Note for Facilitators: This document is designed to be the centering point for a group conversation. You should plan for the conversation to last around 90 minutes, depending on group size. Most parts are meant to be read by members of the group, so you should plan to ask participants to take turns reading sections. Alternatively, you can choose the first reader of a section, and then that reader chooses the next reader. Additional guidelines and suggestions for planning and leading a successful conversation can be found at the end of this guide.

1. WELCOME

Before we begin, let’s review the brit—the covenant—that animates our time together:

- **Accountability:** I’ll show up for eight meetings over the next eight months. Or I’ll let the host know the (good) reason I will be absent. I will also be punctual and respect everyone’s time. Which means that meetings will start and end on time, no matter how good the schmoozing.
- **Presence:** When we’re together, I’ll be present and mindful. I will listen and share. Life (and our mobile devices) offer many distractions, but I will stay present and engaged.
- **Double Confidentiality:** I’ll maintain complete confidentiality. What I hear and say stays here. That means that even when I see group member in another context, like at Central or in the neighborhood, I won’t bring up what has been shared in our group unless you open the conversation.
• **Vulnerability:** I’ll stretch myself to be as open and honest as I can with my perspectives and experiences to create a safe environment that might encourage others to take risks, too.

• **Respect:** I will remember that all of us are here for a common purpose and I will respect and acknowledge everyone in my group.

• **No Fixing, Advising, Saving or Setting Straight:** I will give each person the gift of true attention without trying to “solve their problem.” No advice unless it’s asked.

• **Listening:** I understand that some of us are talkers and some of us are quieter, so I’ll be aware to not dominate discussions or always leave the weight of it to others.

• **Curiosity:** Judaism is a religion of exploration; of questions more than answers. I will get the most out of my group by being open to our discussions and the people around me.

• **Ownership:** This is our group. This is our community to create. While we have guidelines and suggestions, it is ours to shape and form. We will get out of it what we put into it.

### 2. ASK AND SHARE

Welcome, and thank you for joining our conversation. Please share what comes to mind when you hear the word “legacy.” You can use the space below to make some notes to yourself.

Note for Facilitators: Give people a moment to organize their thoughts before you start asking for volunteers. It may be helpful to model this response for participants, so consider responding first. Be sure everyone states their name. You don’t need to go in order around a circle. Allow people to respond when the spirit moves them.
3. LEARN

A dictionary definition of ‘legacy’ generally refers to something transmitted from an ancestor or predecessor—something that we have received from those who have come before us. But as we go about the business of crafting our lives today, we can ask ourselves what we want our own legacy to be—what do we want to bring forth into the future? What do we want to have left behind? What kind of impact do we want to have had? What kind of person do we want to have been? How do we want to have touched people? How do we want to be remembered?

Ray Bradbury wrote, in his classic novel Fahrenheit 451, “Everyone must leave something behind when he dies . . . Something your hand touched some way so your soul has somewhere to go when you die . . . It doesn’t matter what you do, so long as you change something from the way it was before you touched it into something that’s like you after you take your hands away.”

But legacies aren’t crafted after the fact. They’re built, day by day, as we make choices about where we choose to invest our time, our energy, our talents and our attention. So part of the work of thinking about the legacy we’d like to leave behind involves making decisions about who we want to be, and how we go about becoming that person, starting today.

Bill Watterson, the creator of the comic strip Calvin and Hobbes, gave a graduation speech at his alma mater, Kenyon College, in 1990, that included the text below. Using his blog, Zen Pencils (zenpencils.com), Gavin Aung Than adapted Watterson’s inspirational speech into a comic story, which he illustrated in Watterson’s style. Please read the comic essay aloud as a group. It begins on the next page. You can find the original comic here: http://bit.ly/1jBs3Q6
Creating a life that reflects your values and satisfies your soul is a rare achievement.

In a culture that relentlessly promotes avarice and excess as the good life...
... a person happy doing his own work is usually considered an eccentric, if not a subversive.

Ambition is only understood if it’s to rise to the top of some imaginary ladder of success.

Someone who takes an undemanding job because it affords him the time to pursue other interests and activities...

... is considered a flake.
A person who abandons a career in order to stay home and raise children is considered not to be living up to his potential.

As if a job title and salary are the sole measure of human worth.

You’ll be told in a hundred ways, some subtle and some not, to keep climbing...

...and never be satisfied with where you are, who you are, and what you’re doing.

There are a million ways to sell yourself out...

