

# Congregational Organizing for Social Justice

## Introduction and Some Basics – Source Sheet Guide

by David Reinhart

Set Induction:

- Play *Lo Alekha* (either guitar or recording)
- Introductions – Name and Why are you here today?
- Blessing for Studying Torah

Source Sheet Page 1 – Heschel Quotes

- Have volunteer READ Heschel Quote from “Religion and Race” (no intro/explanation prior to reading)
- Guiding Questions:
  - How do you react?
  - What stands out to you?
- Highlight and re-read the quote “The prophet is a person who suffers the harms done to others. Wherever a crime is committed, it is as if the prophet were the victim and the prey. The prophet's angry words cry.”
- Break into Hevruta – “What makes you angry?”
  - each person will take turns asking their partner “What makes you angry?” over and over for 1 minute, while the partner answers one thing to each question.
  - after 1 minute the pair will switch roles
  - (Keep time)
- Come back together and READ Heschel Quote from “The White Man on Trial”
- Explain:
  - Abraham Joshua Heschel, although he was born in Poland, is an American Rabbi who was a leader in the Civil Rights movement of the 60s. He was friends with MLK Jr. and marched with him in Selma. (Show photo if possible.)
- Heschel believed we needed to act as the prophets – this too is a foundation of Reform Judaism, which is commonly referred to a Prophetic Judaism because of a return to and focus on Social Justice.
  - Transition – So, let’s learn a little from the Prophets

Source Sheet Page 2 – The Prophets and The World As It Should Be!

- Have 2 volunteers read the two passages from Isaiah
- Guiding Questions:
  - What is Isaiah talking about in these two passages? (Hint: the bullet at the bottom might give it away – feel free to make a joke about this if you wish)

- What is Isaiah’s depiction of the World as is Should Be? How do you feel about Isaiah’s depiction?
- (If needed) Explain: The second passage is very idealic, but this is ok. It gives us a direction to work towards. We don’t have to reach that ideal in a single action/campaign, but with this idealism we have our value and goal.
- Brainstorming: On a board/large chart paper, have the group describe:
  - 1) The World As It Is?
  - 2) The World As It Should Be?
- Transition – How do we get there? Or, at least, how do we move in that direction? Beginning community organizing.

Source Sheet Page 3 – Basic Organizing Principles, i.e. What we’re going to do!

- Have a new volunteer READ Pirkei Avot 1:14
- Guiding Questions:
  - What does this fairly well-known quote actually mean? to you? How would you put it in your own words?
  - Which of the three pieces is most important?
- Explain that Marshal Ganz, an important organizing thinker, connects this tripartite statement into his own, related tripartite series of questions that people engaging in organizing ought to ask themselves.
- Have 3 different volunteers each READ a question
  - Who are my people?
  - What is their urgent problem?
  - How can they turn their resources into the power to solve their problem?
- Facilitator REREAD these questions, but explain that these questions are important to think about and will be important as we continue forward with our organizing initiative. However, today we’re not going to focus on all of these. Instead, just the first one, “Who are my people?”, “*Im ain ani li, mi li?* If I am not for myself, who am I?”
- Both Hillel and Organizing begin with the self. We, as individuals, must be aware of and work from our self-interest in order to effectively engage in organizing and social justice.
  - Define – self-interests are those things that deeply impact our being – it is answering the question “What am I called to do?” or “What causes me to act in each scenario?”
  - Today, we’re going to use Ganz’s question to begin to understand our self-interest. Organizing is relational, therefore we begin with “Who are my people?” “Who are **YOUR** people?” “Who do you love?”
- Break into Hevruta – “Who do you love?”
  - each person will take turns asking their partner “Who do you love?” over and over for 1 minute, while the partner answers one thing to each question.
  - after 1 minute the pair will switch roles
  - (Keep time)

- Come back together and ASK: How did the two break outs make you feel? Being asked “What makes you angry?” and “Who do you love?”?
- When we do relational organizing, we must be aware of our own self-interest and the self-interest of others. We work from both of these, so as to try to avoid manipulating others into acting as we think is best for them rather than what is best for their self-interest as well. Thus, the continuation of Pirkei Avot says:
- READ Pirkei Avot 1:15
  - focus on the last part – “receive every person with a pleasant countenance or face.”
  - This is the basis for relational organizing. It is through relationships that are built in one-to-one, face-to-face encounters that we build the power to enact the change towards which we are working.
- EXPLAIN: Thus the next steps are as follows:
  - Listening Campaign – a group of people will be trained to meet in one-to-ones and house meetings to begin building relationships and determining the issues that are meaningful to our congregation.
  - Research Actions – after the listening campaign, that group will meet and discuss the issues that arose in the meetings to determine which is the most meaningful and actionable. During this stage, we will begin to research the partners and people we might be able to build power with to take action.
  - Strategize and Act – once the issue has been chosen and brought to the community, we will begin creating a strategy to of actions and reflections in order to implement and affect change.
- End with Pirkei Avot 2:16 (Read the Hebrew and the English)
  - Thank you everyone for being here
  - You do not have to be directly involved in the next stages, but that doesn’t mean you can’t be a part of this process. Remember, organizing is all about building and developing relationships, thus we hope you’ll continue to support us in this new endeavor and we hope to hear all your voices in the future.
- sing/play *Lo Alekha*

# **Congregational Organizing for Social Justice**

## **Introduction and Some Basics**

*Source Sheet by David Reinhart*

### **Abraham Joshua Heschel in *The Insecurity of Freedom***

#### **“Religion and Race”**

“There is an evil which most of us condone and are even guilty of: indifference to evil. We remain neutral, impartial, and not easily moved by the wrongs done unto other people. Indifference to evil is more insidious than evil itself; it is more universal, more contagious, more dangerous. A silent justification, it makes possible an evil erupting as an exception becoming the rule and being in turn accepted.

