



AVODAH Anti-Racism Training
Unit 1: Orientation
(Developed by Rabbi Alissa Wise)

Total time: 5 hours

Goals:

- To give participants the opportunity to reflect on their own racial identity and experience
- To give participants the opportunity to reflect on what they were taught and told about race and what their beliefs about race are
- To give participants a framework and analysis that examines the structural nature of oppression, the personal implications of oppression and privilege, and the interconnection of oppressions
- To practice skills that lead to concrete action and incorporating anti-racism into their lives and service work with AVODAH

Outcomes:

- Corps members will have a basis of common language with which to discuss and process their experiences related to race during the AVODAH year
- Corps members will have a basic understanding of dynamics of privilege and oppression as they relate to race
- Corps members will have learned at least one anti-racism related skill that they can put to use in their work during AVODAH

Suggested Activities:

Setting the tone:

Welcome

- Go-around: names, preferred gender pronoun, racial identification and one thing you like about being your race (15 minutes)

Group agreements

- Speak from your own experience
- Lean into discomfort
- Use everything for your learning
- Inquiry/curiosity

Text Study

- Text Study from Mesillat Yesharim/The Paths of the Just (see below)
- Anti-racism is a practice, not something you discuss once and never return to, so today we will come to this workshop with this intention, of returning to it as a practice

Storytelling

- Turn to a partner and tell each other a story about how you were taught about race, racial difference, racism, etc growing up. What was taught in school? What movies were formative? What did your parents teach you?
- Each partner, 4 minutes

- Then 2 sets of partners match up and share stories amongst the 4 of them

Creating a framework to understand oppression:

Continuums of oppression

- Have several lines with arrows drawn on to the paper, each line labeled "racism, sexism, classism, anti-Semitism, etc (have all continuums or just a few up)
- On one end of the continuums have a label "jokes" and at the other end "genocide/murder"
- Ask people to fill in the continuum with examples. I generally ask the people who experience the oppression to answer either first, or be the only ones to answer (again, this is delicate and important to navigate). So for example, under sexism you might have someone say "people think women are not as smart as men" or for anti-Semitism someone might volunteer "assimilation".
- After the one or three or all continuums are filled (and often) Facilitator will fill one or two and then make a statement like "each oppression is unique and has it's own specific examples that would go on it's line. And, you can see that there are also some similarities in terms of jokes, stereotypes, assault, etc.

Overview of 3 types of oppression

- Introduce Internal, Interpersonal and Institutional oppression
 - Get folks to give examples of each
- Points to make:
 - Oppressions are interconnected. Impossible to engage one without engaging all of them as a web, as a system. And, people in this group experience multiple oppressions and so in real life, not just theory, we see that these things are always interacting with one another in various combinations.
 - Oppression is about violence- it is violence, even the jokes
 - The violence is institutional, not just individual or personal
 - Victim blaming- the violence isn't our fault if we are the targets of oppression
 - We can heal from the violence- individually and as a community. And together we can make change.

Pair and share

- What messages did you get about your own race?
- What messages did you get about other races?
- What do you believe about racism—how it works, how we can an end it, what your role is?

Historical overview

- Short history of Imperialism (interactive map activity) -30 minutes
- White supremacy in the US timeline - 15 minutes
- Jews and Whiteness timeline- 15 minutes
- Housing and race timeline (as a case study for how – 15 minutes
- Open discussion – 15 minutes

Taking action to interrupt racism:

Introduction to section

- Bermuda Triangle of Privilege
 - Guilt Responsibility
 - Avoidance Clarity
 - Entitlement Accountability

- Traps (pass around slips and have everyone read one or two)

Hassle Line

- Explain method was used in civil rights movement to prepare for sit-in's, protests, harassment etc
- Line up in two rows facing a partner. Give Person A line to say, and person B has to respond.

Scenarios

- Break into groups of 3, each are given a different scenario of things that have/could happen on the job during AVODAH (trying to avoid having people roleplay in someone else's race)
- <http://www.paulkivel.com/articles/guidelinesforbeingstrongwhiteallies.pdf>

Strategies for Action, Designing Interventions

- Give group time to talk it through and think it through:
 - **Analyze the situation.** Use the following questions as a guideline:
 - What are the racial dynamics? (individual, group and system level, mainstream/margin, social power and privilege, other power dynamics, history, cultural differences, intent vs. impact)
 - What are the feelings of the people involved?
 - What's the conflict / problem?
 - **Come up with a few possible intervention strategies/actions to take.** Use the following questions as a guideline:
 - What's your power / influence?
 - What are your goals – short term, long term?
 - What might your impact be – realistic, intended, unintended?
 - Are you coming from a 50/50, both/and consciousness?
 - ACT – What will you say or do? (Consider time and place)
 - What support will you need and how will you get it?
 - How will you evaluate your action?

