

AMPLIFIER

POWERED BY JEWISH FEDERATIONS OF NORTH AMERICA

**JEWISH
SOCIAL
JUSTICE
ROUNDTABLE**

A young girl with pigtails is seen from behind, holding a sign that says "I'm not black". She is at a protest or rally, with other people and signs visible in the background. The entire image has a purple tint.

GIVING TO MAKE CHANGE

A JEWISH SOCIAL JUSTICE GIVING GUIDE

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Our struggle is to embrace the Jewish values we each hold to be true
and turn them towards a stance of identifying with others.
– Rabbi Isaiah Rothstein

GIVING TO MAKE CHANGE

A majority of American Jews say working for justice and equity in society is essential to being Jewish.¹ If that's you, then this guide is for you! And if that's not you but you want to better understand this perspective and what funding Jewish social justice might mean, then this guide is for you too!

This guide contains background information, exercises, and conversation starters. **Use it as a tool to inform and/or start your giving practice to social justice causes.** It will help you learn about the work being done, set intentions for your own involvement, and explore best practices for social justice giving. Read it alone, with friends or family, or with a group like a book club or giving circle to clarify your Jewish values and ask questions that move you to action.

We also hope this guide **connects you more deeply to the ancient practice of Jewish social justice.** For more than 3,000 years, the Jewish people have continued the tradition that perpetually calls on each generation to pursue righteousness and justice and to foster relationships and mutual responsibilities to act for the sake of heaven and all of humanity.

The rabbis teach:

Anyone who is capable of protesting injustice from their circle of influence and does not—is responsible for the outcomes of their neglect. For the people of one's city—they are responsible for the people of the city. For the whole world—they are responsible for the whole world.

כָּל מִי שְׂאֶפְשֵׁר לְמַחֹת לְאִנְשֵׁי בֵּיתוֹ וְלֹא מִיחָה—נִתְפָּס עַל אִנְשֵׁי בֵּיתוֹ. בְּאִנְשֵׁי עִירוֹ—
נִתְפָּס עַל אִנְשֵׁי עִירוֹ. בְּכָל הָעוֹלָם כּוֹלוֹ—נִתְפָּס עַל כָּל הָעוֹלָם כּוֹלוֹ.

Shabbat 54b:20

This guide was created by Amplifier, Powered by the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA), and the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable, with input from Rabbi Isaiah Rothstein, Rabbinic Scholar and Public Affairs Advisor at JFNA.

¹ Pew Research Center, May 11, 2021, "Jewish Americans in 2020", p.56

WHY SOCIAL JUSTICE?

Imagine you're walking on a beach and see a starfish washed up on the shore. You may think that it was old or sick, or that something happened to that specific starfish that made it end up on the shore. Now, imagine that a few feet farther along, you see another starfish, and then another, and another—dozens of starfish washed up on the shore. **Would you still think that there's a problem with each starfish or would you begin to suspect that there might be a bigger problem, for example, in the water?**

While the starfish are a metaphor, you likely see or hear about sustained hardships or sudden tragedies impacting individuals and communities. As with the starfish, you might initially look for individual solutions, helping one person or community. You might also reflect on how systems (by which we mean organizations, institutions, laws, and norms) could be responsible for disparate outcomes for different people, the proverbial ocean.

IN THIS ANALOGY:

A **direct service** approach **helps each starfish**, maybe by taking it to a rescue center or relocating it.

A **social justice** approach **addresses the root causes** of why so many starfish are washing up on the shore, perhaps by cleaning the ocean or working to stop climate change.

There are a number of methods of social change. **All are necessary!**

Social justice is the fair and just distribution of rights, opportunities, and resources. We get there by transforming systems and ideologies so that all people can thrive, be free, and live in dignity.

Learn more about methods of social change [here](#).





WHY JEWISH SOCIAL JUSTICE?

Making change isn't easy. The injustices we see in the world have long, complex histories and thus have complex solutions. Our sages teach, **"It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it."** (Pirkei Avot 2:16), which lightens our load while pushing us forward.

