



HOW DO WE TELL THE STORY OF THE WORLD THAT WE WANT?

PREP FOR THE SESSION

Overview

This resource unpacks the issue of the **Climate Crisis** through the value of **Creativity**.

At-a-Glance:

Telling the stories of a more just, life-giving future in which we have found ways to lessen harm, protect impacted communities, and build resilience in a climate changed and changing world can help us to move forward, with courage and direction, in the present. But what are the stories we will tell? Are they real or imagined? How creative should we be when we tell stories of the future? The Jewish traditions of *aggadah* and *midrash* are practices of interpretation and storytelling, anchored in Torah, that respond to unknown moments. In many ways they are built on a value of creativity. This resource invites learners to explore the power of wildly imaginative and/or very relatable stories in the context of climate change through engaging with *midrash*. Learners will have the opportunity to both hear and tell stories that engage with these tensions, and will be encouraged to take steps to move from climate helplessness and anxiety to active engagement in building a better world.



Time Estimate:
50-60 minutes



Materials Needed:

- A copy of the midrash cited below
- Markers and pens, paper for each participant
- A large piece of paper (or a google doc online)



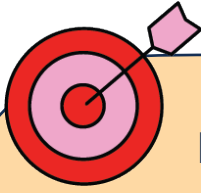
Best Uses:

- For older teens, young adults and adults
- Well-suited for a group engaged in direct service/volunteering
- If you are in person, aim to be outdoors at picnic tables or indoors in a space with windows and daylight. If that's not possible, consider posting photos around the room of vistas (could be natural or human made).



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LET'S GET STARTED



FRAME THE ISSUE

Read the following:

Climate change is perhaps the defining crisis of our time. The shift in weather patterns and natural disasters are happening quickly, but we are not powerless in its face. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres remarked, “the climate emergency is a race we are losing, but it is a race we can win.”

Whether we win or lose may depend on the kinds of stories we tell.

In her article *If you win the popular imagination, you change the game: Why we Need New Stories on Climate*¹, Jewish author and activist Rebecca Solnit writes:

“In order to do what the climate crisis demands of us, we have to find stories of a livable future, stories of popular power, stories that motivate people to do what it takes to make the world we need.”



Facilitator prompts the group:

- Where in your life have you experienced the power of storytelling?

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2023/jan/12/rebecca-solnit-climate-crisis-popular-imagination-why-we-need-new-stories>

5 min





EXPLORE THE VALUE

10 min



Read for context:

Telling the stories of a more just, life-giving future in which we have found ways to lessen harm, protect impacted communities, and build resilience in a climate changed/ing world can help us to move forward, with courage and vision, in the present.

The Jewish traditions of *aggadah* and *midrash* are practices of interpretation and storytelling, anchored in Torah, that respond to unknown moments in the text. (What was she thinking? How did he get there? What did we do next?).

In many ways, *midrash* relies heavily on the value of creativity. Creativity - the use of imagination or original ideas especially in the production of a new artistic work - invites us to imagine what the text is telling us, and allows us to craft the stories that are told.

How can we use *midrash* to consider the stories about the world that we want to tell? Should these stories be relatable and based in today's realities, challenges, and system-wide solutions - or should they be stories that help us think beyond what we know to a radically re-imagined future?



Facilitator prompts the group:

- What are the risks of only telling creative stories of a dreamy and transformed future?
- On the flipside, what is the risk of focusing only on stories grounded in current realities?

The authors of *aggadah* and *midrash* explored this tension - sometimes offering wildly imaginative interpretations of what could be, and in other moments, very believable narratives based in context and the realities of the text.

As communities today face extreme weather and existential challenges, what type of stories do we need?



Facilitator prompts the group:

- Which stories speak more to you - those that are relatable or those that are imagined?



ANCHOR IN JEWISH WISDOM

Facilitator reads to the group:

Let's look at one example from *midrash* of radically imaginative and creative storytelling from Jewish mythic tradition. Similar versions of this story appear in at least 10 places in *midrashic* literature. This one comes from Pirkei Avot – “Sayings of the Fathers (written around 200 CE.)

This particular *midrash* takes place at the end of the six days of creation in Genesis, just before the first Shabbat. In this story, the author(s) look at mysteries in the Torah and the world and write a list of both magical and practical items that (in their imagination and understanding) God created because we would need them to help us navigate future realities.

- Think about that for a moment: why would the authors of the midrash need to list both “practical” and “magical/aspirational” items?

Using the sourcesheet handout, read through the midrash.

