



Labor on the Bimah

5778/2018

Maryland Campaign for a \$15 Minimum Wage

To learn more about JUFJ and our campaigns, visit www.jufj.org or contact:

Bennet Wilcox
Baltimore Community Organizer
bennet@jufj.org
513-659-1446

Laura Wallace
Montgomery County Senior Organizer
laura@jufj.org
240-813-4776

Table of Contents

Welcome Letter

Sermon Starters

- Labor Day Shabbat
- Elul & Teshuvah
- Rosh Hashanah
- Readings 1 & 2
- Text Study 1 & 2

Campaign for a \$15 Minimum Wage

- Background
- Current Campaign
- Additional Resources

About Jews United for Justice (Handout to print, side 1)
Take Action (Handout to print, side 2)

Welcome to Labor on the Bimah

We are so glad you are participating in the 21st year of Labor on the Bimah! Since 1998, Jews United for Justice (JUF) has worked to put “labor” back into Labor Day by engaging our local Jewish communities in a collective conversation about our texts, our historical experiences, and the challenges facing workers today. **JUF is providing congregations with this resource packet, working with congregations to arrange speakers, and planning follow-up events to further educate members of participating congregations about the injustices facing Maryland workers today.**

The theme of Labor on the Bimah this year is raising the minimum wage. JUFniks in Maryland — many of them members of your congregation — began working to raise the wage locally in 2013. In the face of so many injustices in our world today, we chose this campaign because **raising the minimum wage leads directly to greater equity and economic stability in our region.** As Rabbi George Driesen wrote in testimony to the Maryland legislature last winter, “Increasing the minimum wage is essential to the fight against poverty and equally important, a step towards redressing the enormous, shameful wealth and income disparity that plagues the United States to a far greater extent than any other country in the industrialized world.” As we explore in the following pages, there is ample evidence that **our Jewish tradition holds sacred the value of work and the dignity of working people.**

JUF is proud of the role we played in the passage of last year’s \$15 minimum wage law in Montgomery County, which is already improving conditions for 100,000 low-wage workers by ensuring their wages go further to pay for food, shelter, clothing, and medical care for themselves and their families. We are now working with the [Maryland Fight for \\$15 Coalition](#) to move forward a similar bill in Annapolis, for the benefit of working people across Maryland.

In this packet you’ll find resources to help you plan your sermon or other Labor on the Bimah programs. You’ll find readings and sermon starters, information about the history of minimum wage laws in Maryland, and a **printable “Take Action” flyer to share with your congregants** detailing current advocacy efforts and how to get involved. This packet is meant to help spark your thinking about how raising the minimum wage in Maryland is connected to Jewish themes and values. Since Labor on the Bimah closely precedes the *chagim* this year, some of the materials connect to High Holiday themes. We hope these materials will serve as jumping off points, and of course we invite you to supplement them with your own stories, texts, and insights. We look forward to talking more about how we can work together to create a meaningful Labor Day Shabbat experience for your congregation as well as future programs we can do together.

Shanah tovah umetukah! // שנה טובה ומתוקה!

Molly Amster, Baltimore Director, molly@jufj.org, 301-529-3875

Laura Wallace, Montgomery County Senior Organizer, laura@jufj.org, 240-813-4776

Bennet Wilcox, Baltimore Community Organizer, bennet@jufj.org, 513-659-1446

Sermon Starters

Labor Day Shabbat: Parashat Ki Tavo

“To Walk in God's Ways” // Lalechet Bidrachav

אֶת־ה' הָאֵמַרְתָּ הַיּוֹם לְהִיּוֹת לְךָ לְאֱלֹקִים וּלְלַכֵּת בְּדַרְכָּיו וּלְשֹׁמֵר חֻקָּיו וּמִצְוֹתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו וּלְשֹׁמֵעַ בְּקוֹלוֹ

“You have affirmed this day that the Sovereign is your God, that you will walk in God’s ways, that you will observe God’s laws and commandments and rules, and that you will obey God.” (Deuteronomy 26:17)

In Deuteronomy 26:17, the Torah affirms that God is our God, that we will “walk in God's ways,” and that we will follow God's commandments. The rabbis grapple with what it means to “walk in God's ways” when it's not possible for us to physically walk with God. The rabbis understood this to mean we should emulate God's *attributes* and/or God's *good deeds*. The rabbis especially focused on the attributes of compassion, mercy, righteousness, and holiness and actions such as “giving freely” and clothing the naked as those we should strive to emulate.

