

DISCUSSION GUIDE



MORAL RESISTANCE AND **OUR JEWISH OBLIGATION TO SOCIAL JUSTICE** Rabbi Seth M. Limmer, DHL and Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, editors

SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

FOREWORD BY REVEREND CORNELL WILLIAM BROOKS | INTRODUCTION BY RABBI DAVID SAPERSTEIN

**Editors: Rabbi Seth M. Limmer, DHL
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**Discussion Guide by Vanessa Harper,
CCAR Press Rabbinic Intern**

Moral Resistance and Spiritual Authority: Our Jewish Obligation to Social Justice

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Moral Resistance and Spiritual Authority explores the spiritual underpinnings of our Jewish commitment to justice, using Jewish text and tradition, as well as contemporary sources and models. Among the topics covered are immigration, women's health, LGBTQ rights, health care, racial justice, speaking truth to power, and community organizing.

This discussion guide includes both overarching questions for each of the book's three parts ("Spiritual Authority," "Moral Commitments," and "Tools of Resistance"), as well as questions for each chapter. These questions are intended to deepen one's engagement with the text itself, to examine one's own position in relation to the issues the text brings forth, and to help the reader take steps to put their learning into action. Bear in mind that some of the questions marked "action" are more suited (though not limited) to those who are reading the book as part of a group, and many involve preparation in advance of a discussion or a lengthy process of research and organizing for the group.

"Rabbi Tarfon and the elders were hanging out on the roof of Nitza's house in Lod when this question arose: 'Which is greater, study or action?' Rabbi Tarfon answered and said: 'Action is greater.' Rabbi Akiva answered and said: 'Study is greater.' The others responded: 'Study is greater because it leads to action.'" (Babylonian Talmud, *Kiddushin* 40b)

Introduction

Rabbi David Saperstein

1. In his introduction, Rabbi Saperstein asks, “what is the right image to bear in mind as you read this book: that of the normal ebb and flow of social justice, in which the midpoint moves, as in Dr. King’s long arc of history, toward justice; or of an actual crossroads in which we are veering ever further from the path of social justice gains of the past century?” (page xxi). Which of these images resonates with you more (or if neither does, what alternative do you posit)? What are the implications of these different viewpoints for how one approaches the essays in this book?
2. On page xxv, Rabbi Saperstein lists seven “core values” underlying the Jewish textual heritage, and asserts that “Jews who would live up to the aspirations expressed in the Jewish tradition will insist that all human actions and societal/government policies be measured by these principles.” What changes, if any, would you make to Rabbi Saperstein’s list in light of the assertion that follows it, and why?
3. “As daunting as the challenges this book addresses are, we live at a time of hope of which our ancestors, our prophets, and our sages throughout the ages could only have dreamed. We may indeed face perilous and unprecedented problems, but paradoxically, we may well be the first generation of Jews living in a world capable of creating the kind of just, peaceful, and compassionate society our history and our values charge us to build,” Rabbi Saperstein writes on page xxvi. What, in your assessment, are the primary “perilous and unprecedented problems” that we face today? How is today’s Jewish community better posed (or not) to face these challenges? What gives you hope for the future?

Part One: Spiritual Authority

Questions to consider throughout this section:

1. What does “spiritual authority” mean for each of these authors? For you?
2. How do each of these authors use texts to make their arguments? Do you find certain ways of using text more compelling than others? Why?

Judaism and the Political World

Rabbi Seth M. Limmer, DHL

1. Rabbi Limmer argues that, “politics is the path, the art, or at least the term for the art, of how we share our moral sensibilities with our neighbors, express our understanding of what is right, and participate in the process of shaping our society” (page 4). How does this definition compare to your own understanding of politics? In what ways do your “moral sensibilities,” Jewish values, and/or practices affect your political views? How does your Jewish community address political issues?
2. Rabbi Limmer extends the role of the Levitical priests to the role of the Israelite nation as a whole, “to aid other nations’ attempts to be holy, maintain an international standard of the sacred, and try to see the purity of everyone in society” (page 5). Are these charges that the contemporary Jewish people can, or should, try to fulfill? What would “an international standard of the sacred” look like?
3. Summarizing some of the Rabbinic arguments over how to deal with conflicts between Jewish and secular law, Rabbi Limmer writes, “we had to determine the extent to which we would willingly conform to society’s rules and under what circumstances we would place ourselves outside the law” (page 11). Have you ever experienced a conflict between your Jewishness and your nation’s laws? Under what circumstances is it acceptable or right for Jews (or others) not to conform to the law of the land, and why?
4. The Rabbinic argument, according to Rabbi Limmer, that we are all responsible and accountable for the sins of the whole world (page 14) is a heavy burden to bear. How do you reckon with this obligation?

B’tzelem Elohim: A Divine Mandate to Humanity

Rabbi Shoshanah Conover

1. Rabbi Conover offers several understandings of what it means for human beings to be created *b’tzelem Elohim*, including: intellect, free will, equality, speech, authority,

singularity, and desire for relationship. Which interpretation of *b'tzelem Elohim* is most compelling for you and why?

2. One of the ways that Rabbi Conover shows human beings are *b'tzelem Elohim* is through the power of speech, "Speech, both divine and human, has the power to cause the world to come into being" (page 20). How does speech create? How does speech destroy?
3. On page 22, Rabbi Conover argues, "If we are made in God's image, everything we do reflects on God, for good and for ill." What are you/your organization doing that reflects on God for good? What are you/your organization doing that reflects on God for ill, and what will you do to change it?
4. Rabbi Conover writes in her conclusion, "to be in relationship means to create space for the other. Ultimately, this is how we—human beings made in the image of God—act most powerfully" (page 24). What are the relationships that enable you to "live up to your divine potential?" How can you best "amplify the power of others" through relationship? Where do you need to build new relationships or change existing ones to effect necessary changes in your community?

People at the Margins: The Widow (*Almanah*), the Fatherless (*Yatom*), and the Sojourner (*Ger/Toshav*) in the Bible

Rabbi S. David Sperling, PhD

1. Rabbi Dr. Sperling explains that the widow, the fatherless, and the sojourner are the "classes of people who are typically disadvantaged" in the Hebrew Bible (page 27). What makes these social positions precarious? What are the equivalents of these classes of disadvantaged people in contemporary society, and what makes them vulnerable?
2. After examining texts from other ancient Near Eastern cultures, Rabbi Dr. Sperling concludes that "concern for the sojourner" appears to be an Israelite invention (page 28). In what ways has the experience of being a resident stranger affected the Israelite and Jewish people throughout history? How is or isn't this experience and/or history relevant to your own life?
3. According to Rabbi Dr. Sperling, "the biblical writers disagree about the possibility of a *ger* changing [their] status" (page 31). The status changes discussed in the textual examples are a combination of psychological, spiritual, social, and political. What are some of the internal and external barriers to becoming part of a different society? Consider the experience of becoming, for instance, American or Jewish.
 - a. Action: Meet with someone who became an American citizen, and/or someone who converted to Judaism, and learn from their experiences. Are there obstacles that prevent their full integration into their chosen society? What are some

measures that your community can take to help new immigrants/citizens or converts/non-Jewish partners integrate?

