

BEHIND THE KITCHEN DOOR

by Saru Jayaraman



Format

1 x 90' session
(or 2 x 45')

3 x 90' session



Introduction

Behind the Kitchen Door by Saru Jayaraman (Cornell University Press, 2013) has been selected as the 2013-14 Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) Common Read. The book uncovers what is often invisible, inviting restaurant patrons to consider the low wages and poor working conditions of those who prepare and serve the meals. It asks people to consider not only the origin and goodness of the food they eat, but also the well-being of those who serve it, many of whom support not only themselves, but also children and dependent elders. Engaging the reader by telling the stories of ten restaurant workers from cities across the United States, Jayaraman invites us all to consider the political, moral, and economic implications of eating out.

Jayaraman, who collaborated with restaurant workers to launch a national restaurant worker's organization called Restaurant Opportunities Centers United (ROC-United) describes her own awakening to the industry's widespread discrimination and oppression based on economic status, race, ethnicity, gender, and/or immigration status. She gives voice to workers struggling to get by on low wages with few opportunities for training and promotion, and helps the reader to understand the constant fear of illness, accident, or wage theft can leave them without enough money to pay bills. She lifts up restaurants striving to be fair employers, and helps us to understand that customers have great power to push restaurants in the direction of fair wages and equitable treatment for those who cook, serve, and clean to make dining out a pleasurable experience.

The goal of the book is not to discourage people from restaurant dining. On the contrary, she advocates for diners to become more observant and to become the kind of educated customers who support those who work behind the kitchen door. In the words of the book's publicity materials:

What's at stake when we choose a restaurant is not only our own health or "foodie" experience but also the health and well-being of the second largest private sector workforce—10 million people, many immigrants, many people of

color, who bring passion, tenacity, and insight into the American dining experience.

This is an exciting time in the movement for restaurant worker's rights and raising the minimum wage. Unitarian Universalists across the country are working to raise awareness about issues affecting restaurant workers. The publication of *Behind the Kitchen Door* and its selection as this year's Common Read promises to support and help UU congregations and organizations with work already in process and to encourage others to get involved in a variety of ways. The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), which has a long history of advocacy in partnership with low wage worker, has joined with the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC), which has an established relationship with ROC-United. In this discussion guide, you will find links to supplementary materials and specific guidance for how to take action, should you or your group or congregation accept this challenge.

In addition, this guide includes information about initiatives related to the central focus of the book. Included are links to information on the UUA's partnership with Interfaith Worker Justice, advocating for living wages, stopping wage theft, and worker justice, as well as links to materials on Reproductive Justice, the current UUA Congregational Study/Action Issue for 2012-2016. The "reproductive justice" frame of this issue includes economic justice for women who are parents, that they might be able to raise children in safe and healthy environments.

The discussion guide is flexible. Adapt it to congregational, cluster, or district programming for adults of all ages and life stages, for campus groups or young adult groups, for youth groups, or for cross-generational groups. Two formats are offered:

- A single, 90-minute session
 - * Can be expanded for a two-hour session
 - * Can be offered in two parts to accommodate a 45-minute Sunday forum format
- Three, 90-minute sessions

- ★ Can each be extended to a two hour session by lengthening the amount of time for conversation, discussion, and sharing

Single Session

Goals

- Provide a framework for responding to *Behind the Kitchen Door*
- Invite readers to share their reactions and reflections in a safe and trusting community
- Explore the spiritual dimensions of Jayaraman's call for awareness and advocacy and consider ways to engage in the work as a religious, spiritual, and/or ethical practice.

Materials

- Chalice, candle and lighter or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Copy of *Singing the Living Tradition*, the UUA hymnbook
- Optional: Music player

Preparation

- Write these covenant points on newsprint, but do not post:
 - We agree to speak from our own experiences and perspectives.
 - We agree to listen respectfully to the experiences and perspectives of other people.
 - We agree to pay attention to the group process, making sure that everyone has the opportunity to speak and to listen.
 - We agree to use this time as an opportunity for ethical, religious, and spiritual discernment, rather than as a time to debate politics or public policy.
- Optional: Purchase "Please Tip Your Waitress," by Willie Sordillo. at [Smithsonian Folkways](#).

Description

Chalice Lighting/Opening Reading (5 minutes)

Light the chalice and offer these words:

A common mealtime grace asks us to give thanks for the food we are to receive, and to thank and bless the hands of those whose labor made the meal possible. Let us take a few moments in silence to give thanks for all whose labor makes possible not only the nourishment of our bodies, but the nourishment of our spirits as we share the joy of eating together. We light this chalice in thanksgiving for all who prepare, serve, and clean that we might enjoy the food that sustains us.