The prophets' great contribution to humanity was the discovery of the evil of indifference. One may be decent and sinister, pious and sinful.

The prophet is a person who suffers the harms done to others. Wherever a crime is committed, it is as if the prophet were the victim and the prey. The prophet's angry words cry. The wrath of God is a lamentation. All prophecy is one great exclamation: God is not indifferent to evil! He is always concerned, He is personally affected by what man does to man. He is a God of pathos.”

#### **● What makes you angry?**

### **Abraham Joshua Heschel in *The Insecurity of Freedom***

#### **“The White Man on Trial”**

“The teaching of Judaism is the theology of the common deed. God is concerned with everydayness, with the trivialities of life.... The prophet's field of concern is not the mysteries of heaven, the glories of eternity, but the blights of society, the affairs of the marketplace.... [The prophet] addresses himself to those who trample upon the needy, who increase the price of grain, use dishonest scales, and sell the refuse of corn.”

### Isaiah 58:3-7

(3) Because on your fast day You see to your business And oppress all your laborers! (4) Because you fast in strife and contention, And you strike with a wicked fist! Your fasting today is not such As to make your voice heard on high.

(5) Is such the fast I desire, A day for men to starve their bodies? Is it bowing the head like a bulrush And lying in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call that a fast, A day when the LORD is favorable? (6) No, this is the fast I desire: To unlock fetters of wickedness, And untie the cords of the yoke To let the oppressed go free; To break off every yoke. (7) It is to share your bread with the hungry, And to take the wretched poor into your home; When you see the naked, to clothe him, And not to ignore your own kin.

### Isaiah 11:4-8

(4) Thus he shall judge the poor with equity And decide with justice for the lowly of the land. He shall strike down a land with the rod of his mouth And slay the wicked with the breath of his lips. (5) Justice shall be the girdle of his loins, And faithfulness the girdle of his waist. (6) The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard lie down with the kid; The calf, the beast of prey, and the fatling together, With a little boy to herd them. (7) The cow and the bear shall graze, Their young shall lie down together; And the lion, like the ox, shall eat straw.

ישעיהו נ"ח:ג-ז

(ג) ביום צמכם תמצאו חפץ וכל-  
עצביכם תנגשו: (ד) הן לריב ומצה  
תצומו ולהכות באגרף רשע לא-  
תצומו כיום להשמיע במרום  
קולכם:

(ה) הנה יהיה צום אבחרהו יום  
ענות אדם נפשו הלכה כאגמון ראשו  
ושק ואפר יציע הנה תקרא צום  
ויום רצון ליהנה: (ו) הלא זה צום  
אבחרהו פתח סרצפות רשע החר  
אגדות מוטה ושלח רצוצים חפשים  
וכל מוטה תנתקו: (ז) הלא פרס  
לרעב לחמה ועניים מרודים תביא  
בית כיתרא ערם וכסיתו ומבשרך  
לא תתעלם:

ישעיהו י"א:ד-ח

(ד) ושפט בצדק דלים והוכים  
במישור לענוי ארץ והפה ארץ  
בשקט פיו וברוח שפתי ימית רשע:  
(ה) והיה צדק אזור מתגיו והאמונה  
אזור חלציו: (ו) וגר זאב עם פֶּבֶשׁ  
ונמר עם גדי ירבע ועגל וכפיר  
ומריא יחדו ונער קטן נהג בהם: (ז)  
ופרה ודב תרעינה יחדו ירבעו  
ילדיהו וארניה כפקר יאכל תבן:

## ● The World As It Is? vs. The World As It Should Be?

**Pirkei Avot 1:14**

(14) He [Rabbi Hillel] used to say: If I am not for me, who will be for me? And when I am for myself alone, what am I? And if not now, then when?

משנה אבות א' י"ד

(יד) הוא הִזָּה אוֹמֵר, אִם אֵין אֲנִי לִי, מִי לִי. וְכִשְׁאֲנִי לְעַצְמִי, מָה אֲנִי. וְאִם לֹא עֲכָשְׁיוֹ, אֵימָתִי:

**Three Questions at the Heart of Organizing**

- Who are my people?
- What is their urgent problem?
- How can they turn their resources into the power to solve their problem?

**Self-Interest - Who are YOUR people?**

**Leviticus 19:18**

(18) Love your fellow as yourself: I am God.

ויקרא י"ט:י"ח

(יח) וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמֹדֶךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה:

- **Who do you love?**

**Pirkei Avot 1:15**

(15) Shammai says, "Make your Torah fixed, say little and do much, and receive every person with a pleasant countenance (face)."

משנה אבות א' ט"ו

(טו) שַׁמַּאי אוֹמֵר, עֲשֵׂה תוֹרָתְךָ קְבֹעַ. אֲמַר מְעַט וַעֲשֵׂה הרֵבָה, וְהָגִי מְקַבֵּל אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם בְּסֹכֶר פְּנִים יְפוֹת:

- Next Steps (Listening Campaign - Research Actions - Strategize)

**Pirkei Avot 2:16**

(16) He [Rabbi Tarfon] used to say: It is not your responsibility to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it.

משנה אבות ב' ט"ז

(טז) הוּא הִזָּה אוֹמֵר, לֹא עָלֶיךָ הַמְּלָאכָה לְגַמֵּר, וְלֹא אַתָּה בֶּן חוֹרִין לְבַטֵּל מִמֶּנָּה.