4. This chapter ends with a warning to “never forget our past, lest we destroy our future” (page 32). What does the biblical charge to love the *ger* call you to do today? What is currently at stake?

Loving Your Neighbor as the Path to Justice

Rabbi Lisa D. Grant, PhD

1. On page 37, Rabbi Dr. Grant offers different interpretive possibilities for the translation of *rei-a* (neighbor, fellow, fellow Israelite/kinsperson) as well as textual support for these different translations. Which translation is most compelling to you and why? What are the implications of each of these interpretive possibilities for what it means to love your *rei-a* as yourself?
2. In exploring the distinction between the *rei-a* and the stranger, Rabbi Dr. Grant concludes, “Both are deserving of justice. Bringing love into the mix teaches us that compassion is an essential element of justice, especially when it comes to judging people who are very different and distant from ourselves” (page 39). Is compassion essential to justice? Do you find it easier to love (or have compassion upon) someone who is more similar to you, or someone more different, and why?
3. Rabbi Dr. Grant quotes Tamara Ekanazi on love in the Hebrew Bible: “[it] is about commitment, loyalty, and action rather than feelings. To love others is to take responsibility for their well-being” (page 39). In what ways does this definition of love accord with your own, or not? How might this affect your understanding of the commandment to “love your *rei-a* as yourself?”
4. Rabbi Dr. Grant summarizes the spectrum of narrow to broad interpretations of “and you shall love your *rei-a* as yourself,” saying, “we should struggle to consider the limits and potential for loving our fellow humans” (page 40). Where are your limits? Where do you identify potential for growth?

N’vi-im: Vision, Rage, Rhetoric

Rabbi Mona Alfi

1. Throughout this essay, Rabbi Alfi offers different models and tools of prophetic leadership and inspiration. Which spoke to you most? When have you felt that you were playing the role of the prophet? When have you been inspired by a prophetic call or leader?

2. Rabbi Alfi takes note of female prophets and leaders in our tradition, reminding us that “God speaks to us in different ways and through a variety of messengers, and that the way we transmit a message can be as powerful as the vision itself” (page 46). When have you received an important message (or lesson) from an unexpected messenger? What are ways that you can seek out and uplift messengers and leaders whose voices are not being heard? Who are those messengers in your community, and why aren’t their voices being heard?
3. Reflecting on Moses, Miriam, and Aaron’s model of shared leadership, Rabbi Alfi says, “One of the strengths of the Reform Movement’s Commission on Social Action is that it seeks to unite the different visions and voices within our movement into a cohesive and actionable message for us to engage in social justice as a community” (page 47). What is there to gain, and what is there to lose, by uniting different visions into a unified message?
4. Rabbi Alfi says that the clergy who headed MLK’s prophetic call “understood what our prophets knew: there is no distinction between the public and the private, no separation between religious values and political actions ... they must be in harmony with each other” (page 52). When have you experienced a conflict between the public and private, the religious and political? How did you resolve it?

On Truth, Trueness, and Prophecy: The Discourse of Resistance

Rabbi Jonathan Cohen, PhD

1. Rabbi Dr. Cohen opens his essay with a discussion of the importance of what we perceive as truth, and how this truth is acquired and expressed; later, he mentions that in “biblical and Talmudic material, the prophet’s truth must somehow be identified as ‘true prophecy’ in order to be effectively communicated and to sway others” (page 62). Where do your truths come from? How do you evaluate whether a claim is true or false?
2. One distinguishing characteristic of the true biblical prophets, according to Rabbi Dr. Cohen, is that they “internalize and personalize the received or inspired message in ways that render it unique” (page 62). Does this distinction hold true in the age of social media? Why or why not?
3. In summarizing McCormack’s writing on contemporary truth-tellers, Rabbi Dr. Cohen partially characterizes the modern (and ancient) prophet as one whose “courage, strength, speech, and actions transcend accepted norms and etiquette in order to draw and capture attention” (page 60). When have you experienced “truth” being expressed in this way? What were your reactions, or the reactions of others? When have you expressed a difficult truth publically? What was your experience?

4. On page 65, Rabbi Dr. Cohen reminds us of the challenges of articulating truth, including that “we must recall the risk of retaliation and punishment and the willingness or resignation to sacrifice.” As a means of inspiration and instruction, he also notes, “it is incumbent upon us to recall role models of truth-telling and resistance.” What are the truths for which you are willing to risk yourself? Who are your role models of truth-telling and resistance?

Imagining Immigration: The Stranger in Jewish Law and Lore

Rabbi Aaron Panken, PhD, z”l

1. Based on a *M’chilta* passage quoted on page 78, Rabbi Dr. Panken demonstrates how the Rabbis expanded the notion of how strangers must be treated all the way to “demanding equality with respect to every commandment in the Torah ... suggesting that the stranger should both benefit from and be required to participate in every aspect of community life.” What are the implications of this erasure of distinctions between the stranger and the native Israelite, or their contemporary counterparts?
2. On page 83, Rabbi Dr. Panken distills a list of values from the Rabbinic process for conversion. “All of these values,” he says, “take into account the situation of the stranger or convert, rather than focusing on the position of the ones accepting the newcomer ... the goal here is not to distance or reject strangers, rather it is to provide them with the appropriate tools they need to survive in their new home as fully successful members of the new community.” What do you think of both the conversion procedure and the set of values derived from it? Imagine, as Rabbi Dr. Panken suggests, what it would look like “if analogous values were brought to bear on contemporary questions of immigration.”
3. “Later texts ... envision religious places such as synagogues and churches as such places of sanctuary from improper prosecution,” Rabbi Dr. Panken notes on page 85. What would it take to make your synagogue or institution a sanctuary in this regard? Consider how both resources and opinions would factor into such an undertaking.
4. “Obligations arise from history,” Rabbi Dr. Panken argues, “and we who have been slaves and strangers, wanderers and outsiders, simply cannot be silent in the face of persecution and hatred rendered onto others” (page 85). What stories from your history (writ large) obligate you to speak out?

In Every Generation: The Obligations of Our Exodus

Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner

1. Activity: Rabbi Pesner mentions the many contemporary Haggadot, supplementary readings, and new ritual additions to the Seder plate that continue to keep the experience of the Exodus relevant in each generation (page 88). Collect and examine different examples of these supplementary materials. What trends and differences do you notice? Which readings or rituals particularly speak to you, and why?
2. Commenting on Exodus 2:11–12, Rabbi Pesner writes, “Moses becomes aware of who he is.... He becomes enraged at the injustice. And, despite his privilege, he acts” (page 93). How does privilege make action difficult? Does privilege entail a responsibility to act? Why or why not?
3. Rabbi Pesner explains Rashi’s interpretation of a midrash, “God tells Moses that we merited redemption not because of *what was*, but because of *what was to be*” (page 94). What is the vision of the future that motivates the redemption you seek, either for yourself or for others?
4. “Redemption culminates as the people stand in relationship together, bound by a new, shared story,” Rabbi Pesner concludes his summary of the Exodus “template for all redemption” (page 96). How do dialogue, relationship, and shared narrative affect social justice work? When and how have you experienced the effect of having a shared narrative with someone?