Role play in front of entire group

- Have each group role play their scenario in front of the group and the group can freeze it and take the place of someone to change the outcome
- Instruct some to do exaggerated version of what isn't so helpful and then have folks break in to be clear about what is helpful

Closing:

Text Study

- Mussar for Racial Justice (see below)

Pair and Share

- What have you learned today? What you are feeling? What questions remain?

Go-around

- One principle you think is important to take with you into your service work.
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Scenarios

Scenario one:

Over dinner one night folks are talking about their days. Alex begins telling a story about one of his students and says, “her name is Tamika, or Jamika, one of those names, they’re all pretty similar, it doesn’t matter”. How do you respond to Alex?

Scenario two:

A co-worker comes back from an intake interview with a client and says to her co-workers, “I can’t believe that that client didn’t know that you need some form of ID to sign up for state-sponsored health insurance. Isn’t that obvious? How could they not know that?”. How do you respond to your co-worker?

Scenario three:

The annual report is coming out at your organization and your boss asks you to look it over. In it, they boast that they have a multi-racial staff that works collaboratively to address the urgent needs of the community and the direction of the organization’s work. You are surprised because the only people of color at the organization work as receptionists and cleaning staff, they do not inform the strategic direction of the organization. How do you offer that correction to your boss?

Scenario Four:

A Corps member is complaining on the subway ride home that as one of a few White, middle class, college-educated on staff at the organization she is working at, she feels a sense of exclusion from the staff culture and doesn’t feel accepted by their coworkers. She says that she thinks that if the organization wants people like them to stay working there that people need to be friendly and not so exclusionary. How do you respond to your housemate?

Scenario Five:

A corps member is talking at dinner one night about her frustrations at work. She says that the school she works at was trying to prepare low-income students of color for college but when she asked the girls what they wanted to do when they were older, they just wanted to become hair stylists and open a hair salon. How do you respond to your fellow corps member?

Common Traps when Confronting Racism

Bootstrap myth- "Racism is a thing of the past, it's a free country, anyone who works hard can make it in America"

Backtracking-"that's not what I meant, you took my words out of context"

Blaming the victim- "you are too sensitive, if you were not so vocal people would not pick on you"

Colorblindness- when we pretend race does not matter in a racist world we are protecting our privilege as people whom racism benefits

Reverse racism- "people of color are just as racist as White people". A myth. There is no such thing as reverse racism.

Being the "good White"- Distancing yourself from other White people who are more overtly offensive or don't know the "right" anti-racist things to say

I never owned slaves- we often hear individual blame whenever racism is brought up, so we react defensively without recognizing how we as a group and individuals benefit today from past and present forms of White supremacy

Bending over backwards- accepting everything a person of color says as truth, overcompensating because of your own guilt

Justifying- "but a person of color once treated me badly so my racism comes from personal experience"

Escapism- "but I'm oppressed too"--as a woman, a queer or transgender person, a young person, etc. This is also called making false parallels between your own oppression and racist oppression

Cultural appropriation- "but I'm down" this plays out in our speech, dress, style, spiritual practices, music, and the writing/arts we produce, buy, and value

I'm nothing without you- "teach me, help me" using people of color as your support network in inappropriate ways through your process of developing an anti-racist consciousness

Waiting for applause- thinking you should be considered heroic or special for doing anti-racist work

Smoke and mirrors- Using "pc" language, saying the "right" things and acting against racism when we want to appear "down". But never when there is any personal risk involved

The penitent- when out of guilt we are "sorry, sorry, sorry" without acting to change ourselves or the situation -

Some of my best friends- claiming we are not racist because some of our best friends are people of color

Mesillat Yesharim/ The Path of the Just
By: Rabbi Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto

From the Author's Introduction
Translation by Rabbi Ira F. Stone

The writer says: I have written this work not to teach people what they do not know, but to remind them of what they already know and is very evident to them, for you will find in most of my words only things which most people know, and concerning which they entertain no doubts. But to the extent that they are well known and their truths revealed to all, so is forgetfulness in relation to them extremely prevalent. It follows, then, that the benefit to be obtained from this work is not derived from a single reading; for it is possible that the reader will find that he or she has learned little after having read it that he or she did not know before. Its benefit is to be derived, rather, through review and persistent study, but which one is reminded of those things which by nature one is prone to forget and through which one is caused to take to heart the duty that we tend to overlook.

