

DOES THE VALUE OF INTEGRITY IMPACT MY SUSTAINABILITY CHOICES?

Overview

This resource unpacks the issue of **environmental sustainability** through the value of **integrity**.

Timing

25-30 minutes, paired with service activity focused on the environment or use as a stand-alone.



FRAME THE ISSUE (5 MINUTES)

Read the passage below:

From coffee beans to salmon, ethically sourced food normally comes at a higher cost. According to one study by Netherlands consulting firm Kearny, sustainable products were found to be 75-85% more expensive than conventional products. And for good reason. They are more expensive to grow, they are sustainably farmed, and generally of higher quality.

Yet despite the knowledge that purchasing these items is the right thing to do there may be times when it's not practical, feasible, cost effective or desirable to make these choices. We may find ourselves wondering: If I know that this is the "right" thing to do, but have competing needs and interests that lead to other choices, where does that leave me? Am I a hypocrite? What does it say about who I am?

Facilitator prompts the group:

- ▶▶ Describe a time when you felt this tension in the choices you faced. What was it about? Articulate the competing desires that pulled at you.



EXPLORE THE VALUE/JEWISH ANCHOR (10 MINUTES)

Read the following:

Exploring the value of integrity can help us navigate the many choices we have when it comes to making decisions around sustainability.

When we picture someone with integrity, we think of a person who is upright, honest and has strong moral principles. But what does integrity actually mean? Jewish tradition has some insights on how we might view integrity.

The Hebrew language is layered with meaning and allusions. The word used in the *Tanakh*, the Hebrew Bible, for integrity is “*tamim*.” The Bible scholar Professor Everett Fox in his translation of *Tanakh* translates “*tamim*” - when it is used in connection to humans - as balanced and whole-hearted.

It is interesting to note, as a point of contrast, that when the word *tamim* is used in connection to God, its meaning shifts, and it means that God is “perfect.”

Facilitator prompts the group:

- ▶▶ What in your mind is the difference between being “balanced” and being “perfect”?

Read these two quotes from contemporary influencers and thinkers, and respond to the prompts that follow:

- ▶▶ “Integrity is choosing courage over comfort; choosing what is right over what is fun, fast, or easy; and choosing to practice our values rather than simply professing them.”

-Brené Brown - author, professor, writer, lecturer, podcaster.

- ▶▶ “Changing your mind doesn’t mean you’ve abandoned your principles. It may mean you’ve learned something. It’s better to contradict yourself and be accused of hypocrisy than to stick to your guns and sacrifice integrity. The hallmark of integrity is honesty, not consistency.”

-Adam Grant - organizational psychologist, author, motivational speaker.

Facilitator prompts the group:

- ▶▶ What does each of the writers add to your understanding of integrity?
- ▶▶ Which one speaks more to you in terms of informing your own choices? Why?

Conclude with a summary:

We explored the word integrity in Hebrew, *tamim*, giving a sense that integrity is not an “all or nothing proposition. In English, we have similar nuance: integrity is deeply related to the word “integrated” and as such to be a person of integrity raises personal questions about how we live lives of balance. There may be ethical choices that we hold to be principled, and yet, we may make other choices that supersede them, prioritizing other values of ours.



MAKE MEANING & TAKE ACTION (8 MINUTES)

Facilitator prompts the group:

- ▶▶ Based upon the above exploration, **think** about a choice that you make in your life that may fall short of your ideals – and even though you think choosing otherwise might be better for the earth, this choice – right now – was the result of prioritizing other values.
- ▶▶ **Consider:**
 - What drove you to make the choice that you did? What did you gain and what did you lose by doing so?
 - Using the definition of integrity we just discussed, how did this choice uphold your own integrity?
- ▶▶ **Share** with a *havruta*, a partner, and compare the choices you each made and how your choice reflects your integrity.
- ▶▶ Now, **name** an area where you have made a choice where convenience, family, or any other value “wins” over sustainability.
- ▶▶ How might you be able to push yourself to strive toward making a more sustainable choice? What commitment can you make to implement this in the coming month?

Facilitator encourages each participant to share their commitment with the group.



CLOSE WITH INTENTION (3 MINUTES)

Read the passage below:

The discussion we just had allows for a new understanding of integrity that focuses on the legitimate and competing interests that pull at us as we make decisions in our lives. When it comes to decisions surrounding sustainability, we at once want to make choices that are the most ethical, and best for the world, and at the same time, we may choose to act in ways that strengthen other values and commitments in our lives. Integrity, then, is not an all-or-nothing game. Understanding the value of integrity as one that strives to maintain balance in the face of these competing choices can help us assess and strengthen our sense our commitments in all realms.

Facilitator prompts the group:

▶▶ As a result of this conversation, I now think differently about ...