Part Two: Moral Resistance

Section A: Moral Commitments

Questions to consider as you read the chapters in this section:

1. How does morality feature in each of these authors’ commitments? Where do you understand your own sense of morality coming from? How does morality factor into the causes you care about?
2. Do any of these chapters inspire you to take action or care about an issue you that you hadn’t previously? What do you find inspiring?
3. Did you disagree with any of these authors’ positions at the outset of the chapter? Did they change your mind? Why or why not? How did your initial attitude affect your experience of the chapter?
4. Does the most compelling argument that each author presents draw from Jewish sources, other sources, or a combination? How might a Jewish reader (perhaps

specifically a Reform Jewish reader) receive this argument differently than a non-Jewish reader?

Economic Justice and the Social Safety Net

Rabbi Marla J. Feldman

1. Following her evaluation of biblical texts mandating that society care for the vulnerable in society, Rabbi Feldman suggests, “perhaps we find such reminders repeated throughout the biblical texts precisely because this was not always a popular message” (page 103). What are the contemporary arguments in favor of and in opposition to this message? What motivates or moderates your own contribution to the social safety net?
2. On page 105, Rabbi Feldman quotes a passage from Maimonides’ *Hilchot Mat’not Ani-im*. What do you make of Maimonides’ interpretation of “sufficient for whatever he needs?” What would following this interpretation in your community today entail? Is it realistic? Why or why not?
3. Rabbi Feldman argues that Jews are obligated to care for the vulnerable of society as a whole, not only its Jewish population, “Even as early as the Mishnaic period the Rabbis articulated the requirement to provide a basic level of support for non-Jews as well. This duty of care was qualified as *mipnei darchei shalom*, ‘for the sake of the ways of peace’” (page 106). How do you understand this justification, “for the sake of the ways of peace?” Do you find this reasoning compelling? If so, why, and if not, what would be more compelling for you?
4. In her discussion of who should pay for the social safety net, Rabbi Feldman writes, “Every member of the Jewish community is obligated to contribute a portion of his or her resources to those who are in need, and every Jewish community is obligated to maintain the societal structures necessary to implement these principles in a just and fair manner” (page 107). What are the structures that exist in your Jewish community to administer a social safety net? How might such structures be created or improved?

Health Care as a Justice Issue: A Healthy System Starts with Healthy Jewish Values

Rabbi Adam F. Miller

1. “Communal support for health care actually occurred in Jewish communities throughout the ages,” Rabbi Miller writes on page 117. What are the current structures for ensuring that the medical needs of your community are met? (Consider, for instance, the role of online crowdfunding to cover medical expenses). What qualifies as a medical “need”

within these structures? How do these structures measure up to the obligations outlined throughout this essay?

2. Rabbi Miller quotes a CCAR responsum on the obligation to provide health care, which argues for adequate compensation for physicians, noting “a key element in the Jewish legal theory which permits physicians to be paid for their work: when a positive commandment [i.e., *pikuach nefesh*] is incumbent upon all members of the community, no one person can be required to perform it for free” (page 118). How might this principle apply to other commandments or professions (e.g., teachers)?
3. In his discussion of the individual obligation for preventative self-care, Rabbi Miller adds, “[Maimonides] does not address whether failing to uphold one’s responsibility for self-care would negate or lessen the community’s responsibility to provide health-care access” (page 119). How would you address this issue? Consider factors that might serve as barriers to adequate self-care.

Do Not Separate Yourself from the Community

Rabbi Lynne F. Landsberg, z”l

1. “We people with disabilities remain ‘undesirables’” or, at best, outsiders in *every* basic sphere of life: education, recreation, social life, religious life, and especially employment,” Rabbi Landsberg argues on page 127. Where and how have you seen negative or indifferent attitudes towards people with disabilities at play (including in yourself)? Where have you seen positive examples of a full inclusion of people with disabilities?
2. Rabbi Landsberg writes, “Jewish communities all over the country shut Jews out by not altering *all* physical barriers. We shut Jews out by continuing *non*-inclusive programming. We shut Jews out by simply not inviting them to volunteer or to join groups like sisterhood or youth group or to use their talents in leadership positions or actual Jewish jobs” (page 129).
 - a. Action: Conduct an audit of your synagogue/ institution/ community: what are the barriers to entry and full participation? What accommodations currently exist? Where are persons with disabilities being served, or not? What is the prevailing attitude towards persons with disabilities in your community?
3. On page 130, Rabbi Landsberg insists, “‘Equal access to all things Jewish’ means more than a ramp. It means physical and *programmatic* access. Programmatic access includes, but is not limited to, all kinds of Jewish education: religious school, day school, youth group programs, adult education, retreats, conferences, and informal education like

camps.” What are the benefits of including and accommodating learners with different abilities, both for those students and for the normative students in those settings? What might communities (like yours) do in order to realize these possibilities?

4. As Rabbi Landsberg concludes, she says, “My greatest wish is to take what I’ve learned from my experience and sound a wake-up call to the whole Jewish community that (a) Jewish people with disabilities are out there alone, and they need to be embraced by our communities, and (b) all people with disabilities need our political advocacy” (page 134). What can you personally do to bring about positive change for Jews and everyone with disabilities, through your own attitude, actions, and advocacy?

What Reproductive Justice Might Look Like

Rabbi Emily Langowitz

1. Despite the relatively pro-choice rulings found in Jewish legal tradition, Rabbi Langowitz writes, “the halachic process remains born of and carried out in a patriarchal power structure.... What, then, should a contemporary, feminist, post-halachic Jewish discussion on abortion look like? How can we, as a movement, ground ourselves in a Judaism that represents the values of Reform and honors the humanity of those making reproductive decisions for themselves?” (page 142). Based on the arguments Rabbi Langowitz presents throughout this chapter, how would you answer these questions? What role should scriptural and halachic texts play in a “contemporary, feminist, post-halachic Jewish discussion?” Whose voices should be added to the conversation?
2. “The Torah focuses on the transmission of Judaism as a biological inheritance.... But the heritage of female reproductive decision-making can be understood as an equally sacred covenantal inheritance. The passing down of a lineage amounts to more than genetic replication; it includes elements of spiritual, religious, and ethical transmission as well,” Rabbi Langowitz writes on page 145. What are some issues of reproductive justice that affect the Jewish community in particular? Consider issues such as genetic predispositions to certain diseases like Tay-Sachs, assumptions or prejudices within the Jewish community around childlessness, single parenthood, and/or adoption, or other issues pertinent to your community.
3. Rabbi Langowitz argues that the story of Creation offers a paradigm for understanding the sacredness of reproductive choice, “... we affirm God’s image when we ensure that reproductive justice is present in our society: when women and all individuals have the capacity to make choices for how they create life, when they will not create life, and what must be in place for their lives to be truly good” (page 146). What do you think Rabbi Langowitz means by “what must be in place for their lives to be truly good?” What would you place in this category in relation to the issue of reproductive justice?