Engaging in social justice work as Jews offers sources of meaning and nourishment. Drawing on Jewish wisdom, communities, and histories connects us to the tradition of social justice, making the work more sustainable, vibrant, and exciting.

Social justice calls on us to look at the underlying reasons for suffering and injustice and to consider the ways intersecting experiences and systems can compound them. A social justice approach helps people in need. It recognizes that those with direct experience of injustice have the most relevant background and insight to offer solutions. Those with less direct experience are invited to listen and learn from impacted communities. And all people, regardless of their connection to the injustice, ought to feel empowered to participate in making change in whichever ways are accessible and transformative: organizing, advocating, legislating, educating, and donating money.

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

A social justice approach can be applied to understanding the underlying causes of the injustices we see in the world. These causes are often hidden. To help uncover them, we can use the simple practice of asking: *Why?* **Let's consider a few examples and ask why a few times.**

FOOD INSECURITY

During the coronavirus pandemic, up to 42 million in the US may be food insecure (up from 35 million in 2019).¹

Why are as many as 42 million people facing hunger in the US?

Because people impacted by poverty may not have money for food

Why don't they have money for food?

Because many jobs in the US pay below a living wage

Because many people are burdened by debt from medical bills, education, etc.

CLIMATE JUSTICE

Heat wave-related deaths are concentrated among poor, elderly city residents.²

Why are heat waves disproportionately impacting the poor, elderly in cities?

Heat waves are becoming more frequent and severe due to climate change

Perhaps they are less likely to have access to air conditioning

Maybe they live in older buildings without air conditioning

Maybe they live on fixed incomes and can't afford the high cost of utilities

RACIAL DISPARITIES IN WEALTH

The median white household's wealth was \$188,200 in 2019, which was almost 8 times that of Black households, whose median wealth was \$24,100.³

Why do Black households have so much less wealth than white households?

One reason may be that most wealth historically has been held in real estate

Why were Black people less likely to have wealth in real estate?

Perhaps the practice of redlining kept the value of Black people's homes from growing, and also made it nearly impossible for Black people to obtain mortgages

¹ Feeding America, March 31, 2021, "The Impact of the Coronavirus on Local Food Insecurity", p.1

² Research Gate, May 20004, "Poverty and Disasters in the United States"

³ The Brookings Institution, December 8, 2020, "The Black-white wealth gap left Black households more vulnerable", p.2

The next step is to ask: *Which systems (education, healthcare, legislative, etc.) are involved? Who is most impacted?*

When we ask these questions, we often confront the large scale and complexity of the challenges our society faces.

Try digging deeper using a [root cause tree activity](#). Choose a cause that matters to you or to your broader community. Explore what's at stake by asking *why* multiple times, then consider the systems involved and people most impacted.





WHAT OFFERS HOPE?

While the number of injustices and causes is enormous, all of these issues have changed over time, meaning that interventions and solutions are possible. The changes, big and small, that organizations and those involved in social justice work have made give us hope.

Whichever cause you care about, there are communities and organizations working to fight for justice in coalition with Jews and Jewish organizations. Social justice is helping people in need. They're making meaningful strides towards changes!

Another benefit of social justice work is that even when a need may seem specific to a community, once a solution is implemented, it helps others. The ripples and impacts of even small successes can be widespread including building relationships across communities working in coalition, helping others with similar needs, and giving people skills that they can use to continue making meaningful change, among others.

Many victories are won by coalitions. Coalitions form when a number of organizations representing different communities come together to fight for a specific cause. Coalition members often don't agree on everything but commit to working together on a common goal.

