



WHAT AM I EATING?

PREP FOR THE SESSION

Overview

This resource explores the issues of the **Environment** and our **Food Choices** through the value of **Intentionality**.

At-a-Glance:

This resource asks learners to think about the tension between ideal food consumption, alongside the need to be realistic and practical when it comes to feeding ourselves. It invites participants to consider the different steps that bring our food from farm to table. Using the Jewish practice of reciting *berakhot*/blessings over food as a framework, learners will look at food choices through the value of intentionality and consider what is hard about being intentional. It concludes by having participants go through an exercise in articulating their own food priorities and choosing one to focus on over the next month and beyond.



Time Estimate:

45 minutes



Best Uses:

- For teens and young adults
- Classroom/workshop type setting
- Group discussion and individual reflection



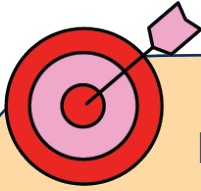
Materials Needed:

- Whiteboard or poster sheets & markers
- Pens and paper/notebook for participants
- Package of dried fruit
- Printouts of the different food values/priorities
- Post-it notes-enough for each participant to have 3



This resource was created as part of M²'s Values in Action Environment Fellowship, generously supported by Micah Philanthropies. For a full list of Fellows in the inaugural Fellowship cohort, [click here](#).

LET'S GET STARTED



FRAME THE ISSUE

Share the following:

We might take for granted that we can find strawberries at the supermarket all year round, or that there are hundreds of different types of cereal in the breakfast aisle, but our modern global food system is actually quite new.

For hundreds of thousands of years, humans did the same thing that nearly all animals do—they woke up and went out and hunted and gathered their food for the day. Between 10,000 and 20,000 years ago, people started cultivating crops and domesticating animals for food, and this radically changed the way human societies were structured. From that point on, people have continued to innovate new methods of producing food and integrating the latest technologies into this process. What we think of as the modern food system, with products traveling thousands of miles from farm to table, and the complex processing of raw ingredients, has only been happening for about 100 years.

Facilitator prompts the group:

- Think of one thing you ate in the past 24 hours. Where did it come from?

Continue reading:

Along with many conveniences, today's food system is also rife with injustice and exploitation - from environmental degradation (soil loss, pollution of air and water, decreased biodiversity) to mistreatment of workers, to ruining small independent businesses in favor of large-scale food corporations. As a consumer striving to make ethical decisions, it can be difficult to know which food choices are best, and even if we do know, we may not always be able to have these choices reflect our values, as we balance them with affordability, availability, and convenience.

Facilitator prompts the group:

- What is one ethical food choice that you have recently made?

5 min





EXPLORE THE VALUE AND ANCHOR IN JEWISH WISDOM

12 min



Share the following:

With all the various sources of our food, and the different ethical considerations at play, things can become overwhelming. The value of intentionality can help us in making our way through all the different options.

When we are deliberate about and aware of every act that we perform and every experience that we have, then we are being intentional. It's mostly a mental state of mind, but it demonstrates itself in the actions we take.



Facilitator prompts the group:

- Think of the last time you were truly “intentional” about an act you did. (It does need to be related to food.) When was it? How did it make you feel?
- What is hard about intentionality? What holds us back? What is on the other side?

Continue reading to anchor in Jewish wisdom:

Judaism instructs us to make a *berakha*/blessing before eating or drinking. Different foods have different blessings, some of them referring to how the plant was growing (for example, we refer to the “*fruit of the tree*,” or “*fruit of the earth*”). One reason for this practice is to bring intentionality to the process of consuming food.

Even when we're very hungry, we strive to take a moment and appreciate the privilege of having access to sustenance. By invoking the way the plant was growing in the ground, we're invited to trace our food back to its origin, and consider all the people that made this moment possible.



Facilitator prompts the group:

- Think of your favorite food. Take a few moments and on a separate piece of paper write your own version of a *berakha*/blessing for the food. (*It could be based on the food itself or the experience you associate with eating it.*)
- Share with others and explain why you wrote the *berakha* that you did.



ACTIVITY

FOOD MEDITATION

Facilitator passes out a piece of dried fruit to each participant. Invite everyone to sit quietly and hold the piece of food, feeling its presence in their hands.

Facilitator prompts the group:

- Try to trace back in your minds (or write it down) each step that this fruit took to get from the tree that it grew on, into your hands.
- Turn to a *havruta* and share the journey of your fruit. Who were some of the people who played some part in the process of getting this fruit to you?
- How similar were the two journeys? After hearing from your *havruta*, what may have been missing in the way you imagine your fruit's journey?

Give everyone two minutes to sit quietly and then recite the blessing:

*Baruch atah A-donay, Elo-heinu
Melech Ha'Olam borei pri ha-aitz.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְרִי הָעֵץ

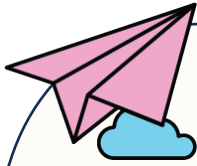
Blessed are You, Hashem our G'd, sovereign of the universe, who creates the fruit of the tree.

Invite everyone to enjoy the fruit quietly, with their eyes closed. After a minute, ask people to share:

- How did it feel to conclude the process of considering the fruit's journey with the blessing?
- What gets in the way of being intentional every time you eat?

10 min





PROMPT ACTION

DEVELOPING PERSONAL FOOD PRIORITIES

Facilitator reads the following:

Inspired by the idea of blessings bringing more intentionality to our food choices, we're now going to begin to develop our own food priority list. Being intentional about our food choices presses us to think about all the different factors involved in what we know about our food, where it comes from, how we eat, and what impact its production has on the world.

There are different categories to consider when it comes to food intentionality. They are listed below (*or around the room on pieces of paper.*) Now is a chance for you to think about which ones you think about the most when it comes to your own food choices.

Have the following items printed out on paper around the room. Give everyone three post-it notes, and a few minutes to walk around and place a post it by their top 3 priorities or things they think about the most when it comes to food choices.

- Taste
 - Seasonality
 - Ecological impact
 - Worker's rights
 - Knowing your farmer/producer
 - Spiritual practice
 - Vegetarianism/veganism
 - Health
 - Political
 - Price
- Everyone stands next to one of their top 3 and we'll go around and hear from a few people about their choices.
 - Discuss:
 - Why did you make the choices you made?
 - Which ones reflect the value of intentionality? How?



Facilitator prompts the group:

- Identify one of these priorities to focus on for the next 30 days. Turn to someone near you and share your focus - commit to checking in with each other in 30 days to see if you've been able to focus on this priority.

15 min





CLOSE WITH INTENTION

Over the course of this session we've had the chance to reflect on our connection to food, how it connects us to so many people all over the planet, and how the value of intentionality can allow us to better appreciate the many hands that touched it along the way. We practiced that intentionality through writing and reciting our own *berakhot*. Inspired by the idea of blessings bringing more intentionality to our food choices, we developed our own food priority list to help our actions align more closely with our values.



Facilitator prompts the group:

- Share three words (only three!) that express how you are feeling about intentionality in your food choices ...

5 min

