GENERAL RESOURCES

Opportunities to Speak About Mass Incarceration
Reform throughout the Jewish Year

Rosh Hashanah
Judgment and mercy, and/or the world created anew

Yom Kippur
Repentance and forgiveness

Pesach
Freedom, liberation

MLK Weekend
Mass incarceration as the civil rights struggle of our day

Breshit
Creation in God’s image; it is not good for human to be alone

VaYera
Sodom and Gomorrah models a society that does not care about the welfare of other people

VaYeshev
Joseph in the pit and in jail can spark conversation on prison conditions, since Joseph thrives in prison through contact with other people and meaningful work.

Mishpatim
System of criminal and civil law; public safety; prohibition on charging interest (talk about debtors’ prisons)

VaYikra
4:13, “If the entire community sins…”

Metzora
The ritual of returning a person with tzara’at to the camp as a model for thinking about returning citizens

Kedoshim
19:15, “Do not commit corruption in justice”

Emor
24:22, “You shall have one law for the citizen and the sojourner…” opportunity to talk about race or about immigration prisons. Also 24:10-12, the story of the blasphemer, who is put under “mishmar,” guard, while Moses asks God what to do with him. It’s the closest the Torah comes to describing incarceration.

Shlach Lecha
15:32 tells the story of the man found gathering firewood on Shabbat. This is the other instance of mishmar.

Masei
The Cities of Refuge create an opening for a discussion of vengeance, punishment, rehabilitation, and mercy.

Shoftim
Police and court systems. Also, Cities of Refuge redux.