

CHARITY OR HOSPITALITY?

Overview

This resource unpacks the issue of **Housing Insecurity** through the value of **Hospitality**.

At-a-Glance:

This resource prompts us to look at the value of hospitality and the way it can help us contend with issues of housing and housing justice. Using the legal and thematic underpinnings of the holiday of Sukkot, we will think about housing impermanence in the lives of those around us. Through a central law of the holiday we are encouraged to exercise hospitality and invite others inside, even in our temporary structures, and even when it might be a challenge to do so. Learners will have the opportunity to identify frameworks for hospitality in the context of their service, and will be pressed to distinguish between hospitality and charity, and how such differences can foster new commitments to be made to welcome others in varied ways.



MATERIALS AND SET-UP

Timing:

30 minutes

Best Uses:

- To be paired with a service activity component

Materials Needed:

- Pen and paper for the Make Meaning & Take Action section



FRAME THE ISSUE (5 MINUTES)

Read the passage below:

The definition of housing insecurity is broad and describes most types of housing challenges, including difficulty finding affordable, safe, and/or quality housing, having unreliable or inconsistent housing, and, at times, overall loss of housing. Housing insecurity at some level means you don't know if you are going to be able to keep a roof over your head. The Center for Disease Control used the frequency of responses to the question of, "How often in the past 12 months would you say you were worried or stressed about having enough money to pay your rent/mortgage? Sometimes, usually, or always?" to identify those who are housing insecure.

Housing insecurity has many root causes, and is impacted by structural intersectional issues, such as systemic racism, taxation systems, geographic realities, and overall political and economic forces.

Facilitator prompts the group:

- ▷▷ In past service opportunities have you encountered individuals who have felt the stress of housing insecurity?
- ▷▷ Think of a time when you opened your own home to someone who needed it. (This could be someone who needed it because they were housing insecure, or because they were traveling in town. Either will work for the purposes of the conversation.) Hold that example in your mind as we engage in the conversation below.



EXPLORE THE VALUE/JEWISH ANCHOR (15 MINUTES)

Read the passage below:

Housing insecurity leads us to think about vulnerability in the face of the of places in which we live. It therefore prompts us to explore the value of hospitality, and consider how and where hospitality shows up in our own lives as we consider inviting others inside.

Hospitality can be defined as the relationship between a guest and a host, where the host receives the guest with goodwill. Inviting those in need to your home through an act of *hospitality* is quite different than an act of *charity*. In fact, one can be "hospitable" even without a home.

Facilitator prompts the group:

- ▶▶ How, in your estimation, is being “hospitable” different than being “charitable”?
- ▶▶ How might you people move themselves from being “charitable” to “hospitable” when it comes to those who are housing insecure?

After reading the following passage for context, answer the prompts below:

The Jewish holiday of Sukkot invites us to think about the nature of homes, the protection they afford, and how – without them – individuals are vulnerable to the forces of nature. One of the central *mitzvot* (commandments) of this holiday is to build a Sukkah - a temporary booth whose roof is made of palm leaves and through which you are able to see the sky. The exact goal of the mitzva of Sukkah is debated in the Talmud. (*Sukka* 11b). Rabbi Eliezer thought that the Sukka is meant to remind us of the miraculous Clouds of Glory that protected the Israelites in the desert, while Rabbi Akiva argued it is meant to represent the actual physical booths that the Israelites dwelled in the desert.

Sukkot then is a time of impermanence, and an opportunity to think about the vulnerability of not having fixed and secure shelter, raising many of the issues involved in housing and housing justice. It also invites us to think about hospitality, since a core aspect of Sukkot is inviting guests inside your dwelling, even if it is temporary.

In fact, a symbolic marker of this value is that of “*Ushpizin*,” which is the Aramaic word for “guests.” In Jewish tradition it is a reference to key Jewish historical figures who metaphorically come to visit us in the sukkah, each of the seven days of the Sukkot festival.

“Ushpizin” is not just a symbolic dimension of Sukkot, but rather, a core part of the experience of the holiday. Guests are an important part of the Jewish home all year round – but especially on the Jewish holidays, and in particular on Sukkot.

Facilitator prompts the group:

- ▶▶ How can we think about the value of hospitality on Sukkot and extend it to larger questions of engaging with those who are experiencing housing insecurity?
- ▶▶ How might the vulnerability of a Sukka open up your thinking about those who experience housing insecurity in an ongoing way?

Facilitator prompts the group before service:

- ▶▶ As you enter into your service activity today, listen carefully for words that come up that relate to the themes of vulnerability and hospitality. (These may be things that are said by other volunteers, or by the community members with whom you are engaging.)
- ▶▶ If you can, write them down (or commit to remembering at least one of them) for the post-service reflection.

BREAK FOR SERVICE EXPERIENCE



MAKE MEANING & TAKE ACTION (8 MINUTES)

Hospitality: A Framework and Invitation

Facilitator prompts the group:

- ▶▶ Return to the example you came up with in our very first prompt. (A time you opened your home to someone who needed it.)
 - Based on our conversation today, were you being “charitable” or “hospitable”? Turn to a *havruta*, partner, and spend a few minutes discussing your answers.
 - Was it easy or hard to open your home? Explain.
- ▶▶ Now, think about one thing you heard in your service today that relates to vulnerability and hospitality that bothered you.
- ▶▶ How can you commit to taking an action that will reduce it?
- ▶▶ Now, imagine you were inviting someone who was experiencing housing insecurity into your home. What words might you use in your invitation? Why those words?
- ▶▶ Finally, based on the conversation above and your experiences today, what is one small change you can make to enable others to more deeply understand the experience of housing insecurity?



CLOSE WITH INTENTION (3 MINUTES)

Read the passage below:

The conversation we just engaged in prompts us to look at the value of hospitality as it relates to issues of housing and housing justice, and the vulnerability that exists as a result of impermanent housing. The holiday of Sukkot gets us to think about housing impermanence in the lives of those around us and encourages us – through a core mandate of the holiday – to invite others inside, exercising hospitality as a central part of the holiday, even when space is limited and when it might be hard. Focusing on hospitality as a value in our housing service work allows for a deeper understanding and response to those who experience housing insecurity in an ongoing way, and prompts us to go the extra distance to welcome them in.

Facilitator prompts the group:

- ▶▶ As a result of this conversation, identify one individual or organization that can help you learn more about those around you experiencing housing insecurity.
- ▶▶ What is one action you can take that will allow you to develop the value of hospitality in your day-to-day life?