

TAKE ACTION
Introduction

TALMUD KIDDUSHIN 40B

Rabbi Elazar son of Rabbi Zadok said: To what are the righteous compared in this world? To a tree whose trunk is rooted in a place of holiness and whose boughs spread out to a place of impurity. Even if the boughs are cut off, its body stands in a pure place...

Rabbi Tarfon and the sages were gathered in the upper chamber of Nitzah's house in Lod, where they were asked which is greater, study or action. Rabbi Tarfon answered: action is greater. Rabbi Akiva answered: study is greater. The rest answered: study is greater, for study leads to action.

Just as a tree depends both on its trunk and its boughs, so too does changing the world depend on the interplay of study and action.

One important step on the path is connecting to news sources and advocacy groups you trust, so you can stay informed of the latest developments in broader efforts to

“We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes.”

This is the refrain of “Ella’s Song,” written by Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon from words spoken by the civil rights leader Ella Baker over the years.⁵⁰⁷ This section of the handbook offers some frameworks for moving beyond study to action.



Ella Baker, from the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Creative Commons license.

end mass incarceration. Following are a few suggestions to get you started.

An over-arching guiding principle of the campaign against mass incarceration is that, as much as possible, it should be led by those most affected by it: the currently and formerly incarcerated, their families, and their

wider communities. As Glenn E. Martin of Just Leadership USA says, **“Those closest to the problem are closest to the solution, but furthest from resources and power.”**⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁷ See <http://ellabakercenter.org/blog/2013/12/ellas-song-we-who-believe-in-freedom-cannot-rest-until-it-comes>. Baker was a director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, as discussed in Jelani Cobb’s March 2016 *New Yorker* article about the Black Lives Matter movement: “New scholarship [has] begun charting the contributions of women, local activists, and small organizations—the lesser-known elements that enabled the grand moments we associate with the civil-rights era. In particular, the career of Ella Baker... See <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/03/14/where-is-black-lives-matter-headed>

⁵⁰⁸ <https://www.justleadershipusa.org/about-us/>

All of the organizations in this list are sources of important information and wisdom, as well as centerpoints of activism; the starred organizations were created by or have leadership from people of color.

- Of course we'll start with T'ruah. www.truah.org. Follow us on Twitter at @truahrabbis for updates about campaigns, volunteer opportunities, and news.

- The Marshall Project offers a daily digest collecting incarceration-related news stories from around the web, plus their own original reporting. www.marshallproject.org.

- The ACLU is a major driver of criminal justice reform advocacy. www.aclu.org

- *The Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI) “educates and engages African American and black immigrant communities to organize and advocate for racial, social and economic justice” and has particularly good resources on incarceration in both an immigration and criminal context. <http://blackalliance.org>

- *Campaign Zero is a grassroots movement led by young activists, mainly from communities of color, to end police violence in America. <http://www.joincampaignzero.org/#vision>

- *Detention Watch Network is organizing to end immigration detention. <http://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org>

- The Drug Policy Alliance “is the nation’s leading organization promoting drug policies that are grounded in science, compassion, health and human rights.” www.drugpolicy.org

THE RECORD, FROM THE MARSHALL PROJECT

For those not interested in a daily email digest, The Marshall Project offers a database, indexed by topic. They write, “Since 2014, The Marshall Project has been curating some of the best criminal justice reporting from around the web. In these records you will find the most recent and the most authoritative articles on the topics, people and events that are shaping the criminal justice conversation.” This is a crucial resource for anyone who wants to end mass incarceration.

<https://www.themarshallproject.org/records>

- *Equal Justice Initiative, founded originally to represent men wrongfully sentenced to death, now conducts a wide range of work on mass incarceration, race, and poverty, as well as ending the death penalty. www.eji.org

- Grassroots Leadership, focused primarily in the southeast and Texas, organizes against for-profit incarceration, both in criminal justice and immigration. <http://grassrootsleadership.org>

- *Just Leadership USA is committed to cutting the U.S.

correctional population in half by 2030. <https://www.justleadershipusa.org>

- NRCAT, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, is a leading group focused on solitary confinement. www.nrnat.org

- The Sentencing Project—“working for a fair and effective criminal justice system by promoting reforms in sentencing law and practice, and alternatives to incarceration.” www.sentencingproject.org