4. In her conclusion, Rabbi Langowitz leaves us with this charge: “As people of faith, we have a responsibility to counteract the dominant societal narrative that assumes that religion is *against* abortion, reproductive and sexual health access, and reproductive justice. This means that the work we do is twofold: to speak out and reclaim the public narrative around religion and reproductive justice, and to continue to take action that ensures that all people have the access to the information, health care, and services that will reflect their dignity as creative agents made in the image of God” (page 146). Which of these two prongs of action do you find more challenging? More urgent? Why?
 - a. Action: Research: What are the current obstacles to reproductive justice in society, and in your area in particular? Determine: What services or advocacy can you/ your organization provide to overcome those obstacles? Organize: Who can you partner with in your community to increase your impact? Are there other faith groups that would be your partners in this work? Why or why not?

Toward LGBT Liberation

Rabbi Rachel Timoner

1. In her discussion of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Rabbi Timoner writes, “Many rabbis argue that rather than intending to condemn homosexuality, the Hebrew Bible intended to condemn sexual actors who did not honor their sexual partner” (page 152). How do you understand this reinterpretation, and others that Rabbi Timoner offers, of these difficult texts? Do you find them compelling? Challenging? Why?
2. Rabbi Timoner argues, that “it’s not just LGBT people who suffer from homophobia and transphobia, and it’s not just women who suffer from sexism, but that cis-gendered, heterosexual people, and cis-gendered heterosexual men in particular, also have a great deal to gain from a freeing of these rigid categories and an acceptance of the full range of human sexuality and gender expression” (page 157). What are some of the potential gains that Rabbi Timoner outlines from Pharr’s work? What are others that you can envision? Do you have room to grow in your own “acceptance of the full range of human sexuality and gender expression?” If so, where? Do you have valuable experiences and insights that you can share with others to help promote this range of acceptance? If so, what are they, and what forums do you have for sharing them?
3. On page 157, Rabbi Timoner outlines steps the Jewish community should take moving forward on these issues, “First, we must assert our pluralistic, egalitarian vision for Judaism and the Jewish people. Second, we must teach an interpretation of the Hebrew Bible that allows for the full humanity, dignity, and expression of people of all sexual orientations and genders. Third, we must advocate in the public sphere for the liberation of LGBT people and all people from heterosexism, homophobia, transphobia,

and sexism.” On which of these points do you feel most equipped to take action? On which do you feel least equipped? What steps would you need to take in order to move from the latter category to the former?

4. Action: As Rabbi Timoner notes that the Religious Action Center released a guide to better inclusion of transgender and gender nonconforming members and their families. Go through this guide as a starting point, research any terms or concepts of which you are uncertain, and conduct an audit of your organization/community. Identify areas for growth, potential sources of resistance, immediate action steps, and long-term plans for creating a more inclusive and safe space for folks all across the gender and sexuality spectra (make sure you include people with different gender and sexual identities in your assessment and planning groups!). Determine your partners in the community who can help put these plans into motion.

“Nothing Will Be Out of Their Reach”: Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault, and Gender Power Imbalance

Rabbi Jill L. Maderer

1. Rabbi Maderer writes on page 166, “Because the oldest texts in our tradition so often strip women of power, they can be unhelpful and even offensive in our search for guidance about how to repair the gender power imbalance that is at the root of sexual harassment and assault. I do not apologize for those texts. Instead, I turn elsewhere.” Do you agree with Rabbi Maderer’s approach in this regard? Why or why not? Where do you turn for guidance about how to repair the gender power imbalance? In what ways is that source helpful, and where might it fall short?
2. Building off Rabbi Aviva Richman’s teaching on Deuteronomy 22:23–27, “The rabbis interpret the scream as an indication of the critical role of a third party—the person who is supposed to hear the scream and intervene to prevent this act of violence,” Rabbi Maderer elaborates, “The burden is on the third party. Who is the third party? ...*All of us*” (page 163). What are some of the factors (cultural, institutional, individual, etc.) that perpetuate systems of inequality and thus enable acts of violence and/or unequal treatment? What would be required to dismantle these factors and/or systems?
3. Rabbi Maderer provides many examples of behaviors that perpetuate gender power imbalances in institutional settings in her charge, “When we see the unchecked power that enables devaluing women with microaggressions, insults, or inequality such as comments about women’s looks, greeting women in the workplace with a hug rather than a handshake, calling women in the workplace ‘girls,’ using women’s first names rather than earned titles, the telling or tolerance of sexist jokes, unequal hiring practices and mentorship pipelines, all-male panels, or a lack of parental leave for men, we must

dismantle it” (page 167). When have you seen or been on the receiving end of (or perpetuated) such behaviors? What happened, and what was your experience of it?

- a. Action: Conduct a listening campaign in your institution or community, including both professional staff and lay people, to learn about the experience of people of different genders within the community. Examine records of salaries, ratios of genders in positions of leadership, and other relevant pieces of information that you can acquire. What are some of the most prevalent issues of power imbalance in your community? Create a plan to address at least one of these.
4. In her conclusion, Rabbi Maderer addresses several questions to the reader, transferring the burden for creating change from the institution to the individual: “Where do you have power? Where do you have status? Where do you have the most to lose? When you see a woman harassed or any vulnerable person harmed by someone in power, someone who can strip you of your power, your money, your friends, your dignity . . . will you accommodate the predator, or will you allow yourself to notice? Will you keep silent, or will you speak up? Are you ready to make a sacrifice in order to dismantle the gender power imbalance?” (page 167). Answer these questions for yourself with concrete examples. Whether the answer to the final question is yes or no, figure out why you have arrived at that answer.

Gender Pay Equity

Rabbi Mary L. Zamore

1. Rabbi Zamore writes, “Just as the Talmud’s instruction that fair measurements include two parts, measuring accurately, plus adding a bit more, to ensure ethical business practices, employers need to be scrupulous in assigning salaries to female workers, perhaps even overpaying by a bit to safeguard they are not underpaying and therefore perpetuating the gender pay gap.” (page 175). How did you react to her suggestion that it would be better to overpay rather than underpay female workers, and why do you think you reacted that way? What do you envision when you think of justice in workplace wages?
2. “Many employers use implicit bias inventories, self-administered tests which help individuals reflect on the biases they unwittingly harbor, before engaging in the hiring or review process to reduce the impact of bias on hiring, promotion, and salary. Being able to identify those subconscious biases that inevitably lurk within every human helps an employer consider if they are judging potential or current employees fairly,” Rabbi Zamore explains on page 176. Have you ever used an implicit bias inventory? If not, try taking a few [<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html>]. What were your results? Did they surprise you? How do you see your results affecting you in your work

or other aspects of your life? How might you use your results to counteract conscious or subconscious biases you have?

