



# SHOULD WE PURSUE JUSTICE AT ANY COST?

## PREP FOR THE SESSION

### *Overview*

Through exploring the value of justice- particularly what that can get in the way of the pursuit of justice- learners will develop new insights into how to approach justice issues that are important to them.

### *At-a-Glance:*

In the Torah we are taught “Tzedek Tzedek Tirdof: Justice, Justice You shall Pursue.”  
צֶדֶק צֶדֶק תִּרְדּוּף (Deuteronomy, 16:20) Jews are not just supposed to do justice, but to actively pursue it. But what does that look like? Whose justice should we pursue? And do we pursue justice at all costs - even when it is dangerous, or against our own self-interest?

This resource aims to help learners to explore the opportunities and limits of pursuing justice. Learners will leave with a visual roadmap of steps that they can take to pursue justice in their communities.



### Time Estimate:

- 60 minutes



### Best Uses:

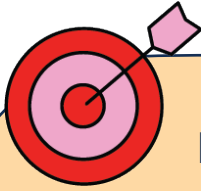
- Best for middle school through adult learners
- Designed for in-person settings. Can be adapted for a virtual experience.



### Materials Needed:

- [Text study handout](#)
- [Poster template to print](#)
- Pens
- Blank paper
- Sticky Chart Paper (or large poster board with tape)
- Markers
- Collage materials like stickers, magazines, scissors

## LET'S GET STARTED



### FRAME THE ISSUE

The world we are inheriting can feel very broken. There is no shortage of systemic injustices that need repair- homelessness, discrimination, wealth inequality, etc.

Justice (*tzedek* in hebrew) is not an easy topic- otherwise the world would have no problems and we would have nothing to talk about today! Before we get much further, let us just do a non-judgemental pulse check. We are going to honor all experiences in the room regardless of whether you are a self-defined social justice warrior, just beginning to explore your relationship with justice, or anywhere in between.

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**Facilitator prompts a 3 minute pulse check for groups of 2-3 people:**

- How do you define justice?
- What is your connection to social justice today or in the past?

Using your thumbs as an indicator, show me how much agreement there was in your group. Thumbs up means everyone was on the same page, thumbs down indicates no agreement and thumb to the side is there was some alignment. It is expected that we are not all on the same page around what justice means. If there was disagreement in your small group of three, imagine how much disagreement there is in the larger world!

We are going to use a general definition of justice today: the quality of being just, impartial, or fair. If something is just, it is morally right and fair.

And for some Jewish framing: The Hebrew word for justice is *tzedek*, often translated as righteousness. You may hear the connection to the word *tzedakah*, righteous giving, or just giving. Torah teaches, *Tzedek Tzedek Tirdof* "Justice, Justice You shall Pursue." צֶדֶק צֶדֶק תִּרְדּוֹף (Deuteronomy, 16:20) Jews are not just supposed to do justice they are supposed to actively go after it and pursue it.

10 min





## EXPLORE THE VALUE: JUSTICE

40 min



With a partner I would like to invite you to take a look at a quick piece of Jewish text. It is from the Torah, and at first you might wonder, what does this story about livestock have to do with justice? But do not worry, I have a feeling we will have a lot to talk about even if we do not personally keep any livestock. We are going to look at text in partnership so we are not stuck in our own way of thinking, but have an opportunity to struggle and glean from it together - which can itself be seen as an act of justice!

"If you see your fellow Israelite's ox or sheep gone astray, do not ignore it; you must take it back to your peer. If your fellow Israelite does not live near you or you do not know who [the owner] is, you shall bring it home and it shall remain with you until your peer claims it; then you shall give it back. You shall do the same with that person's donkey; you shall do the same with that person's garment; and so too shall you do with anything that your fellow Israelite loses and you find: you must not remain indifferent.

(Deuteronomy 20-22)

לֹא-תִרְאֶה אֶת-שׁוֹר אֲחִיךָ אוֹ  
אֶת-שֵׂיוֹ נִדְחִים וְהִתְעַלְמָתָּ מֵהֶם  
הִשָּׁב תְּשִׁיבֵם לְאֲחִיךָ: וְאִם-לֹא  
קָרֹב אֲחִיךָ אֵלֶיךָ וְלֹא יָדַעְתָּ  
וְאִסְפָּתוּ אֶל-תּוֹךְ בֵּיתְךָ וְהָיָה עִמָּךְ  
עַד דֶּרֶשׁ אֲחִיךָ אֹתוֹ וְהִשְׁבֹּתוּ לוֹ:  
וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה לַחֲמֹר וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה  
לְשִׁמְלָתוֹ וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְכָל-אֲבֵדָת  
אֲחִיךָ אֲשֶׁר-תִּאֲבֹד מִמֶּנּוּ  
וּמִצָּאתָהּ לֹא תִוָּכַל לְהִתְעַלֵּם:  
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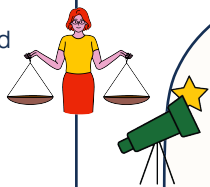