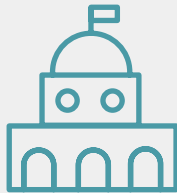
EXAMPLES OF VICTORIES



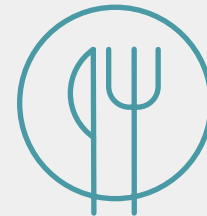
Jews United for Justice (JUFJ) led the Coalition for Paid Family Leave in DC. After more than five years of work, the program launched successfully in the midst of the pandemic in July 2020. In its first six months of operation more than 5,000 people received benefits, a majority of them people of color; 40% of the applicants had incomes of less than \$50,000.



The New York Religious Action Center (RAC-NY), part of the Reform movement, worked with the Less Is More NY Coalition. They supported passage of the Less is More Act, which ended incarceration of people on parole for minor, technical violations (such as missing curfew) and created a more racially equitable, humane, and cost-effective parole system.



Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) continues to build congressional support for the Better Care Better Jobs Act. The Act would provide funding for low-income older adults and people with disabilities needing home- and community-based care, and empower them to remain in their homes and communities. After advocacy with coalition partners, action alerts, and targeted outreach to lawmakers, the Act passed in the US House of Representatives. This work is ongoing as of the writing of this guide.



Taking the food insecurity example from above, we draw hope in MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger's success as part of a coalition advocating for and winning an historic update to the formula that determines benefits for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, also known as food stamps). The average benefit was raised \$36.24 per person, per month as of October 2021. This means struggling families will have more money to put food on the table.



STRENGTHENING YOUR SOCIAL JUSTICE GIVING

Social justice work requires funding to succeed.

Go through the steps on the following pages on your own, with friends, or with community members to craft or inform your social justice giving plan.

STEP 1 | IDENTIFY YOUR VALUES

Our actions are informed by values, whether or not we have taken the time to name them. Which values would you ascribe to your giving? Are they the values others would ascribe to your giving? How can you use your values to actively inform your giving?

Read the values and reflections below. Place a check mark next to 1-2 values, or add other ones, that are core to your worldview. Consider how they spur you to give to social justice work.

These values are inspired by the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable's [Guiding Principles for Racial Justice](#) and the Jewish Federations of North America's [Jewish Equity Diversity & Inclusion Values](#).

IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

B'tselem Elokim | בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים

Every single person is made in the image of God. This means each person is a unique and an equally valuable human. We want a world in which every person is seen and treated as holy and wholly equal.

PARTNERSHIP

Shutfut | שְׂתֻפּוּת

We are called on to be a light unto nations and unto each other. Lights are brightest when they are close, not shining from a distant hill. For our light to truly shine bright we must be proximate (indeed, we are already interconnected) and in authentic partnership with all people. Partnership demands that we speak out against all forms of hate and bigotry with honesty and humility and that we engage in dialogue across difference and disagreement.

HOPE

Tikvah | תִּקְוָה

We are propelled forward by the vision of the world we want, the strength of our community, and the magnitude of our accomplishments rather than overwhelmed or defeated by the scale of the work or the enormity of suffering.

LOVING KINDNESS

Chesed | חֶסֶד

Loving kindness is love in action. It is a necessary practice of building relationships and interdependence in order to bring about the world we want. We understand that there is always more to someone's experience than we can see and we can show up for them with compassion.

SHABBAT AS A VALUE AND PRACTICE

Shavat Vayinafash | שְׁבִיט וַיִּנְפֹּשׁ

Jewish tradition offers us the gift of weekly rest. Shabbat is a reminder that even the most important work, the creation of the universe, can pause every six days. Justice is long, hard work. Applied over a lifetime, Shabbat is a reminder that sometimes stepping away is necessary to sustaining justice work.