Raising the minimum wage is about making it possible to act in God's ways *as a society*. We can't as individuals — or even as organizations — clothe every naked person, but we can make sure that every working person has the income necessary to clothe themselves. We can choose to be compassionate in our public policy, treating others as we would want to be treated. We can choose to emulate God in setting up social structures that are generous (see the Sifrei and Rabbi Shai Held excerpts below) rather than enshrining a lack of generosity and compassion in our social structures.

Here are some related texts you might use to flesh out these ideas:

Sefer Hamitzvot, #8 of the positive mitzvot:

הִיא שְׁצוֹנוֹ לְהַדְמוֹת בּוֹ יִתְעַלֶּה כְּפִי הִיכּוֹלֶת וְהוּא אָמְרוּ וְהִלַּכְתָּ בְּדַרְכּוֹ. וְכִבֵּר נִכְפַּל זֶה הַצּוּוֹי וְאָמַר לִלְכֹת בְּכָל דַּרְכּוֹ וּבֵא בִפְרוֹשׁ (סוּטָה י"ד) מֵהַ הִקְבֵּה נִקְרָא חֲנוּן אִף אֶתָּה הִיָּה חֲנוּן מֵהַ הִקְבֵּה נִקְרָא רַחוּם אִף אֶתָּה הִיָּה רַחוּם מֵהַ הִקְבֵּה נִקְרָא חֲסִיד אִף אֶתָּה הִיָּה חֲסִיד. וְכִבֵּר נִכְפַּל זֶה הָעֵינִין בִּלְשׁוֹן אַחֵר וְאָמַר אַחֲרֵי ה' תִּלְכוּ וּבֵא בִפְרוֹשׁ שְׂרָצָה לֹמַר הַהֲדָמוֹת בְּפַעּוּלוֹתָיו הַטּוֹבוֹת וְהַמְדּוֹת הַנִּכְבָּדוֹת שִׁיתּוּאֵר בָּהֶם הָאֵל יִתְעַלֶּה עַל צַד הַמִּשְׁלַל. יִתְעַלֶּה עַל הַכֹּל עִלּוֹי רַב. (בִּפְרֹשֶׁת וְהִיָּה כִי תִבָּא, מִדַּע הַלְכוֹת דְּעוֹת)

The mitzvah that we have been commanded is to be similar to God...as we are told “and you shall walk in God's ways” (Deuteronomy 28:9)...And this is the explanation: Just as the Holy Blessed one is called “compassionate,” you, too, be compassionate. The Holy Blessed One is called gracious - you, too, be gracious. The Holy Blessed One is called righteous - you, too, be righteous. The Holy Blessed One is called holy - you, too - be holy. This is the language of the Sifrei (see below). And this commandment also comes to us in different language, as it says “follow in God's ways” (Deuteronomy 13:5)...meaning, to emulate the good deeds and attributes that we attribute to God

(See Sotah 14a). [Note: the English translation follows a slightly different version of the Hebrew text that is found in Rambam La'Am.]

Sifrei Devarim 49:1

ללכת בכל דרכיו - אלו דרכי הקב"ה, שנ' (שמות לד) ה' ה' אל רחום וחנון, ארץ אפים ורב חסד ואמת, נוצר חסד לאלפים, נושא עון ופשע וחטאה ונקה. ואו' (יואל ג) כל אשר יקרא בשם ה' ימלט. וכי היאך אפשר לו לאדם להיקרא בשמו של הקב"ה? אלא מה המקום נקרא רחום וחנון - אף אתה הוי רחום וחנון ועשה מתנת חנם לכל. מה הקב"ה נקרא צדיק, שנ' (תהלים קמה) צדיק ה' בכל דרכיו וחסיד בכל מעשיו - אף אתה הוי צדיק. הקב"ה נקרא חסיד, שנאמ' וחסיד בכל מעשיו - אף אתה הוי חסיד.

“To walk in God’s ways” (Devarim 11:22): Which are the ways of the Holy Blessed One? (Shemot 34:6-7) “The Lord, the Lord, God of mercy and grace, slow to wrath and abundant in mercy and truth, keeping lovingkindness for thousands, forgiving transgression, offense, and sin, and cleansing...” And it is written (Yoel 3:5) “All who will be called by the name of the Lord will escape”: Now how is it possible for a person to be called by the name of the Holy Blessed One? Rather, just as God is called “compassionate and gracious” you, too, be compassionate and gracious and give freely to all. Just as the Holy Blessed one is called righteous (“tzadik”) as it says in Psalms 145:17 “Righteous is God in all God’s ways and holy in all God’s acts” - you, too, be righteous. Just as the Holy Blessed One is called holy (“chasid”) - you, too, be holy.

Commenting on the Sifrei above (and other midrashim), Rabbi Shai Held, writes: R.

