

BRING GENEROSITY TO A TOUGH TABLE

LAB/SHUL
www.labshul.org



We know that Thanksgiving (or Friendsgiving) can bring together people who struggle to speak about the weather with civility--let alone dive into a conversation about food justice. Repair the World teamed up with Lab/Shul to create this guide if you are heading into a tense or divisive space and want to foster a generous and open conversation at your table.

Pre-Dinner Prep

Before your Thanksgiving dinner, invite your guests to bring the following two things:

- An object that represents **TRUTH**
- An object that represents **PEACE**

People can and should interpret this request in any meaningful way to them. When your guests arrive, ask people to place the objects on the table or, if the table is overflowing with food, around the room where they can be seen during dinner.

If you or your guests are struggling with figuring out objects that represent truth and peace, here is a suggested freewriting exercise to get your ideas flowing:

Put 5 min on the timer. Start answering the following question, "Where do you see the values of truth and of peace manifest in your community? Among your family and friends?" Or just starting writing what first comes to mind when you think about truth and peace. Then, walk around your home and find two objects that will symbolize your writing.

At The Table: Disagreeing with Generosity

There's a popular Jewish quip: "2 Jews, 3 opinions." Disagreement is an ancient Jewish technology, beginning famously with the rabbinic scholars Hillel and Shammai. Hillel and Shammai, and their respective schools, would hold and teach opposing opinions about how people should live a Jewish life. As we will learn in the text below, their disagreements are a model for generous learning amidst conflict.

Now and then, especially in our current socio-political climate, when family, friends, and neighbors come together over a meal, we argue - sometimes without generosity or even civility. Even the possibility of gathering around the same table might provoke anxiety. Our lived experiences, relationships, and identities result in profoundly different understandings of the world. But love, connection, duty, or even guilt draw us together to share a table with one another - often on Thanksgiving. Tonight and together, we will draw on Jewish technology to practice how to engage in conflict not with strangers, but with people at our own table.

Read the following text out loud:

Yevamot 14b, Babylonian Talmud, 4th-6th c.CE

The Babylonian Talmud is a collection of Jewish laws, rabbinic wisdom and stories taught and learned in Mesopotamia 1,500 years ago.

Even though Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel often disagreed . . . they would practice love and friendship with one another to fulfill what is taught by the prophet Zechariah: love truth and peace.

אע"פ שנחלקו ב"ש וב"ה . . . שחיבה וריעות נוהגים זה בזה לקיים מה שנאמר (זכריה ח, יט) האמת והשלום אהבו

In responding to this text, a principal commentator, Rashi (11-12th c. CE), taught that to practice love and friendship is to practice generous learning.



ENGAGING IN THE TEXT

Practices for Generous Learning

On Thanksgiving, we invite you to practice three components of generous learning at your table:



Listening (*Shema*)



Open Heart to myself
and others (*Petach Libi*)



Questioning to
Understand (*Sh'elah*)

To begin: Designate a speaking tool; it can be a fork, candlestick or saltshaker! Whoever holds the speaking tool is the only speaker.



1 First Responses to the Text

- Why does the text emphasize loving truth and peace?
- What is the importance of pairing truth and peace?
- What does it mean to have truth without peace and peace without truth? What would be missing?

2 Our Own Experience with Truth and Peace

Go around the table. Invite everyone to share their symbols of truth and symbols of peace and answer the following question.

- Example of **TRUTH**: A bottle of lemonade to represent Beyoncé's seminal album, "Lemonade," that shared a powerful, beautiful and complex depiction of Black womanhood in the United States.
- Example of **PEACE**: A picture of my grandfather and me hiking in the mountains. I felt so safe in his knowledge of the woods and that he knew exactly where we were going.

Why did you chose these two objects? Invite people to ask curious questions of each other based on what they've shared about their objects. Remind people to learn generously by listening, opening their hearts to themselves and one another, and by questioning to understand. This is what it is to practice **love and friendship like Hillel and Shammai**.

3 Diving Deeper

Among your differing objects of truth and peace is a common object: the table. Among our different and perhaps conflicting truths, what sort of table have we created here? Is it connective? Divisive?

Use the following meditation from Joy Harjo, poet and member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation to consider the different narratives and truths of Thanksgiving.

Read the following meditation by Joy Harjo and discuss the following questions:

- What does our table mean to us?
- Does that meaning change when we consider this poem is written by an artist whose Indigenous experience is pushed aside by the common story of the Thanksgiving table?

*Perhaps the World Ends Here*¹ | Joy Harjo

The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.

The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. So it has been since creation, and it will go on.

We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corners. They scrape their knees under it.

It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women.

At this table we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers.

Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children. They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves back together once again at the table.

This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun.

Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is a place to hide in the shadow of terror. A place to celebrate the terrible victory.

We have given birth on this table, and have prepared our parents for burial here.

At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse. We give thanks.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite.

CLOSING RITUAL

Gratitude for Being Seen

Jewish morning rituals open with gratitude. Our awakening to one another is a moment for appreciation - not only for hearing one another, but for being seen. Please close your conversation by reading the following words aloud together in English and/or Hebrew:

וּתְנֵנוּ הַיּוֹם וּבְכֹל יוֹם לַחַן וְלַחֶסֶד וְלִרְחֻמִּים בְּעֵינֶיךָ וּבְעֵינֵי כָל רוֹאֵינוּ

*Ut'nenu hayom uv'chol yom lechen
u'lechesed u'lerachamim b'enecha
uv'e'nei chol ro'enu.*

Today and every day, let us receive
grace and love and compassion
from one another and from everyone