### **Facilitator prompts pairs to discuss:**

- How might the message in this text be applied to our experiences today?
- When was a time when you made an extra effort to help a friend? a stranger? When was a time you chose not to help - or you were not able to help? Why?
- Why do you think the text says "you must not remain indifferent?" What are the responsibilities or priorities that might cause us to choose not to pursue justice (e.g. your safety and security, commitments to your family or friends, preserving your mental or physical health)?

### **After text study, facilitator shares:**

The Torah teaches us to pursue justice and not to be indifferent, but there are very real factors that can make pursuing justice difficult or inaccessible at times. These factors might include our responsibilities to our family and friends, our health and safety, feeling overwhelmed by what needs to change in the world, or becoming burnt-out by the process of pursuing justice itself!



## ACTIVITY

**Note to facilitator:** You can decide how focused this conversation will be on the real world. If your group is going to choose a justice project to pursue, you may want to offer some constricts around dollars and time. For example, envision what steps towards justice around this issue look like in one year with \$250 dollars or resources. Or encourage them to complete an asset map where they take stock of the gifts, skills, and capacities that they have access to, that will help address their issue.

You are going to work together to create a poster that articulates what achieving justice, *tzedek*, might look like in your lives. For brainstorming you can imagine having unlimited financial resources to help you get started, but ultimately you want to be rooted in reality of possibility. Your poster should use words and images that clearly communicate to the rest of what your group is thinking.

Your poster is going to have 3 areas:

- Injustice (what's broken in our community/world).
- Justice actualized
- Action plan for justice- how might we achieve justice for \_\_\_\_\_

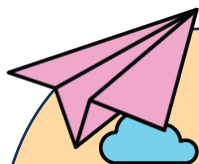
Begin to think and articulate what is broken in the community or communities that you are part of (think about your school, synagogue, neighborhood, city). You may want to zoom in on one person that you care about and think about what's unjust for them. What are the impacts of that injustice on their everyday life? That goes into the first area of the poster.

Do the justice actualized section second, What would justice look like for that person/people/area you are thinking of. What is the best possible scenario of what justice would look like for this person/people/situation? What would justice look, feel, sound, or even taste or smell like?

Once you know what the large goal is, then start making a plan. What are some small steps you can take? What are the action items that need to be put into place to move something from injustice to justice? What else do you need to learn about? What skills, resources, or gifts do you have access to that can help you? What obstacles might you encounter and how will you respond to them? What other questions do you need answers to?

As you finish your posters, prop them up around the room so that everyone can see them. We are going to do a quick gallery walk and then we will ask each group to present a one minute high level explanation of the most important aspect of their poster or the group's conversation.

10 min



## REFLECT AND PROMPT ACTION

Talking about the injustice we see in the world, and the change we want to see can make us feel fired up and ready to take action! Let us take advantage of this feeling. When we get further into a project, and especially when there are tedious aspects - sending emails, waiting for replies, working on spreadsheets, filling out forms - it can be easy to get disengaged and start to feel that our work does not matter! At those moments, I encourage you to revisit the justice-activated portion of your poster, and try to feel connected with the passion and drive that you may be feeling right now!



***Facilitator prompts learners to discuss with someone they have not talked to yet today:***

- What did this experience today help you realize about your own relationship with justice, tzedek?
- What does pursuing justice look like for you in your life at the moment, in your individual relationships or in a more large-scale way?
- What small action do you personally want to commit?

Note to facilitator: If you have a group that is working on a justice project together, prompt them to make a concrete plan for next steps. You might share, it is really easy to say that we commit to something, but the first step of pursuing justice is action- so what can we do right now that will move this conversation forward? Do you need to take out phones and put a meeting together? Do you need to call an organization? Do you need to schedule time next Tuesday to talk to an expert? What small action are you going to take right now that will help you take next steps later? Share with your partner: I am taking out my phone so I can\_\_\_\_\_.