...and I guarantee you’ll hear about them.
TO INVENT YOUR OWN LIFE'S MEANING IS NOT EASY...

...BUT IT'S STILL ALLOWED...

...AND I THINK YOU'LL BE HAPPIER FOR THE TROUBLE.

- BILL MATTHEWS

ASKBIGQUESTIONS.ORG
UNDERSTAND OTHERS. UNDERSTAND YOURSELF.
As you reflect on this comic story, here are a few questions to consider:

**Interpretive Questions**

- What does Watterson think are the risks and benefits of the various paths he describes?
- What do you think he means by “invent[ing] your life’s meaning”?
- Where does the main character in the comic find his purpose? Where does he locate his legacy?
- What kind of legacy do you think he wants to leave his child?

**Reflective Questions**

- In what ways have you made choices that help you invent your life’s purpose?
- What kinds of choices do you think you need to make to create a life that “reflects your values and satisfies your soul”?
- How do you come to determine what has meaning in your life? Are there people or experiences or values or traditions that are particularly important for you?
- What do you want your legacy in life to be?

**4. PERSPECTIVES FROM JEWISH TRADITION**

How do these questions look through the lens of Jewish text? Here are two excerpts from the Babylonian Talmud (redacted in the 5th century CE) that may offer some other possibilities for thinking about our legacies. Please read them aloud together. You need not discuss both of the texts; feel free to choose those that speak to you. These texts are merely tools for reflecting on your own stories and experiences. Please use them in a way that organically continues or deepens the conversation you have been having so far.

Amor Rava: בֵּשָּׁעָה שָׁמוֹנִים אָדָם לְדִימָא אֲמֵרָיו לְא: נֹאַּת נַתְּתָה בַּמַּעֲמָה: כְּבָשָׁת תָּחְתָּה? כְּבָשָׁת בֵּפַרְמָא רוֹבִית? ִלְמָלֵלָה בַּכֹּמֶנָן, חָכָם דָּרֵר מַחוֹר דָּרֵר?

Rava said: When they escort a person to his final, Heavenly judgment after his death, the Heavenly tribunal says to him: “Did you conduct your business transactions faithfully? Did you set aside fixed times for Torah study? Did you engage in procreation? Did you wait in hope for the Messiah? Did you delve into wisdom? Did you learn how to infer one thing from another?”  --Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 31a

- What does this text suggest are the main priorities that should inform a person’s life choices?
- How do these priorities differ from, or build upon, Watterson’s notion of legacy?
- Do you think that these questions reflect a Jewish idea of how to evaluate a life?
- If you were asked these questions, how would you answer?
- Do you see your choices today reflected in your answers?
I did not find the world desolate when I entered it. And as my parents planted for me before I was born, so do I plant for those who will come after me.
--Babylonian Talmud Taanit 23a

• In what ways does this text build upon or expand upon the first Talmudic text’s ideas? Upon Watterson?
• In what ways does it give us a new way of thinking about our legacy?
• To what degree is our legacy dependent on what we leave for the next generation?
• Does our legacy to the next generation depend on whether or not we have children?

Use the space below to write some notes to yourself.

Note for Facilitators: This is the heart of the conversation. Give people several minutes to prepare their thoughts. Then, if you would like, you can invite people to divide into pairs or triads and share their responses. Give them a good amount of time for this—10-20 minutes. It may be longer, depending on how much momentum they develop. Then reconvene in the large group and ask people to share from their small-group conversations.

• A few tips on facilitation:
  • The large-group debrief should take another 20-30 minutes.
  • Begin by asking for a volunteer to share an insight from their conversation. You might begin by asking, “What came up?”
  • When each person is done, thank them for their comment.
  • Don’t feel a need to rush or to fill silences.
• If someone begins to monopolize the time, you might say, “I want to be sure that everyone has a chance to speak, so let’s try to make room for another person.”

For other ideas on facilitation, please refer to the AIR-IT guide at the end of this document. When you sense that the group has finished sharing its responses to these questions, invite people to share any further insights or reflections from the conversation, before moving to the conclusion.

