

TORAH—Educational Engagement Material for All Ages

6. DIFFERENCES & DILEMMAS: EXPLORING OUR CONNECTIONS TO ISRAEL—A Religious School/Family Education Program

INTRODUCTION

Often when we think of how to educate about Israel, we tend to forget that in order for an individual (kids as well as adults) to develop a long lasting, meaningful relationship to the Land and State of Israel, one needs to find one's own entry point and to grapple with ideas related to one's own connection to this special place. This program is designed to provide a few points of entry that would challenge some of the kids' and parents' beliefs and thoughts, explore their values and leave them wanting to learn and explore more.

OVERALL GOALS

- To encourage participants to articulate values related to their connection to Israel
- To provide opportunities for parents and kids equally to share their thoughts and ideas in a non-hierarchical manner
- To provide opportunities for a parent-child dialogue around the significance of Israel in their lives
- To strengthen the classroom community while providing them with engaging activities and topics for discussion

RATIONALE AND LENGTH

The 90-minute program consists of two 45-minute parts designed to complement one another. The first part of the program is meant to raise curiosity while sharing some interesting facts about Israel, as well as introducing the participants to the idea that when it comes to exploring one's relationships to the Land of Israel, there are no "wrongs." Israel is more than just a fact. It is a meaningful value, and therefore, every thought is legitimate and can and should be expressed.

The second part of the program deals with some specific dilemmas that might be raised when the value of Israel comes up within a Jewish conversation. The three dilemmas are just a small sample. If you feel you can raise dilemmas and questions that are more relevant to the lives of the families in your congregation, feel free to do so.

PARTICIPANTS

4th–7th graders and their parents.

Please note that we suggest not mixing the classrooms for the second part of this program, as each grade might explore the dilemmas according to their age level. Part One of the program can be conducted in a large group for all ages and then you might want to break into grade classes. This program can be conducted without

the presence of parents, but we strongly recommend conducting this as a Family Program, as this multi-generational dialogue is very enriching.

PART 1: THE TRUE OR FALSE GAME FOR YOM HA'ATZMA'UT

INTRODUCTION

In order to break the ice and introduce the subject of discussing the connection of North American Jews and Israel, we suggest opening with a fun “True or False” game that would demonstrate the fact that the purpose of this session is to learn from each other and to discuss the meaning of the State of Israel (*Medinat Yisrael*) to us.

GOALS

- Ice breaking, fun and compelling introduction to the subject
- Introducing the idea of Israel, and caring for the State of Israel, as a value
- Teach a few interesting facts about Israel that might cause curiosity and the will to explore more

RULES OF THE GAME

1. The game should be led by one teacher as Host and three Panel Presenters (could be three parents).
2. The three Panel Presenters are “Graduates of the College for Liars” meaning: They will all give answers to questions (presented by the Host) that seem like truth but only one answer is a true answer.
3. Competition of three groups: the Host should divide the participants into three groups (parents are also participating) and will appoint a representative from each group to provide the answer that the group comes up with. Each time a representative gives the right answer (the truth speaking presenter will reveal himself/herself by standing up), that group will receive a score.
4. Rounds: the game has 4 rounds. The first three rounds are simple—there is only one true answer at each round.
5. **4th round—Exception to the rule:** The fourth question DOES NOT deal with facts, but is a value. Therefore ALL the three answers to this question are true. The Host should *not* let the participants know about this rule exception until the end of the game. Once all presenters get up as speakers of truth, only then will the Host explain that all of them spoke the truth, and therefore, there are no winners and losers in this part of the game (please refer to the “linkage” part further down)

DURATION

45 minutes.

MATERIALS

Large board for scores

Sheets of true/false questions for the presenters (please have presenters prepare in advance)

A stage-like setting

COURSE OF THE GAME

1. The Host welcomes all participants and explains that they are here to explore and discuss their relationship to the State of Israel, in honor of its 60th Birthday. She/He will explain the rules of the game, divide the participants into three groups, and introduce the Panel Presenters.
2. The Host will run the game through to its end and then, after all Panel Presenters have admitted that they were answering the truth for the fourth question, he will explain in the following manner:

LINKAGE

- What is the difference between the first three questions and the last question?
- The first three questions were dealing with facts. The last question was related to “Value”—something very important to people. When we deal with values, there are no totally “right” or “wrong” answers. Everyone has his or her own opinions and beliefs. The purpose of today’s activity is not to overwhelm you with facts, but to provide us opportunities to learn from each other—to understand how and what you feel and think about certain ideas related to the State of Israel.