3. On page 176, Rabbi Zamore argues, “Like false weights and measures, it is impossible to completely repair the damage done by the wage gap, for it affects the access the employee and her family has to quality food, health care, childcare, education, and retirement.” In addition to these factors, what are the other consequences created by the wage gap, both immediate and far-reaching? Will fixing the wage gap completely eliminate these consequences? Why or why not?
4. “A comparison of salary surveys and studies of the rabbis, cantors, executive directors, and educators of the Reform Movement reveal that on average Jewish women professionals earn roughly 85 percent of their male counterparts. It is even more troubling ... since it is this branch of Judaism that touts gender equality and social justice as foundational values,” Rabbi Zamore reveals on page 179. Why do you think the pay gap persists in Reform institutions despite the foundational values of the Reform Movement? Where do you see evidence of other factors that might be correlated to the pay gap in these institutions?
 - a. Action: Find out whether or not your institution/community has policies in place to ensure equal pay for equal work (from religious school teachers to rabbis), using objective scales and data from salary studies. If not, do research to find out what fair wages are for each kind of work available, level of experience, etc., in your area, and create a proposal of a policy to present to the relevant governing body.

When Good Isn't Enough: Understanding Racial Privilege and Challenging Racial Injustice Ilana Kaufman and Rabbi Rebekah P. Stern

1. “Our ability as U.S. Jews to push back against racial injustice is strengthened when we better understand the diversity of our domestic Jewish community, which, like the rest of the United States, is steadily becoming more racially and ethnically diverse,” Kaufman and Rabbi Stern argue on page 184. What is the racial and ethnic makeup of your Jewish community in relation to your wider geographic community? Is your Jewish community a place where Jews of different backgrounds are welcome, comfortable, visible? How do you know? What can your community do to create a safe, non-judgmental space for Jews of color?
2. The authors warn, “White people who call attention to white privilege and dominance risk ... having to admit to ourselves that we are not only racist, but that we benefit from and feel the need to maintain those systems. We risk having to move from a space of doing all we can to maintain the fictive narrative of our own goodness as *rodfei tzedek*

(pursuers of justice), to one that is much more honest and therefore much more unattractive” (page 185). Are you able to make an honest assessment of yourself on these grounds (regardless of your own racial identity)? How are you able to do this or what stands in your way? What do you stand to risk and gain by dropping the “fictive narrative of [your] own goodness?”

3. On page 189, Kaufman and Rabbi Stern argue, “We suffer from inattentive blindness, that is, how people with more privilege perceive so little when we are not paying attention. Those of us who live more privileged lives, whether due to skin color, sexual orientation, gender identity, able-bodiedness, and so on, just simply miss the challenges faced by people with less privilege.” What are ways to counteract inattentive blindness? Describe a time when you became aware of a challenge faced by someone with less privilege than you. How did you feel? What did you do as a result?
4. “When we who live lives of privilege really open ourselves, through the honest building of meaningful relationships, to the experiences of those with less privilege, we gain new lenses through which to understand the world. This opens doors to new possibilities for many different kinds of connections,” the authors write on page 190. When have you experienced a relationship or connection of this sort? How did it change you?
 - a. Action: Form a diverse dialogue group (or groups) made up of people from your community. Discuss what gets you up in the morning, what keeps you up at night, etc. What does each person see as the biggest issue facing the community? Find out what each of you can do to alleviate that issue.

Advocacy in Action: Working toward Immigration Reform

Rabbi John A. Linder

1. “Speaking truth to power, learning the details of legislation, and especially utilizing the model of congregation-based community organizing (CBCO) have been powerful ways to unite our brothers and sisters in the interfaith community around immigration reform” (page 193), Rabbi Linder shares from his experience. On which issues can (or does) your Jewish community partner with the larger interfaith community to advocate and work for change? What are the benefits and challenges of interfaith organizing?
2. Rabbi Linder warns, “Organizing and advocacy do not always have immediate impact or lead directly to immediate gratification and desired outcomes” (page 196). How do you maintain motivation, hope, and energy during organizing/advocacy work, or in the face of ongoing issues and injustices? What do you do when faced with an undesired outcome, especially one you worked hard to prevent?
3. On page 199, Rabbi Linder reflects, “The process of readying for these sessions, preparing ourselves for advocacy with the help of the RAC, and having each member of

our clergy/lay leader delegations speak in the meeting was a great model of civic engagement. It was a good reminder that our elected officials are accountable to us, their constituents. It is up to us to make our voices heard in an organized, thoughtful way.” Reflecting on your own advocacy work, evaluating a group in your community, or planning a future advocacy campaign, consider how the internal organization and practices of your chosen group reflects the values for which that said group advocates. What does the group do well? Where are the shortcomings, and how can they be effectively addressed?

4. “Being immigrant friendly and ensuring responsible security measures are not mutually exclusive,” Rabbi Linder writes on page 199. Consider an issue that your community is working on, or issues that interest you, or members of your group: identify two needs/desires that seem to be in opposition, but which are not mutually exclusive, like Rabbi Linder’s example above. Where are the places of overlap? How can your community/group use these points of overlap to advocate for change?

Stuck on the Shores of the Parted Sea: Mass Incarceration through a Jewish Lens

Hilly Haber

1. “Across the country, a felony incarceration can lead to legalized forms of discrimination, including but not limited to denying men and women employment, housing, public benefits, the right to vote, the ability to serve on a jury, and public accommodations, all of which affect not only the person being discriminated against, but his or her family members as well,” Haber writes on page 202. Do you see these legalized forms of discrimination as justifiable, in any or all of these cases? Why or why not? How do you think would you react if you knew that someone with a previous felony incarceration moved in next door, and why? What are some of the potential consequences of these kinds of discrimination?
2. Haber argues, “The cycle of incarceration and recidivism fueled by racism and poverty within the United States is the Egypt in our midst” (page 203). What are some of the laws, practices, and conditions that have led to the creation and perpetuation of this cycle? Who is most affected? What will it take to break the cycle? What are the moral implications of Haber’s assertion that this is “the Egypt in our midst?”
3. On page 205, Haber writes, “Maimonides’s conception of *t’shuvah* involves repentance, atonement, and return. Once a person has repented for his or her sins, forgiveness and reintegration into society must follow. Today’s criminal justice system, one that emphasizes punishment and surveillance over rehabilitation and reintegration, offers few opportunities for true *t’shuvah*—true return for those permanently sentenced to states of non-freedom.” What do the terms “repentance,” “atonement,” and “return”

mean to Maimonides? To you? What could these look like for a person who has been convicted of a crime? Do these possibilities change based on different crimes committed? Are there any existing programs or systems that fit your vision?

4. At the conclusion of her essay, Haber asks, “How can we help build new pathways out of Egypt? How can we look in the mirrors of the parted sea, notice who is missing, and bring even more people into our mixed multitude (Exodus 12:38)? How can we emphasize and model compassion and *t’shuvah* within our communities? What are the ways in which Judaism can inspire change in our criminal justice system today?” (page 206). Consider these questions both as an individual and within the context of your community.

