



For a Jewish Life Built On Everyone's Contribution!

ROLE MODELS

RATIONALE

Role models provide inspiration to help us to reach our aspirational goals. When role models are found within our own communities, we can connect with them on a personal level. They may share similar values, religions, upbringings and even worldviews. This exercise introduces participants to some Jewish social activists who can be a source of inspiration and illuminate some of the strategies which are used to achieve change. It follows well from the discussion on the story of Moses, demonstrating the different fields of activism through real-life examples.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- To learn about past and present activists in the Jewish community
- To analyse what motivated them to act
- To identify some social change strategies
- To reflect on the role that Judaism may have had in driving the role models' activist goals or methods
- To analyze if they acted within and/or from and/or for the Jewish community

REQUIREMENTS

Materials

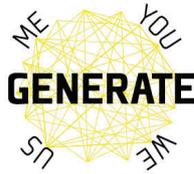
- Role Model Profile printouts for every participant
- Flip charts
- Markers

Time

- 1 ½ hours

DIRECTIONS

1. In advance of the activity, write on the Flip Chart the following questions:
 - What qualities characterized this person?
 - How did s/he relate to Judaism/Jewish community?
 - What needs motivated/drove them to action?
 - What kind of activism did s/he engage in?
 - What tools/tactics did they use to change/evolve the situation to address the need?
2. Explain the rationale of the activity to the participants.
3. Divide them in small groups so that each group can examine one role model profile.



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4. After approximately 20 minutes, ask each group to elect one person to share about the role model they examined. Ask the presenter to introduce their person as though they are introducing themselves, saying “I am...”. Encourage them to think dramatically and not simply read the profile to the group.
5. After each presentation is made, invite the group to ask any questions they have for this person. Of course, it is important to acknowledge that the “actor/presenter” and the group as a whole may not have the answers at that time, but it is interesting to note the questions anyhow.
6. Encourage participants to look for further information after the training. Website links at the bottom of each profile provide more on each role model. Copies of the profiles from the other groups can also be distributed.
7. Engage the group in a conversation using the following questions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Are there any particular profiles from those that we looked at that inspire you more? Why?
2. What kind of change were they acting for?
3. Did you recognize yourself in any of these people?
4. Did the role models do Jewish activism? What makes activism Jewish?
5. Are there other Jewish activist role models that you can tell us about?
6. What have you learned from this activity?



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SAUL ALINSKY



Saul Alinsky was an agnostic Jew for whom religion of any kind held very little importance and little relation to the focus of his life's work: the struggle for economic and social justice, for human dignity and human rights, and for the alleviation of the sufferings of the poor and downtrodden. His methods have long been considered controversial and it is perhaps for this reason that the Jewish world has never trumpeted its connection to the late Saul Alinsky, father of modern community organizing. Still, when asked what his religion or ethnicity was, he would say he is Jewish.

Born to Russian-Jewish parents in Chicago in 1909, Saul Alinsky was a Communist/Marxist sympathizer who helped establish the tactics of confrontation—that have been central to revolutionary political movements in the United States in recent decades.

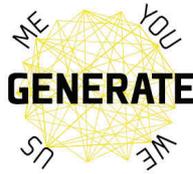
Saul Alinsky had a colourful history. While studying criminology as a graduate student at the University of Chicago, he became friendly with Al Capone and his mobsters. Ryan Lizza, senior editor of *The New Republic*, offers a glimpse into Alinsky's personality: "Charming and self-absorbed, Alinsky would entertain friends with stories—some true, many embellished—from his mob days for decades afterward. He was profane, outspoken, and narcissistic, always the center of attention despite his tweedy, academic look and thick, horn-rimmed glasses."

Despite these characteristics, according to Lizza, "Alinsky was deeply influenced by the great social science insight of his times, one developed by his professors at Chicago: that the pathologies of the urban poor were not hereditary but environmental. This idea, that people could change their lives by changing their surroundings, led him to take an obscure social science phrase—'the community organisation'—and turn it into, in the words of Alinsky biographer Sanford Horwitt, 'something controversial, important, even romantic.' "

He identified a set of specific rules for ordinary citizens to follow – "The 12 rules for radicals", and tactics for them to employ, as a means of gaining public power. His motto was: "The most effective means are whatever will achieve the desired results."

In the late 1930s, Saul Alinsky earned a reputation as a master organizer of the poor when he organized the "Back of the Yards" area in Chicago, an industrial and residential, ethnic minority neighbourhood on the Southwest Side of the city. In 1940, Alinsky established the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), through which he and his staff expanded his methods of community organizing throughout the United States. IAF remains an active entity to this day, with national headquarters located in Chicago and affiliates in the District of Columbia, twenty-one separate states, and three foreign countries (Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom).