Creating a Covenant (10 minutes)

Post the covenant points you have written on newsprint. Propose them as guidelines. Ask if any points need to be clarified, added, or amended. Note changes on newsprint. When the covenant is complete, invite participants to voice or signal agreement.

Introductions and First Impressions (15 minutes)

Tell participants you will invite each person to introduce themselves and take two or three sentences to briefly share a story from their own experience as a restaurant worker or customer, and how the book may have changed their previous understanding of that experience. Allow silence for two or three minutes for people to find their words. Then, invite each person in turn to speak briefly uninterrupted, asking them to share only a single brief story. Mention that for this conversation and any others, each person reserves the right to pass.

Discussion (15 minutes)

Read this excerpt from the book:

...To most foodies, “sustainable food” refers to food that is grown without the use of pesticides or other harmful chemical agents, and livestock that is raised humanely and without hormones. When we hear the words “sustainable food,” we also tend to think of food that is produced locally to reduce the amount of environmental damage caused by transporting food thousands of miles to cities

across the country. Most foodies care how we define “sustainable food” because they are concerned about their health and the environment. However, “sustainable food” also needs to embody fair and equitable labor practices. Food can’t really be healthy, ethically consumed, or sustainable if it’s prepared and served in an environment that permits abuse, exploitation, and discrimination. It’s definitely not sustainable to eat food served by workers who cannot afford to feed their families and face the added burden of having their wages and tips stolen. Sustainable food, by definition, must include sustainable labor practices. (p. 32)

Lead a conversation, asking:

- Have you and your family made changes in your diet out of concern for your health and/or the environment?
- What implications does Jayaraman’s assertion that equitable labor practices must be part of the ethical eating equation have for your own life?
- Since reading the book, have you considered making any changes in your dining practices? Have you discussed this with those close to you?

(Optional break for 45-minute forums. If you are doing this in two sessions, begin the second session with a summary of the discussion from the first.)

Sharing (30 minutes)

Say:

Behind the Kitchen Door highlights several ways in which restaurant workers are vulnerable to exploitation, including gender and race discrimination, the very low minimum wage for tipped workers, the lack of earned sick time benefit, and the pervasive practice of wage theft. The book makes visible policies and practices of which many who patronize restaurants are largely unaware.

Ask:

- What does your Unitarian Universalist faith call on you to do with your new understanding of the exploitative conditions under which restaurant workers labor?
- What steps will you take that will be relatively easy for you?

- What actions are you considering will be harder for you personally- and why?

Give participants two or three minutes to think in silence, and then ask each to share, in turn, without cross-conversation, their reflections. After all have shared, invite any who wish to add additional thoughts or affirm one another's commitments.

Note to facilitators: There may be some anxiety among participants about taking action on these issues, especially when they consider talking to restaurant management.

Reaffirm the covenant to which your group has agreed, and emphasize that participants will be sharing without cross-conversation.

After all have spoken, ask the group to consider the position of waitstaff vis-à-vis both management and customers.

Ask:

- Why and how might having conversations with customers about wages and benefits be difficult for food service workers in a way that would not be true for restaurant managers?

Conversation (10 minutes)

Invite the group to consider how this conversation can be continued in your congregation, group, community, or family. What partners in your local community might you work with to bring information about the exploitation of restaurant workers to public attention? How might you, your congregation, your group, or your community engage in advocating for changes in both law and practice that facilitate exploitation? Present a range of possible actions:

- Invite others to read *Behind the Kitchen Door* and organize more discussion groups, perhaps including those from other faith communities and civic or community organizations.
- Explore the resources on [economic justice](#) on uua.org. In particular, find out about "Raising the Minimum Wage- a Moral Imperative," by reading the resources there, including Unitarian Universalist and interfaith theological perspectives on worker justice. Organize a campaign to support the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013, which includes anchoring the minimum wage for tipped employees to 70 per cent of the regular minimum wage.

