

ADDRESSING HUNGER TOGETHER

APPETIZER:

"UNTIL JUSTICE ROLLS DOWN LIKE WATER"

We encourage you to participate the following activity, adapting the practice of handwashing to our Thanksgiving discussion.

Framing

The ritual of hand washing in Judaism functions on two levels. The first is practical, the hygienic act of cleaning your hands before you eat. The second is spiritual; washing your hands before a meal is intended to wash away the impurity that exists in the world and provide the opportunity to welcome in an additional element, something holy, spiritual, and something better than the world as it is.

There is something powerful about taking a moment to imagine and dream of a world free of poverty and hunger. But after completing the ritual, we must return from our ideal world to the world that we live in- one where we cannot and should not simply “wash our hands clean” of injustices and inequities.

At Thanksgiving, we hold conflicting points - gratitude and erasure - as part of the complexity of this day. For many, today’s Thanksgiving festivities celebrate the values of gratitude and generosity. Yet, the mythology of Thanksgiving where “pilgrims and Indians happily break bread” together obscures the history and continued existence of violence against and displacement of Indigenous people in the United States. To honor that tension, we are going to start our meal by both imagining the ideal AND by recognizing the things we cannot wash clean.

Instructions¹

Complete this opening ritual by washing your hands² using any blessings or meditations that resonate with you. If it’s helpful to use, here is the traditional Jewish prayer:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם
אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו
על נטילת ידים

Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu,
melekh ha-olam, asher kid’shanu
b’mitzvotav, v’tzivanu al n’tilat
yadayim.

ENTREE:

LED BY THOSE DIRECTLY IMPACTED

Framing

According to the United States Department of Agriculture’s 2016 survey, “41.2 million people lived in a food-insecure households.” In other words, 28.3 million adults and 12.9 million children lived in households where, at some point during the year, one or more members did not have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to lead an active, healthy life. Within those households, individuals feel the impact of food insecurity in many different ways; parents skip a meal to make sure their children have enough to eat, food is supplemented through governmental and non-governmental assistance, or families rely on basic and limited diets.³

These statistics are horrifying and humbling. Millions of people are living in hunger in the United States of America. For every given or chosen family that gathers around Thanksgiving dinner tonight, there are many who approach another meal with anxiety and hopelessness. But understanding the scope is just the first step. The numbers do not tell us how to act effectively and thoughtfully against hunger. Next we must listen and learn about the root causes and solutions to food insecurity from communities directly impacted by hunger.

Instructions

Why are people going hungry in our country of plenty? Which communities are most deeply impacted? When approaching the issue of hunger, who determines how we address it? Read these three texts to discuss the root causes of hunger, who is impacted, and how to address it.

- NOTE: There is some God language and Jewish ritual in the following activity and blessings. Interpret it in the way that both feels comfortable to you and encourages you to explore different perspectives. If Shabbat rituals aren’t your thing, feel free to complete the prompts without the hand washing.
- Traditional hand-washing ritual: prepare a (large) bowl with water and a cup or move over to the sink. Fill the cup up with water; first pour water twice over your right hand and then pour water twice over your left hand. Dry your hands and recite the handwashing blessing.
- “Household Food Security in the United States in 2016.” Alisha Coleman-Jensen, Matthew Rabbitt, Christian Gregory, and Anita Singh. United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service.

Text One: Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 250:1

In the 16th century, Rabbi Yosef Caro wrote the shulchan aruch, “set table,” a code of Jewish law that has remained authoritative in its structure and presentation in most orthodox communities to this day. The Shulchan Aruch, which contains many centuries of debate about how to best apply traditional standards to the “contemporary” situations Jewish communities were wrestling with, follows Sephardic⁴ laws and customs.

How much do we give to a poor person? That which is sufficient for whatever he needs. In what way? If the person is hungry, they feed them. If the person needs to be clothed, they clothe them. If a person doesn't have household goods, they buy them household goods. And even if that person's practice when they were rich was to ride on a horse with a servant running in front to clear a path for them, they buy the person who is now poor a horse and a servant. Such is done with each and every individual, sufficient for whatever he needs.

“Farming is Feminist: A Q&A with “The Color of Food” Author, Natasha Bowens”⁵

Freelance investigative journalist Annamarya Scaccia interviews writer and food justice activist, Natasha Bowens. In her book, “The Color of Food: Stories of Race, Resilience and Farming,” Bowens explores the intersections of race and food through the stories of farmers of color and her own family history in agriculture. 18 of the 30 people that she profiles in the book are women.