TRUE OR FALSE QUESTIONS (BASED ON FACTS)

1. **What was the exact secular date that Israel declared itself an independent Jewish State (Hebrew date—5th of Iyar)?**
 - The declaration on Israel’s independence occurred on Friday afternoon, May 14, 1948. It was important to declare the establishment of the State of Israel before the British Mandate (administration over Israel’s territory) ended the next day, since the Jews were afraid of an Arab attack and did not want to postpone. (true)
 - The declaration on Israel’s independence occurred in the Tel Aviv museum on Saturday evening, May 15, 1948, shortly after *Shabbat* ended and immediately after the British Government ended its Mandate. That day, the Egyptian forces attacked Israel from the air. (false)
 - The Declaration of Independence was signed on Sunday May 23, 1948. The American government had tried to bring about a truce agreement between sparring Arab and the Israeli forces after the British Mandate ended; it was important for this agreement to occur before any Declaration of Independence in order to prevent all out war. Since the American efforts had failed, the temporary Israeli government then declared the formation of the Jewish State. (false)
2. **How many days a week, and on what days, do Israeli children go to school?**
 - The Israeli children go to school 5 days a week from Sunday–Thursday, since Friday is the day Israelis prepare for *Shabbat*. (False)
 - The Israeli children go to school 5 days a week from Monday–Friday. They finish up school early on Fridays in order preparing for *Shabbat*. Israelis have Sundays off as well because of the influence of Western culture: They use a secular calendar, watch American movies, love Harry Potter books, and they also want to accommodate the 2.1% Christians who live in Israel. (False)
 - The Israeli children go to school 6 days a week, Sunday–Friday. Even though they study more days a week than North American kids, their school days are somewhat shorter: The average Israeli school day lasts from 8:00AM–1:00 P.M. (True)

3. **On what circumstances (when and where) did Theodore Herzl say the words: “*Im Tirtzu, Ein zo Aggada*” (“If you will it, it is no dream”)**
- Theodore Herzl wrote this phrase at the end of the nineteenth century in his book *Old, New Land*, referring to the establishment of a Jewish State. This phrase was adapted by the Zionist Movement—the movement that was striving for the re-establishment of a National Homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine. (True)
 - Theodore Herzl, the visionary advocate for the State of the Jews, said these words at the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland (1897) when he was giving his opening speech. (False)
 - Theodore Herzl said these words at the Seventh Zionist Congress in 1905, as a way to appease the Zionist groups from Eastern Europe after many months of arguments over a British suggestion to establish a Jewish State in Uganda (Africa). Herzl saw this offer as a wonderful opportunity and supported the British offer because he was afraid for the well being of Russian Jews who suffered many government sponsored attacks (“Pogroms”) at the time. (False)

MORE QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER (DON'T USE MORE THAN 3 “FACTS” QUESTIONS PER GAME)

- **How was the Israeli flag created and who came up with this idea?**
- **What is the favorite vacation spot in Israel?**
- **How long does it take for new Jewish immigrants to Israel to receive their Israeli citizenship?**
- **What percent of the total Israeli population are the minorities (non-Jews)?**
- **How big is the state of Israel?**
- **How do you say “Hamburger” in Hebrew?**

FINAL QUESTION (BASED ON VALUES—ALL ANSWERS ARE “TRUE”)

4. **What is the meaning of the State of Israel to Jews around the world?**
1. (Spiritual meaning) The Land of Israel is the birthplace of Judaism and the place where we can express our spiritual connection to our religion. Israel is Holy to us. (true)
 2. (National meaning) The State of Israel is the Jewish national Homeland. It was established as a safe haven for all Jews and our historic home where Jews can again govern ourselves as a nation. Every Jew has the right to become an Israeli citizen. (true)
 3. (Culture) The State of Israel is the place where the Jews were born in ancient times as a People, which now has the largest number of Jews (Israelis) in one place, and where the national language, customs, holidays, and history are all based on Jewish foundations. (true)

PART TWO: EXPLORING DILEMMAS RELATED TO OUR RELATIONSHIP TO ISRAEL

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this part is to have the participants (adults and kids together) grapple with ideas related to the nature of the Jewish State and to their relationships and obligations to the State of Israel. As stated in the

game, there are no “wrongs” ideas. Every opinion is legitimate and educating for the group. The goals of this part are reflected in the overall goals stated at the beginning of this program.