OTHER

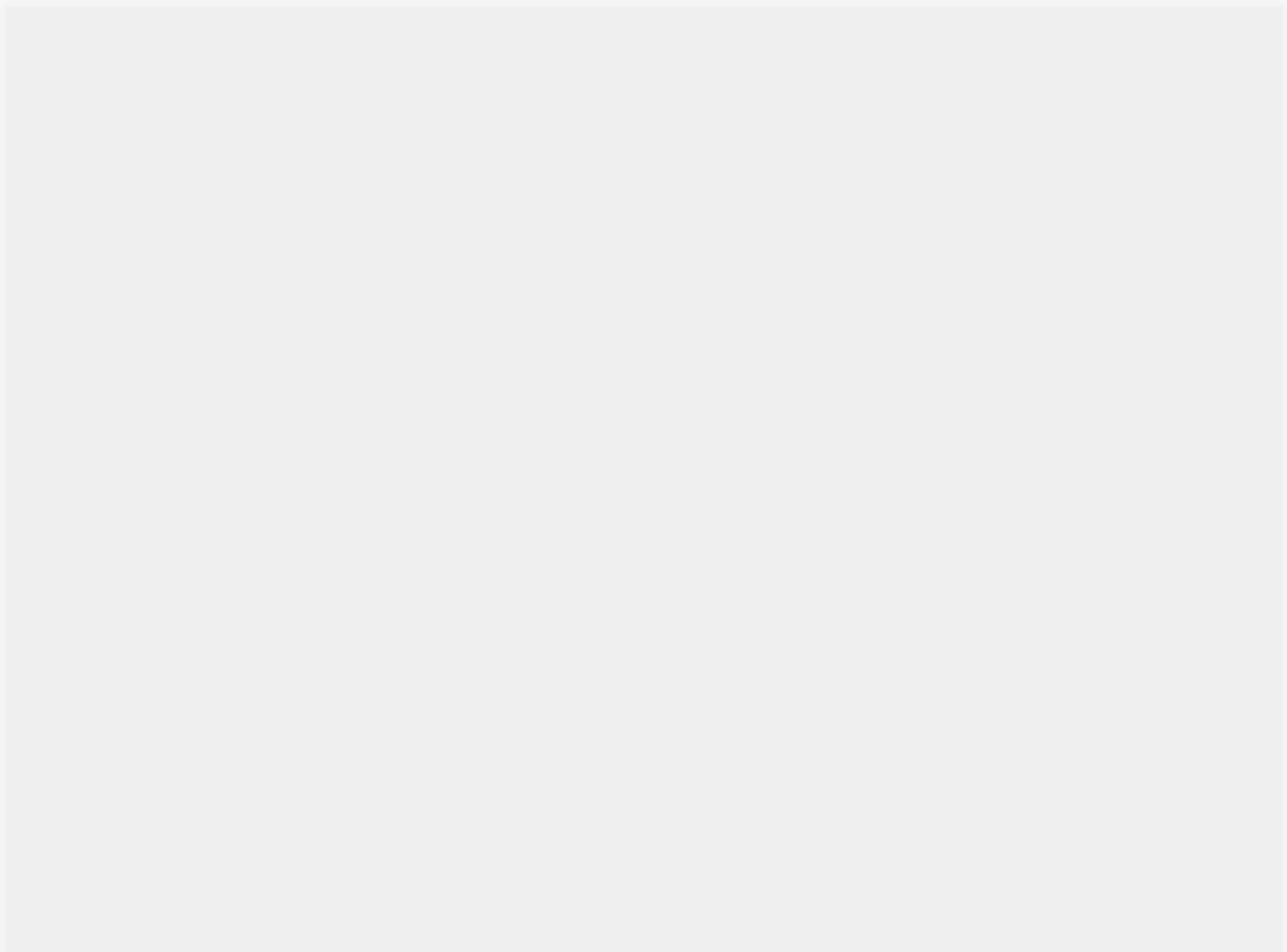
STEP 2 | CHOOSE A STARTING POINT

What causes are important to you? To the people in your life? In your community? Everyone who makes an impact starts from a bit of heartache and anger about something they see in the world and acts on a point of connection, inspiration, hope, or wisdom to make a difference.

Go through the steps below and write down your answers.

What is something that whenever you encounter it, you want to look away because it strikes a chord within you? What is the pain, injustice, or disparity that you cannot stand to see?

It's useful to have this in writing so spend time journaling or making a list.



