



Reflection as an Activist Practice

Prepared by Rabbi David Rosenn for JRF Tikkun Olam Conference 2002

1. Reflection is not simply a tool for augmenting social justice work and community building efforts. In many ways, **the practice of reflection is itself a move towards positive social change and stronger community ties.**

2. When you think about how to structure reflection sessions, remember that **there are many different forms of reflection.** Don't get stuck thinking about reflection in just one way: journal writing, group discussions, etc. Sometimes the best reflection comes from a pointed question asked at the beginning of a service project or a planning meeting, such as: "What will have changed as a result of our work and what will remain unchanged?"

A corollary: Just as people have different learning styles and styles of expression, **people have different styles of reflection.** Try multiple methods for reflection such as journal-writing, structured discussion, art projects, dramatic performance, debates, letters to the editor, video production, and presentations to outside groups.

3. It's hard to teach what you don't know. **The best facilitators of reflection are people who regularly practice reflection themselves.**

4. **The best reflection is a mix of "processing", sharing, and critical assessment.** While the first two tend to make participants feel more settled and comfortable, the third – critical assessment – can often raise feelings of frustration and unease. That's perfect. Reflection should make us aware of things that need to change, and change is frightening. On the practical level, it's important to remember that it's not necessarily a bad reflection session if people leave feeling unsettled.

5. **Celebrations after a program or project are an excellent opportunity to reflect on what's been accomplished,** while also rewarding participants and having good fun. Not all reflections is calm and deliberate!