. What actions would you like these people to take to work for global justice?

### Spend

#### 6 Tim Power, architect and designer, quoted in “I shop therefore I am” *David Report*, April 2008<sup>11</sup>

Each and every dollar we spend on a product or service is a vote for (or against) the process, quality, belief system or form of what we buy. Every dollar we spend is a vote—you use what you buy to empower what you believe in!

#### Discussion Questions

1. To what extent do you agree with this statement?
2. How can you or do you spend your dollars in ways that support your values?

#### 7 Daniel Little, *The Paradox of Wealth and Poverty: Mapping the Ethical Dilemmas of Global Development*, p.154

... citizens and governments in wealthy countries are in fact benefited by the economic activities of the developing world—we drink the coffee, we wear the clothing, and we watch the televisions that are produced in poor countries, and we do so at a cost that is less than it would be if we did not have access to the economic activities of those countries... These facts are ethically central.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.davidreport.com/the-report/issue-9-2008-i-shop-therefore-i/>

Discussion Questions

1. Think about an item you use during your daily life and the country or countries it comes from. What is the process by which it might be made (i.e. what resources are used, where are they made and by whom, where and how are they transported, etc.)?
2. What specific concerns do you have about human rights, labor rights and environmental impact throughout the process of production of this item?
3. What values do you hold in the areas of human rights, labor rights and the environment? Are there ways that your purchasing habits at the moment can support or undermine your values in these areas?
4. Where do you get information about how the goods you use were produced? Do you believe you have an obligation to actively seek out this information?

8 **Jared Diamond, "What's Your Consumption Factor?" *The New York Times*, January 2, 2008**

... Living standards are not tightly coupled to consumption rates. Much American consumption is wasteful and contributes little or nothing to quality of life. For example, per capita oil consumption in Western Europe is about half of ours, yet Western Europe's standard of living is higher by any reasonable criterion, including life expectancy, health, infant mortality, access to medical care, financial security after retirement, vacation time, quality of public schools and support for the arts. Ask yourself whether Americans' wasteful use of gasoline contributes positively to any of those measures.

Discussion Questions

1. Diamond says that "living standards are not tightly coupled to consumption rates." What does he mean? Do you agree?
2. How would you describe your own consumption patterns?
3. What are some specific ways you could shift your levels of consumption?

Give

9 **Rambam, Laws of Gifts to the Poor 7:5**

A poor person came and asked for *tzedakah* to pay for his needs, but the person giving *tzedakah* could not provide for all of his needs. The donor should give according to how much s/he is able. And how much is that? The greatest way to fulfill this commandment is to give up to 20% of one's possessions. The average way to fulfill this commandment is to give 10% of one's possessions. Less than this is considered an evil eye [idiomatic expression for inappropriately low] ... Even a poor person who is supported by *tzedakah* is obligated to give *tzedakah* to another.

רמב"ם הלכות מתנות עניים ז:ה

בא העני ושאל די מחסורו ואין יד הנותן משגת נותן לו כפי השגת ידו וכמה עד חמישית נכסיו מצוה מן המובחר, ואחד מעשרה בנכסיו בינוני, פחות מכאן עין רעה . . . ואפילו עני המתפרנס מן הצדקה חייב ליתן צדקה לאחר.



**Discussion Questions**

1. What position does this text hold about the extent to which we should give in order to fulfill our obligation to help people in need?
2. If you were going to adopt this value in practice, how would you act on it in your life?
3. Why do you think Rambam suggests a range of 10-20% as the appropriate level for *tzedakah* giving?

**10 Tur, Yoreh Deah 251**

Rav Saadia Gaon wrote: “A person’s own *parnassah*<sup>12</sup> takes precedence over that of anyone else, and one is not required to give *tzedakah* until he [or she] has acquired a *parnassah*, as it says: ‘And your fellow will live with you’ (Leviticus 25:36), meaning your life takes priority over that of your fellow.<sup>13</sup>”

**טור יורה דעה סימן רנא**

כתב ה"ר סעדיה חייב אדם להקדים פרנסתו לכל אדם ואינו חייב לתת צדקה עד שיהיה לו פרנסתו שנאמר וחי אחיך עמך חייך קודמין לחיי אחיך

**Discussion Questions**

1. What position does this text hold about the extent to which we should give in order to fulfill our obligation to help people in need?
2. If you were going to adopt this value in practice, how would you act on it in your life?
3. In our time, what do you think are the reasonable elements that constitute a *parnassah*, such that all people should have them and anyone who lacks them should be exempt from giving *tzedakah*?

**Final Challenge:**

*AJWS and AVODAH believe that to be a Jewish Global Citizen, Jews should engage in some combination of these methods of social change. At different stages of life individuals can often act on different methods more effectively and with greater ease and talent. However, it is useful to remember that all of the points are necessary to achieve social change. We invite you to strive to engage in each method at some point in your life and to have a plan and strategy for how you organize your involvement. Take a few minutes and create a plan of how you might like to use these methods over the course of the next 10 years.*

<sup>12</sup> *Parnassah* can mean “a living,” as in “to earn a living” and “subsistence.”