- Explore the resources on [reproductive justice](#) on uua.org. In particular, find out about gender inequity in the restaurant industry and consider why these issues are questions of reproductive, as well as economic, justice. Included on the webpage are resources for education, congregation-based or individual action, and reflection.
- Explore the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee's "[Choose Compassionate Consumption](#)" campaign and share them. Make "[Paying customer, paying attention](#)" stickers available in your congregation, group or community and have one-to-one conversations with others about making use of them.
- Identify people in your congregation or group who can take advantage of UUSC training modules so they can, in turn, train interested community members to take action as concerned consumers, concerned consumers, educated advocates and community coalition builders after they learn about and discuss the issues. Contact mobilization@uusc.org to receive more information.
- Review the ROC National [Diners' Guide to Eating Out](#) and encourage others to do the same. Let people know that the guide is available on line, in paper format or as a mobile app, and can be a tool that will help them make ethical choices.
- Visit the website of [The Welcome Table](#), a national organization committed to education and action for a sustainable food system that includes justice for restaurant workers. You will find a [discussion guide](#) for *Behind the Kitchen Door* that offers a process for in-depth study of the issues in the book.

Ask individual participants to commit to specific actions and timelines to move the conversation forward in your congregation.

Closing (5 minutes)

Share the lyrics to "Please Tip Your Waitress," written in 1980 by Willie Sordillo, used with his permission. If you prefer, you can purchase the song at [Smithsonian Folkways](#) and play it:

Sixteen tables, four chairs at each one

Two shows every night she's on the run

Three coffees here, five desserts there, let's go

And some jerk over there says she's too slow

Chorus:

Please tip your waitress, she's working hard for you

She'll walk a few miles before she's thru

She's got bills to pay & food to buy like you

Please tip your waitress 'cause she's working hard for you

It's "honey" this & "dear" that all the time

But that's not half as bad as all those lines

She's a strong woman & her temper's gonna perk

If one more guy asks when she gets off work

Chorus

When she gets home from work she still can't rest

'Cause tomorrow at the college there's a test

She's up early in the morning as a rule

Making sure the kids get off to school

Chorus

Her paycheck's low. She does the work of two

When something's wrong the folks blame you know who

And then they say "Come on now, where's your smile?"

While the owner's getting richer all the while

Chorus

Three Sessions

Goals

- Provide a framework for responding to Jayaraman's book
- Invite readers to share their reactions and reflections in a safe and trusting community
- Explore the spiritual dimensions of Jayaraman's call for awareness and advocacy and consider ways to engage in the work as a religious, spiritual, and/or ethical practice.

Session 1

Materials

- Chalice, candle and lighter or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Optional: Computer with Internet connection and digital projector/speakers

Preparation

- Write these covenant points on newsprint, but do not post:
 - We agree to speak from our own experiences and perspectives.
 - We agree to listen respectfully to the experiences and perspectives of other people.
 - We agree to pay attention to the group process, making sure that everyone has the opportunity to speak and to listen.
 - We agree to use this time as an opportunity for ethical, religious, and spiritual discernment, rather than as a time to debate politics or public policy.
- Write these reflection questions on newsprint, and post:

- What pieces of information were new to you? What do you now know or notice that you did not previously?
 - What surprised, troubled, or challenged you?
 - What stories from the book stick with you?
 - How has reading this book changed your experience of restaurant dining?
- Optional: Queue video (2:32) [book trailer](#) for *Behind the Kitchen Door*

Description

Chalice Lighting/Opening Reading (5 minutes)

Welcome participants. Light the chalice and share the words of D.G. Kelley, Professor of American History at UCLA:

We are more than workers and consumers; indeed, we are more than bodies in need of food, clothing, and shelter. We are humanity, complex and multi-, the victims and shapers of the world we inhabit.

Creating a Covenant (10 minutes)

Post the covenant points you have written on newsprint. Propose them as guidelines. Ask if any points need to be clarified, added, or amended. Note changes on newsprint. When the covenant is complete, invite participants to voice or signal agreement.

Introductions and First Impressions (20 minutes)

Tell participants you will invite each person to introduce themselves and take two or three sentences to briefly share a story from their own experience as a restaurant worker or customer, and the ways in which the book may have changed their previous understanding of that experience. Allow silence for two or three minutes for people to find their words. Then, invite each person in turn to speak briefly uninterrupted, asking them to share only a single brief story. Mention that for this conversation and any others, each person reserves the right to pass.

Sharing (35 minutes)

If desired, show the video book trailer.

Remind participants that as he was working to organize ROC-United (Restaurant Opportunities Centers United) Fekkak Mamdouh, formerly a headwaiter at Windows on the World, remarked that “he had never thought about workplace discrimination before, but after discussing it with us he could see how all of the restaurants he had worked in maintained racial segregation, with lighter-skinned workers in the front, serving customers, and darker-skinner workers in the back, hidden in the kitchen.” (p. 6)

Read aloud the reflection questions you have posted. Ask participants to share their own responses to the book, responding to one or more of the questions.

