

Yom Kippur Program

Let's Talk About It

Created By Natasha Westheimer – Hanegev 2008

Length of program: 1-1.5 hours (depending on how many issues you discuss)

Materials: Choose 2-3 contemporary issues to discuss and provide background information on topics of choice (prepare in advance)

*preferable to choose one world issue and one “teen” issue

Goal: To allow USYers space to engage in dialogue on secular issues. USYers will discuss how, in their opinions, these issues are of Jewish concern

This program gives USYers the chance to reflect on a topic they don't usually get the chance to discuss or think about on Yom Kippur and allows them to achieve the same kind of reflection appropriate for the holy day.

1. Introduction: Yom Kippur is a serious day. We try not to focus on our hunger and instead, try and turn inward towards thinking, feeling and reflecting. *Leader should share the goals of the program: Let's take the time today to think about what's really going on in our community and the world. Let's share our thoughts and ideas for how we can be involved in these issues.*

2. Introduce the Topic and explain why it was chosen

Build on prior knowledge: Ask USYers to call out everything they currently know about this issue. Do you have the knowledge or confidence to be able to discuss this? Is it your responsibility as a citizen or human being to be aware of this issue? Here you'll be given the facts and the opportunity to talk about it.

3. Explain the facts: eg. Darfur 101 – what, where, why, how

4. **Pose a question** to open the discussion or debate

Eg. Do you think Jews are doing enough to stop the genocide in Darfur? Because we too suffered a near Genocide, are we obligated more than others to stand up and fight for this cause?

Idea: Have USYers choose a side (even if they actually don't agree with it) and demonstrate that no issue is black and white. You may present it as a court case or trial and have each team prepare a legal case.

5. Leader may play the Devil's Advocate. Let them debate and argue but have some control over comments and order.

6. Summarize with a plan of action. If this issue is particularly important to you as an individual, what can you DO about it? What about as a community? Is it enough just to be aware and knowledgeable or must we DO something?

7. Summarize the issue and the different perspectives shared. Explain that not everything is black and white and that we must be educated about issues before we form opinions. Our opinions matter as they lead to action.

Jewish text to share (as a good introduction or summary):

A Talmudic Debate: What is worth more - to know or to do?

The word *Torah* does not mean law, but it comes from the root of the word *Horaah* which means “instruction.” Torah is G-d’s instruction book for living. This definition means that unlike other science or other intellectual systems that remain separate from performance, Torah knowledge must be translated into action. The Talmud has an interesting debate between 2 rabbis whether learning or action is more important. (Kedushin 40b).

PAUSE. You be the judge. What is more important: to know or to do?

The verdict:

The debate concludes that learning is more important “for it leads to action.” An ignorant person cannot do good. In order to perform the deed, one must have the knowledge. In order to keep *Mitzvot*, one must first learn the principles – how and why.

The Code of Jewish law mandates that a person who has little time for Torah study should primarily study those areas of Torah with practical day-to-day application.

From this perspective one may summarize that Torah is the instruction manual to lead an ethical and moral life here on Earth

Judah Goldin says, “Study, interpretation, debate are the discipline for living; without them no right action is likely...” (*The Living Talmud*).

Themes to consider:

- Genocide in Darfur
- Civil responsibility and the 2008 US election
- School uniforms
- Gangs

- Peer pressure – What do you do, what would you do to fit in?
- Being Jewish in a non-Jewish world
- Bullying- would you intercede if you saw someone being bullied (also tie in school violence, shootings)
- Dangers and fun of Facebook, My Space, etc.
- Special needs: Integration or separation?
- Teens and dangerous habits: drugs, alcohol, disordered eating, sexual promiscuity, cutting, etc.