



ACTIVITY

God and Jewish Civilization

Materials Needed

- Video clip
- Screening device and Internet connection
- Pen and paper

Time Needed

30-45 minutes

Goals

When we understand Judaism as only a religion, belief in God is essential. When we understand Judaism as a civilization, all Jews are included, even atheists. In this activity we will explore what it means to be a part of the Jewish community without believing in a divine presence.

Before you Get Started

Look at the list of Enduring Understandings:

- Judaism is a civilization, and not primarily a religion.
- A civilization is constituted by its history, literature, language, social organizations, folk sanctions, standards of conduct, social and spiritual ideals, esthetics and values. All of these elements form a civilization.
- Jewish communities share the content of the civilization and the drive for sustaining it, but they also each bring to the table their unique local perspective and interpretation, which in turn contributes to and enriches the collective global civilization.
- The local and global dimensions of Jewish Peoplehood, as perceived through the prism of developing and sustaining Jewish civilization, represent two sides of the same coin.
- The work of building and strengthening Jewish civilization at the local Jewish community level is central to the future of Jewish peoplehood.
- The contribution of every Jew in every community can be significant to the development of the Jewish People's collective enterprise.

Which one would you like to emphasize through this activity?

Directions for Activity

1. Have your participants complete the sentences:
 - As a Jew I believe....
 - As a Jew I do....
 - As a Jew I am...
2. Share their responses. Was it a challenge to complete the sentences? Did God feature on their list? If not, and upon personal reflection, do they feel like they have a meaningful Jewish identity?
3. Introduce and share the video clip. Ira Glass, the popular host of the NPR series "This American Life" took part in a discussion with Jim Henderson, a pastor turned "spiritual anthropologist." He recently developed a series entitled "Jim Henderson Presents" whose goal is to bring discussions about Christianity into the public sphere. Central to his approach is to give space to non-Christians to talk about what faith means to them. While Jim Henderson invites Glass onto the show, the self-described atheist Jew points out how being a Jewish atheist is not a contradiction in terms, much

to Henderson's surprise. While Christians might see Judaism as solely a religion, Ira Glass has a different idea.

4. Discuss the clip using these guiding questions:
 - Ira Glass says, "I'm a Jew whether or not I believe in God." Do you think being a Jewish atheist is an oxymoron?
 - If you were representing what Judaism is to someone of a different faith, how would you describe it?
 - What aspect of Jewish life do you find most compelling and why?
5. To close the activity, consider showing Avraham Infeld and his talk "Judaism is NOT a Religion!".

Note to Educator

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