Allow two or three minutes for participants to consider their responses, and then ask them to share, one at a time, without interruption. If there is time, invite participants to respond to what others have shared. Remind them that the group has covenanted to speak from personal experience and perspectives, rather than challenging the validity of another’s experiences and perspectives.

Discussion (15 minutes)

Lead a discussion, asking:

- Why is it that restaurant customers are largely unaware of gender and race discrimination and poor working conditions in the restaurant industry?
- What Unitarian Universalist principles and values call us to pay attention to the working conditions for restaurant workers?

Closing (5 minutes)

Extinguish the chalice and share these words from the book:

For the first time, I saw every kitchen worker, every restaurant worker, as a human being, with a unique story, family, dreams, and desires... Suddenly I could see a whole world I had never seen in a lifetime of eating in restaurants .(p. 11)

Invite participants to bring their new perceptions out into their own day to day lives.

Session 2

Materials

- Chalice, candle and lighter or LED battery-operated candle

- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Covenant from Session 1
- Copy of *Singing the Living Tradition*, the UUA hymnbook

Preparation

- Post the covenant from Session 1.
- Write on newsprint and post:
 - Have you and your family made changes in your diet out of concern for your health and/or the environment?
 - What implications does Jayaraman's assertion that equitable labor practices must be part of the ethical eating equation have for your own life?
 - Since reading the book, have you considered making any changes in your dining practices? Have you discussed this with those close to you?

Description

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Review the covenant from Session 1.

Sharing (25 minutes)

Read this excerpt from the book:

...To most foodies, "sustainable food" refers to food that is grown without the use of pesticides or other harmful chemical agents, and livestock that is raised humanely and without hormones. When we hear the words "sustainable food," we also tend to think of food that is produced locally to reduce the amount of

environmental damage caused by transporting food thousands of miles to cities across the country. Most foodies care how we define “sustainable food” because they are concerned about their health and the environment. However, “sustainable food” also needs to embody fair and equitable labor practices. Food can’t really be healthy, ethically consumed, or sustainable if it’s prepared and served in an environment that permits abuse, exploitation, and discrimination. It’s definitely not sustainable to eat food served by workers who cannot afford to feed their families and face the added burden of having their wages and tips stolen. Sustainable food, by definition, must include sustainable labor practices. (p. 32)

Call attention to the posted reflection questions. Allow a minute or two of silence for people to find their words. Then, invite each person to share briefly, uninterrupted. Mention that for this conversation and any others, each person reserves the right to pass. As time allows, invite participants to respond to what others have shared.

Discussion (50 minutes)

Using some of the questions that follow, lead a discussion about the wage issues and working conditions faced by those Jayaraman profiles:

- How did the stories in this book illuminate the reasons why a restaurant worker might work while ill, putting customers and workers at risk? When there are reports of illness transmitted in this manner, who is generally blamed?
- What do reality television shows that depict covering kitchen workers and abusive supervisors tell us about what we, as a society, consider to be acceptable? Why are such shows so popular?
- How are we, as a society, complicit in supporting exploitive working conditions?
- Have you had the experience of working for tipped wages? What was it like for you? Were you able to meet your financial needs?
- Have you experienced wage theft as described in the book (being forced to clock out early, being forced to share tips with management, or being forced to over-report tips on a slow shift)? Why is such theft so common? What recourse do workers have?

- How much of a role does consumer preference for low prices play? If educated about the realities behind the kitchen door, would diners push for better conditions and better wages?

Closing (5 minutes)

Share Reading 580 in *Singing the Living Tradition*, “The Task of the Religious Community,” by Mark Morrison-Reed. Extinguish the chalice.

Session 3

Materials

- Chalice, candle and lighter or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Covenant from Session 1
- Copy of *Singing the Living Tradition*, the UUA hymnbook
- Optional: Computer with internet access
- Optional: Music player

Preparation

- Post covenant from Session 1.
- Optional: Purchase “Please Tip Your Waitress,” by Willie Sordillo. at [Smithsonian Folkways](#).

Description

Chalice Lighting/Opening Reading (5 minutes)

Share Reading 502, “Now is the accepted time,” by W.E.B. DuBois. Light the chalice and review the covenant from Session 1.

Discussion (30 minutes)

Lead a discussion about discrimination in the restaurant industry based on gender, race, immigration status and/or ethnicity as evidenced in the stories Jayaraman presents:

- Have you personally observed the racial discrimination of which Jayaraman writes, where skin color is progressively darker as one moves from restaurant

front (servers) to the back (dishwashers)? Do you notice race and ethnicity when you are a restaurant patron? Has that changed since reading the book?