However, by the late 1960s, the Black Power movement drove Alinsky and his organizing crusades out of the African-American neighbourhoods in the projects, leaving him no choice but to shift his focus to predominantly white, middle class communities and establish the Citizens Action Programme (CAP) in 1970. As Stanley Kurtz writes in his 2010 book *Radical in Chief*, "Alinsky was...convinced that large-scale socialist transformation would require an alliance between the struggling middle



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class and the poor. The key to radical social change, Alinsky thought, was to turn the wrath of America's middle class against large corporations."

"[W]e are concerned," Alinsky elaborated, "with how to create mass organisations to seize power and give it to the people; to realize the democratic dream of equality, justice, peace, cooperation, equal and full opportunities for education, full and useful employment, health, and the creation of those circumstances in which men have the chance to live by the values that give meaning to life. We are talking about a mass power organisation which will change the world ... This means revolution."

Alinsky's tactics were often unorthodox. In *Rules for Radicals*, Alinsky wrote that "the job of the organizer is to manoeuvre and bait the establishment so that it will publicly attack him as a 'dangerous enemy,'" thus generating public attention, validating the cause and increasing the credentials of the organizer.

Further information

<http://www.discoverthenetworks.org/individualProfile.asp?indid=2314>

http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/new_york/saul_alinskys_moment_o



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RACHEL AZARIA



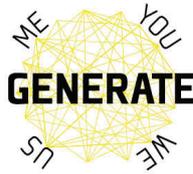
After 10 years working among activists promoting environmentalism and Jewish law concerning women's rights, Rachel Azaria, a Jewish politician, established the Yerushalmim political party in Jerusalem in 2008. Now as the councilwoman representing the party, she promotes a pluralistic and diverse future for Jerusalem and primarily represents the religious and secular youth of Jerusalem.

Azaria has led many campaigns for pluralism in Jerusalem, such as the campaign against segregation of women in the public sphere as well as the Kosher restaurants revolt against the Rabbinat certification. Azaria represented young families in the "Imahot Protest" in Jerusalem in the summer of 2011, in which she fought to bring free education to children ages three and up, a right that holds personal value as she has four children of her own.

While Azaria never planned on getting into politics, she now finds herself firmly ensconced in the field. Perhaps this is due to her firm belief that: "you can't just give up on Jerusalem; it's not an option." She switched her title from Deputy Mayor to a member of a new party in the Knesset, formed in November 2015 by former Likud minister, Moshe Kahlon. Among her current goals are her plans to upgrade playgrounds with better equipment, get Jerusalem's sanitation trucks to collect garbage at night, create an adequate number of preschools for the capital's kids, ensure that all train platforms offer shade to waiting passengers, create bike stands and easy access for commuters, etc, all in addition to her fight against gender segregation, empowering secular Jerusalemites and changing the face of urban planning.

Having had an Orthodox upbringing, Azaria now works to encourage a better relationship between secular and Orthodox Jerusalemites. She has recently held successful secular Shabbat events about which she says: "When we started the Shabbat events for secular families, everyone was amazed that so many people showed up. They didn't think there was anyone like them in the city. It has to do with the way you perceive yourself, and in Jerusalem, it's about the way the non-Orthodox are starting to perceive themselves as they really are. Secular Jerusalemites had nothing to do in this city on Shabbat and we have to let them have what they need. Jerusalem was always a city filled with social activism but it's become even more intense over the past few years. That's what we do in Jerusalem. There is power in the system. I spent a decade in social change organisations and four years on the city council and I got more done in my first year in the city council than in the previous decade.

In addition to religious and secular tolerance, Azaria works tirelessly against the culturally-entrenched sexism that plagues Jerusalem. She is credited with bringing the now often used term, *hadarat nashim*—exclusion of women—from the women's studies textbooks to the frontlines of Israeli society. Recently, for example, she fought against religious extremism in order to keep images of women in advertisements on the sides of Jerusalem's buses. However, the bus company Egged refused to resolve the situation and instead avoided the issue all-together by removing all images of humans from bus advertisements. According to Azaria, this is because "there's a very



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strong link between Egged and the radical ultra-Orthodox, a lot of behind the-scenes work. Now they're using that power for segregation and the removal of women from the public sphere."

Azaria has fought to battle sexism on all fronts, particularly calling to question religious extremism. "For a while, the Israeli public wrote off the Rabbanut, relegated its relevancy to the religious and ultra-orthodox sectors alone. However, many Israelis are coming to the realization that the Chief Rabbinate significantly affects all our lives through marriage, divorce, burial, kashrut, Shabbat, and more. Someone is making concrete decisions, and we have absolved ourselves of responsibility for ensuring that someone who shares our values be involved. It should come as no surprise that the Chief Rabbis don't really reflect the majority of Israelis. After all, they are largely elected by other ultra-orthodox rabbis, with almost no female representatives. It is perfectly logical that the newly elected Chief Rabbis reflect the Haredi –strictly Orthodox - world. That's just how it's done.

