



When Will Our Sentence Be Done?

Addressing Post-Incarceration Barriers to Re-entry

Sample Program for Elul or High Holy Days

Goals:

1. Introduce the barriers to post-incarceration re-entry and the Time Done campaign;
2. Promote re-evaluation of how we think about formerly incarcerated people and therefore what public policies both support formerly incarcerated people and their families in successful re-entry and serve public safety;
3. Connect the Time Done campaign with Jewish values, specifically *teshuvah*/High Holy Days.

Opening Welcome: (4 minutes) We are going to learn today about barriers to post-incarceration re-entry that are faced by the millions of Californians who have a criminal record. People who have completed prison sentences, parole and/or probation, often decades ago, are still limited by legal barriers that prevent them from succeeding and participating in civil society. The campaign to pass Senate Bill 731, known as "Time Done," has been the 2021 priority campaign of RAC-CA, in partnership with Californians for Safety and Justice, an organization led by many formerly incarcerated people who are directly impacted by these barriers. RAC-CA is the network of URJ congregations across California, working together for just public policies. (Optional: share the above goals of this program.)

Introductions: (5 minutes) Invite people to share their name and why they came – if you have a large group, the question of why they came could be done in pairs.

Text Study: (10 minutes) In small groups; have someone read the texts aloud before discussing the questions.

Hilchot Teshuvah/Laws of Repentance 7:8 (Maimonides, 12th century Spanish Jewish philosopher)

It is the custom of the person who has repented to be humble. If fools insult them by reminding them of their previous mistakes, saying: "But yesterday you did that, and yesterday you said that," it is best to ignore them... In fact, it is a serious wrongdoing to say to a person: "Remember your previous conduct", or to remind them in order to shame them. All this is forbidden and comes under the general law of wronging another person with words, concerning which the Torah warned, "And you shall not wrong one another" (Leviticus 25:17).

The New Jim Crow (Michelle Alexander, civil rights lawyer/advocate, writer, professor)

Once a person is labeled a felon, he or she is ushered into a parallel universe in which discrimination... and exclusion are perfectly legal, ... the felony record...relegates people for their entire lives, to second-class status.

Questions for discussion groups:

- What are the impacts of reminding people repeatedly of a past mistake after they have made amends?
- Is there something you have done for which being constantly reminded of it would hold you back rather than help you do better?

Show the [RAC-CA Time Done Video](#) (11 minutes)

Share out responses to the video (7 minutes, in small groups):

- What stands out, moves or surprises you?
- What did you learn?

Whole Group Discussion (15 minutes, address some or all of these questions)

1. Dr. Reuben Miller writes in *Halfway Home: Race, Punishment and the Aftermath of Mass Incarceration*, “Psychologist Phillip Atiba Goff found that black boys were viewed as less innocent and assumed to be much older than white children of the same age. Black boys and girls were not just seen as guilty – they were separated from their innocence” (p68). Speaking of lower-income Black communities, he writes, “You are overpoliced and under-protected. The police don’t come when you call them, and when they do show up, they beat your ass, because they come only when you’re being arrested” (p77).
Acknowledging that different people and communities experience policing and the criminal justice system differently, with this understanding, who is the “public” that the criminal justice system is charged with protecting, and what is “public safety”? Can you envision a system that supports the safety of all people?
2. Miller continues, “The problem of mass incarceration has never really been about crime. It’s that the people who Americans are afraid of are subject to a separate of rules. They live in a separate and altogether different social world... No social-service agency, no matter how well funded, can bridge the divide between these two worlds... You cannot treat or arrest or, perhaps, even reform your way out of mass incarceration because mass incarceration is about citizenship, not criminal behavior, and citizenship is about belonging” (p269-70).

In contrast, Isaac Yosef spoke in the video about employing formerly incarcerated people as a means to challenge barriers to re-entry, which he understands as part of what makes his business and his life “kosher”. **In addition to changing statewide laws, how can we as Jewish communities contribute to local changes that address the problem of belonging that Miller describes?**

Share a report on the Time Done campaign (3 minutes)

Congregational leaders and members lobbied on Senate Bill 731, the Time Done legislation, reaching over 30 state legislators. The bill passed the Senate in May and is expected to be voted on by the Assembly by September 10 or before.

Program Leaders: For latest update to share in your discussion, see rac.org/TimeDone or contact Rabbi Julie Saxe-Taller at jsaxe-taller@rac.org.

While this program, especially if held on Yom Kippur, is not a planning meeting, you might share information about who to contact to think about congregational follow up, or the date of your upcoming congregational justice team meeting for interested people to join.