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.

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.

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.

Jeeep

Global Advertising

In a culture that relentlessly promotes avarice and excess as the good life...
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 WATTERSON
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.

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.

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 worth-whileness 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.
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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