"They seem to fear the effect that women would have over the process. At the same time, the female, Zionist, religious world is undergoing a true feminist revolution, marked by struggles and changes in consciousness and values...We are re-defining the system, the power relations, and the internal dynamics. I have no doubt that if women were included in the Rabbinate's electoral body, the end result would have been completely different."

Azaria's social efforts and powerful rhetoric distinguish her as a modern and progressive Jewish politician and a champion of a more tolerant future for Jerusalem.

Further information

<http://www.jewishpress.com/sections/jewess-press/impact-women-history/rachel-azaria-yerushalmim-jerusalemites/2014/02/07/>

<http://blogs.forward.com/sisterhood-blog/190645/rachel-azaria-deputy-mayor-of-holy-town/>

<http://www.voiceofisrael.com/meet-jerusalem-deputy-mayor-knesset-candidate-rachel-azaria/>



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DR. ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL



Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel was born in 1907 in Warsaw, Poland to a devout Jewish family and was the namesake and descendent of two preeminent rabbis in Eastern Europe. He received his PhD in 1933 from the University of Berlin and a liberal rabbinic ordination from the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums in 1934.

In 1938, he was arrested by the Gestapo and deported back to Poland where he taught at the University of Warsaw. With the help of a friend, he obtained a visa to go to London, narrowly missing the German invasion of Poland by six months. His family was not so lucky. Heschel's sister Esther was killed in a German bombing. His mother was murdered by the Nazis, and two other sisters, Gittel and Devorah, died in Nazi concentration camps. Heschel would never again return to Poland or Germany.

His experience during the Holocaust would be a major influence on his life's work. He had seen first-hand what racism and apathy could do, and how violence towards human beings often began with the abuse of language. Hitler, he would later say, did not come to power with tanks and machine guns, but with words.

Despite the tragedies he had witnessed Heschel would never blame God. According to Father Daniel Berrigan, who knew Heschel well: "I was seeing someone who was totally immersed in his own religious tradition and was at the same time charmingly ecumenical...and open to others...The two went together...if you were a person of deep faith you were open to others and you didn't draw lines or boundaries or say we're inside the circle and others are out."

It was upon moving to New York City in the mid-1940s that Dr. Heschel would become a prominent social activist. He campaigned for the rights of Jews in the Soviet Union, and at the Vatican Council II, as representative of American Jews, Heschel persuaded the Roman Catholic Church to eliminate or modify passages in its liturgy that demeaned the Jews, or referred to an expected conversion to Christianity. He published theological works in the 1950s that argued that religious experience is a fundamentally human impulse, not just a Jewish one. He believed that no religious community could claim a monopoly on religious truth.

In his opening address at the National Conference on Religion and Race in Chicago on 14 January 1963, at which Martin Luther King Jr. was also a featured speaker, Heschel maintained that Americans had the chance to find redemption through their efforts to combat racism: "Seen in the light of our religious tradition, the Negro problem is God's gift to America, the test of our integrity, a magnificent spiritual opportunity." Heschel also viewed ecumenism as the necessary means to attack this social ill.

A social consciousness infused with an ecumenical approach brought Heschel and King together again on 19 November 1963, when both men addressed the United Synagogue of America's Golden Jubilee Convention in New York. King expressed his deep accord with Heschel's cause—which was to stand against the Soviet Union's treatment of its Jewish population—by restating his own view that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." King stated that he could not neglect the plight of his "brothers and sisters who happen to be Jews in Soviet Russia." In March 1965, Heschel responded to King's call for religious leaders to join the Alabama voting rights



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march from Selma to Montgomery march for voting rights. The march was spiritually fulfilling for Heschel, and he recalled feeling like his “legs were praying” as he walked next to King.

Dr. Heschel would remain devout to his religion until his death in 1972. “My being Jewish,” he once said, “is so sacred to me that I am ready to die for it.” His notable activism in the fight for civil rights went hand-in-hand with his religion. As he once said, “God is either the father of all men or of no man, and the idea of judging a person in terms of black or brown or white is an eye disease.”

Further information

<http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/heschel-religion-and-race-speech-text/>

<http://pbs.org/wnet/eligionandethics/2008/01/18/january-18-2008-abraham-joshua-heschel/1789/>

http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/about_king/encyclopedia/heschel_abraham.html



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RUTH MESSINGER



Ruth Messinger is a New Yorker through and through. She “[walks] fast, [talks] fast, [thinks] fast and, most importantly, [stands] up fast when the best interests of [her] city are being sold down the river.” Born in 1940 on the Upper West Side, Messinger worked tirelessly throughout the 1990s in the public service in New York City to fight for women’s and minority rights.