[Facilitator note: different participants can read each line]

15 min





Pirkei Avot/Ethics of the Fathers 5:6

עֲשָׂרָה דְּבָרִים נִבְרְאוּ בְעֶרְבַת שַׁבָּת בֵּין הַשְּׁמָשׁוֹת, וְאֵלוֹ הֵן, פִּי הָאָרֶץ, וְפִי הַבְּאֵר, וְפִי הָאֵתוֹן, וְהַקֶּשֶׁת, וְהַמָּן, וְהַמָּטָה, וְהַשְּׁמִיר, וְהַכֶּתֵב, וְהַמְּכַתֵּב, וְהַלְוִיחֹת. וַיֵּשׁ אֲמָרִים, אֶף הַמְּזִיקִין, וְקַבּוּרְתוֹ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה, וְאֵילוֹ שֶׁל אֲבָרָהָם אֲבִינוּ. וַיֵּשׁ אֲמָרִים, אֶף צֶבֶת בְּצֶבֶת עֲשׂוּיָה:

Ten things were created at twilight on the eve of Shabbat, and they were:
 The mouth of the earth [to resolve community fracture in Korah's time],
 The mouth of [Miriam's] well [a water source during our time in the desert],
 The mouth of [Bilam's] donkey [to help us communicate across species in high stakes moments],
 The rainbow [after the great flood, as a sign of God's covenant with all life]
 The manna, [for food while we wandered in the desert]
 The staff of Moses [to work miracles when we need them most]
 The shamir [a magical worm that cut giant stones to build the ancient temple in Jerusalem, avoiding metals of war]
 Letters [of the Hebrew alphabet]
 Writing [likely: of the Tanakh / Hebrew bible – a blueprint for ethics and daily life]
 The tablets [of the ten commandments, the foundation of Torah]
 And some say: also the demons, the grave of Moses, and the ram of Abraham our father [that appeared during the binding of Isaac].
 And some say: also tongs, formed with tongs.



Facilitator prompts the group:

- Go back through the list and choose 3 items that more “practical” and three that are more “magical/imaginative.” Compare your lists with a havruta/partner.
- Why do you think both types of items are included here?
- Which category of items speak to you more? Which provide you with more comfort when faced with the unknown? Why?



ACTIVITY



DEVELOPING OUR OWN LIST FOR THE FUTURE:

Facilitator prompts the group:

- Having looked at this list of items that helped us through challenging moments in Jewish mythic history, let's make a collective list: What do we have or need to cultivate now to help us in the future as it relates to climate change?
- Challenge yourself to include both practical and aspirational/magical items.

Take a few minutes to think, then add - to one large list - as many items as come to mind.

[In person, pass out markers and have participants add directly to a piece of poster paper or, if it's a big group, write on post-its then add to the poster paper. Online, use a shared google doc.]

- Once most people have written items on the list, invite learners to take a minute to read what has been written.

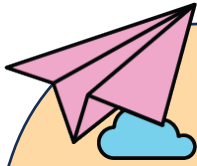
Facilitator prompts each individual to:

- Choose one item from the list that they want to remember/take with them.
- Write it down somewhere for safekeeping.

7-10 min



15 min



PROMPT ACTION

Facilitator reads:

In a moment, you'll get a chance to tell [or write] the story of the item you chose from our collective toolbox. Think of the following considerations:

- How does it help us transition to or thrive in a just, livable future? How will this item be used and by whom? Share as many details as possible.
 - You can be as relatable and realistic (e.g. food, water, shelter) or wildly imaginative as you'd like.
 - You can tell the story from a future being looking back – or from someone today looking forward.

Facilitation note: *If you are sharing verbally in groups of 2-3, give learners a few minutes to reflect and think, then 3-4 min each to share. If participants are writing, give 10 minutes to write and 5 minutes to share anything they would like with a partner.*

Gather everyone together to re-group and discuss with the following prompts:

- What objects or ideas did you choose from the list?
- How did it feel to share or write those stories? What came up for you? How did it feel to hear the stories?
- Stories of a positive future and how we get there can help us feel more hopeful and motivated to take action. What type of stories do you think we need in this moment? (relatable / near future stories? stories of a transformed/radically different realities? Stories of how we get to that future? Something else?)



CLOSE WITH INTENTION

In the exploration we just experienced, we used the value of creativity, imaginative storytelling, and constructing our own stories, to engage with climate change. By learning and drawing upon the Jewish tradition of *aggadah* and *midrash* we became aware of how interpretation and storytelling can help us respond to unknown moments. By creating our own stories, learners were invited to explore the power of both wildly imaginative and/or very relatable stories in the context of climate change. By engaging in this activity, we hope you will feel better equipped to live in and respond to a changing world.

Close with facilitator prompting the group:

- I now know that the story I want to tell about a future world, includes ...

3 min