<sup>13</sup> In other words, you must continue living in order for your fellow to live with you.



## Seder Resource—The Four Questions of Social Justice

### Introduction

Every year in this season, the Jewish community recalls and relives our master story of the Exodus from Egypt. We return to this tale year after year, each time rediscovering its radical assertions that oppression can and must end, and that humanity and the world can be redeemed. The Exodus story contains the Jewish vision of how a just world might look.

Yet the Exodus narrative is far more than a story, or the basis for a family dinner in the spring. Rather, the Exodus reflects a powerful ambition for a political order, and it can, and has been, an influential force for shaping the world. To read the story of the Exodus in this way is to understand that the Jewish textual tradition is not now, nor was it ever, concerned *exclusively* with ritual observance or devotional prayer. Judaism has a vision of earthly justice that demands liberation from oppression, a covenantal community and an unending aspiration for a tomorrow that is better and more just than today. To engage with Judaism at that level is to engage with its fundamental building blocks.

### How to use the Seder Resource

The Seder Resource highlights four important questions about Jewish life and social justice that are raised by the Exodus story. The four questions may be used as an evolving conversation that follows the order of the traditional *seder*, or as stand-alone units. Each question is presented along with the following components:

- Suggested *Time in the Seder* to introduce the question
- *Texts* to read out loud as a group or for study in *chavruta* (paired learning) or small groups
- *Discussion Questions* to support *seder* participants in thinking critically about the sources

The four questions are:

- Why do free people avoid responsibility?
- Do we achieve justice through reform or revolution?
- What does our covenant with God entail?
- How do we sustain commitment for the long haul?

### Question 1: Why do free people avoid responsibility?

#### Time in Seder: Urchatz/ורחץ

At this point in the *seder*, we wash our hands. In the context of social justice, Egypt can represent the desire to escape responsibility for our actions. It is literally washing our hands of responsibility and allowing the powerful oppressor to bear responsibility for our own inaction. When do we choose to take responsibility and when do we hide behind a powerful “Egypt,” to avoid it?

#### Texts

##### 1. Exodus 16:3

The Israelites said (to Moses and Aaron): If only we had died by the hand of Adonai in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, when we ate our fill of bread! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to starve this whole congregation to death.

##### שמות פרק טז:ג

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִי יִתֵּן מוֹתֵנוּ בְּיַד ה' בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּשִׁבְתֵּנוּ עַל סֵיר הַבָּשָׂר בְּאֲכִלְנוּ לֶחֶם לֶשׁ בֵּעַ כִּי הוֹצֵאתָם אֶת־נוֹ אֶל הַמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה לְהָמִית אֶת כָּל הַקָּהָל הַזֶּה בְּרָעָב:

##### 2. Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*, p. 5

Is there not also, perhaps, besides an innate desire for freedom, an instinctive wish for submission? If there is not, how can we account for the attraction which submission to a leader has for so many today? Is submission always to an overt authority, or is there also submission to internalized authorities, such as duty or conscience, to inner compulsions or to anonymous authorities like public opinion? Is there a hidden satisfaction in submitting, and what is its essence?

#### Discussion Questions

1. What did the Israelites claim to miss about Egypt? What other longings might have been below the surface?
2. Fromm suggests that in addition to desiring to be free, it is human nature to desire someone or something to which we can submit—and therefore avoid taking responsibility for our actions. Share a personal story that illustrates, or refutes, Fromm’s idea about submission.
3. When you choose whether or not to pursue justice, do you make this choice out of a sense of freedom or obligation?

## Question 2: Do we achieve justice through reform or revolution?

### Time in Seder: Yachatz/יחצ

One tradition suggests that in breaking the middle *matzah*, we acknowledge that the world is broken and is in need of repair. However, while many people recognize the brokenness of the world, there is great disagreement about how to repair it. Will we achieve change and justice through reform or revolution?

### Texts

#### 1. Exodus 32:26-28

Moses stood up in the gate of the camp and said, "Whoever is for Adonai, come here!" And all the Levites rallied to him. He said to them, "Thus says Adonai, the God of Israel, 'Each of you put sword on thigh, go back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay brother, neighbor and kin.'" The Levites did as Moses had bidden; and some three thousand of the people fell that day.

