



ACTIVITY

Meaningful Jewish Peoplehood Practices

Materials Needed

- White board
- Markers
- Paper
- Pens/Pencils

Time Needed

45-60 minutes

Goal

Participants will consider what actions we do in our day to day lives that can make identifying with the Jewish people a meaningful practice.

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. Write the phrase "the Jews are ..." on a white board and ask the group to suggest possible nouns to complete the phrase: "The Jews are a". Possible suggestions might include words like: religion, a people, a nation, a civilization, a culture. If People is not on their list, add it in.
2. Now divide the group into small groups: Give each group all of the words that have been suggested and ask them to think of three essential actions needed for the collective to exist according to each definition. For example, for religion, suggestions might include: coming together regularly to pray, fasting on Yom Kippur, building a Sukkah, boys putting on tefillin, maintaining places where Jews can study traditional texts, training Rabbis etc. For nation, suggestions might include learning Hebrew as a Jewish language, supporting the State of Israel, defending rights for Jews in all countries, celebrating Jewish festivals etc.
3. Explain that the question "what are the Jews?" has received many answers, especially since the Jews entered the modern world in the last two centuries or so.
4. Explain that there is much difference of opinion and suggest that each person is entitled to come to their own conclusions. The oldest of all of these definitions and the one that appears most commonly in traditional Jewish sources is the word *Am*—translated as People as in *Am Yisrael*—the Jewish People. Explain that this is the word that you are going to concentrate on: what does it mean to be part of the Jewish People?

5. List all of the actions that they have chosen for People. If they were asked to choose just one that they see as absolutely central for existing as the Jewish People, what would they choose? Why?
6. 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?