

Interfaith Israel Café

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Spring Kallah 2011 Regional Board Program, Minneapolis, MN

Touchstone Text:

“As you teach, you learn.”

-Jewish Proverb

Goals:

- The PP’s will familiarize themselves with various social and political dilemmas faced by Israel and Israeli citizens and their complexities.
- The PP’s will reflect on the similarities and differences between dilemmas of the Jewish population in Israel to that of the community in North America
- The PP’s will develop an appreciation that in social and political issues, when having to do with Jews in Israel and North America, there isn’t necessarily a “right” or “wrong”, but different viewpoints and ideologies.

Objectives:

- PPs will write express their thoughts and opinions on quilt squares that will come together
- PPs will discuss social, political and religious conflicts that play out through interfaith relations
- PPs will learn the history to religions and religious places in Israel

Materials:

- 16 tables with 5 chairs on either side (for a total of 160 chairs) set up in a circular formation
- 2 copies of each Appendix A-H
- 12 large quilt squares
- Permanent markers on each table
- 1 bowl of Snacks or candy per table for groups to snack on during discussion

People:

- 3 Program leaders
- 3 “Floaters”
- All PPs at events in groups of 4-5 of their own choosing

Time table:

0:00-0:04 Introduction

0:04-0:13 Station One

0:13-0:14 Transition to next table
0:14-0:23 Station Two
0:23-0:24 Transition to next table
0:24-0:33 Station 3
0:33-0:34 Transition to next table
0:34-0:43 Station 4
0:43-0:44 Transition to next table
0:44-0:53 Station 5
0:53-0:54 Transition to next table
0:54-1:03 Station 6
1:03-1:05 Conclusion

Detailed Procedure:

0:00-0:04 Introduction

PPs will walk into room and immediately sit down at the tables. They can sit wherever they want, with whomever they want, just so long as they do not move any chairs from or to tables.

PPs will be introduced to the “café” by the Program leaders, describing some of the situations that that will be brought up. It is in Speed Dating style, the tables being set up in a circle. The outside will move counter clockwise and the inside will move clockwise (in other words, both the inside and out will move to their right), reaching all the stations and discussing with a new group each time.

PL1: *What is our connection to Israel? What about other religions? Do you believe one religion more than another? How do our lives as Jews differ from here than in Israel? What about those who aren't Jewish living in Israel; how are lives similar to our lives as Jews in America? (Have one PP answer for each question)*

PL2: *Welcome to the Interfaith Café, where you will get to enjoy some snacks, but also discuss as a group how interfaith relations play within Israel along with learning about the histories of the different religions Israel has birthed.*

PL3: *In a minute we will ask you to read the paper on your table as a group, and then answer and discuss the questions. If you are sitting on the outside of the tables, after a few minutes, each side of the table will be moving to the table to their right so they'll be at a new table with a new group of people.*

PL1: *At each station there is a piece of paper and marker. We will be piecing these papers into a banner to be shown when we come together as a region. During your discussions at each station you can write on the paper “prayers” or statements on your stands in Israel and how they'll change and grow.*

0:04-0:13 Station One

There will be six different stations, labeled A-H that each participant will visit. (See Appendix A) They will be on the topics:

- A. Christianity in Israel
- B. Judaism in Israel
- C. Muslim in Israel
- D. Challenges for non-Jews in Israel
- E. How do non-Jews identify with the Israeli flag and Hatikvah (the national anthem)?
- F. Interfaith YMCA Preschool
- G. Oneness of G-D
- H. Prayers of Peace

On each table, there will be sheets with the topic and history, along with discussion questions. Groups will be free to discuss the topics with advisors and other regional board members, but there will be no official group leaders.

At each station there will be paper that PP's can write their "prayers" or statements on their stands in Israel and how they'll change and grow.

0:13-0:14 Transition

Groups will move to their next station, the outside circle moving counter clockwise and the inside circle moving clockwise.

0:14-0:23 Station Two

Groups will discuss a new topic and work on a new quilt square at the next table.

0:23-0:24 Transition

Groups will move onto their next table.

0:24-0:33 Station Three

Groups will discuss a new topic at a new table.

0:33-0:34 Transition

Tables will move onto the next table.

0:34-0:43 Station Four

Groups will discuss a new topic.

0:43-0:44 Transition

Groups will move onto the next table.

0:44-0:53 Station Five

Groups will discuss a new topic.

0:53-0:54 Transition

Groups will move onto their last table.

0:54-1:03 Station Six

Groups will discuss their last topic

1:03-1:05 Conclusion

Program leaders will wrap up and transition into lunch.

