

IS THERE A “RIGHT WAY” TO UPLIFT HUMAN DIGNITY?

Overview

This resource unpacks the issue of **food insecurity** through the value of **human dignity**.

Timing

25 – 30 minutes, paired with service activity.

Materials

Digital device to view photos or handout of photos, [click here for PDF](#).

Note

- This resource draw on characters from the Biblical book of Ruth. To learn more about Ruth, see [here](#).



FRAME THE ISSUE (3 MINUTES)

Read the passage below:

Food insecurity, according to the USDA, is defined as a lack of consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to live an active and healthy life. The predicament may be temporary, or can last a long time. The causes of food insecurity are complex, and include poverty, low income, lack of affordable housing, chronic health conditions, systemic racism and racial discrimination. More than 34 million people, including 9 million children experience food insecurity in the United States.



EXPLORE THE VALUE/JEWISH ANCHOR (10 MINUTES)

Read the passage below:

When thinking about ways to tackle the multi-layered issues involved in food insecurity, we are pressed to think about its connection to human dignity. In what ways do our actions to combat food insecurity bolster the human dignity of others, and in what ways, even with the best of intentions, may they actually reduce it?

The Torah teaches us that humans – no matter their gender, race, color or abilities – are all created *בצלם אלוקים*, *B'tzelem Elokim*, in the image of God. As such, we are inherently worthy. In Hebrew, this value is called *כבוד הבריות*, *kevod habriyot* – the honor and dignity of all people.

In the language of Repair the World, each person has a unique, inherent value that invites us to consider how we treat those who live under different circumstances than our own. We recognize the unique and infinite value of every person and believe everyone deserves equal rights, dignity and to be met with generosity.

The word in Hebrew for honor, *כבוד*, *kavod*, is related to the word for weight and heaviness (heavy = *kaveid* in modern Hebrew). The value and concept of *kavod habriyot* then, is related to giving weight to the presence of another human being.

Facilitator prompts the group:

- ▶▶ What does it mean to give ourselves and others the “weight” we deserve? When we make light of things, how does that diminish human dignity?
- ▶▶ Thinking about the work we are about to do today, in your opinion, what are the most dignified ways to reduce food insecurity, either at an individual or structural level?
- ▶▶ What might get in the way of exercising human dignity consistently?

After reading the following passage for context, analyze the photographs that follow:

In his photography series, *Biblical Stories*, world-renowned, Israeli-born photographer Adi Nes, boldly engages with contemporary issues of the day and launches critical examinations of them, drawing upon his own diverse background and experiences. In his photograph series, *Ruth and Naomi*, he draws on the classical Biblical story of two widowed women, displaced from their home, poor, food insecure from famine and loss, who went to glean and gather wheat in the field of a distant relative, who ultimately supports and cares for them.



Nes' modern depiction of Naomi and Ruth portrays two women gleaning onions at the end of the day in an open-air market in contemporary Tel Aviv. About the image, Nes says, "the hardened women gather onions from their tears which turn to gold in their hands."

Facilitator prompts the group:

- ▶▶ Scan the QR code or [click here](#) and look at the pictures. What feelings do these images evoke?
- ▶▶ Is there a recognition of the human dignity of the women in these photos? Explain your answer.
- ▶▶ Does Nes' accompanying quote (cited above) bolster or reduce the human dignity of the featured women?

Prompt before breaking for service:

- ▶▶ As we head into our service together, we invite you to notice the ways that you as individuals in your service today can take concrete steps to honor and recognize the preciousness of each human being. Note them for yourself.

BREAK FOR SERVICE EXPERIENCE



MAKE MEANING & TAKE ACTION (8 MINUTES)

Read the following and follow the prompts below:

A Global Task Force on Food Insecurity was recently asked to consider issues related to food poverty and make recommendations for the field. In their report, the group outlined “Dignity Principles in Practice” as a way for community food providers to reflect on the design and delivery of their work from the perspective of someone experiencing food insecurity.

The principles they came up with are:

- ▷▷ Involve in decision-making people with direct experience.
- ▷▷ Recognize the social value of food.
- ▷▷ Provide those who are food insecure with opportunities to contribute.
- ▷▷ Leave people with the power to choose.

Facilitator prompts the group:

- ▷▷ **Choose** one of the above principles and in your own words, explain what it means.
- ▷▷ As you consider steps you will take to guide the way you hold dignity as core value as you move forward, **come up with** 1 “Dignity Principle” of your own.
- ▷▷ With a *havruta*, a partner, **share** your principle and explain it engages with the value of human dignity. Compare your answers.



CLOSE WITH INTENTION (3 MINUTES)

Read the passage below:

The conversation we just engaged in encourages us to look at the value of human dignity as it relates to food insecurity. There are responses we can take that support the human dignity of others in cases of food insecurity, and at times, our most well-intended actions might actually diminish the human dignity of others. Focusing on human dignity as a core value in assessing responses to food insecurity allows for a more nuanced understand of the overall effectiveness of our service. Where we situate the individual in the context of larger scale change-making can help us strengthen our capacities for uplifting the human dignity of others.

Facilitator prompts the group and asks each person to respond to one or both of the sentences:

- ▷▷ As a result of this conversation, an insight I now have about the relationship between food insecurity and human dignity is ...
- ▷▷ A step forward I might now take is ... (*i.e.* I might learn more about...; I might read...; I might try...)