

## **Bread and Roses**

Lesson plan for family/congregational education

*This lesson plan is part of a larger Go & Learn lesson entitled “We Have Found You Wanting: Labor Activism and Communal Responsibility,” which can be found at <http://jwa.org/teach/golearn/sep08/>.*

*This plan is written for use in a family education setting, though you may choose to use parts of it for a classroom setting. It would be ideal for use as a program to spark excitement about a community project.*

*You may choose to do this lesson with adults and children together, or you may begin together and then have the adults do one of the text studies provided below while the children begin working on an aspect of the proposed community project. For example, if you choose to begin a project where you will be visiting seniors either in their homes or in a senior residence, you can have the children make artwork that will be appropriate for an upcoming holiday.*

### **1. Opening exercise and discussion**

Write the following quotation on a large piece of paper, leaving room on the bottom for kids to write underneath it:

*“What the woman who labors wants is the right to live, not simply exist...the worker must have bread, but she must have roses, too.”*

-- Rose Schneiderman

Begin a discussion by asking participants for their interpretation of this quotation.

Some questions to guide your discussion:

- What is the difference between “living” and “simply existing?”
- Does everyone *need* both bread and roses?
- Does everyone *have* both bread and roses? Why or why not?

Guide the discussion to explore what necessities are important to living a good life.

Option 1 – for children

On the large paper with the quote, invite kids to write down one (more, if it's a small group) thing that they think is necessary to live a good life – i.e. tangible things that they feel help them and others feel happy. It is likely that they will come up with the basics such as food and shelter, but they may also find that there are things that they think are crucial such as music (ipod), TV, good food (not basics such as bread and water), and other essential personal items.

Ask them to explain their choices and lead a discussion of what it is that makes a good life for a person.

Option 2 – for children with or without adults

Write the quote on large paper and create a chart with two columns. On one side, have them write the basics people need to live. Invite them up one by one to fill out this side only. Then, invite them up again and ask them to write down one personal item that they feel they need to make their own lives happy. Compare the lists and ask them the difference between the two. If these lists are different, how do they differ and why?

Option 3 – for children with adults

Design the same chart described above in option 2 and have the children fill out one side, while adults do the other. Then have them compare the two lists. This can be an interesting experiment in generational differences as well. Equally interesting – have students write down the one thing that is most important to their parents and have the parents do the same for their children.

Once the list (whichever option you chose) is finished, continue the conversation.

Some points to consider:

- In this world, some have only basic necessities, while others have an abundance of things that they feel are necessary to live a “good life.” Still others do not even have the basic things they need to survive.
- How do we deal with this inequity? Should some people be forced to live with less? Do those of us with more have any responsibilities towards people with less to help them out with more than just the basics of food and shelter?

## 2. Text study

We have presented two options for texts. You may choose to use one of these texts with adults alone, while children begin work on one aspect of the project your community will choose. Or, you may have children and adults learn one of these texts together in small groups.

A. The following text is from Maimonides' famous work of *halakhah* (Jewish Law), the Mishneh Torah, Laws of Gifts to the Poor, chapter 7:1, 3.

תתן תצדקה ליתום ולאלמנה ככל צרכן

ליתום ולאלמנה ככל צרכן וכל צרכן

תתן תצדקה ליתום ולאלמנה ככל צרכן וכל צרכן  
 ליתום ולאלמנה ככל צרכן וכל צרכן  
 ליתום ולאלמנה ככל צרכן וכל צרכן  
 ליתום ולאלמנה ככל צרכן וכל צרכן

*It is a positive commandment to give tzedakah to the poor according to what is fitting for that poor person...*

*According to what that person is lacking, you are commanded to give to him: If he has no clothing, you clothe him. If he has no utensils, you purchase them for him. If he has no wife, you find him a wife. If it is a woman, you find her a husband. Even if it was the way of this poor person to ride on a horse while a servant runs before him. If he has lost money (and become poor), one buys him a horse and servant to attend to him. As it is written: "But you shall open your hand wide to him, and shall surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he lacks." (Deuteronomy 15:8).*

Some questions for discussion:

- What do you think the verse from Deuteronomy 15:8 means, without considering Maimonides' interpretation? What is meant by "sufficient for his need?"
- Why does Maimonides say that a poor person who used to be wealthy enough to have a horse/servant should be kept in the "manner to which he has become accustomed?" What is his concern?
- Maimonides seems to be interpreting the words "In that which he lacks." How do you think he understands this phrase?
- Do you agree with Maimonides on this, or do you think poor people should each receive *tzedakah* equally?
- If you think everyone should be equal, what is the minimum standard? How does this get decided, and by whom? The giver? The receiver?

## B. Rose Schneiderman's Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Speech

Begin with some background information on Rose Schneiderman. See the introductory essay on the main page of this edition of *Go & Learn*, which can be found at <http://jwa.org/teach/golearn/sep08/>.

Discuss the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, providing background on the fire, including the working conditions that preceded it, as well as the fact that this Jewish-owned business took advantage of its primarily

immigrant population. If you want more information than what is included in the introductory essay, see <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire>.

Following the fire, Schneiderman made a speech at a memorial for the 146 workers who died. (See main page of this edition of *Go & Learn* for text of her speech from April 2, 1911, <http://jwa.org/teach/golearn/sep08/>.) Read the text of Rose Schneiderman's speech after the Triangle Fire together.

Some questions to consider:

- What does Schneiderman mean when she compares working conditions in her time to the Inquisition? What do you think of this comparison? Is it too extreme?
- What are the responsibilities of Jewish business people? Should their responsibilities be different than others'? Should Jews be held to a higher standard by their own people? Is this standard different from how they should treat people of other nations?

Share the following short quote from the Babylonian Talmud, Shevuot 39a:

*And for all of the transgressions of the Torah is not the whole world punished? Isn't it written: "And they shall stumble one upon another"?! (Leviticus 26:37) [That is to say,] one because of the iniquity of the other. This teaches us that all Israel are sureties (responsible) for another! There [they are punished], because it was in their power to prevent [the sin], and they did not prevent it.*

The phrase in Hebrew is

"Kol Yisrael arevim zeh ba-zeh" ??? ?????? ???' ???

Discuss:

- Have people heard this phrase before? If so, how is it usually used? If not, how can we understand it?

- This Talmud excerpt suggests that when one person sins, we are all punished. How does this relate to Schneiderman's complaint that "*We have tried you good people of the public and we have found you wanting*"?
- How should we understand these concepts of collective responsibility and collective punishment today? Should we apply them only within the Jewish community? Do we understand them on a more universal level? What are today's sins for which we are all responsible and will all pay the price if we do not prevent them?

### **3. Community project**

Use these opening texts as a starting point for a community project. The project could address either a basic need (Schneiderman's "bread") or a quality of life need ("roses").

Some suggestions of organizations that help provide basic necessities (such as food and shelter) are:

- Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger
- Habitat for Humanity
- American Jewish World Service

Some suggestions of "roses" projects (some can be done with entire group, and some would work better as family or small group projects):

- Start a collection of toys for children in a local hospital or shelter.
- Have the children create works of art to brighten up a hospital, nursing home, or shelter.
- Have students create a skit to be performed for young children at a local hospital.
- Visit a home-bound elderly person for conversation or reading (some local organizations have "adopt a grandparent" programs).
- Create a simple puppet-making workshop for children at a shelter.