During her years as the Manhattan Borough President, Messinger noted that, while there was an increase in the percentage of women that held such positions, there was still a distinctive discrimination in the financial support of political donors as well as the treatment of herself by colleagues. One of her colleagues would ask “all sorts of questions and then, at the end of our conversation, when I push for a response, says, ‘Of course you can have a hearing. I can never say no to a pretty girl.’”

She became the first woman to get the Democratic Party’s nomination for the mayoral race in 1997, which she lost to Rudy Giuliani. However, her role in the public sphere was far from over. She became the President and Executive Director of the American Jewish World Service (AJWS), an organisation which dedicates itself on fulfilling “Judaism’s imperative to pursue justice.” Through this organisation she has worked to alleviate poverty, hunger and disease in the developing world.

Messinger is well known for her leadership in the movement to end genocide in Darfur and her efforts to give voice to women and LGBT communities in the developing world. She has helped mobilize faith-based communities throughout the U.S. to speak out on the global plight of marginalized people. She served on the Obama administration’s Task Force on Global Poverty and Development and now sits on the State Department’s Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group.

Heading successful campaigns for human rights, Ruth Messinger works for the betterment of conditions for all people through the Jewish values instilled in her from a young age. “The expression ‘Never again’,” Messinger says, “cannot be reserved only for Jews.” Now in her 70s, she still fights inequality through AJWS as well as through the many NGOs she is active in, including Surprise Lake Camp, of which she is President. It is little surprise then that Ruth Messinger has been named numerous times as one of the 50 most influential Jews of the Year by Forward newspaper.

Further information

http://ajws.org/who_we_are/executive_team/ruth_messinger.html

<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/messinger-ruth>

<http://www.miriamscup.com/MessingerBiog.htm>



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ANITA DIAMANT



Anita Diamant was born in 1951, in Brooklyn, NY, the daughter of two Holocaust survivors who met as interned refugees in Switzerland. She had moved many times across the United States by the time she settled in Boston, Massachusetts where she received her first job writing as a journalist. During her time in Boston, she wrote for many different magazines including *Equal Times*, an alternative women's weekly and the *Boston Phoenix* where she worked as the assistant to the editor.

It was while working for an article on Jewish Renewal for the *Boston Phoenix* that she met Rabbi Laurence Kushner, who would convert Diamant's husband—then, fiancé—Jim. It was through her husband's conversion and learning of the Jewish faith that Diamant felt a renewal of interest in her religion. She proceeded to write many non-fiction Jewish books that were linked to her own experience in the faith: *Living a Jewish Life*; *The New Jewish Baby Book*; *Choosing a Jewish Life: A Handbook for People Converting to Judaism*; *Saying Kaddish: How to Mourn as a Jew*; *How to Be a Jewish Parent: A Practical Handbook for Family Life*; and the *New Jewish Wedding-Revised and Updated*.

Anita Diamant has gained notice, however, from her novels. In 1997, she published a *New York Times* bestseller in which she gave voice to one of the silent female figures in the Bible, Dinah. *The Red Tent* was adapted into a two-part miniseries by Lifetime, which was released in December 2014. Her other novels also have links to Judaism. *Good Harbor*, published in 2001, is a character reflection of her own experience as a mother and wife within the secular Jewish community. It explores the dynamics of being born into the faith as well as being a convert. Her most recent novel, *The Boston Girl*, depicts a fictional account of a girl growing up at the turn of the 20th century to strict Russian Jewish immigrants and the dynamics that arose because of it.

When Anita Diamant is not writing, she is the founding president of *MayyimHayyim: Living Water Community Mikveh and Education Center*, a community-based ritual bath in Newton, Massachusetts. Mikveh has a rich history in the Jewish culture and Diamant wants to bring resurgence to the tradition. At *MayyimHayyim*, people are welcome to immerse to commemorate a wide variety of transitions and occasions: prior to reading Torah for the first time, before or after surgery, on the occasion of being ordained a rabbi, or becoming a grandparent, or reaching the age of 40, or 50, or 85. Regarding Mikveh, Diamant has said, "We wanted a return to the beautiful roots of the Mikveh—of water as a source of renewal purification and transformation, to open the door wide and make it welcoming."

Further information

<http://www.thejc.com/arts/arts-interviews/28718/interview-anita-diamant>

http://www.interfaithfamily.com/arts_and_entertainment/popular_culture/Interview_with_Anita_Diamant_Author_of_Good_Harbor.shtml

<http://anitadiamant.com/bio/biography/>