

## RADICAL AMAZEMENT

### HOST INSTRUCTIONS:

- This guide is intended to be served on Shabbat.
- The language used for participants is guests. This is intentional. The deep questions asked assumes that the host is a friend and that the participants trust the Host and are treated as guests in their home.
- Likewise, the language used for the person leading the Shabbat is host rather than facilitator or leader. Yes, you are to guide the conversation but you should be as much a part of the conversation as you are guiding it.
- The conversations intended are intense and deep. It is up to the host to ensure that the atmosphere is casual but safe and encouraging towards participation.
- Questions posed are a suggestion. Not all questions need to be asked, nor do each set of questions need to be asked. However, the questions set with the main are connected to the theme.
- The host should encourage guests to open up facilitation and ask questions to the group as well.
- There are no time limits for conversation once the Shabbat dinner begins. Conversation should flow freely and not be impeded by time limits. Likewise, If there is silence after a question, that is okay. Some of these texts and questions may take time to process and it's okay to embrace this silence.
- Not all conversation should be centered on the guide. It is ok to veer off-topic. This dinner should be as social as it is educational and introspective.

**Serves 5 - 10 guests**

## Conversation 1 – To be served with the pre-dinner schmooze

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Start question once two guests have arrived. Continue asking the question to new guests/ inviting new guests into the conversation. Allow talking about the question to continue until max 10 minutes after the final guest arrives.

- **What was the last situation in which you felt amazed, or an overwhelming sense of awe?**

### **Setting the atmosphere – to be served with the pre-dinner rituals (Candle-lighting; Shalom Aleichem; Kiddush; Washing; Hamoitzzi etc. as per your custom)**

Inform/ remind guests that this dinner is not a normal Shabbat dinner - that it is meant to inform deep conversation about beliefs that many hold personal and can only be successful if people both share what is personal, and respect the personal that is shared. Further, that conversation is to be free-flowing and that questions are only a guide – guests are encouraged to ask their own questions based off of rituals, question stimuli, and the answers of others so long as it is a question for the whole table and not just individuals. Additionally, guests should also be encouraged to empower and make space for softer and more introverted voices without singling anyone out.

## Conversation 2 – To be served with Challah and Appetizers

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**Instructions: Allow a different person to read each text first then follow with the questions. Allow conversation to continue until the vibe peaks.**

**Stimulus 1** – *More than the Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews.* – Quote by Secular Jewish thinker and cultural Zionist Ahad Ha'am

**Stimulus 2** – Edgar Bronfman – Secular Jewish Philanthropist

*'Shabbat, above all, underscores the idea that 'being' is as important as 'doing'.*

**Stimulus 3** – *'The Sabbath Lie'* by Yahuda Amichai - Secular Jewish Writer

*On Friday, at twilight of a summer day  
While the smells of food and prayer rose from every house  
And the sound of the Sabbath angels' wings was in the air,  
While still a child I started to lie to my father:  
"I went to another synagogue."*

*I don't know if he believed me or not  
But the taste of the lie was good and sweet on my tongue  
And in all the houses that night  
Hymns rose up along with lies  
To celebrate the Sabbath.  
And in all the houses that night*

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*Sabbath angels died like flies in a lamp,  
And lovers put mouth to mouth,  
Blew each other up until they floated upward,  
Or burst.*

*And since then the lie has been good and sweet on my tongue  
And since then I always go to another synagogue.  
And my father returned the lie when he died:  
“I’ve gone to another life.”*

## Suggested Questions

- What did you connect to in these texts?
- What did you find troubling?
- These three writers were secular Jews, meaning they didn’t necessarily believe in the G-d described in the Torah. Can you really appreciate Shabbat without believing in G-d or the story of creation?
- What do you appreciate about Shabbat?

## Conversation 3 – To be served with the Main

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### **Stimulus 1** – Albert Einstein, Inventor/Philosopher

*There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.*

### **Stimulus 2** – Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel –20th Century Jewish Philosopher

*As civilization advances, the sense of wonder declines. Such decline is an alarming symptom of our state of mind. Mankind will not perish for want of information, but only for want of appreciation. The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living. What we lack is not a will to believe but a will to wonder.*

*Awareness of the divine begins with wonder...Wonder or radical amazement, the state of maladjustment to words and notions, is, therefore, a prerequisite for an authentic awareness of that which is.*

### **Stimulus 3** – Carl Sagan, Jewish Astronomer, Voyager 1 Mission

*The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every ‘superstar,’ every ‘supreme leader,’ every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there – on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.*

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## **Stimulus 4** – Moses, Devarim 7:17-21

Perhaps you might say in your heart, “These nations are more numerous than I; how can I dispossess them?” You shall not be afraid (lo tira) of them. You shall surely remember that which Hashem, your God, did to Pharaoh and to all of Egypt: The great tests which your eyes saw, and the signs and the wonders, and the strong hand, and the outstretched arm whereby Hashem, your God, brought you out—so will Hashem, your God, do to all the nations before whom you are afraid (yarei). Furthermore, Hashem, your God, will release the hornet against them, until the destruction of those who are left and those who hide themselves before you. You shall not be intimidated/frightened (lo ta’arotz) before them, because (ki) Hashem, your God, is in your midst, a God Who is mighty and feared (nora).

### **Suggested Questions**

- What makes you feel wonder, awe, or amazement?
- What role does curiosity and wonder play in your life when you are a child? How about as you grow up?
- Part of growing up is adjusting to your surroundings and building mental schemas that allow you to quickly comprehend what is happening around you. How can you retrain yourself to feel amazement?
- How might experiencing the world through the lens of radical amazement change your life?
- In Hebrew, the word yirah means both ‘fear’ and ‘awe.’ How do fear and awe intersect? How are they similar? How are they different? Does this change the way you think of the commandment to “fear Hashem?”

## **Conversation 4 – To be served with Dessert**

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### **Stimulus 1** – Edgar Bronfman

*‘Questioning, arguing, and even outright rebellion is integral to Judaism...Even when the perpetrator is G-d himself, we are invited to stand up, to challenge, to question and even chastise’*

### **Stimulus 2** – Stephen Jay Gould- Secular Jewish Scientist

*“Nothing is more dangerous than a dogmatic worldview - nothing more constraining, more blinding to innovation, more destructive of openness to novelty.”*

### **Suggested questions:**

- What are these quotes trying to say?
- Do you agree with Bronfman – Does Judaism allow G-d to be questioned, challenged and even chastised?
- What troubles you about Judaism and why?
- In what ways do you wrestle with your Jewish identity?
- What does it mean to you to be Jewish?

**Compulsory question – Did you find this Shabbat dinner helpful in articulating your Jewish connectivity?**