

Choices and Consequences

Purpose: Reflect on the relationship between having the language to convey what you feel and the challenge of speaking out against injustice. Compare and contrast multiple texts to examine the bystander effect and the range of responses in the face of injustice.

APPROXIMATE TIME:
30 minutes

MATERIALS:
 **HANDOUT**
The Silent Pact

ADVISOR NOTES:

1. Tips for Reading “The Silent Pact”

The handout **The Silent Pact** is divided into two parts. It is important that advisees do not read ahead to see what happens so they can participate in the paired discussion about Patel’s motivations and choices. For this reason, we recommend that you read this story aloud as an advisory rather than in small groups.

2. Revisiting the Exit Cards

If you collect **exit cards** at the end of the meeting, you can check for understanding to see where advisees are making connections between the advisory content and their own lives and get a sense of their questions. You might save their questions for mini-conferences or, if you notice recurring questions, use them as the opening routine in a future meeting (keeping the names of the writers private). Visit facinghistory.org/advisory-media to learn more about the Exit Cards teaching strategy.

PROCEDURE:

1. Read and Discuss Eboo Patel’s Response to an Injustice He Witnessed

- Pass out **The Silent Pact** and read the first part of Patel’s story out loud to the group. Then have advisees “turn and talk” with a partner to discuss the four questions on the front side of the handout.
- Then read the second part of the story out loud as a group. Have advisees “turn and talk” with a partner to discuss the three questions about that part of the story.
- Choose from the following questions to discuss in pairs, small groups, or as an advisory.
 - In the second paragraph of his story, Eboo Patel discusses the roles that language and silence played in his decision-making process. Reread the paragraph and then discuss the following questions:
 - What do you think Patel means by the statement, “We were not equipped with a language that allowed us to explain our faith to others or to ask about anyone else’s”?
 - Why do you think they didn’t have the language to talk about religion?

- Why do we so often remain silent in the face of an injustice? How can the video **The Bystander Effect** (Activity 47) and Eve Shalen's story in **The "In" Group** (Activity 49) also help you answer this question? How does it feel to remain silent when you witness something wrong or an injustice? How does it feel to try to speak up in those situations?
- What role does silence play in your school community?

2. Reflect on Recent Advisory Themes and Content with Exit Cards

Ask advisees to respond to the following questions on a **3-2-1 exit card** (visit facing-history.org/advisory-media to learn about this teaching strategy). Let them know that you will be collecting their exit cards at the end of the meeting and that you might share their ideas in a future opening routine, but you will not include their names. They can indicate on their exit cards if they do not wish to have one or more of their responses shared anonymously with the group.

- Consider "The Bystander Effect" and the stories of Eve Shalen and Eboo Patel when responding to these questions on your exit card:
 - What are **3** new, different, or deeper understandings that you have about the roles people play and the choices they make in the face of injustice or unfairness?
 - What are **2** connections that you can make between one or more of the texts and your own experiences?
 - What is **1** question that you have about the bystander effect, the roles people play in the face of injustice, or one of the texts?



The Silent Pact

Eboo Patel is the founder and executive director of the Interfaith Youth Core. The goal of the program is to create a community of young people who are working to foster understanding between people of different religious backgrounds. In his memoir, *Acts of Faith*, Patel describes the roots of his own activism.

Part One

... In high school, the group I ate lunch with included a Cuban Jew, a Nigerian Evangelical, and an Indian Hindu. We were all devout to a degree, but we almost never talked about our religions with one another. Often somebody would announce at the table that he couldn't eat a certain kind of food, or any food at all, for a period of time. We all knew religion hovered behind this, but nobody ever offered any explanation deeper than "my mom said," and nobody ever asked for one.

This silent pact relieved all of us. We were not equipped with a language that allowed us to explain our faith to others or to ask about anyone else's. Back then, I thought little about the dangers lurking within this absence.

A few years after we graduated, my Jewish friend reminded me of a dark time during our adolescence. There were a group of kids in our high school who, for several weeks, took up scrawling anti-Semitic¹ slurs on classroom desks and making obscene statements about Jews in the hallways.²

Turn and Talk

1. What choices does Eboo Patel have in this moment?
2. What are the possible consequences of each choice?
3. What are the factors that might motivate him to take action?
4. What are the factors that might motivate him not to take action?

1 Antisemitism is prejudice toward or hatred of Jewish people.

2 Eboo Patel, *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2019), XVII–XIX.

Part Two

I did not confront them. I did not comfort my Jewish friend. I knew little about what Judaism meant to him, less about the emotional effects of anti-Semitism, and next to nothing about how to stop religious bigotry. So I averted my eyes and avoided my friend, because I couldn't stand to face him.

A few years later, he described to me the fear he had experienced coming to school those days, and his utter loneliness as he had watched his close friends simply stand by.

Hearing him recount his suffering and my complicity is the single most humiliating experience of my life. I did not know it in high school, but my silence was betrayal: betrayal of Islam, which calls upon Muslims to be courageous and compassionate in the face of injustice; betrayal of America, a nation that relies on its citizens to hold up the bridges of pluralism when others try to destroy them; betrayal of India, a country that has too often seen blood flow in its cities and villages when extremists target minorities and others fail to protect them.³

Turn and Talk

1. What factors motivated Eboo Patel to take or not take action in the face of injustice?
2. How did he feel about his decision while he was in high school?
3. How does he feel about his decision as an adult?

Discussion Questions

1. The following questions are about paragraph two in the first part of the story, where Eboo Patel discusses the roles that language and silence played in his decision-making process.
 - a. What do you think Patel means when he writes, "We were not equipped with a language that allowed us to explain our faith to others or to ask about anyone else's"?
 - b. Why do you think they didn't have the language to talk about religion?
2. Why do people so often remain silent in the face of an injustice? How can the video "The Bystander Effect" and Eve Shalen's story also help you answer this question?
3. How does it feel to remain silent when you witness something wrong or an injustice? How does it feel to try to speak up in those situations?
4. What role does silence play in your school community?

³ Patel, *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation*.