Eliyahu Dessler (1892-1953) argues that to be created in the image of God is to have the capacity, like God, to be compassionate and to give generously. We are constantly pulled, he writes, between the impulse to give and the urge to take, between stubborn selfishness and deep kindness. Being created in God’s image implies that we truly can become givers - more, that we are intended from creation to be givers. What the midrashim we have seen implicitly suggest is that a life of Torah is intended to help us become more fully what we are intended to be: Creatures who manifest love and kindness and generosity to others.

(http://mechonhadar.s3.amazonaws.com/mh_torah_source_sheets/CJLIParashatVeZotHaBerakhah5774.pdf)

Talmud Bavlia Sota 14a:

ר' חמא בר' חנינא אמר אף משה רבינו אינו יודע היכן קבור כתיב הכא ולא ידע איש את קבורתו וכתב התם (דברים לג, א) וזאת הברכה אשר ברך משה איש האלהים וא"ר חמא ברבי חנינא מפני מה נקבר משה אצל בית פעור כדי לכפר על מעשה פעור ואמר רבי חמא ברבי חנינא מאי דכתיב (דברים יג, ה) אחרי ה' אלהיכם תלכו וכי אפשר לו לאדם להלך אחר שכינה והלא כבר נאמר (דברים ד, כד) כי ה' אלהיך אש אוכלה הוא אלא להלך אחר מדותיו של הקב"ה מה הוא מלביש ערומים דכתיב (בראשית ג, כא) ויעש ה' אלהים לאדם ולאשתו כתנות עור וילבישם אף אתה הלבש ערומים הקב"ה ביקר חולים דכתיב (בראשית יח, א) וירא אליו ה' באלוני ממרא אף אתה בקר חולים הקב"ה ניחם אבלים דכתיב (בראשית כה, יא) ויהי אחרי מות אברהם ויברך אלהים את יצחק בנו אף אתה נחם אבלים הקב"ה קבר מתים דכתיב (דברים לד, ו) ויקבר אותו בגיא אף אתה קבור מתים.

Rabbi Chama son of Rabbi Chanina said: What is the meaning of that which is written: “After the Lord your God shall you walk, and God shall you fear, and God’s commandments shall you keep, and unto God’s voice shall you hearken, and God shall you serve, and unto God shall you cleave” (Deuteronomy 10:20)? But is it actually possible for a person to follow the Divine Presence? But hasn’t it already been stated: “For the Lord your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God” (Deuteronomy 4:24), and one cannot approach fire? He explains: Rather, the meaning is that one should follow the attributes of the Holy One, Blessed be God. He provides several examples. Just as God clothes the naked, as it is written: “And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin, and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21), so too, should you clothe the naked. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be God, visits the sick, as it is written with regard to God’s appearing to Abraham following his circumcision: “And the Lord appeared unto him by the terebinths of Mamre” (Genesis 18:1), so too, should you visit the sick. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be God, consoles mourners, as it is written: “And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed Isaac his son” (Genesis 25:11), so too, should you console mourners. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be God, buried the dead, as it is written: “And he was buried in the valley in the land of Moab” (Deuteronomy 34:6), so too, should you bury the dead.

Talmud Bavli Shabbat 133b

אבא שאול אומר ואנוהו הוי דומה לו מה הוא חנון ורחום אף אתה היה חנון ורחום.

Abba Shaul says: “Ve’anveihu” (the word meaning “And I will praise God”) should be interpreted as if it were written as two words: “Ani va’Hu” (meaning, “me and Him (i.e., God)”). Be similar, as it were, to God: Just as God is compassionate and merciful, so too should you be compassionate and merciful.

Elul & Teshuvah

Returning to Our Commitment to Dignity for All Workers

Elul is the beginning of our process of *teshuvah*, turning and returning to examine our commitments, habits, and actions. We examine our own individual habits and think about how we are part of a society that has collectively sinned.

The 19th century Torah scholar, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, known as the Natziv, taught about how oppressive work affects people's sense of self, and about how an active response is needed to combat the effects of oppressive circumstances. In *HaEmek Davar* on Leviticus 26:13, he writes:

אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מֵהָיוֹת לָהֶם עֲבָדִים וְאֲשֶׁבַר מִטַּת עַלְכֶם וְאֹלֶךְ אֶתְכֶם קוֹמְמִיּוֹת - וְאֲשֶׁבַר מִטַּת עַלְכֶם. הוּא מִשַּׁל כְּמוֹ שׁוֹר שְׂרָגִיל לִישָׂא עוֹל שְׂנוּצֵר לְזֶה. וְרָאשׁוּ כַפּוּי לַמָּטָה כְּמוֹ שִׂידָע שֶׁהָעוֹל יֵהָא מוֹנֵחַ עֲלָיו. וְאִפִּילוּ בִשְׁעָה שֶׁמִּסִּירִים הָעוֹל מֵעֲלָיו יוֹדָע שְׂאֲחֵר שְׁעָה מוֹכֵן הוּא שְׁנִית לַמִּשְׁאֹ. עַד שֶׁמִּשְׁבְּרִים אֶת הָעוֹל לְעִינָיו הוּא בְּטוֹחַ שֶׁלֹּא יִחְרוֹשׁ עוֹד. וְעַדִּין הוּא בְּרָאשׁ נִמּוֹךְ מֵרֹב הָרְגָלוֹ לִכְךָ. עַד שֶׁבָּא בְּעֲלָיו וּמִרְגִּילוֹ לְהַגְבִּיָּה רָאשׁוֹ וְלִילֵךְ קוֹמֵם

"I am your God who brought you out of the land of the Egyptians to be their slaves no more, who broke the bonds of your yoke and made you walk upright." (Leviticus 26:13)

"The image presented by this verse is one of an ox that is accustomed to wearing the yoke made for it. The ox keeps its head bowed [even when it is not wearing the yoke], as though it knows that the yoke will be placed upon it [at any moment]. Even when the yoke is taken off, the ox is ready to accept it again after a short while has passed. [The ox is so accustomed to the yoke that] even if it sees its master break the yoke, and understands from this that it will not be required to plow ever again, it nevertheless keeps its head bowed from the force of habit until its master comes and trains it to lift up its head and walk upright." (translation by AJWS)

In this passage the Natziv describes the process of freeing the Israelites from slavery. It was not enough to simply break their bonds. The Israelites needed to learn to walk upright again, as free people. They could not break the habits of oppression by remaining passive; action was necessary.

The metaphor of the bowed ox can be extended to understand other oppressive conditions. We might picture low-wage workers toiling under the yoke of living from paycheck to paycheck, bowed under the threat of not being able to provide for their family's basic needs. The yoke might represent our desensitization to oppressive working conditions in our region: have we bowed like the ox, and acquiesced to the permanent presence of these low-wage jobs? Do we accept the constant state of economic crisis that many of our neighbors endure as a matter of course?

As we examine our habits in the process of doing *teshuvah*, we might ask ourselves these questions: Have we become accustomed to the presence of dehumanizing jobs in our society, jobs that lead to poverty and from which there is little escape? Why would we resist a \$15 minimum wage that allows workers where we live to make ends meet? What has our role been in perpetuating low-wage jobs and what action might we take to help end the oppression of jobs that pay a poverty wage or that force people to choose between their job and caring for themselves or a loved one?

Let us do *teshuvah* as a community, returning and recommitting to building a society that values and supports all of its workers and all kinds of work.

Rosh Hashanah

God's Coronation Day

Rosh Hashanah, the beginning of the new year, celebrates the coronation of God as sovereign power in the world. On this day, we recognize the equality of all humans, no matter our social position, in the eyes of the Holy One.

This lesson is underscored in Bava Metzia 10a with regard to the relationship between workers and employers. Rav Nachman argues that a worker is an extension of his employer (*k'yad ba'al habayit*). If he or she finds something of value while on the job, that thing should belong to his or her employer. The text replies to Rav Nachman and records the following conversation:

והאמר רב פועל יכול לחזור בו אפי' בחצי היום אמר ליה כל כמה דלא הדר ביה כיד בעל
הבית הוא כי הדר ביה טעמא אחרינא הוא דכתיב כי לי בני ישראל עבדים עבדי הם - ולא
עבדים לעבדים

But doesn't Rav say: "The laborer may retract [i.e., leave his or her job] even in the middle of the day? [In other words, the worker is not simply an extension of his or her employer but is a separate person who can act for himself or herself.] [Rav Nachman] answered him: [Yes, but] as long as s/he does not retract [i.e., as long as s/he continues in the job] s/he is like the hand of the employer. When s/he does retract [i.e., leave the job, s/he is able to do so because of what] is written (in Leviticus 25:55): "For unto Me the children of Israel are servants; they are My servants." It is not [written] "servants to servants." (B. Talmud, Bava Metzia 10a)

According to Rav Nachman, as long as a person is working in a job, they are considered – and should consider themselves – an extension of the employer, doing the employer's work. At the same time, it is also clear that the worker is free to leave the job, because she is ultimately responsible to God over any human employer (though there are limitations on this rule, when leaving a job would cause financial damage or danger to the employer or their clients).

