



# HOW IS OUR WORTH MEASURED?

## PREP FOR THE SESSION

### *Overview*

This resource unpacks the issue of **Global Poverty** through the value of **Universality**.

### *At-a-Glance:*

This resource encourages us to explore the value of universalism as it connects to global poverty and inequality. It prompts us to think about both the arbitrary and deliberate ways that privilege lands in our world, and to not let feelings of guilt hold us back from deepening our commitment to service work. A key Jewish concept – that all humans come from the same source, and therefore have infinite and not relative value – guides how we are meant to view others in the world. Learners will have the chance to use diary entries to reflect on the concept of “radical sameness” as well as inequalities. It closes with an opportunity to strengthen our commitments to more service work while simultaneously reckoning with possible feelings of guilt and privilege.



#### **Time Estimate:**

25 minutes,  
paired with service activity



#### **Materials Needed:**

- [Diary Reflection Handout](#)

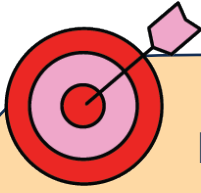


#### **Best Uses:**

- For young adult and adult audiences
- For a reflective exercise with a practical dimensions.

**Note:** This resource is designed so that the first three sections are facilitated prior to a service activity, and the last (Prompt Action) afterwards as a reflection.

## LET'S GET STARTED



### FRAME THE ISSUE

*Read the passage below:*

For three decades, the number of people living in extreme poverty - defined as those who live on less than \$2.15 per person per day - was declining. But the trend was interrupted in 2020, when poverty rose due the COVID-19 crisis. The number of people in extreme poverty rose by 70 million to more than 700 million people worldwide. The world's poorest people bore the steepest costs of the pandemic, as their income losses were twice as high as the world's richest. The poorest also faced large setbacks in health and education which have lasting consequences for their lifetime income prospects. The recovery since then has been uneven, as a result of war, climate shock, and conflict. By the end of 2022, 685 million were living in extreme poverty.

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*Facilitator prompts the group:*

- What is your reaction when you read the data points above?

3 min





## EXPLORE THE VALUE/JEWISH ANCHOR

### *Read the passage below:*

On one level, global poverty surfaces deep inequalities. We live in a world where privilege lands in both arbitrary and deliberate ways, and residual feelings of guilt are strong. Why am I afforded opportunities while others are not? How does the accident of my birthplace determine my lot in life? How do I navigate systemic forces that are designed to keep others down while I can flourish? How can I contend with such deep differences and not be held back by the guilt I may feel?

One path towards reckoning with such feelings is not by a rejection of one's privilege, but rather accepting privilege as a fact, but not as something that is existentially significant. Leaning into our engagement with the value of universality – that individuals in the world may have vastly different realities – economic, social, educational – but are at their core radically the same, can help guide our feelings and actions, and help us set aside feelings of guilt that may be holding us back.

### *Facilitator prompts the group:*

- Have you felt/do you feel guilt in the service work that you do?
- Articulate 1-2 sentences that capture your feelings. What is the hardest part about engaging in the service you are about to do today?

### *Read the following and reflect on the questions below:*

Jewish principles guide the way we value one's worth and how we are meant to see others in the world. According to Jewish wisdom, all humans come from the same source, and therefore each has infinite, and not relative value. Humans are not allotted a sense of worth vis a vis one another, as each human life is of infinite value.

The Mishna (the first major written collection of the Jewish oral traditions that are known as the Oral Torah, edited 200CE) outlines the rules and regulations concerning examinations and cross-examinations of witnesses in civil and criminal cases in *Beit Din* (the Jewish court system). [Sanhedrin 4:5]

10 min





In that context it also tells us the reasons why Adam the first man was created alone.

Mishna 5 says:

“The court tells the witnesses: Therefore, Adam the first man was created alone... And this was done due to the importance of maintaining peace among people, so that one person will not say to another: My parent i.e., progenitor, is greater than your parent.”



***Facilitator prompts the group:***

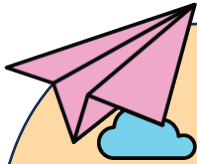
- Explain the Mishna in your own words.
- Why is this statement something that is important to tell witnesses before a court case?
- How does this Mishna and that idea that all humanity comes from the same source shape the way you view your service work today?

***Facilitator prompts the group before service:***

- As you are about to engage in service work, think about the ways that viewing others with “radical sameness” may feel at odds with the realities you see. Try to capture some of those feelings in writing for yourself.

**BREAK FOR SERVICE EXPERIENCE**

8 min



## PROMPT ACTION

After having engaged in service, now is an opportunity for you through journal writing, to reflect on both "radical sameness" and "inequality" as you saw/ experienced it. It is a chance for you to capture on paper any additional feelings and emotions that may have surfaced for you throughout your experience.

*Scan the QR code or download the [Diary Reflection here](#).*



*Facilitator prompts the group to write a diary reflection utilizing the following prompts:*

- The inequality I saw today felt ...
- I was able to lean into viewing others as being fundamentally the same as me, when ...
- The challenge I am still holding onto is ...

*If participants feel comfortable, facilitator should encourage them to share impressions and commitments with one another.*



## CLOSE WITH INTENTION

***Read the passage below:***

The exploration we just took part in prompts us to look at the value of universality as it relates to global poverty and inequality. It encourages us to be honest with ourselves about the arbitrariness of some of the privilege we may have, and to not let feelings of guilt hold us back from deepening our service work. Jewish wisdom guides us to view all humans as coming from the same source, and therefore as having infinite, and not relative value. Focusing on universality as a value in engaging with issues of global poverty allows for us to dig into the complexities and disparities we might see in front of us, strengthening our abilities to commit to more service work while reckoning with possible feelings of guilt and privilege.



***Facilitator prompts the group to respond to the following:***

- As a result of this conversation and experience today, I will now ...
- One question that I still need to ask myself to further my own thinking about the relationship between poverty and universality is ...

3 min

