

Helping Youth Process Civil Unrest and their Role

Post Election 2020

Opening Activity:

Use Padlet to choose an image (or word/s or drawing) that represents how you are feeling right now about what is going on (assuming something is going on).

Alternative: Use a Word Cloud allowing students to express one word that shares how you are feeling right now.

Framing:

We are living in uncertain times and sometimes it is difficult to make sense of what is going on. There is unrest around us. Yet, when we are unsure of how to proceed, we can always lean on our Jewish texts and values to guide us. What we are experiencing right now can be both empowering and disempowering, yet, this is hardly the first instance of disagreement, unrest, and protest. We can turn to past examples to guide our thoughts and actions and help us contextualize our role in all of this.

Notes for educator: Choose a sampling from this [list of quotes](#). Ensure that there is a balance, some that reflect pro-protest sentiments, some that reflect pro-peace sentiments, and some that reflect conflict or abstention.

- Choose 1 Quote that captures your current mood/thoughts – What about it spoke to you?
- Choose 1 quote that you couldn't agree with less – What about it didn't you agree with?
- Choose 1 quote that you are struggling with/ have questions about – What aspect are you struggling with or what are you questioning?

Suggested Quotes for middle school:

1. *By three things is the world sustained: justice, truth and peace.* Avot 1:17
2. *Why did God create swarms of bees, prides of lions, herds of deer, schools of fish, and flocks of birds, and only one human couple? So that no one can say to another 'My ancestry is superior to yours.* Mishnah, Sanhedrin 4:5
3. *If I am not for me, who is for me; and if I am (only) for myself, what am I. And if not now, when?* Hillel, Ethics of the Fathers, 1:14
4. *Gam Zeh Ya'avov - "This too shall pass"*
5. Leviticus [18:5]: *"You shall therefore keep my statutes...which if a person does, they shall live by them."* The rabbis add: *"That they shall live by them, and not that they shall die by them."* Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 85b
6. *Do not stand Idly by the blood of your fellow.* Leviticus 19:16

Suggested Quotes for teens:

1. At a time when the community is suffering, no one should say, "I will go home, eat, drink, and be at peace with myself. Babylonian Talmud Taanit, 11a.
2. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it. Pirkei Avot 2:21
3. There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest. Elie Wiesel
4. Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may live. Deut.16.20
5. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it. Pirkei Avot 2:21
6. When we hear and accept what we hear without meeting others, without asking how can it be, without looking for friends outside our circles, when we accept hatred for a group as a legitimate discourse – Pharaoh is alive and well, inside ourselves. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel
7. Whoever can protest to his household and does not, is accountable [for the sins] of his household; if he could protest to his townspeople, he is accountable for their sins; if he could protest to the whole world, he is accountable for the whole world. Shabbat 54b

A lot of these quotes encourage justice, what are some forms that justice might take beyond voting or participating in a protest? Take suggestions from the group. (Answers might include):

- Engaging in small acts of *chesed*, kindness
- Showing support for others such as the Keshet' [Havdalah for Hope](#) for LGBTQ Teen and Allies on Saturday November 7, 2020
- Advocate for legislation that aligns with your values
- See a list of [10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism](#) (from the ADL) for additional ideas

Closing Activity:

Now that you have identified quotes you align with, what do we do with this? Take a quote and turn it into an Instagram post, a mantra, protest sign or tweet (don't forget your hashtags!). What would you do with this quote? How would you use it to continue to inspire or motivate yourself or others?

Closing Message:

I want to thank each of you for sharing. It is clear how much each of you care about others and the world around you, even if it might take different forms. Even though things might feel hopeless, I feel hope hearing each of you express how much you care and want to see the world improve now and in the future.