- How are restaurant managers enforcing not only their personal prejudices, but also broader cultural prejudice when they hire and promote for customer contact positions based on race, ethnicity, type of accent, gender, body size and type, and so on? In other words, how does personal and cultural prejudice become discrimination and oppression?
- What in our Unitarian Universalist principles and values calls upon us to speak and act against discrimination and oppression based on race, ethnicity, gender, social class, and so on? What are you prepared to do?

Sharing (30 minutes)

Read this passage from *Behind the Kitchen Door*.

I frequently eat out with friends and acquaintances who ask servers questions like, “Is the arugula organic?” or “is the burger grass-fed?” or “Are the strawberries locally grown?” These kinds of questions have compelled restaurateurs across the country to rethink their menus, but we can help create more equitable restaurants and put a stop to segregation and discriminatory labor practices by asking another set of questions: “Do you have promotion and training opportunities in your restaurant? How diverse is your waitstaff?” Most managers value feedback from their customers. You can make an enormous difference by simply letting managers know that a diverse waitstaff is as important to you as the quality of your meal. As long as the restaurateurs strive to be popular and profitable, they will listen when we tell them what we want and what we value in our dining experience. (p. 129)

Say, “Jayaraman requests in her book that diners become more active, asserting their power as customers to make choices about where to eat, talk with staff to find out about working conditions, observe staffing patterns and, above all, to make it clear to management that things are important.” Lead a time of sharing asking:

- Have you thought about Jayaraman’s request that you be an advocate for restaurant workers when you have occasion to be a customer?
- How might becoming such an advocate change your dining experience on a personal level? What are the positive outcomes for you personally that you envision if you take on an advocacy role? For your community?
- Are you hesitant about taking such a role? Why or why not?

Allow a minute or two of silence for people to find their words. Then, invite each person to share briefly, uninterrupted. Mention that for this conversation and any others, each person reserves the right to pass.

After all have shared, ask:

- How can your Unitarian Universalist faith community encourage and help sustain your sense of commitment?

Discussion (20 minutes)

Invite the group to consider how to engage your congregation or group in the movement for fair working conditions, fair wages, and equity in hiring and advancement opportunities for restaurant workers. What partners in your local community might you work with to bring information about the exploitation of restaurant workers to public attention? How might you, your congregation, your group, or your community engage in advocating for changes in both law and practice that facilitate exploitation? Present a range of possible actions for discussion:

- Invite others to read *Behind the Kitchen Door* and organize more discussion groups, perhaps including those from other faith communities and civic or community organizations.
- Explore the resources on [economic justice](#) on [uua.org](#). In particular, find out about “Raising the Minimum Wage- a Moral Imperative,” by reading the resources there, including Unitarian Universalist and interfaith theological perspectives on worker justice. Organize a campaign to support the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013, which includes anchoring the minimum wage for tipped employees to 70 per cent of the regular minimum wage.

- Explore the resources on [reproductive justice](#) on uua.org. In particular, find out about gender inequity in the restaurant industry and consider why these issues are questions of reproductive, as well as economic, justice. Included on the webpage are resources for education, congregation-based or individual action, and reflection.
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- Identify people in your congregation or group who can take advantage of UUSC training modules so they can, in turn, train interested community members to take action as concerned consumers, concerned consumers, educated advocates and community coalition builders after they learn about and discuss the issues. Contact mobilization@uusc.org to receive more information.
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Ask individual participants to commit to specific actions and timelines to move the work forward in your congregation or group.

Closing (5 minutes)

Share the lyrics to "Please Tip Your Waitress," written in 1980 by Willie Sordillo, used with his permission. If you prefer, you can purchase the song at [Smithsonian Folkways](#) and play it:

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Sixteen tables, four chairs at each one

Two shows every night she's on the run

Three coffees here, five desserts there, let's go

And some jerk over there says she's too slow

Chorus:

Please tip your waitress, she's working hard for you

She'll walk a few miles before she's thru

She's got bills to pay & food to buy like you

Please tip your waitress 'cause she's working hard for you

It's "honey" this & "dear" that all the time

But that's not half as bad as all those lines

She's a strong woman & her temper's gonna perk

If one more guy asks when she gets off work

Chorus

When she gets home from work she still can't rest

'Cause tomorrow at the college there's a test

She's up early in the morning as a rule

Making sure the kids get off to school

Chorus

Her paycheck's low. She does the work of two

When something's wrong the folks blame you know who

And then they say "Come on now, where's your smile?"

While the owner's getting richer all the while

Chorus

Extinguish the chalice and thank participants.