

DISCUSSION GUIDE

For the short documentary

“The Case Against Torture” by Brian Knappenberger

The following is a guide for a 60 minute session using the short documentary “The Case Against Torture” by Brian Knappenberger. These questions are offered to guide a fruitful discussion and you are welcome to adapt for use in your setting. If the group is too large for discussion as one body, you might want to divide it. If you do, ask someone in each subgroup to facilitate.

Gather (5 minutes)

Open with prayer, if that is your tradition, and depending on size and setting, ask participants to introduce themselves.

Show Film (10 minutes)

The 7 minute documentary is available at <https://youtu.be/56J0wOTI15c>.

Initial Reactions (5 minutes)

Turn to the person next to you and take 2 minutes each to describe how you feel.

- What part of the video did you find to be the most powerful?
- What’s something you learned that you didn’t know before?

Desecrating the Sacred (15 minutes)

All faiths teach that human beings are sacred, created with dignity and worth, and some faiths teach that human beings are created in the image of God. Torture desecrates the dignity of the one being tortured and the torturer.

- Thinking about your own beliefs, what do you think about the treatment of detainees that Major Wright discusses, including waterboarding, sleep deprivation and threats to kill family members?

Major Wright says, “You can always lose your job, but you should never lose integrity --- and that is what I thought was important.”

- Major Wright thought his integrity was at risk if he continued taking part in the military commissions at Guantanamo Bay. Do you think he was right?
- Have you been in a situation where you had to choose between your job and your integrity?

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Major Wright also says, “How we treat people in our justice system is a reflection of who we are as Americans and I believe America is a great country, and we are a country of laws and not men.”

- What is the just way to treat someone who has been tortured?
- What if that person is alleged to have been involved in a violent act prior to being tortured?

Collective Responsibility (10 minutes)

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel is quoted as saying that “some are guilty, but all are responsible.”

- What are some of the ways that we might all have some responsibility for the torture described in the video?
- What does your religious tradition say about repentance, accountability and redemption?
- How can we actualize these values as a nation?

Repairing the Brokenness (10 minutes)

As people of faith, we know that brokenness can be healed – both in individual lives and in the life of the nation. All religions believe that redemption is possible. Many of the 40 people who remain imprisoned in Guantanamo Bay were tortured – and 31 of them have never been tried, convicted, or even accused of any crime – now more than a decade after they were first imprisoned. 5 have already been cleared for release by the security experts in our own government, but continue to be detained for political reasons. Letters to the editor, calls to Members of Congress, group prayers, vigils, and rallies, and group meetings with congressional offices are all ways to influence the way these prisoners are treated and whether or not they will ever be tried or leave Guantanamo.

- What have you done to address the wounds of torture?
- What are you willing to do?
- What are you willing to do this week?

Closing (5 minutes)

End with a closing prayer or in the way that is typical in your setting.

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