

SESSION 4

The Need for Progressive Judaism

Key ideas for discussion:

Rabbi Shira Stutman makes the case for revisiting the idea of Judaism as a religion (as opposed to a civilization). At Sixth & I, there's a strong focus on teaching people "hard skills" – the skills involved in participating and leading Jewish ritual, so they can actually practice the religion.

"Fee for service" makes some people uncomfortable, but in American culture it is an essential way that people express what they value. There's no membership at Sixth & I – it has gone against the grain of conventional wisdom and designed itself as a place that is almost entirely fee-for-service.

"Our competition is not the synagogue down the street. Our competition is Soul Cycle. Our competition is going for a walk. Our competition is yoga...We are a proselytizing congregation." Our young people want meaning and personal human flourishing.

Some of the most interesting work happening Jewishly today is happening outside the denominational structure. 100 years from now we won't have denominationalism that looks how it looks now. "The world is not living in denominations. Our young people do not care. They want meaning. They want to feel of value. They want to feel welcomed in, no matter who their partners are, no matter how they identify about Israel, no matter how they identify about Judaism. They don't care what the denomination is."



Rabbi Shira Stutman

Rabbi Shira Stutman is Senior Rabbi at Sixth & I in Washington, D.C. Her focus is to make Jewish meaning and build Jewish community for young professionals. She practices what she calls "radical welcoming" and draws on her extensive experiences as a community organizer, Jewish educator, and Jewish program designer. Rabbi Stutman also works with interfaith couples, and she serves as the scholar-in-residence for the National Women's Philanthropy program at the Jewish Federations of North America. Her favorite t-shirt reads: "This is what a real rabbi looks like."

Connected Resources

Sixth & I: SixthAndI.org

Example of program series on Israel issues: "The Hardest Conversation":
SixthAndI.org/event/the-hardest-conversation-1

New Jewish Spaces Podcast: ReconstructingJudaism.org/podcast/episode-1