שמות לב:כו-כח

וַיַּעַמַּד מֹשֶׁה בְּשַׁעַר הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיֹּאמֶר מִי לַיהוָה אֵלַי וַיֵּאֱסָפוּ אֵלָיו כָּל בְּנֵי לֵוִי: וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם כֹּה אָמַר ה' אֵל הַיִּשְׂרָאֵל שִׁימוּ אִישׁ חֶרְבּוֹ עַל יָרְכוֹ עִבְרוּ וְשׁוּבוּ מִשַּׁעַר לְשַׁעַר בְּמַחֲנֶה וְהָרְגוּ אִישׁ אֶת אָחִיו וְאִישׁ אֶת רֵעֵהוּ וְאִישׁ אֶת קָרְבּוֹ: וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְנֵי לֵוִי כַדְבָר מֹשֶׁה וַיָּפֹל מִן הָעָם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא כִּשְׁלֹשׁ אֲלָפֵי אִישׁ:

#### 2. Exodus 18:20

And enjoin upon them the laws and the teachings, and make known to them the way they are to go and the practices they are to follow.

שמות יח:כ

וְהִזְהַרְתָּה אֹתָהֶם אֶת הַחֻקִּים וְאֶת הַתּוֹרָה וְהוֹדַעְתָּ לָהֶם אֶת הַדֶּרֶךְ יֵלְכוּ בָּהּ וְאֶת הַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּן:

#### 3. Rabbi Yosef Yosel Hurwitz, *Madreigat Ha-Adam*, "Darkei ha-Teshuvah"

If someone has a *treif* (non-kosher) kitchen and wants to repent and make it *kosher*, he might say, "How can I repent all at once and break all my dishes? It will cost a great deal of money! I'll do it gradually. I'll break one dish, and replace it with a *kosher* one; later I'll replace a second dish, later a third...until it is completed." Such a person would be considered a fool. For as soon as the [first] *kosher* dish mixes with the rest, it is all *treif*. If he wants to repent he must break all the dishes at once.

### Discussion Questions

1. In Texts 1 and 2, Moses guides the Israelites through their transition from slavery to freedom in two different ways. In Text 1, he pursues revolution, rallying troops to kill those who worshipped the Golden Calf. In Text 2, he pursues reform, using his skills as an educator to convince the Israelites to follow God. Which approach do you think was more successful? Was there a benefit to using a combination of these methods?
2. According to Rabbi Hurwitz, one can only truly pursue a new way of life by smashing the old system or by totally separating from it. What can we learn about pursuing social change from Rabbi Hurwitz?
3. Are you more of a reformer or a revolutionary? Share a personal story that reflects this orientation.
4. On Passover, we are mindful of the liberation we have experienced and the one we need to create. Which methods do you think the world most needs today to bring about justice?

## Question 3: What does our covenant with God entail?

### Time in Seder: Magid/מגיד

Early in the *Magid* section, before we continue with the four children, we take a moment to thank God for giving us the Torah. In accepting the Torah, what obligations do we take upon ourselves?

### Texts

#### 1. Exodus 19:3-8

And Moses went up to God. Adonai called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me. Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel." Moses came and summoned the elders of the people and put before them all that Adonai had commanded him. All the people answered as one, saying, "All that Adonai has spoken we will do!" And Moses brought back the people's words to Adonai.

#### שמות יט:ג-ח

וּמִשָּׁה עָלָה אֶל הָאֵל הַיּוֹם וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו ה' מִן הַהָר לֵאמֹר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבֵית יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי אֵלֵיכֶם לְמַצְרַיִם וְאֲשָׂא אֶתְכֶם עַל כַּנְּפֵי נְשָׁרִים וְאָבֵא אֶתְכֶם אֵלַי: וְעַתָּה אִם שְׂמוּעַ תִּשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וְשָׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת בְּרִיתִי וְהָיִיתֶם לִי סֻגְלָה מִכָּל הָעַמִּים כִּי לִי כָל הָאָרֶץ: וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מְמַלְכֶת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תְּדַבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: וַיִּבְּאוּ מִשָּׁה וַיִּקְרָא לְזִקְנֵי הָעָם וַיִּשְׁמָעוּ לְפִנֵּיהֶם אֶת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּהוּ ה': וַיַּעֲנוּ כָּל הָעָם יַחְדָּו וַיֹּאמְרוּ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע מִשָּׁה אֶת דְּבַרֵי הָעָם אֵל ה':

#### 2. "Duty to Assist" law from the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms (Part I, Chapter 1:2)

Every human being whose life is in peril has a right to assistance... Every person must come to the aid of anyone whose life is in peril, either personally or calling for aid, by giving him the necessary and immediate physical assistance, unless it involves danger to himself or a third person, or he has another valid reason.

#### 3. Seinfeld: The Finale, Part II

Chiles: It is a travesty of justice that these four people have been incarcerated ... You know what these four people were? They were innocent bystanders. Now, you just think about that term. Innocent. Bystanders. Because that's exactly what they were. We know they were bystanders, nobody's disputing that. So how can a bystander be guilty? No such thing.