5. **DO**

In the Jewish tradition, there is a beautiful custom of writing an Ethical Will. Parents write letters to children summing up what they have learned in life, what values are important to them, and what they hope to have instilled in the family. It is believed these sentiments are just as valuable as material family heirlooms. In writing an ethical will, one confronts oneself—forcing a reflection on time spent living. William Joseph Adelson was a Jewish pediatrician and allergist who lived in Sudbury, Massachusetts. His ethical will is part of an anthology (*So That Your Values Live On*, by Jack Riemer and Nathaniel Stampfer). In his Ethical Will, Adelson writes to his children, “More than material possessions, I hope I will have left each of you an optimistic spirit, a fervor and enthusiasm for life, a sensitivity to nature and esthetics, a closeness and regard for one another, a sense of responsibility and concern for others, and a sense of worthwhileness about yourselves.”

When you reflect upon your own life, and upon the legacy you hope to leave towards the end of your life, what do you envision? And how can you live into tomorrow’s legacy today?

As we conclude the conversation, here are a few final questions to consider.

• What’s one insight that you’ve gained from this conversation?
• What is one action you might take, or practice you might try, before we meet next time, based on what you’re taking from this conversation?
• What’s one obstacle to taking that action? How can you overcome it? Who might you need help from in order to do so?
• What could we do together as a community based on what we talked about today?

Use the space below to note your response to these questions.
Give people a minute to reflect on the question. Then ask anyone who wants to share to do so. When you sense that the group has finished sharing its response to this question, invite people to share any further insights or reflections from the conversation, before moving to the conclusion.

Thank you for being part of this conversation.

Central Synagogue works tirelessly toward a world in which Judaism is central to the lives of Jews everywhere and is a profound and positive force for humanity. We are relentless in our pursuit of that goal — constantly evolving and always seeking new ways to be “more excellent.” We reach far beyond the walls of our synagogue to learn, worship, serve, and continually redefine what it means to be Jewish today.

Ask Big Questions is an initiative of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life in partnership with the Einhorn Family Charitable Trust. Visit AskBigQuestions.org to answer questions, learn from others, and join the movement.

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AIR-IT: A GUIDE TO FACILITATING CONVERSATION

A: ASK BIG QUESTIONS.
Big Questions are different than Hard Questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Big Question</th>
<th>Hard Question</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anyone can answer it. Example: “When have you been a stranger?”</td>
<td>Experts will answer it best. Example: “What is the history of racism on campus and what can be done to promote greater inclusion?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focuses on wisdom and experience. Example: “What’s the best advice you’ve ever received?”</td>
<td>Focuses on intelligence and skill. Example: “Are human beings naturally good or evil?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses plain language.</td>
<td>Uses technical language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directed at a subject (me, you, us). Example: “What could we sacrifice to change the world?”</td>
<td>Directed at an object (it). Example: “Is it better to cut spending or raise taxes to balance the federal budget?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opens up space and invites people in as participants</td>
<td>Closes space and leads people to feel like spectators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leads to sharing personal stories.</td>
<td>Leads to debates about truth claims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasizes a both/and approach.</td>
<td>Emphasizes an either/or approach.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I: INVITE PERSONAL STORIES.
Big questions lead to sharing personal stories. The facilitator acts to support this by:
Creating the space (physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual) of trust in which these stories can be shared and honored.

Weaving: Summarize, reflect back, and keep the stories and observations tethered to the big question. This helps the group to maintain integrity and not feel that it is fragmenting or fraying.

R: REALLY LISTEN.
Ask Big Questions conversations are marked by real listening. The facilitator’s reflecting back and weaving is crucial to this. Participants should be able to answer questions like: “What did so-and-so say? What do you think they meant when they said it? What did it evoke in you?”
IT: USE INTERPRETIVE THINGS.

Ask Big Questions conversations often use a text, poem, artwork, song, natural object or other “interpretive thing” to help center the conversation and create a common point of access for all participants.
QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN PREPARING FOR A DISCUSSION

WHERE?
Does the place where you’re having the conversation create a space in which people can feel safe?
Is it a closed space? Does it have a door you can close to ensure privacy and confidentiality when needed?
What can you do to make the space visually appealing or lovely? Does it have windows to let in light? Do you want to play some music?
Can everyone sit comfortably in a circle?

WHEN?
Are you scheduling the conversation at a time when everyone can be physically awake and present?
Will people be hungry? Will you provide food or drink?
Will they be tired or sleepy after a meal?
How long will the conversation be?
How will you break up the time if necessary?

WHO AND HOW?
Do you need to make any special arrangements for people with special needs (i.e. physical disabilities)?
How will you have everyone introduce themselves? (Big Questions are great for introductions!)
How will you close the conversation?

WHAT ABOUT YOU?
What will you do to get yourself ready?