This idea that we are *avdei Hashem* rather than *avdei avadim* is one of the values underlying the effort to raise Maryland's minimum wage. While minimum wage workers are not slaves, no person should feel enslaved to a job, and certainly not to a job that keeps them mired in the oppression of poverty. The purchasing power of a minimum wage salary today is so low that it actually keeps people entangled in poverty no matter how many hours they work. A full-time, minimum wage job in Maryland with an hourly wage of \$10.10 results in a total salary of about \$21,000 a year. Workers are often forced to take more than one full-time job simply in order to make ends meet. Low-wage workers effectively become *avdei avadim*.

As a society we should be working toward a world in which no work approximates slavery. This involves advocating for workers on a range of issues, including a minimum wage high enough to support people's basic needs. Moreover, at a time of year when we especially focus on our equality before God, employers and employees are both called upon to treat each other with the respect due to all people as beings created in God's image, all with the same responsibility to God. The minimum wage we set as a community is a reflection of the base level value for human work. Out of respect for the aspect of God in every person, we must work toward raising the minimum wage so all working people can make ends meet with dignity.

Reading

Prayer for Workers

by Interfaith Worker Justice (www.iwj.org)

Let us continue to recognize the many people whose work is a blessing, and to call those who are in leadership positions to act with justice.

All: Av Harachaman, God of Compassion, hear our prayer.

We pray for construction workers who build our homes and places of work and worship.

All: Av Harachaman, God of Compassion, hear our prayer.

We pray for injured workers who are too often neglected.

All: Av Harachaman, God of Compassion, hear our prayer.

We pray for farmworkers and poultry workers who help provide us with our food but who often work in dangerous conditions and struggle to provide food for their own families.

All: Av Harachaman, God of Compassion, hear our prayer.

We pray that our legislators and elected officials act on the cries for justice in our community.

All: Av Harachaman, God of Compassion, hear our prayer.

We pray that all owners and managers recognize the dignity of workers and uphold the standards of our faith traditions by providing living wages, affordable benefits, and the freedom of association.

All: Av Harachaman, God of Compassion, hear our prayer.

God of Exodus, you went to your people in Egypt, saw their pain, and set them free — free from the bondage of their oppressor. You walked with them to freedom. Walk with all of us who struggle for dignity in the workplace, for a living wage, and for fair benefits. Bless all of us as we continue working to bring forth your vision — a vision of justice and peace, kindness and compassion, grace and mercy.

AMEN.

Reading

Prayer for Just Workplaces

by Interfaith Worker Justice (www.iwj.org)

We pray for those who are injured on the job and feel forgotten and abandoned.

All: God who heals, hear our prayer.

We pray for the families of workers who have died from injuries or accidents.

All: God who mourns, hear our prayer.

We pray for more effective health and safety laws and their enforcement.

All: God who cares, hear our prayer.

We pray for the office workers and those in the service industry who face unfair conditions.

All: God who serves, hear our prayer.

We pray for coal miners who suffer from black lung disease.

All: God who suffers, hear our prayer.

We pray for those with repetitive strain injuries from work in poultry and meat packing.

All: God who supports, hear our prayer.

We pray for farmworkers and their families exposed to hazardous pesticides.

All: God who protects, hear our prayer.

We pray for legislators who will not neglect the vulnerable in the workplace.

All: God who leads, hear our prayer.

We pray that employers accept responsibility for changing unsafe conditions on the job.

All: God of honor, hear our prayer.

We pray that workers have the courage to take action when unsafe conditions exist.

All: God of might, hear our prayer.

We pray for the adequate compensation of those injured in the workplace.

All: God of justice, hear our prayer.

AMEN.

Text Study

Views on Wealth and Work

Toldot Yitzchak (Isaac Karo), Parshat Re'eh

The reason that the poor person is poor is because the rich person is rich...The [Biblical] text says [i.e., refers to], “the poor person with you.” What need is there to...[add the phrase], “with you” [to the description of the poor person]?

[Karo answers his own question, saying:] “To indicate that you are the reason that he is poor...” (As quoted in Jill Jacobs’ *There Shall Be No Needy*, p. 17, with added explanations.)

Questions

1. Flesh out the worldview described in this quotation. What is Karo really saying? What are the implications of this perspective on rich and poor?
2. What does this text mean about “you”? Who is “you”? And how do *you* hear this text?
3. Does this text resonate with your experience of the world? Why or why not?