***PL1:** Up next we are having lunch, but we encourage you to continue these same conversations with everyone over lunch and beyond. Maybe you guys came up with the same answers, maybe many of you differed. Interfaith relationships play throughout the world, even in Israel*

***PL2:** As you noticed, you didn't get a chance to go to all of the stations. We encourage you to talk with your friends, talk with people you don't know, to learn and hear about what they did at those tables. We hope that this will get the interfaith conversation started within our own religion, so hopefully it can continue to build between religions. We will now be moving into lunch.*

Appendix A

A.) Christianity's Claim to Israel

Many of us know the story of Jesus Christ. He was the messiah, the son of God, and he came to the people and healed them. He was later crucified but then was resurrected. In the heart of Jerusalem lies the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The site is called Golgatha, which is the place where Jesus was crucified. Also in the church is the Holy Sepulchre, where Jesus was buried.

The site was buried until Emperor Constantine the Great converted to Christianity in 312 AD. He quickly showed an interest in holy places relating to his new faith and commissioned numerous churches to be built throughout the Holy Land. The most important of these, is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. This church has been a pilgrimage for many of the Christian faith since the 4th century, and is now the host of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, Eastern Orthodoxy, Oriental Orthodoxy, and Roman Catholicism.

How is the Christian claim to Israel similar to the Jewish claim to Israel? Do you know any Christians that have talked about wanting to go to Israel? Why do you think that we don't hear as large of a percentage of Christians talk about taking a pilgrimage to Israel as you do from Jews? Do you feel that Christians should be able to get Birthright trips like we do? After you discuss, write some answers to these questions on the piece of the banner on the table.

Judaism's Connection to Israel

“God said to Abram, 'Go away from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you great. You shall become a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and he who curses you, I will curse. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you.’” Genesis 12:1-12:3

Abraham's journey to Canaan was the first reference to Israel in the Torah but it certainly wasn't the last. Throughout the history of the Jewish people, Israel has always been viewed as a homeland. From the story of Exodus in the Torah and then the writings of turmoil in the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud, Israel is always shown as a safe place. This same idea reoccurs after the Holocaust when Zionists such as David Ben-Gurion urge for the creation of a Jewish state in the land of Palestine. During the discussion of the creation of a Jewish state, there was debating of this state being geographically located in Africa Such as Theodor Herzl who wanted it in Uganda. Some may argue that this support is only religious and does not provide legitimate Jewish claim to the land of Israel. Archaeological evidence shows that the Jewish people began developing its distinctive religion and culture some 4,000 years ago in Israel. Jerusalem is the religious and political focus of the Jewish people from the time King David, from the Tribe of Judah and the village of Bethlehem, made it his fortress and the capitol of a united Jewish nation called Israel around 1000 BCE (II Samuel 25:7). When we reference Israel and Jerusalem, we think of the Kotel or Western Wall. These are the last physical evidence of the holy temple which were destroyed twice in 586 BCE by the Babylonians and then in 70 CE by the Romans. This religious landmark has often been used rather symbolically throughout the Jewish people. It has been seen as a symbol or hope, strength, and community. The fact that the remains are still standing after 1,941 years is truly remarkable and can represent the strength of the Jewish people.

Why do we as Jews have such a strong connection to Israel? Could Israel exist in a different location? If Israel was in a different location, would we still feel this deep “bond” for that land and Israel? After you discuss, write some of your thoughts on the banner.

Islam's Claim for Jerusalem

Given that Jerusalem isn't mentioned in the Koran, what is the uniquely Islamic connection to the site? The answer is found in the 17 Sura (chapter) of the Koran. This chapter recounts the story of a dream Mohammed has where he takes a midnight ride (*al-Isra*) on his flying horse *al-Buraq*, which had the face of a woman, the body of a horse and the tail of Peacock. The narrative of the Koran in Sura 17 describes it as follows:

"Glory be to Him, who carried His servant by night from the Holy Mosque (in Mecca) to the further mosque (al-masjid al-Aqsa), the precincts of which we have blessed."

In the late 7th century, the Umayyids claimed that the actual site of *al-Aqsa* was in fact the Temple Mount. Later the site of *al-Aqsa* was restricted to the mosque area at the southern end of the Temple Mount (the site of the current Al Aqsa Mosque). The original mosque, probably located on the site where Caliph Omar first prayed when he arrived in Jerusalem in 638, was built by the Umayyid Caliph al-Walid in the early 8th century. It was destroyed by earthquakes several times and later rebuilt.

