



WE
are the
99
percent

Occupy Wall Street: Congregational Discussion Guide

You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember, the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth and so confirms his covenant....

Deuteronomy 8:17-18

Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge.

Deuteronomy 24:17

We are living at a time of extremes, a time of human-made economic and social crises that have created an immense wealth divide between the top one percent and the rest of us. It is no wonder that the activists, young and old, who are occupying Wall Street and financial districts in other cities, are capturing the imagination of many Americans. They are tapping into widely felt concerns.

The Occupy Wall Street website says,

"We are the 99 percent. We are getting kicked out of our homes. We are forced to choose between groceries and rent. We are denied quality medical care. We are suffering from environmental pollution. We are working long hours for little pay and no rights, if we're working at all. We are getting nothing while the other 1 percent is getting everything. We are the 99 percent."

We may or may not agree with or even understand everything the Wall Street protestors are trying to say, but they have offered a teachable moment for

our congregations. As Jews and people of faith, we must question a society that seems to have forgotten that God is the source of all wealth, and that He has commanded us not to steal, nor to deprive those in need. This is a good opportunity to talk about what is happening in our economy within the context of the faith we share.

1) Do you know people in your family or our congregation who have been hurt by the current economic downturn? How have you, personally, supported them? How have we supported them, as a congregation, in these challenging days?

2) How does the economic downturn hurt those who have not lost their jobs? How have *you* been impacted?

3) Are the resources of the society being shared fairly? Is there some truth to the assertion that 99 percent – meaning almost all of us – are being left out? What does our faith call us to do around questions of fairness and sharing?

4) Is it acceptable that 10 percent of America's workers are officially unemployed? Or that if you add under-employed people, those doing part-time work or needing more hours, the rate climbs to 18 percent? Or that 22% of our children live in poverty? What does our faith call us to do about this?

5) What more could we do as a congregation to see that the resources of society are shared with all people?



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