Mussar Toward Racial Justice

Prepared by: Alissa Wise for RRC Yom Iyyun Spring 2009/5769¹

Mussar has the potential to be a practice that supports those engaged in effective, spiritually-rich, justice-filled communities. Mussar speaks to all aspects of social justice work-- from how we engage with our colleagues in meetings, to how we internalize oppressions that we are working to dismantle. Mussar grounds racial justice work in a Jewish framework that goes beyond verses, quotes and teachings, to a daily practice that promotes accountability and sustainability for those engaged in justice-building work in our uncertain world.

Emet: Truth

Toward Accountability

Say nothing unless you are 100% sure it is true

- Where do you get your news and information about what is happening locally, nationally, globally?
- Who might be harmed but what you are about to say?
- Consider how your ego is involved

...And the Eternal God called to the adam, “where are you?”. And he answered: “I heard your voice and I was afraid because I was naked and I hid”.

- Breishit 3:9-10

Social change begins when we refuse to hide like the *adam*, but instead confront the question “*Ayecha?*” where are you? Working as allies with people of color-led organizations begins with learning how to identify racism and see its impact on public (work) and personal relationships.

Action step: Take time for reflection, for mussar. Where are you? How has racism impacted your life? The lives of your loved ones? Your communities? Your neighborhoods? Who is impacted and hurt by racism?

Anavah: Humility

Toward Curiosity

Seek wisdom from everyone

- Consider how much space you take up in meetings and social interactions.
- Consider whose voices you trust and whose you don't. Why? What is it about them that makes you skeptical?
- How do you hear about the experiences of those directly affected by oppression?

“I can't talk fellowship to you who are gathered here. Too much blood has been spilled. I know from experience it is up to the working people to save themselves. And the only way is through a strong working class movement.”

- Rose Schneiderman

Schneiderman, a Jewish labor organizer, spoke these words in 1911 in the weeks after 146 primarily Jewish immigrant women were killed in the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire in New York City. Schneiderman was speaking to a group of upper-middle-class women who

¹ Adapted from a document originally created for Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (www.jfrej.org) by Alissa Wise and Rabbi Elliott Kukla

were seeking to help by campaigning to change labor laws without consulting working people about their own needs.

We dismantle racism, like class oppression, when we lift up marginalized voices; when we begin by asking questions, instead of providing answers; hearing from others about their experiences before we speak.

Action step: Examine who is speaking at public events in your community. Are you creating the space for people of color and other oppressed people to tell their own stories?

Savlanut: Patience

Toward shared power

Do not aggravate a situation with wasted grief

- Consider how you do or do not assume goodwill. What keeps you from doing so?
- Consider what you fear and why. Where did you learn to fear?
- Consider where and how you are holding onto anger

“Two people held a beam and transferred it to the public domain. Since none of them had the strength to perform this task alone, and they performed it together from beginning to end, they are both considered responsible”

- Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Shabbat* 1:16

Jewish law teaches that our actions can intermingle together to create a more powerful whole. This is the essence of koach, “power with”, as opposed to hierarchical “power over”. Racial justice is based on altering power relations in the way we work together as well as in our over-all goals.

Action step: When partnering with people of color led organizations, make sure the representatives from each organization have input into creating the agenda, inviting participation, and sharing facilitation. Notice who speaks and if the language that is being used is familiar to everyone, and whose ideas are publicly acknowledged and valued. Think about how the room is arranged, what food is available and if childcare will be provided. Attending to these practical details is part of the spiritual practice toward fostering shared power and respect for all participants.

Tzedek: Righteousness

Toward Collective Liberation

What is hateful to you do not do to others

- Really try to bring this into every interaction throughout your day. Really try. Keep trying.
- How do you think that your liberation is distinct from another’s?
- How do you feel when you are tokenized or objectified?

Uprooting racism is based on Hillel’s famous principle: “that which is hateful to you do not do to your neighbors”. However, as Hillel teaches, it is not enough to just repeat this formula—we must also take the time to learn more. To dismantle racism we must know the history of racism and resistance, as well as the needs and aspirations of those with class and race backgrounds that are different from our own.

“No one is free until we are all free”—Rev. Dr. MLK Jr.

Our actions impact each other. Racism is harmful for everyone regardless of race. It confines and constricts the way we interact with our neighbors, raise our children, move through our streets and inhabit our world. The liberation of all people is bound up together, so we must work together to reach it.