Vayikra Rabbah 34:8

ני ר' יהושע יותר ממה שבעל הבית עושה עם העני העני עושה עם בעל הבית שכן רות אומרת לנעמי (רות ב) שם האיש אשר עשיתי עמו היום בועז אשר עשה עמי אין כתיב כאן אלא אשר עשיתי עמו אמרה לה הרבה פעולות וטובות תעשיתי עמו היום בשביל פרוסה שנתן לי

Rabbi Yehoshua taught: The poor person does more for the master of the house than the master of the house does for him/her. For thus Ruth says to Naomi [in the Book of Ruth]: “The man's name *with whom I worked* today is Boaz (Ruth 2:19).” The text does *not* say “who *worked with me*” but rather “*with whom I worked*.” By saying this, Ruth implied to Naomi: “I have done many services and favors for him today in return for the morsel of food he gave me!”

Questions

1. How do you generally understand the phrase, “with whom I worked?” How does this line up with the way it is explained in this text?
2. What are the messages or implications about workers and employers in this text?
3. How do the messages of this text compare with your experience of work and your associations with workers and employers?

Text Study

Employer and Employee – Interests and Obligations

Employer's Obligations to Worker (Deuteronomy 24:14-15)

לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂק שִׁכִּיר, עֲבִי וְאֶבְיוֹן, מֵאַחֶיךָ, אוֹ מִגֵּרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּאַרְצְךָ בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ

You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether s/he is one of your siblings, or a stranger that is in your land, within your gates.

בְּיוֹמוֹ תִּתֵּן שִׁכְרוֹ וְלֹא-תָבוֹא עָלָיו הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ, כִּי עֲבִי הוּא, וְאֶלְיוֹ, הוּא נָשָׂא אֶת-נַפְשׁוֹ; וְלֹא-יִקְרָא עָלֶיךָ אֶל-יְהוָה, וְהָיָה בְּךָ חַטָּא

In the same day you shall give them their pay, don't let the sun go down [without paying your worker], for they are poor, and count on it: lest s/he cry against you unto God and you would be culpable.

Worker's Obligations to Employer (Rambam's Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Sechirut, 13:9-11)

אָבֵל אֵין הַפּוֹעֵל רָשָׁאי לַעֲשׂוֹת מְלָאכָתוֹ בַּלַּיְלָה, וְלִהְשָׁכִיר עַצְמוֹ בַּיּוֹם, אוֹ לְדוֹשׁ בְּפֶרְתוֹ עֶרְבִית, וְלִהְשָׁכִירָה שַׁחְרִית; וְלֹא יִהְיֶה מִרְעִיב וּמִסֹּגֵף עַצְמוֹ, וּמֵאֲכִיל מְזוֹנוֹתָיו לְבָנָיו, מִפְּנֵי גִזְל מְלָאכָתוֹ שְׁלִבְעַל הַבֵּית, שֶׁהֵרִי יִכְשֹׁל כּוֹחוֹ וְתַחֲלֹשׁ דַּעְתּוֹ וְלֹא יַעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה בָּכו

כְּדֹרֶךְ שְׂמִיזָהּ בְּעַל הַבֵּית שֶׁלֹּא יִגְזַל שִׁכְר עֲבִי, וְלֹא יַעֲכֹבְנוּ--כֹּךְ הָעֲבִי מִזָּהָר שֶׁלֹּא יִגְזַל מְלָאכָת בְּעַל הַבֵּית, וְיִבְטֹל מֵעֵט בְּכָאן וּמֵעֵט בְּכָאן וּמוֹצִיא כָּל הַיּוֹם בְּמֵאֲרָה, אֵלֹא חַיֵּב לְדַקְדֵּק עַל עַצְמוֹ בְּזִמְנ מְלָאכָה, שֶׁהֵרִי הִקְפִּידוּ חֻכְמִים עַל בְּרָכָה רַבִּיעִית שְׁלִבְרַכַת הַמָּזוֹן שֶׁלֹּא יִבְרַךְ אוֹתָהּ

A worker may not perform work at night and then hire themselves out during the day, or work with their ox in the evening and then rent it out in the morning. Similarly, they should not starve and aggrieve themselves and give their food to their children, because this leads to stealing from the work due their employer, for their energy will be sapped and their thinking unclear, and they will not be able to perform their work robustly.

Just as the employer is warned not to steal the wage of the poor person or to withhold it from them, the poor person is forewarned not to steal from the work due their employer and neglect their work slightly here and there, spending the entire day in deceit. Instead, they are obligated to be precise with regard to their time. The importance of such preciseness is indicated by our Sages' ruling that workers should not recite the fourth blessing of the Birkat Hamazon [grace after meals], so as not to neglect their work [by spending too much time on non-work matters].

Questions

1. What assumptions are being made by these texts about the employer and the worker?
2. How are these assumptions applicable in your experience of workplace relations today?
3. Does your perspective shift as you consider assumptions across service sectors (corporate, non-profit, retail, food service, etc.)? Across wage levels?
4. What changes do you think would need to be made in our society in order for Jewish laws around labor relations to be more broadly observed?