Learn about the challenges that are being experienced by that community or the people impacted by that issue, including yourself if you are directly affected.

You don't need to become an expert. The goal is to either understand enough that you can find the organizations working to address the root causes or find a leading organization working on the issue from which you can learn more.

For example, you do not need to become an oceanographer or chemist to learn that the starfish are washing up on this section of the beach because there's too much plastic in the water and too much agricultural runoff. Once you learn this information, you can find an organization working to make change, or you might find a leading organization helping starfish and learn that healing the ocean means removing plastics and addressing runoff.



STEP 3 | DECIDE HOW MUCH AND HOW OFTEN TO GIVE

Injustice often impacts how much money we have to give while also creating a feeling of scarcity and uncertainty no matter our financial situation. For many Jews in particular, antisemitism (which includes stereotypes about Jews and money) and violent histories of our ancestor's displacements have made it hard to talk openly and honestly about money or to part with the money we have.

- Explore your own feelings about giving: Ask yourself how and if your own history and associated feelings impact your giving. How can this awareness serve as a point of connection and inspiration for your giving?
- Based on the values and causes you identified above, create a plan of where to give and how much. Start with what feels possible.

Allow the deep well of Jewish traditions to offer guidance and reassurance as you consider how your giving to social justice takes shape.

The amount one should give to tzedakah: If one can afford it, enough to answer all the needs of the poor people. But if one cannot afford that much, then one should give up to a fifth of one's possessions. Which is doing the mitzvah* in an exceptional fashion—one tenth is an average percentage, and less is considered miserly. One should not give away more than a fifth, lest he or she ultimately become dependent on others.

כַּמָּה חֵיב לַתֵּן וְכִיצַד יִתְּנָהּ. וְבוֹ ט"ז סְעִיפִים:
שְׁעוֹר נְתִינָתָהּ אִם יְדוּ מִשְׁגָּת יִתֵּן כְּפִי צָרָה הָעֲנִיִּים וְאִם אֵין יְדוּ מִשְׁגָּת כֹּל כֶּף יִתֵּן
עַד חֲמִשׁ נְכֹסִיו מִצְוָה מִן הַמְּבֻחָר וְאַחַד מֵעֶשְׂרֵה מִדֶּה בִּינוּנִית פְּחוֹת מִכָּאן עַיִן רָעָה
וְחֲמִשׁ זֶה שְׂאֵמְרוּ שָׁנָה רֵאשׁוֹנָה מֵהַקָּרֵן מִכָּאן וְאֵילָף חֲמִשׁ שְׁהַרְוִיחַ בְּכֹל שָׁנָה: הֲגַה
וְאֵל יִבְזֶז אָדָם יוֹתֵר מִחֲמִשׁ שְׁלֹא יִצְטָרֵף לְבָרִיּוֹת.

Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 249:1

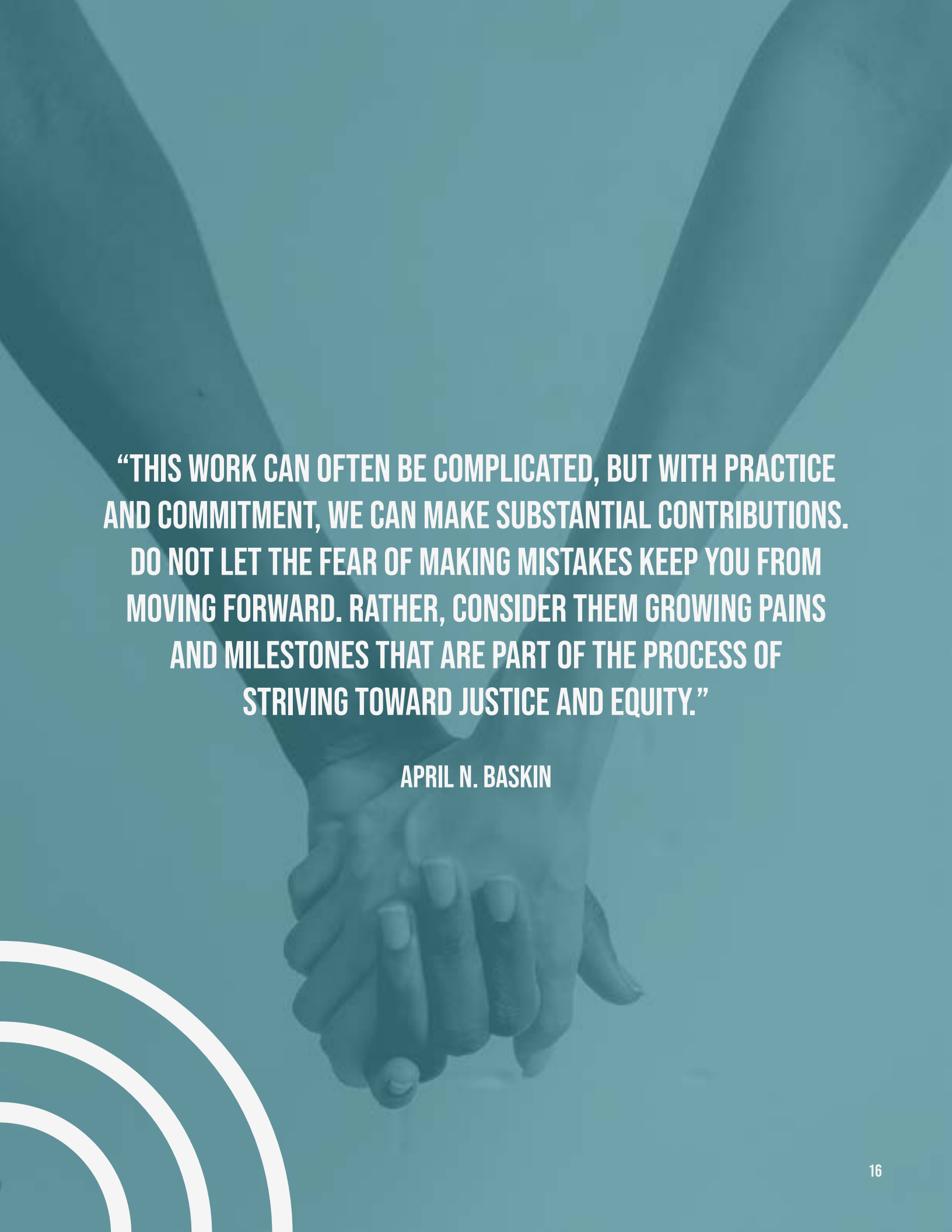
*Mitzvah literally means a commandment. Colloquially this is often used to mean any good deed. The plural of mitzvah is mitzvot.

STEP 4 | DECIDE WHERE TO GIVE

There are so many organizations that are doing important change work. It takes some digging to find smaller organizations, but is well worth the effort! Donations of any amount can make a big impact for a small organization and also offer more opportunity to develop a meaningful relationship with the staff and the work.

Ask yourself the following questions and allow your answers to guide your research and giving:

- Is it important to give to a Jewish organization? Some Jewish organizations are working toward social justice for Jews explicitly. Some organizations anchor their work in Jewish values and Jewish wisdom to support efforts on behalf of a wider community. Is this important to you?
 - ◇ Most local Jewish Federations provide direct support to local Jews and non-Jews alike, funding a wide range of work rooted in Jewish values and community. [Find your local Jewish Federation](#) and learn more.
 - ◇ Are you interested in supporting visibly Jewish organizations that work for justice for all people? If so, start with the [Jewish Social Justice Roundtable's list of affiliates](#).
 - ◇ Coalitions are often the way organizations work together on social justice issues. You can check out your local [Jewish Community Relations Council](#) to see where it's participating as a representative of the Jewish community.
- Is it important to donate directly to organizations doing social justice work or would you prefer to donate to a fund or organization that uses its unique expertise and connections to make grants to multiple organizations? This is a common model for Jewish Federations and social justice funds, like those in the [Giving Project Network](#). Start with what feels meaningful. A meaningful gift often feels a bit scary without impacting your ability to provide for your core needs.
- To find smaller organizations, look at the members of coalitions working on causes you care about or signatories on statements you agree with. Ask friends or look into where trusted leaders are giving.
- Is it important to give locally, nationally, or internationally?
 - ◇ If you're looking to give locally, show up to events, discussions, and actions to learn about organizations and the people involved.
 - ◇ If you're interested in international giving, start with the [Global Giving Guide](#).