The Planet in Peril

Rabbi Rachel Greengrass

1. “Sadly, technology is, at best, a stopgap measure. Eventually, if we don’t change how we are living today, the flood *will* come. With the rainbow, God promised never again to destroy our world (Genesis 9:11)—but if we don’t change our ways, we may end up destroying ourselves,” Rabbi Greengrass argues on page 209. What are you doing to live more sustainably? What more could you be doing? Why aren’t you doing it?
2. “Such action would include retooling our economy and society toward sustainability. It would entail attainable but serious changes to our diet and agriculture, our travel, our land use, and our sources of energy. Long ago, the Torah bade us to do just that through the radical notions of the Sabbatical and Jubilee years,” writes Rabbi Greengrass on page 210. What are the most compelling arguments for environmentalism that Rabbi Greengrass presents from Jewish tradition? What is your congregation/community doing that is and is not contributing to sustainability?
 - a. Action: Evaluate your congregation/building’s use of disposable materials, energy use, recycling practices, etc. Establish an environmental committee to oversee sustainability for a “Sabbatical Year Campaign.” Consider adopting a vegan policy for food brought into the building (or other eco-kashrut policies). Anticipate where there will be resistance from within the community, and plan ways to educate the community, using both scientific and Jewish textual sources, on the importance of these changes.
3. Rabbi Greengrass writes, “We often feel that our choices affect only us or maybe our immediate surroundings. But the truth is that we live in a global economy of an interconnected world” (page 214). Trace a single electronic (or other) product that you have purchased from its creation to its disposal and subsequent environmental effects, using Rabbi Greengrass’s essay and any additional research as a guide. Where on this

path are other people affected by your purchase, and how? In what ways, if any, will this analysis affect your future purchasing or other decisions?

Seek Peace and Pursue It

Rabbi Joel Mosbacher

1. Rabbi Mosbacher writes, “One might legitimately think: if someone else puts themselves in harm’s way (e.g., by walking on another person’s roof), surely we do not have any responsibility for them. But this text affirms that we do, indeed, need to do more than not harm another person; we must actively prevent harm from happening whenever possible” (page 219). To which situations can you apply this principle? How far does it extend? Is the prevention of harm the same thing as seeking peace/avoiding violence? Why or why not?
2. On page 220, Rabbi Mosbacher notes, “In modern times, our own Reform responsa wrestle with the idea of violence ... more recently responsa have acknowledged that war is sometimes obligatory.” Are there cases in which violence and/or war are necessary? If so, what are those situations?
3. “What seems clear from the biblical ethic is that Judaism is not at its root a purely pacifistic religion; there is such a thing as obligatory self-defense and justified war. That said, the preponderance of Jewish textual sources call us, as in the words of the Psalmist, ‘to seek peace and pursue it,’” Rabbi Mosbacher writes on page 223. How do you understand the conflicting narratives and commandments about war and peace in the Jewish textual tradition? Where are you “at war” with the texts, and when are you “at peace?”
4. Rabbi Mosbacher argues, “It is the audacity of religion that demands we not accept the world as it is, but aspire to a more perfect world, and to work to bring that world into reality, even against all odds” (page 224). What is your vision of a more perfect world? What are the odds that vision is up against and what are you doing to overcome them?

Moral Outrage: Reform Jews and Guns

Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie

1. “For American Jews, moderate, justice-oriented politics are consistent with what they perceive to be their values and their interests as a small, still-vulnerable minority,” Rabbi Yoffie claims on page 228. Do you agree with his assessment? Why or why not?
2. Rabbi Yoffie disputes “the claim that the experience of Israel, where armed soldiers and security guards are to be found everywhere and where many settlers carry guns, argues for easy gun access as a guarantee of security ... the situation in Israel, which has hostile

neighbors on its borders and faces the constant threat of organized terror, is very different from the political and cultural realities in America. And more to the point, private gun ownership is far lower in Israel than in America, and gun laws are exceedingly strict” (page 229). If you have been to Israel, how did you react to seeing openly carried weapons, both by soldiers and people in plainclothes? In general, do you feel differently about guns carried by people in uniform as opposed to guns carried by people in ordinary clothes, or about guns kept at home versus guns carried in the public sphere? If so, what motivates the differences in your feelings?

3. “We need to see the control of guns not as a political problem but as a solemn religious obligation. Our gun-flooded society has turned guns into idols, and the worship of idols must be recognized for what it is—blasphemy,” Rabbi Yoffie writes on page 230. What are some of the positive and negative consequences of understanding gun control as a “solemn religious obligation?” Using texts Rabbi Yoffie suggested and others throughout this book, how would you construct your own religiously-based argument for (or against) gun control?
4. On page 232, Rabbi Yoffie argues, “This then should be the American Jewish agenda on gun regulation in the months and years ahead: joining with allies in the religious and general community, American Jews will advocate for a legislative agenda that will regulate firearms in a sensible way, putting an end to the boomerang of bullets and the senseless slaughter now afflicting America.” Considering world events and the gun culture in your area and other areas, what would constitute a “sensible” gun control policy that your community could stand behind and advocate for? Who are your community’s natural allies on this issue?

Justified?: The Moral Burden of Launching a Preemptive War

Rabbi Edwin Goldberg, DHL

1. Rabbi Dr. Goldberg discusses several categories of wars: obligatory, optional, commanded, preemptive, and preventive wars. What are the definitions and distinctions given (or not) for each of these categories in Jewish texts? Do your own understandings of these categories differ from those given by Rabbi Dr. Goldberg? If so, how?
2. On page 236, Rabbi Dr. Goldberg argues that “for a war to be justified, it must be a war of justice. In an age of thermonuclear bombs, chemical weapons, drones, ICBMs, bunker busting missiles, the price is so high that any other kind of war is an abomination. What constitutes just reasons to go to war?” Based on this essay and your own reasoning, what qualifies as a just war?

3. At the end of his essay, Rabbi Dr. Goldberg writes, “the collective wisdom of Jewish tradition about preemptive war holds us accountable to great and pressing questions: Are we doing all we can to defend ourselves? Are we remembering that every human being is created in the image of God? Do we have strong checks and balances that prevent our leaders from waging unjustified attacks? Have we done all we can to seek peace and pursue it?” (page 245). Consider a recent conflict or tension in the news (whether it involves the US, Israel, or another nation), and answer these questions to the best of your ability. If the conditions for a just preemptive war are not in place, what could be done to change this?