Raising the Minimum Wage

Background

The federal minimum wage was last increased in 2009 to \$7.25/hour. For several years, this was the minimum wage throughout Maryland. In 2013, JUFJ was part of successful campaign to raise Montgomery County's minimum wage incrementally to reach \$11.50 in 2017. Prince George's County and Washington, DC also approved increases to \$11.50/hour at the same time.

Raise Maryland, a coalition of faith, labor, and anti-poverty groups, worked successfully to pass a bill in 2014 in the Maryland General Assembly to increase the statewide minimum wage to \$10.10/hour. The increase was scheduled in more gradual increments than those in Montgomery County, reaching \$10.10 in July 2018.

Maryland laws have exemptions for certain classes of workers. For instance, tipped workers have a minimum hourly wage of \$4.00 in Montgomery County and \$3.63 in the rest of Maryland. The minimum wage for workers who are under 20 years of age is only 85% of the full minimum wage for the first six months of employment.

Fight for \$15 Campaign

In response to growing income disparities and the rising cost of living across the United States, working people and allies have campaigned in many jurisdictions to increase the hourly minimum wage, with \$15 serving as a common goal. While \$15/hour is not sufficient in much of the country to provide a living wage — one that would cover the cost of housing, food, transportation, and other basic needs — it would be a significant improvement over the current minimum wage.

The Fight for \$15 movement is active in more than 300 cities across the US and 60 countries across six continents. The campaign has paid off in California and New York State as well as cities like Seattle, where a \$15 minimum wage has been enacted. More than 17 million workers across the country have already gotten raises.

In 2017, JUFJ was a leader in the coalition that successfully campaigned for a \$15 minimum wage in Montgomery County. The County Council approved a bill that phases in minimum wage increases based on the size of the business. The \$15 mark will be met on July 1, 2021 for companies having 51 or more employees, July 1, 2023 for companies having between 11 and 50 employees, and July 1, 2024 for companies having 10 or fewer employees. Importantly, once the \$15 wage has been reached, the minimum wage will be indexed annually to increases in the cost of living. None of these increases in minimum wage apply to tipped wage earners and the exemptions for young workers are still in effect.

JUFJ has joined the Maryland Fight for \$15 Coalition to continue our work to raise the minimum wage at the state level. The coalition is made up of labor unions, community groups, and faith leaders, all working to make life better for working people and their families.

In 2018, the Maryland House and Senate held public hearings on a bill co-sponsored by 21 Senators and 73 Delegates that would extend the gradual increases in the statewide minimum wage to \$11/hour in July 2019, followed by annual \$1 increments until \$15 is reached in July 2023. The legislation would benefit tipped workers, bringing their hourly wage to \$15 by July 2025. The legislation would also eliminate the exemptions for youth workers that have prevented them from receiving the full minimum wage. Unfortunately, the committees in the House and Senate that reviewed this bill did not bring it to a vote. **The coalition's work will continue in the 2019 session in Annapolis, when we will meet with legislators, testify at hearings, and hold public education events** about the importance of raising the wage and ensuring the hard-working people of Maryland make hourly wages that cover their basic living costs and lead them on a path to self-sufficiency.

Additional Resources

Maryland Fight for \$15 Coalition Website

ff15maryland.org

Why America Needs a \$15 Minimum Wage

epi.org/127246

Prepared by the Economic Policy Institute

Why Maryland Needs a \$15 Minimum Wage

nelp.org/wp-content/uploads/Case-for-15-in-Maryland-January-2018.pdf

Prepared by the National Employment Law Project

How Raising the Wage Helps Women and People of Color

nelp.org/wp-content/uploads/Policy-Brief-15-Minimum-Wage-Women-Workers-of-Color.pdf

Prepared by the National Employment Law Project and Maryland Center on Economic Policy

The Business Case for Raising the Minimum Wage

<https://jufi.org/assets/uploads/2018/08/maryland-bfmw-handout-feb-2018.pdf>

Prepared by Business for a Fair Minimum Wage

ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) Report

<https://www.unitedwayalice.org/maryland>

Prepared by the United Way

Facts vs Myths about Raising the Wage in Maryland

https://jufi.org/assets/uploads/2018/08/ff15_facts-vs-myths.pdf

Prepared by the Maryland Fight for \$15 Coalition

Additional Jewish Resources

<http://rac.org/advocacy/issues/issuemw/>

Prepared by the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Additional Text Studies

<https://workerjustice.org/textstudypoint/>

Prepared by the Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice

About Jews United for Justice

Justice is a Jewish Value

Thus said the Eternal One, the God of Israel, to the whole community that I exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon... "Seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to the Eternal in its behalf; for in its prosperity you shall prosper." (Jeremiah 29:7)

Jewish tradition calls on us to protect the vulnerable, fight exploitation, and treat all people with dignity. Jewish history tells a story of rising from oppression to freedom, marginality to security, and reminds us to work to ensure that others have the rights and opportunities we enjoy.