“THIS WORK CAN OFTEN BE COMPLICATED, BUT WITH PRACTICE AND COMMITMENT, WE CAN MAKE SUBSTANTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS. DO NOT LET THE FEAR OF MAKING MISTAKES KEEP YOU FROM MOVING FORWARD. RATHER, CONSIDER THEM GROWING PAINS AND MILESTONES THAT ARE PART OF THE PROCESS OF STRIVING TOWARD JUSTICE AND EQUITY.”

APRIL N. BASKIN



NOW WHAT?

Rabbi Tarfon and some elders were reclining in an upper chamber in the house of Nitza in Lod when this question came up: **Which is greater, study or action?**

Rabbi Tarfon spoke up and said: Action is greater.

Rabbi Akiva spoke up and said: Study is greater.

The others then spoke up and said: Study is greater because it leads to action.

וכבר היה רבי טרפון וזקנים מסובין בעלית בית נתזה בלוד, נשאלה שאילה זו בפניהם:
תלמוד גדול או מעשה גדול? נענה רבי טרפון ואמר: מעשה גדול, נענה ר"ע ואמר: תלמוד
גדול, נענו כולם ואמרו: תלמוד גדול, שהתלמוד מביא לידי מעשה.

Kiddushin 40b:8

This guide has led you in study. Now it is time to take action. The rabbis also teach that we should not see some mitzvot as more valuable than others. Rather, we should see every action as noble, whole, and worthy. There are myriad possible actions you can take to advance justice. Here are a few suggestions:

- ⦿ Commit to allocating a portion of your giving to social justice causes.
- ⦿ Join the mailing lists of organizations that interest you to learn about their campaigns and potential gift-matching opportunities.
- ⦿ Start a [giving circle](#) that focuses on social justice issues or include a social justice grant in your existing giving circle's work.
- ⦿ Learn more about bringing social justice to philanthropy via [trust-based philanthropy](#), [grantmaking for racial equity](#), and [funding with a gender lens](#).
- ⦿ Share this guide with your family, friends, and colleagues.
- ⦿ Check out [Amplifier](#) and the [Jewish Social Justice Roundtable](#) to learn more.

EXTRA RESOURCES

Amplifier, powered by the **Jewish Federations of North America**, is an experiential learning lab for collaborative and democratized giving, rooted in Jewish values. We empower people to give more intentionally, more meaningfully, and in community, engaging more people in tzedakah and amplifying their impact.

The **Jewish Social Justice Roundtable** is a network of US Jewish organizations. Our mission is to strengthen and align the Jewish social justice field in order to make justice a core expression of Jewish life and help create an equitable world. We have a collective vision—that we are working toward a loving, caring, and equitable world in which power is shared and all are free from injustice. In this world, we live out our Jewish traditions of justice, embrace the beauty and multiplicity of Jewish identities, overcome past and present oppressions, and trust in ourselves, one another, and our partners to pursue justice together.

J.E.D.I. (Jewish Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) supports the Jewish communal ecosystem in creating a culture of belonging for all Jews and their loved ones while building bridges across socially and culturally diverse communities. With a multi-prong approach, J.E.D.I.'s Theory of Change simultaneously focuses on three complementary fields of work each with its own projects and programs to measure our change and impact: Education, Engagement, and Empowerment.

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