



ACTIVITY

Collective Memory – Benefit Or Burden?

Materials Needed

- Copies of phrase from Haggadah
- Copies of Katznelson quote
- Tape

Time Needed

30 minutes

Goal

Participants will explore how collective memory can ground their identities as Jews and may (simultaneously) be a potential burden.

Before You Get Started

Look at the list of enduring understandings. Which one would you like to emphasize through this activity?

1. Judaism is not (only) a religion. It is also a People and the national component of Jewish civilization is central to understanding Jewish texts, practices and culture.
2. Many of Judaism's norms, laws and mitzvot are articulated and relevant through the Jewish collective.
3. The Jewish People (and not its constituent individuals) is the carrier of Jewish religion and civilization. Sustaining the People and continuing its legacy is therefore a core Jewish value.
4. "The Jewish People are bound by a shared past (the covenant of fate) and a shared future (the covenant of destiny)" – Soloveitchik.

Directions for Activity

1. Present the phrase from the Haggadah to the class.
2. Discuss what it means, asking why the Rabbis did not tell us simply to remember the going out of Egypt? Suggest that according to the Rabbis, the Jewish approach to history places memory at the center. Ask whether this is realistic – in which ways yes and in which ways no?
3. Put a line of tape on the floor with one end defined as positive and the other defined as negative and ask them to line up according to whether they like the approach of the Rabbis or not. In the resulting debate, you might like to bring the piece from Berl Katznelson in order to strengthen the negative side!

“Human beings are endowed with two faculties, memory and forgetfulness. We cannot live without both. Were only memory to exist, then we would be crushed under its burden. We would become slaves to our memories, to our ancestors...And were we ruled entirely by forgetfulness, what place would there be for culture [and] science?...

A renewing and creative generation does not throw the cultural heritage of ages into the dustbin. It examines and scrutinizes, accepts and rejects. At times it may keep and add to an existing tradition.

At times it descends into ruined grottoes to excavate and remove the dust from that which had lain in forgetfulness, in order to resuscitate old traditions which have the power to stimulate the spirit of the generation of renewal...” -Berl Katznelson

4. Sum up the discussion and ask participants to share a question or idea they are left with.

Note to Educator

Did the enduring understanding that you set out to teach surface during this activity?