Women are disproportionately impacted by the lack of food justice in our food system. Meaning the lack of food access in low-income communities, the inequities in healthy food distribution with farmers markets and food stores, and in fair wages and treatment for women working in the food system. Women, as the primary providers of food for our families, feel the impact of food access and availability more significantly. I met many women who actually began farming or fighting for food justice in their communities simply because they felt it was the only way they could feed their children or ensure their kids were getting healthy foods.

[W]omen like Jenga Mwendo who started the Backyard Gardeners Network in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans and is leading a community food policy council to combat the lack of food access in the neighborhood. And food justice goes beyond the table. Women leading the food justice movement for farmworkers, like those in the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Florida, can tell you about the countless stories of sexual harassment and unfair wages the women who are growing and harvesting our food are suffering...The impact is heavy on every level, from farm to table.

<https://gandmag.wpengine.com>



⁴ | Sephardi Jews trace their roots to Spain, Portugal, and the Spanish diaspora.

⁵ | “Farming is Feminist: A Q&A with “The Color of Food.” Author, Natasha Bowens,” Annamarya Scaccia. Annamaryas.com. January 21, 2015.

“The Sioux Chef Spreading the Gospel of America’s First Food,”
David Treur⁶

In this excerpt, David Treuer, an Ojibwe writer, translator, and professor, profiles Sioux chef Sean Sherman. Through his cooking, Sherman is working to highlight indigenous food as a reclamation and celebration of Native American identity. He only uses ingredients that would have been commonly available before settlers and colonist came to North America.

All over the country, Indian communities that were forcefully divorced from their traditional foodways have suffered from poverty, colonialism, and a lack of fresh food for the better part of a century. In the Plains in the late 1800s, the U.S. Army hunted tens of millions of bison to the point of extinction, specifically to defeat the region’s tribes. In the Northwest, salmon were diminished because of man-made dams along the rivers... By killing the food—from coast to coast—the government defeated Native Americans...

Sherman preps most of his meals for pop-ups, catered events, and food summits at the Little Earth kitchen, which has exposed its diverse population of reservation residents and city dwellers to his food. Many have expressed a feeling of connecting to it on a primal level. Sherman’s food gets at the private worry of all modern Indians—that our story is one defined by loss: loss of land, loss of culture, loss of a way of life. And yet we remain. We exist as modern Americans and Indians, but how much is left? How authentic, really, are we? At what point do we cease being Indians, and become people simply descended from Indians?

Sherman’s food suggests that all is not lost. In fact, it says much remains. It’s around us—the amaranth on the side of the road, the berries and fruit growing over our head. Of course, ingredients alone don’t make a cuisine, much less a political statement. Rather, Sherman and Thompson’s intentional approach is a reminder to focus on the richness of our surroundings and the earth from which we came.



<http://stmedia.startribune.com/>

Guiding Questions

- *In these texts, who determines what a person lacks? How do you understand “whatever he needs”?*
- *Who do these texts identify as most directly impacted by food insecurity and its consequences?*
- *How do the authors frame root causes of hunger?*
- *What strategies do the Shulchan Arukh, Bowens, and Sherman advocate for addressing food insecurity? Who do they say should be leading the fight?*
- *What are the differences and similarities in their frameworks?*

DESSERT: A TASTE OF MINDFULNESS

Today we will conclude by taking a few moments to meditate on the food in front of us. We must express gratitude for our access to healthy and satisfying food, while acknowledging that many people are not so fortunate.

Choose one dish from your Thanksgiving tables that contains fresh ingredients. This meditation is an excerpt from a mental health study, showing how broadly food affects our moods, bodies, and overall well being. As you focus, notice how all of your senses correspond to bring you this experience. **Conclude by going around the circle and share a sentence of gratitude for someone at the table.**

HOLDING

First, take the piece of food and hold it in the palm of your hand or between your finger and thumb. Focusing on it, imagine that you've just dropped in from Mars and have never seen an object like this before in your life.

SEEING

Take time to really look at the object; gaze at it with care and full attention. Let your eyes explore every part of it, examining the spots that are brightest in the sun. Note the shape and vibrancy of color. Look for any asymmetries or unique features.

SMELLING

Holding the piece of food beneath your nose, with each inhalation drink in any smell, aroma, or fragrance that may arise, noticing as you do this anything interesting that may be happening in your mouth or stomach.

TASTING

When you are ready, prepare to chew the piece of food, noticing how and where it needs to be for chewing. Then, very consciously, take one or two bites into it and notice what happens in the aftermath, experiencing any waves of taste that emanate from it as you continue chewing.