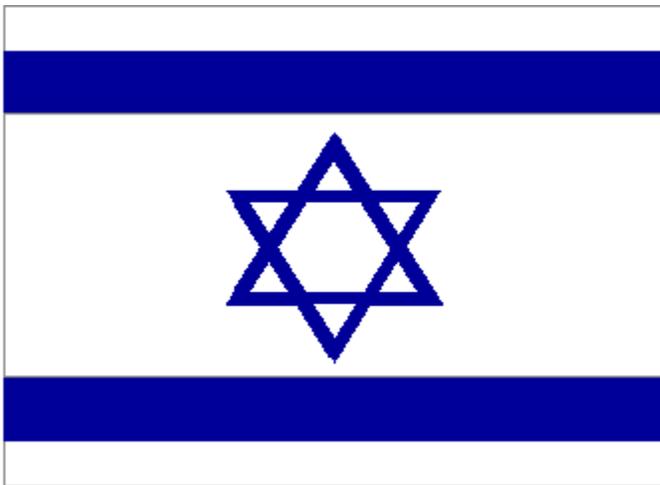
The narrative of the Koran then describes how Mohammed, having arrived at *al-Aqsa*, then ascends to heaven (*al-Mi'raj*: "the ascension") accompanied by the angel *Gibril* (Gabriel), where he then traveled around the heavens and spoke with *Allah* and other prophets. The Umayyids in Jerusalem claimed that the actual site of Mohammed's ascension to heaven was the exposed piece of bedrock at the top of Mount Moriah. Thus Caliph Abd-al-Malik's beautiful Dome of the Rock was built to commemorate the location of this important event.

From 638 CE until 1917 (with the exception of the Crusader occupation from 1099 to 1187), Jerusalem was controlled by various Islamic dynasties based in Syria, Egypt and Turkey. While Jerusalem remained a city of pilgrimage, none of these Islamic dynasties made Jerusalem their capital. The only other people in the last 3,000 years to have Jerusalem as a capital are the Crusaders who founded the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem from 1099-1187.

Today, although Israel technically claims sovereignty over the site of the Temple Mount and Dome of the Rock, the defacto reality since 1967 has been that the Muslims have control over the site.

How is Islam's connection to Jerusalem similar to the Jewish connection to Jerusalem? If this is such a Holy place and land for both religions, why do you think that Jews and Muslims continue to have violence in Jerusalem? Do you believe there is any way that Jews and Muslims could share the space occupied by the Temple Mount and the Dome of the Rock that would not lead to conflict? Why or why not? Write some suggestions to achieve this on the piece of the banner on the table.

In recent years, a few of Israel's Arab soccer players have been selected to play in the national team. They are honored, but at the same time confronted with the issue of singing the National Anthem at the beginning of each match. Although they are Israelis, a lot of Arabs feel that the anthem ("Hatikva") and also the Star of David flag for that matter don't really represent them since they are after all Jewish symbols representing Jewish history and yearning to return to their homeland. On the other hand, a lot of Jewish Israelis feel that a player that won't sing the anthem shouldn't be allowed to wear the uniform and play for the national team. This has triggered off a debate regarding the national anthem of Israel since it is only relevant to Jewish Israelis. The suggestion is being made to create a second anthem and national flag that will represent all Israelis, regardless of their religious or cultural affiliation. However, others argue that by doing so the whole idea of the State of Israel being the Jewish state – the Land of the Jews will completely vanish. Those holding that opinion also claim that although Arabs are entitled to complete equality under the law, they need to understand that they are after all living in Israel and not in one of its Arab neighboring countries. Who is right?



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THE HOPE

As long as deep within the heart
A Jewish soul stirs,
And forward, to the ends of the East
An eye looks out, towards Zion.

Our hope is not yet lost,
The hope of two thousand years,
To be a free people in our land
The land of Zion and Jerusalem.

Challenges for non-Jews in Israel

As Jews in America, we face a challenge every day when we wake up. We must try to be Jewish; we have to make a concerted effort every day to be Jewish. In Israel, however, that is not true. Last year, former NFTY Shaliach, Hanan Cidor, told us that Jews in Israel just have to wake up and they are Jewish. They don't have to make too much of an effort.

It is easy to be Christian in America. We get time off for Christmas, Easter, and other Christian holidays. Most of us in NFTY NO do not get school off for Rosh HaShanah or Yom Kippur – or even Passover.

Discuss a time when you've been in a situation where there has been a Christmas tree put up in your school (or somewhere like that), but not a menorah? How does it make you feel?

Consider this issue:

In recent years, with the immigration of many Jews from the former Soviet Union to Israel, Christmas trees have been seen in the windows and shops around December time. For Russians, Christmas is an important Russian festival, not from a Christian point of view but as a cultural reminder of life in Russia. One pub in down town Jerusalem where many Russians drink has even placed a Christmas tree outside the pub, which also happens to be opposite the municipality. Religious members of the town council are calling for action saying this weakens the Jewish character of society. Are they right?