The Jewish Stake in the Struggle for International Religious Freedom

Rabbi David Saperstein

1. “In these countries, religious communities contribute significantly to the social welfare of their fellow citizens; they serve as a moral compass to their nations, and interfaith cooperation flourishes. Indeed, it is worth noting that we are witnessing today interfaith cooperation at a level unprecedented in all of human history. When religious groups work together for common goals, they manifest a power and influence none of them could exert alone. In working together, they powerfully model the very pluralism, tolerance, and freedom that they are seeking to create in their society.” With these words, Rabbi Saperstein summarizes the contributions of religious communities in societies in which religious freedom flourishes (page 252). Religious communities are described to have social, moral, and political functions. Does your own understanding of the functions of religious communities differ from the understanding of Rabbi Saperstein? Why or why not?
2. Rabbi Saperstein quotes the prophet Micah (page 250) “In the end of days, it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the Eternal’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills. Peoples shall flow unto it, and many nations shall come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Eternal, to the house of the God of Jacob; so that God may teach us of God’s ways, and we will walk in God’s paths; for the law shall go forth from Zion, and the word of the Eternal from Jerusalem.’ And God shall judge among many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off.” He then offers the interpretation of these verses by Dr. Robert Gordis. Do you agree with Rabbi Saperstein’s evaluation that these verses are “the prophets’ most eloquent call for international peace”? Why or why not? Is this vision truly universal? Is it truly pluralistic?
3. “We who have condemned the conscience of the world for remaining silent in the face of the Holocaust and of so much persecution that afflicted the Jewish people, can we

now stand by idly when we see persecution aimed at others?," Rabbi Saperstein writes on page 252, and tells the story of his family and himself on pages 248 and 257–258. Do you agree with the author's assessment that the experience of discrimination and persecution has made the Jewish people more sensitive and responsible in moral matters than others? Why or why not? Does your family pass on similarly powerful stories about moral responsibility?

4. On pages 256–257, Rabbi Saperstein lists the contributions that the United States has made to the cause of international religious freedom. Read this list carefully. Can you think about additional ways the United States might invest in the project of international religious freedom? Would you consider additional investments necessary? Why or why not?
5. On pages 253–255, the author describes the destructive potential that laws against blasphemy might have in otherwise democratically stable societies.
 - a. Action: Look into your circle of friends and family. Do you know anyone who is located in one of the states Rabbi Saperstein lists on page 254? When would be a good time for you to initiate a conversation with them regarding possible steps they could take to help abolish these laws? How would you start this conversation?

On Global Jewish Responsibility: Putting the *Olam* in *Tikkun Olam*

Ruth W. Messinger and Rabbi Rick Jacobs

1. "Many of the teachings from our prophets seem to call for the creation of an international law by which God will judge the nations. In other words, before peace can come, there must be a law accepted by all nations, with mechanisms to enforce that law and a process to judge the disputes that inevitably will arise," Messinger and Rabbi Jacobs write on page 263. What role does, could, and should international law play on the world stage? Do you agree with the authors' assessment that a law accepted by all nations must precede peace? Why or why not?
2. "Why do we have this [global] responsibility, and how has it played out over time? How broadly must we take this charge? What kinds of actions are we compelled to take?... For whom and how far do we extend ourselves?" (pages 264 and 266). How do the authors answer these questions? How do you answer them? What criteria do you use to make these determinations?
3. Messinger and Rabbi Jacobs cite "Hillel's well-known dictum, 'If I am not for myself, who should be for me; if I am for myself alone, what am I?' (*Pirkei Avot* 1:14)," noting, "But in Hebrew the two phrases are linked by a conjunction, *uch'she*, which connects the idea that we are responsible for ourselves *and* for others" (page 265). How do you balance

the responsibilities of caring for ourselves (both as individuals and our in-groups) as well as others? Do you prioritize one side of this spectrum over the other? If so, why? Is this same balance and/or prioritization reflected in your giving and service? If not, why not?

4. The authors ask on page 266, “When we are instructed to care for non-Jews as well as Jews for the sake of peace, do we understand that it is incumbent upon us to reach out across lines of difference and division because that is our moral obligation, or because it will allow us to live more safely in the world?” Why is this distinction important? Do the motivations matter if the resulting actions are the same? Why or why not?
5. Messinger and Rabbi Jacobs conclude with the charge, “We are called upon to act, to do what we can, both at home and abroad, to be that light unto the nations even—or perhaps, particularly—in hard times. We must pursue justice at home, in our own communities, in our own country, in Israel, and throughout the world. Before millions starve in East Africa or new violence erupts in Sudan, we, as Jews, motivated by text, by tradition, and by history, must heed the call to accept responsibility, to act, and to protest these transgressions” (page 271).
 - a. Action: Look back over the history of your community’s giving and action/advocacy (or your own). What is the ratio of local to global giving/work? Choose a new global issue around which to organize your community. How will you motivate people to give/act? Where do you anticipate resistance or apathy, and how will you overcome it?

Part Two: Moral Resistance

Section B: Tools of Resistance

Questions to consider as you read the chapters in this section:

1. What “best practices” can you draw from each of these chapters? How can you use them to improve your own community’s ability to organize and act?
2. Which of these accounts do you find most inspiring, and why?

“Two Are Better Than One”: Community Organizing and the Art of Building Power to Repair the World

Rabbi Stephanie Kolin

1. Rabbi Kolin writes, “I want to suggest that there are three primary motivations that drive the strategy and focus of the Reform Movement’s organizing: to repair injustice, to deepen connections inside our communities, and to build relationships across lines of difference. In order to deliver on these values, not only do we need to be able to respond to urgent need, but we must also address the systemic injustices and

imbalances that determine how individuals and families will fare in this society” (page 279). How does your community/congregation address these three primary motivations? What is the balance between your community’s responses to urgent need versus systemic injustices? Why are both of these categories of response important?

2. On the power of story as a community organizing tool, Rabbi Kolin writes, “As community members’ hearts are open to one another through an exchange of story, we can find ourselves inspired to be accountable to each other and feel less alone in the world ... it has also contributed to our congregations being places where people can feel truly heard, seen, and known in ways that epitomize what is sacred about a faith community” (page 280). When have you experienced the power of another person’s story? When has telling your own story been a transformative experience for you? Does your community/congregation feel like a place where “people can feel truly heard, seen, and known?” Why or why not? If not, what steps could you take to change this?
3. “To build power effectively, we identify and cultivate leaders who will be able to weave together a community around its shared interests and prepare them for action,” Rabbi Kolin writes on page 284. What are your metrics for effective leadership? How do they compare with the qualities that Rabbi Kolin suggests? How do they compare with leadership practices in your community?
4. “Whether our personal connections to an issue reflect our own experiences, the experiences of people we know and love, or our deeply held Jewish values, the model of organizing asks of us that we get clarity on our own “self-interest” on any issue we engage in. This does not mean we only take on issues that singularly affect ourselves, but it equally does not mean that we take on issues out of pity for another person or group of people,” Rabbi Kolin writes on page 286. Why is the motivation of self-interest so important in this context? How does this differ from the argument in the previous chapter’s (“On Global Jewish Responsibility”) take on motivations for action? Are these positions in conflict or not, and why?

Training: The Key to Effective Action

Rabbi Karen R. Perolman

1. On page 291, Rabbi Perolman writes, “So many of us want to make a difference and help to repair what is broken in our world, and yet, it can often feel overwhelming. Instead of doing anything, we feel paralyzed; we sit at home reading articles or watching other people’s actions posted on social media.” What are your own greatest barriers to action? If you have been able to overcome them, what enabled you to get over the hurdle? Consider discussing the role of social media in both helping and hindering social justice work.

2. Rabbi Perolman summarizes the reasons to attend a social justice or community organizing training as “to learn firsthand from experts and seasoned organizers, to take the opportunity to rehearse, build confidence, and work through any personal baggage, and to meet like-minded individuals and build community” (page 295). In which of these areas do you have the most desire for growth? What opportunities can you take advantage of (whether trainings like Rabbi Perolman describes or other experiences) to achieve that growth?