Action step: Leverage your power and your community/congregation's power to be a voice for change by joining forces with local, grassroots groups led by low-income people, immigrants, and people of color to win concrete changes in people's daily lives.

Jews and Whiteness Timeline

Prepared by Rabbi Alissa Wise with [How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America](#) by Karen Brodtkin

1870s- America obsessed with setting racial boundaries, and Jews use racial language to describe Jewish difference.

1898- Moves away by Jewish leaders from racial language. Rabbi Isaac M. Wise, leader in the Reform movement says: Caucasians form one race...whatever the ancestral derivation of a family may be if it lived continually in the United States, its members after one or at most two generations can only be classed generically as of the American

race. The term Anglo-Saxon is broad enough to encompass all those who had cast their lot with the British or Americans.

1900- German Jews (earlier immigrants) look down on Russian immigrants. Spend time, energy, and money, disassociating, educating, insulting, etc.

1910-1950's- Jews are sports stars (particularly basketball and baseball) as one of the few avenues of advancement opportunities when quotas on education continue to exist.

1913- Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith founded --fights racialized images of Jews on stage, screen, and in literature.

1914- Chicago's Anti-Stage Jew Ridicule Committee pressures theater owner and managers to limit "racial" portrayals of Jews and promoted legislation to restrict certain characterizations of Jews onstage.

1947: "underneath surface differences, Jews, Catholics, Protestants all think alike"- *The Gentleman's Agreement* (a film)

1960s: Jews part of shaping white Americanness---J.D. Salinger, Philip Roth, Bernard Malamud were great American---not great Jewish---writers of the period.

WWI- General Americanization is encouraged among immigrant Jews, discouraging "Hebrew political clubs" or "Hebrew workingmen's clubs" since it might lead folks to suggest that Jews had "racial" interest different from those of other white Americans

1930's: Comic books become one of the most popular art forms, mostly written by Jews, underscoring traditional white, Christian masculinity. Jews and others are closeted except as the monster or other, who is revealed to have an inner whiteness and goodness.

Post WWII- philosemitism develops in the US—Jewish intellectuals, comedians, actors, food are embraced in the US, maybe out of guilt for blocking immigration, maybe because of horror/disgust post Nazi genocide

1940's: Eastern European immigrants benefit from GI bill, and FHA home mortgage laws to obtain cheap or free education, and low-interest home loans.

1950s: Jewish mother stereotype—strong, two-parent families, keeping sons away from bad influences and instilling protestant-like values, fathers at work, community organization involvement, white masculinity development in Ashkenazi Jewish men, part of GI bill benefits and post-war opportunities. Strong sentiment of pulling yourself up by your bootstrap. Jewish mothers seen as smothering, emasculating, self-centered, withholding, materialistic, asexual wives

1959: Barbie invented by Jews

1970s: JAP, Jewish American Princess starts to be used to refer to Jewish women—male projected nightmares about their own whiteness and consumer culture projected onto women

Housing and Institutional Racism Timeline

Developed by Rabbi Alissa Wise. Thanks also Katie Goldstein, Jennifer Miller, Cindy Greenberg and Circus Amok

Late 19th Century: Restrictive Covenants

In urban centers restrictive covenants, which first became popular in the late nineteenth century, created segregated neighborhoods. Such covenants took the form of [contracts](#) between home owners prohibiting

the sale of real estate to nonwhites and often to Jews, Blacks, and other ethnic groups. Because these covenants were private agreements, there appeared to be no direct [state](#) action in creating segregated neighborhoods and thus no violation of the [Fourteenth](#) Amendment. Such covenants were especially common in the North, where segregation was often illegal. For example, both [Michigan](#) and Illinois prohibited segregation, but in [Detroit](#) and Chicago, restrictive covenants created neighborhoods segregated by race and ethnicity.

Langston Hughes from Chicago's South Side:

*Folks fly.
Even every foreigner
That can move, moves*

1930s: Redlining

In 1934, President Roosevelt's New Deal government created the Home Owners' Loan Corporation to help families whose homes were threatened by widespread bank collapses during the Great Depression. Using racial criteria to determine lending and insurance risks, the Corporation created color-coded maps of American cities that was based on Philadelphia. Wealthy, mostly white neighborhoods were outlined in green, and poor and mostly black neighborhoods were outlined in red. Following the government's lead, banks and insurance companies refused to give mortgages to families who fell inside the red lines.

Without loans and insurance, these neighborhoods couldn't have the investment and development needed and instead, all that infrastructure support flowed out to the suburbs, leaving these older urban neighborhoods behind.