Consider this issue:

In order to get citizenship in Israel, you must qualify in one of four ways:

1. Born to Israeli parents
2. A Jew who makes Aliyah
3. You were living in the borders of the British Mandate and haven't left (this is how many Arabs have citizenship in Israel)
4. Special permission from the Minister of the Interior

It is very difficult for non-Jews to become citizens of Israel. The Minister of the Interior very rarely grants citizenship under this last provision. Even if a non-Jew did gain citizenship, they cannot get married in Israel and cannot be buried in the land of Israel.

In America, we tend to see things as anti-Semitic when we Jews are not given equal rights. Should we also advocate for equal rights for non-Jews in Israel? Why or why not?

Appendix F

F.) Interfaith YMCA Preschool

The YMCA Peace Preschool is teaching Arab and Jewish children from a young age to work (and play) together in peace. The Peace Preschool has been running for about 30 years. Despite reoccurring issues, parents and teachers strive to work together to teach their children about peace.

Adena Levine, director of the Peace Preschool, stated “The kids don’t know the word ‘Arab’ or ‘Jew’. All they know is that they have friends with a different language”.

Although some teachers may come saddened by the news, they leave it at the door. The goal is not to discuss politics nor create a debate, the goal is peace. On days where the school offers programs to the children and their parents, the parents aren’t arguing about what is happening in the country, they are talking about their children. Each year, Jewish and Arab children take part in creating an image of Abraham as part of a co-existence project. Abraham was the father of both Isaac and Ishmael, Ishmael who is seen as the father of Islam.

Peace is not a new issue facing our culture and history. We have seen hatred and fighting since the time of Jacob and Esau. At that time, giving a child the birth right was a form of favoritism creating sibling rivalry. In this same story, we saw Jacob favor Joseph which caused Joseph’s brothers to hate him and sell him as a slave in Egypt. So, when does the hatred stop? Jacob tried changing his ways by giving both of Joseph’s sons the birth right. So, were Jacob and Esau taught to hate each other, or were they born that way?

Are children born to hate, or do they learn it? Do our parents’ feelings and beliefs affect how we view other people of different backgrounds and beliefs? Is there an age where people learn or choose to hate others or except others? Do parents’ ignorance equal children’s’ ignorance; do parents’ acceptance of others equal children’s’ acceptance of others?

The three prayers on the table speak to the Oneness of God. This weekend we are exploring the 3 major monotheistic religions and have this chance to see how each of the religions expresses their devotion to a single God through prayer. Look at all 3 prayers. What do you notice is similar? What is different? Does any of the language resonate with you in a new way after seeing them side by side? After reading and discussing them together, write a prayer about the importance of the Oneness of God with your group.

Sh'ma yisrael Adonai eloheinu Adonai echad.

Hear, O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is one.

This prayer is said each day upon waking up and going to sleep – as well as 3 other times during the daily prayers. It is supposed to be the last thing a Jew says before he dies. Jews also keep these words in their mezuzot on the doorposts of their house.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

This prayer is found in two places in the New Testament – Matthew 6:9 and Luke 11:2. It has been translated into hundreds of languages and recited at major times of the Christian holiday calendar. It is recited by all denominations of Christianity. On Easter Day, 2007, it was estimated that over 2 billion Christians read this prayer in their own language.

There is none worthy of worship except God and Muhammad is the messenger of God.

This declaration of faith is called the Shahadah, a simple formula that all the faithful pronounce. The significance of this declaration is the belief that the only purpose of life is to serve and obey God, and this is achieved through the teachings and practices of the Last Prophet, Muhammad. Reciting these words is one of the five pillars of Islam – it must be made three times sincerely for one to become Muslim.

The three prayers on the table pray for Peace on Earth. This weekend we are exploring the 3 major monotheistic religions and have this chance to see how each of the religions expresses their prayers for peace. Look at all 3 prayers. What do you notice is similar? What is different? Does any of the language resonate with you in a new way after seeing them side by side?

After reading and discussing them together, write a prayer for peace with your group.

*Oseh Shalom bimromav, Hu ya'aseh shalom alienu, v'al kol Yisrael. V'imru, Amen.
May He who makes peace in the heavens make peace for us, and all of Israel, and we say,
Amen.*

This prayer shows up multiple times throughout our prayer service – and in Birkat Hamzon. It has also become a popular song that we sing and that many musicians have set to music. It is perhaps one of the most recognized phrases from our liturgy. President Bill Clinton read it at Yitzhak Rabin's funeral.

*Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.*

This prayer is attributed to St Francis of Assisi in the 13th century. It is often incorporated into morning prayers. It has also been made into songs often – including one by Sarah McLaughlin. It was read at Princess Diana's funeral and in the movie Rambo.

*O God! O our Master! You are eternal life and everlasting peace by Your essence and attributes. The everlasting peace is from You and it returns to You. O our Sustainer! Grant us the life of true peace and usher us into the abode of peace. O Glorious and Bounteous One!
You are blessed and sublime.*