Cutting an Issue: Moving from the Big to the Doable

Rabbi Erica Seager Asch

1. Rabbi Asch differentiates between problems, which are “big, amorphous, and intractable” and issues (page 297). Practice: take one problem that keeps you up at night, and divide it into as many different issues as you can. What does this exercise teach you?
2. On page 298, Rabbi Asch describes the criteria for choosing an issue: “First, an issue should be winnable, but not too easy to win.... Second, the issue needs to be deeply felt (people care a lot about it) and broadly felt (many different people care). Third, it has to have a clear target—someone who can say yes or no. Finally, it should build power for your synagogue or local partners.” Based on the examples Rabbi Asch provides throughout this essay, which of these criteria seems to be the most challenging to meet, and why? Practice: return to the list of issues you made previously, and determine which one meets the most criteria for your community. What information do you need to gather in order to make these determinations? How would you go about acquiring it?
3. Rabbi Asch offered many examples of organizing work in different communities in this chapter. Which anecdotes, issues, and/or tools inspired you the most? Why?

The Power of the Pulpit: When Sermons Lead to Action

Rabbi Ken Chasen

1. Rabbi Chasen asks in his introduction, “Beyond some spirited conversation during the car ride home, how long does a good sermon endure? Will it be remembered a day later? A week? Will the actions urged by the rabbi actually be embraced? Or will the listener simply be satisfied having heard an inspiring message and return to life largely unchanged?” (page 309). When have you heard a sermon (or other speech) that was particularly memorable and/or motivated you to change? (if you haven’t, or can’t recall, consider Rabbi Chasen’s sermon excerpt on page 312–314). What were the factors that made this oratory so effective?

2. In his description of Reform CA's building of the TRUST Act campaign, Rabbi Chasen notes that one of the strategies included "Jewish holiday observances with special resources and rituals connected to our campaign" (page 310). How do you feel about connecting organizing issues with Jewish holiday observances? What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of this approach? If you are currently working on an organizing campaign, how could you connect it to a Jewish holiday or ritual?
3. Consider the whole story of Rabbi Chasen's experience with the TRUST Act campaign. What steps did the organizers take to create the most optimal circumstances that they could? Which factors were outside of the organizers' control, and which were within their sphere of influence? What was the role of luck, if any?

Tools of Resistance: Interfaith Partnerships

Rabbi Joshua M. Z. Stanton

1. "Silence from allies was in many ways worse than hate from right-wing extremists," Rabbi Stanton writes on page 322. When have you found speech easier than silence and silence easier than speech? When is silence more effective than speech, and when is it more detrimental?
2. On page 324, Rabbi Stanton argues, "If religious leaders feel an obligation not only to their own religious communities, but also toward each other's, this diversity can foster genuine religious pluralism. If we recognize that when one is under duress, none are truly safe, we all become our brothers' keepers." When do religious groups need other religious groups specifically to advocate for them (consider both actual and hypothetical events)? How can interfaith (and innerfaith, given the denominational landscape of contemporary Judaism) partnerships benefit the Jewish community in particular?
3. Rabbi Stanton writes on page 325, "The absence of more and deeper relationships between religious leaders contributed to the slow and spotty response time to such a public crisis. If we are not breaking bread, building bridges, or teaching text together, how can we work together effectively when so much more is at stake?" What is the state of your relationships with communities of other faiths, outside of moments of crisis? What can you do to improve these relationships?
4. "We need not agree on all issues in order to stand in solidarity on some. At times, coalition building can become contentious. It is not always possible to include members of all groups in a given coalition. There are limits to who we should be willing to join in coalition," Rabbi Stanton notes on page 325. What are the litmus tests or red lines in your community as to deciding which groups you will partner with? Which of these are negotiable for the sake of partnership on issues unrelated to those red lines? What might be gained from a willingness to be flexible?

The Work of Repairing the World: Resilience and Failing (in Order) to Succeed

Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum

1. “Defeat and disappointment are not signs that your cause is doomed—they are an integral part of the process,” Rabbi Kleinbaum writes on page 330. When have you experienced this truism in your own justice work or in your life in general? What are effective strategies for moving past the difficult stages of defeat or disappointment?
2. On page 330, Rabbi Kleinbaum argues, “The struggle for marriage equality ultimately triumphed, and I believe that success was the result of an approach both social and political: because we told the stories of our queer lives over and over again, insistently and urgently, and because we formulated a thoughtful and clear strategy to promote change in each state, one at a time.” In what ways do the social and political spheres affect social justice work, in general and in relation to specific issues? Does your own justice work involve both of these spheres? If so, how, and if not, what can you incorporate to change this?
3. Rabbi Kleinbaum recounts from her experience advocating in Albany, “We let them know that all Jews do not speak with one voice and that we as progressive Jews believed strongly that civil marriage should not be determined by religious values—ours or anyone else’s” (page 331). Progressive Jews (and those of other faiths) often find ourselves in an interesting position, using religious values to argue that religion should not determine civil law. Consider the complications, advantages, history, etc. that arise from and contribute to this phenomenon.
4. Action: Rabbi Kleinbaum concludes with a great list of tools for effective advocacy for Jewish groups (pages 334–335). Check your own community’s current social justice strategies against this list—what else can you be doing? What can you be doing more effectively? What might you add to Rabbi Kleinbaum’s list?

Creating Young Stakeholders in the Pursuit of Social Justice

Rabbi Michael Namath

1. Rabbi Namath argues, “Perhaps this is counterintuitive, but the sense of failure students feel is much more powerful than an illusion of success” (page 340). When have you experienced this phenomenon? What did it teach you? Are young people in your community given the opportunity to experience failure (especially in a social justice work context)? If so, do the outcomes seem to accord with Rabbi Namath’s assessment, and if not, what are the risks and rewards of failure and/or the illusion of success?

2. “The overriding value that *L’Taken* provides is a value that can be re-created by any program that makes students feel a sense of ownership in the larger structures that impact their lives,” Rabbi Namath argues (page 341). In what ways are young people given the opportunity to take ownership in the structures of your community (not just in youth groups)? Where might new positions be created to give young people real stake and decision-making power? What mentoring can members of your community provide? What outcomes do you anticipate as a result of young people actually taking on these positions?
3. Rabbi Namath notes on the experience of one Machon Kaplan fellow that “because her internship also included opportunities to attend interesting events and rallies, she saw firsthand how being responsible for ‘menial’ tasks worked within the larger picture of making change” (page 342). Consider service projects you did (or are doing) as a young person. To what extent did you feel you understood the larger purpose of the immediate work you did? Examine some of the service projects offered to young people within your community. What learning or experiences could be provided to include an understanding and experience of the larger impact of that service?
4. On page 344, Rabbi Namath writes, “the beauty of Machon Kaplan is that it is a training for how to balance Jewish, professional, and social justice interests.” How do you balance all of these interests in your own life?