### Discussion Questions

1. In Text 1, the Israelites enter into a covenant with God. What are the parameters of this covenant? Is the Israelites' commitment passive or active?
2. Texts 2 and 3 are two perspectives on the extent to which people are obligated to one another. Where on the spectrum are you? What factors have influenced your thinking on this issue?
3. Whom do you feel obligated to help and how much help do you feel obligated to give?

## Question 4: How do we sustain commitment for the long haul?

### Time in Seder: Nirtzah/נרצה

We end the *seder* with the words “Next year in Jerusalem,” hoping that next year, redemption will come, the world will become just and we will all celebrate Passover together in the Land of Israel. Despite this, we are fairly certain that we will be sitting in the same place next year in a world still unredeemed. How, then, do we keep striving to create a better world, without becoming discouraged?

### Texts

#### 1. Deuteronomy 34:7-8

Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eyes were undimmed and his vigor unabated. And the Israelites bewailed Moses in the steppes of Moab for thirty days.

#### דברים לד:ז-ח

וּמִשָּׁה בֶּן מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה בָּמֹתָו לֹא כָהָתָה  
עֵינָיו וְלֹא נָס לֶחָה: וַיִּבְכּוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת מֹשֶׁה  
בְּעֶרְבֹת מוֹאָב שָׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם וַיִּתְּמוּ יָמֵי בְּכֵי אֲבֵל  
מִשָּׁה:

#### 2. Hosea 4:1-2

Hear the word of Adonai, O people of Israel! For Adonai has a case against the inhabitants of this land, because there is no honesty and no goodness and no obedience to God in the land. [False] swearing, dishonesty, and murder, and theft and adultery are rife; crime follows upon crime!

#### הושע ד:א-ב

שָׁמְעוּ דְבַר ה' בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי רִיב לָהּ עִם יוֹשְׁבֵי  
הָאָרֶץ כִּי אֵין אֱמֶת וְאֵין חֶסֶד וְאֵין דַּעַת אֶל־הֵים  
בְּאָרֶץ: אֶל־הַ נִכְחַשׁ וְנָרַח וְנִגְנַב וְנָאָף פְּרָצוּ  
וְדָמִים בְּדָמִים נִגְעוּ:

#### 3. Nicholas Kristof, “Save the Darfur Puppy,” *The New York Times*, May 10, 2007

Finally, we’re beginning to understand what it would take to galvanize President Bush, other leaders and the American public to respond to the genocide in Sudan: a suffering puppy with big eyes and floppy ears.

That’s the implication of a series of studies by psychologists trying to understand why people – good, conscientious people – aren’t moved by genocide or famines. Time and again, we’ve seen that the human conscience just isn’t pricked by mass suffering, while an individual child (or puppy) in distress causes our hearts to flutter.

#### 4. Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, p. 149

So pharaonic oppression, deliverance, Sinai, and Canaan are still with us, powerful memories shaping our perceptions of the political world. The “door of hope” is still open; things are not what they might be— even when what they might be isn’t totally different from what they are. This is a central theme in Western thought, always present though elaborated in many different ways. We still believe, or many of us do, what the Exodus first taught, or what it has commonly been taken to teach, about the meaning and possibility of politics and about its proper form:

## Seder Resource

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- first, that wherever you live, it is probably Egypt;
- second, that there is a better place, a world more attractive, a promised land;
- and third, that “the way to the land is through the wilderness.” There is no way to get from here to there except by joining together and marching.

### Discussion Questions

1. In Text 1 we read about Moses’s death before the Israelites reached the Promised Land; his fate was to die just before they entered. What meaning, if any, do you derive from the death of the greatest leader of the liberation movement just as they are about to reach their goal? Similarly, what, if any, significance do you derive from the fact that the Five Books of the Torah ends without the Israelites reaching the Promised Land?
2. Text 2 shows the Israelites backsliding. They have reached the Promised Land and yet they have not achieved a just society. Does your conception of liberation work include backsliding and readjustment? How do you keep yourself going in such circumstances?
3. In Text 3 Kristof talks about compassion fatigue. How can we overcome compassion fatigue and other obstacles that stand in the way of our ability to sustain the day-to-day work of justice?
4. According to Walzer in Text 4, the only way to liberate the world and ourselves is by joining together and marching. Who are the people with whom you already march? With whom would it be strategic for you to march in order to hasten a socially just world?





Pursuing Global Justice  
Through Grassroots Change

**American Jewish World Service (AJWS)** is an international development organization motivated by Judaism's imperative to pursue justice. AJWS is dedicated to alleviating poverty, hunger and disease among the people of the developing world regardless of race, religion or nationality. Through grants to grassroots organizations, volunteer service, advocacy and education, AJWS fosters civil society, sustainable development and human rights for all people, while promoting the values and responsibilities of global citizenship within the Jewish community.

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THE JEWISH SERVICE CORPS

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