It wasn't until 1968 that the federal government finally outlawed redlining and passed legislation intended to help low-income people become homeowners.

1934: Federal Housing Administration

The federal banking system was restructured and the Federal Housing Administration was created. Its intent was to regulate the rate of interest and the terms of mortgages that it insured. These new lending practices increased the number of people who could afford a down payment on a house and monthly debt service payments on a mortgage, thereby also increasing the size of the market for single-family homes.

Charles Abrams says: "A government offering such bounty to builders and lender could have required compliance with a nondiscrimination policy. Or the agency could at least have pursued a course of evasion, or hidden behind the screen of local autonomy. Instead, FHA adopted a racial policy that could well have been culled from the Nuremburg laws. From its inception FHA set itself up as the protector of the all white neighborhood. It sent its agents in two the field to keep Negroes and other minorities from buying houses in white neighborhoods"

1960s-1980s: Urban Renewal

Urban renewal typically involves the destruction of businesses, the relocation of people, and the use of [eminent domain](#) as a legal instrument to reclaim private property for city-initiated development projects. The justifications often used for Urban Renewal include the "renewal" of residential [slums](#), [blighted](#) commercial and industrial areas. In the 1960s James Baldwin dubbed Urban Renewal "Negro Removal".

In the second half of the 20th century, renewal often resulted in the creation of [urban sprawl](#) and vast areas of cities being demolished and replaced by [freeways and expressways](#), [housing projects](#), and vacant lots, many of which still remain vacant at the beginning of the 21st century.

Robert Moses took a meat ax to the Bronx with the displacement hundreds of thousands (500,000) of working class tenants to create the Cross Bronx Expressway. Robert Moses displaced hundreds of thousands of tenants throughout NYC and also built most public housing developments. He purposefully made the developments look ugly and have little sunlight as a way to punish the poor. Most public housing in NYC was originally for white working class tenants coming back from the war, but then

during the 1970s and 80s the demographics shifted towards more people of color living in Public Housing developments.

1974: Rent Regulation

The strong tenant movement in NYC sees its rewards through establishing the system of rent-regulation which guarantees that tenants live in an apartment where the rent is regulated, they have a guaranteed lease renewal (can't be kicked out of their apartment), and don't have to pay their full rent if the landlord is not doing full repairs. New York City is the only city left in the United States that still has rent-regulation and it is currently heavily under attack.

Past Decade: Subprime Lending and Gentrification

Subprime lending, virtually unrestricted over the past decade by local, state or federal regulation, has trapped millions of unsuspecting homeowners who sought either to purchase a larger home or to consolidate debt. Subprime loans were initially created for borrowers with low incomes or poor credit histories who were unable to obtain prime loans at a standard bank rate. Many borrowers who would have been able to qualify for credit on better terms, however, were targeted for these higher-interest loans. More than three-quarters of all subprime loans are Adjustable Rate Mortgages (ARMs), which have rates that automatically increase after two years. Lenders often consider only whether the starting payments are affordable, not the later payments, which are much higher. Because so many subprime loans were made with adjustable rates or interest-only payments, the payments are just now beginning to rise and thus become unaffordable. As long as home prices continued to rise, homeowners could continue to refinance or even sell their homes at a profit. But home prices have leveled off or even dropped, leaving homeowners who face foreclosure with fewer options.

Nonwhites are much more likely than whites to receive a subprime loan when refinancing. In 2001, more than one out of four, 27.76% of all conventional refinance loans received by African-American homeowners were from subprime lenders, as were 13.60% of the refinance loans received by Latino homeowners, compared to 6.32% of the refinance loans received by white homeowners. In comparative terms, African-Americans were 4.4 times more likely to receive a subprime loan, and Latinos were 2.2 times more likely to do so.

Forces of Gentrification:

Gentrification: Gentrification is the changing class composition of a neighborhood. Intentional policies by cities and states try to make it less easy for low-income and communities of color to live in their neighborhoods and make it easier for a higher-income, usually white, population to move in. Many factors have been making up the phase of hyper-gentrification we are in right now:

- **Less Federal Money:** Disinvestment in public and subsidized housing
- **Criminalization of poverty:** Police target poor neighborhoods and methadone clinics using "quality of life" policing while the city cuts services in those communities
- **Privatization** of welfare services, parks, waterfront property and government subsidized housing.
- **Growing Gap between Rich and Poor.**
- **Loss of Subsidized and Regulated Housing**
- **Development and Rezoning**