Jews United for Justice (JUFJ) educates and mobilizes Jews of all ages from across Maryland and Washington, DC to join in local grassroots activism for equality and justice, and raises a proud Jewish voice in solidarity with our region's working people, immigrants, communities of color, and other vulnerable people. Many Jews share a dream of a more just world, and together we can do something substantive and lasting to make that dream a reality.

Current JUFJ Campaigns in Maryland

\$15 Minimum Wage: JUFJ is working with a broad statewide coalition to pass a \$15 minimum wage for all working people in Maryland, phased in over multiple years. A minimum wage increase has already passed in Montgomery County, where the wage will reach \$15 by 2024. For more information, email laura@jufj.org.

Criminal Justice Reform: In 2015, JUFJ and our partners worked to pass historic police reform legislation that increased police accountability to the public and in 2018 we challenged anti-Black 'Tough on Crime' policies while advocating for root cause-focused alternatives. We continue to work at the state and city level to end systemic racism in policing and for a truly just criminal-legal system. For more information, email bennet@jufj.org.

Migrant Justice: Since 2017, JUFJ has been advocating for increased protection for our immigrant neighbors with some successes in Montgomery and Baltimore Counties. We continue to work locally to pass legislation and participate in direct action to influence local ICE action and prevent migrants from being deported, especially using our local tax dollars. In the 2019 state legislative session we will continue to advocate for increased immigrant protection. For more information about this issue in Montgomery County, email isaac@jufj.org and email bennet@jufj.org for Baltimore.

Rent and Water Rights: JUFJ helped pass a bill in the 2018 legislative session to prevent Baltimore City from selling residents' homes due to unpaid water bills. Now, we're working to make water affordable in Baltimore, where 52% of residents are paying more for water than the UN's Human Right to Water Policy deems appropriate. JUFJ is also working at the city and state levels to strengthen the rights of Maryland renters, which are often violated in a system where landlords have the upper hand and tenants live in unsafe housing. For more information, email bennet@jufj.org.

To find out more and to get involved, visit www.jufj.org.

**JEWS UNITED
FOR JUSTICE**

THINK JEWISHLY. ACT LOCALLY.

Take Action with JUFJ

As Maryland residents and employees, we can make real change in our community – but only if we raise our voices and advocate for what's right. From holding an event, spreading the word on social media, emailing an elected official, to meeting with government officials, there are many ways to engage with JUFJ's Maryland campaigns. No commitment is too small!

1. **Stay Informed:** Visit www.jufj.org and sign up for our weekly newsletter to get updates about labor justice in DC and Maryland, as well as our other campaigns and programs.
2. **Host an educational meeting for your community:** Invite JUFJ to speak at your synagogue or community group or host a meeting in your home for interested friends. These meetings give participants a supportive space to learn about the issues and take action.
3. **Organize your congregation:** Work with a team of volunteers from your congregation to mobilize fellow members to write letters, make phone calls, meet with legislators, and more.
4. **Lobby your elected officials in Annapolis:** Join other JUFJ volunteers in Annapolis for press conferences, faith events, rallies, hearings, and our annual Purim Lobby Night.
5. **Meet with an organizer:** Have coffee with a JUFJ staff member or volunteer leader to learn more about our work and how you can make a difference.

To let us know of your interest in any of these options, email laura@jufj.org if you live in Montgomery County and email bennet@jufj.org if you live anywhere else in Maryland.

Sukkot with JUFJ: The Struggle for Shelter

Join JUFJ to celebrate Sukkot by learning about the housing crisis in our cities and our region. We will read the book *EVICTED*, by Matthew Desmond, visit the exhibit at the National Building Museum, and reflect together on what it means to celebrate shelter when so many people can't afford it.

- Thursday, 9/13, 7:00 PM: *EVICTED* Book Group, with meet up locations in Baltimore, Montgomery County, and DC
- Friday, 9/21, 7:00 PM: Pre-Sukkot Shabbat Dinner for those in their 20s and 30s at Common Good City Farm in DC
- Sunday, 9/23, 11:30 AM: *EVICTED* Exhibit Tour at the National Building Museum in DC

To RSVP, visit jufj.org/events/. Join us for one, two, or all three programs!

To find out more and to get involved, visit www.jufj.org.

**JEWS UNITED
FOR JUSTICE**

THINK JEWISHLY. ACT LOCALLY.