Shabbat: Continuing the Conversation

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Invitation to Dinner:
After a divisive election, please join me for Friday night dinner, where we can share, heal, process, and talk about where we are individually and as a country.

Additional Language (For the Invitation or to Open the Dinner):
Shabbat is a traditional Jewish day of rest, of peace, and of calm. Beginning on Friday evening, it is, for many, a time to decompress from the stress of the week. Many people gather with family and friends over a meal to reflect on the week and be together. The weeks following the election results have been turbulent and emotional for many of us, for our friends and family, and for our country.

In the face of this, we seek to engage with each other in the spirit of what Shabbat can offer, not by setting aside our emotions and feelings, but by sharing them with each other and supporting each other. In doing so, it’s our hope that we’ll be able to be a part of healing ourselves, each other, and our very broken society. I hope you will join me this week for dinner so that we can be together, share our perspectives on the election, and talk about where to go from here.

You may also want to include: time, place, how to RSVP, and what’s for dinner.

Tips for Hosting this Conversation:
- Acknowledge that our responses to the election are complicated and far-reaching; we’re not going to cover all aspects of this issue.
- Appoint a facilitator.
- Acknowledge that you or your guests might have moments of discomfort and vulnerability – and that it’s okay.
- Establish group ground rules.
- Do not tokenize people (Don’t make someone speak for everyone you think is "like" them.)
- Everyone should only speak from their personal experience.
- Ensure that everyone who wants to speak gets a chance to speak.
- Be respectful of introverts – and of silence.
- Avoid the terms “right” and “wrong.”
- Take a deep breath (or two) before responding.
- If you’re offended, consider one of the options:
  - Remove yourself from the conversation
  - Call people “in” not “out”
  - Move back and listen
- Use facts graciously - not to shut down a conversation.
Food For Thought

Tonight is the start of what can be a continued conversation. This resource kit was designed to assist in creating a powerful evening that you and your guests can create together if you wish. Consider bringing (or asking others to bring) pieces to the evening/dinner/table such as conversation topics, articles, quotes, a book, or images to create dialogue. Two topics that we have seen come up are, separation and divergent views.

Separation

You may choose to begin your meal by lighting two candles and then blessing the wine and bread. These rituals formally begin the Sabbath and set it apart from the rest of the week. Tomorrow night, some people will close Shabbat with havdalah, a parallel ceremony to the opening rituals that involves a braided candle, a cup of wine or grape juice, and “fragrant spices.”

Havdalah literally means separation and as much as it marks a separation from the remainder of the week, that separation isn’t absolute. Among the interpretations for smelling the spices and drinking the wine or grape juice is the desire to take some of the sweetness of Shabbat with us as we leave it behind to begin our week.

The final blessing of havdalah drives this message of separation home:

ברוך אָמֵם יְלַוְּוֶם הַעָלָה, מַבְרֵדָיִי בֵּין קָרָק לְחֹל, בֵּין אוֹר לְחֹל, בֵּין יָשָׁר לְשָׁמַי, בֵּין נָשְׁבָע לְשָׁמַי, מַבְרֵדָיִי בֵּין קָרָק לְחֹל

Baruch atah, Ad-nai, El-haynu melech ha’olam, hamavdil bayn kodesh lechol bayn or lechoshech bayn Yisrael la’amim bayn yom hashevii i leshayshet yemay hama’aseh. Baruch atah, Ad-nai, hamavdil bayn kodesh lechol.

Blessed are You, Ad-nai, our G-d, Sovereign of the universe, who separates between the holy and the profane; between the light and dark; between Israel and the other nations; between the seventh day and the six days of the week. Blessed are You, G-d, who separates between the holy and the profane.
Discussion Questions

The havdalah blessings recognize the distinction between Shabbat and the rest of the week, but the ritual also encourages us to take some of the sweetness of Shabbat with us when we leave.

How do our feelings about the election bleed over into other parts of our lives?

What’s the impact of the election on the rest of who we are and what we do?

Much of the rhetoric in the campaign targeted specific groups of individuals, and many in these communities are experiencing fear and vulnerability right now. Indeed, some of us around the table may carry identities that lead us to be afraid tonight.

What are the ways in which you connect with these communities, whether ones you’re a part of or others?

What are the ways in which you feel separated from them?
Divergent Views

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Eruvin 13b

For three years, the House of Hillel and the House of Shamai argued. One said, “Jewish law follows our opinion,” and the other said, “Jewish law follows our opinion.” A voice emerged from heaven and said: “Both these and these are the words of the living G-d, and Jewish law follows the House of Hillel.”

A question was raised: since the heavenly voice declared: "Both these and these are the words of the living G-d," why was Jewish law established to follow Hillel’s opinion? Because Hillel’s students were kind and gracious. They taught their own ideas as well as the ideas from the students of Shamai.

Discussion Questions

How do you make sense of the phrase, “Both these and these are the words of the living G-d”?

What do you think about the reasons for establishing Jewish law to follow the House of Hillel?

When faced with divergent opinions, how do you decide which to follow? Does the speaker’s manner have more weight than what they’re saying?

What does it mean to teach someone else’s opinion, even if you don’t agree with that opinion?

Can we apply the message of this text to our current reality? If so, how? If not, why not?

What's Next?

- Converse: Continue the conversation that began tonight.
- Commit: Advocate for your values. Make your voice heard and stand with those who are being marginalized, silenced or attacked. Check out Repair the World’s Turn the Tables resources as a starting point: http://turn-the-tables.org/past-guides/.
- Connect: Reach out to neighbors and loved ones. When you’re ready, to those who might have a different perspective than you. Consider hosting another Shabbat dinner in the coming months to truly continue the conversation.
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Content for this guide is brought to you by Repair the World as part of Repair’s broader Turn The Tables series.

Turn the Tables believes in raising complex issues that challenge our vision of a just society. We believe that meaningful and structured dialogue about community issues is the catalyst that leads to action. Learn more and take action at turn-the-tables.org.

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