DURATION

45 minutes

MATERIALS

- 3 Dilemma cards with some discussion questions.
- Props
- Board+Markers

COURSE OF PROGRAM

1. Associations (5-10 minutes): The program leader will write the word “Israel” on the board and will ask the group to give associations they have with this word. The program leader will write the words on the board and will point out some other relevant ideas. For instance: Hebrew, 60, 1948, Jews and Arabs, war, camels, warm climate, holy, Jerusalem, my Israeli cousin, my hebrew teacher, the Western Wall etc. Each association might invite more comments, interpretations and opportunities for discussion about similarities and differences to life here—but DO NOT have this activity exceed more than 10 minutes.
2. Linkage to dilemmas: The program leader will note that this exercise brought up many questions and ideas, any of which can be explored in depth. However, we would like to concentrate on three ideas which will be presented to you through dilemmas.
3. What is a dilemma: A dilemma is a story which invites many thoughts. A dilemma is a difficult decision, and any person (child, adult) encounters dilemmas throughout the course of his or her life.
4. Divide the class into three groups and explain that each group will receive a dilemma to grapple with. The mission of each group will be to discuss the questions in the story it will get, try to come up with a solution to this dilemma, and then present it to the rest of the class as a skit (use drama). Encourage the kids and the parents to participate alike (as they prepare for their skit) and even suggest to the parents to “play” the role of kids and to the kids to “play” the role of parents.
5. Working in small groups: please give each group 20 minutes to discuss the dilemmas and prepare for the skit. While the groups are working, please go around the room and offer your help to the participants when it is necessary.
6. Dilemmas presentation:
Setting the atmosphere:
The program leader should set a place in the classroom for an imaginary stage, ask the people to turn off the mobile phones (ideally they will be turned off as a result of their participation at the program) and welcome them to the “Our Israel” play. The more the class gets into the right setting, they will respond better to their friends’ skits and the dilemmas presented in front of them.
The program leader, or any of the group members, should be prepared to read the dilemma in front of the classroom in order for the rest of the groups to understand the skit.
Summarizing after each skit:
The program leader should be prepared to highlight the solution and ask clarification questions after each skit.

7. Summary:

“We’ve been discussing and learning from each other about various aspects of life in Israel—both similar and different than ours—and our relationship to the State of Israel. It was interesting to share all of these different opinions about our Jewish Homeland and its value in our lives. I invite you to continue this discussion at home and find more ways to connect to the Land and State of Israel.”

EXPLORING OUR CONNECTION TO ISRAEL—DILEMMAS

B’NEI MITZVAH

Julie and Alexander are twins preparing for their *B’nei Mitzvah* ceremony. Last night at dinner, their parents presented them with a tempting offer: “I just spoke to my friend David from work,” said their Dad, “and he told me what a great time they had in Israel celebrating their daughter’s *Bat Mitzvah*. He says it was a phenomenal experience for the whole family, so Mom and I started considering this seriously...”

“If we cut down on some of your *B’nei Mitzvah* expenses here and just hold a modest gathering in our Temple” continued Mom enthusiastically, “we could all go to Israel, tour the country and have a nice ceremony near the *Kotel* (the Western Wall).”

“What do you mean by cutting down the expenses here?” asked Julie.

“Well...” their Mom began, “it means no big, fancy party, no designer clothes, no DJ and no to all the party favors you wanted to give to your friends. Also, if we want to keep it small, many of our extended family members may not be able to celebrate this moment with you.” Their 17 year old sister Natalie then jumped into the conversation. “Not to mention the fact that you might encounter some security challenges there. When I was in Israel two summers ago there was tension in the northern part of the country and they wouldn’t let us go any farther north than Tel Aviv. So we ended up seeing only half of the country. Considering the money we paid for that miserable trip—it just seemed not worth it.”

“Natalie, you’re not being fair,” said Dad. “Why don’t we give it some thought, kids,” he said, turning to them, “what do you say?”

Now Julie and Alexander got really confused. They had never been to Israel and the possibility of celebrating their *B’nei Mitzvah* in Jerusalem as well as touring this country they’d heard so much about seemed exciting. “On the other hand,” said Alexander, “I want a *Bar Mitzvah* event just like my friends’ and I want to be able to celebrate it with as much of my family members as possible. I tend to say ‘let’s celebrate here.’”

“But how can you say no to Israel?” asked Julie. “I want to be able to celebrate this moment in the Jewish Homeland. I want to see Israel for the first time with my family.”

The conversation continues...

Please try to come up with a solution to this dilemma and present this as a skit to your class members.

Discussion Questions:

1. What makes a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* experience special? What makes a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* experience in Israel unique? What is so special about seeing Israel for the first time with your family?
2. What are the advantages of celebrating your *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* in your country? Are there ways to connect a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* celebration to Israel even if one celebrates it here? What are they?
3. What were Natalie’s thoughts regarding the possible Israel trip? Why did she choose to raise them?

MOVING AWAY

Lately, your friend Dan has seemed very upset. Anytime you and your friends would try to talk to him or invite him to go to the movies together, or just ask him to join your soccer game during recess at school, he would just become extremely sad and refuse to join in.

“I’m really worried about him,” your friend Emily said to you. “He keeps avoiding all of us and looks really sad. Would you talk to him? He’s your best friend.”

“I tried a couple of times,” you replied, “but maybe I should try harder.” You decided to pay him an unexpected visit at his house that afternoon. Your Mom dropped you off. Your heart was beating fast as you knocked on the door holding a bag of your favorite treats and a few soccer magazines you wanted to leave with Dan as a friendship gesture.

The door was answered by Dan. You looked at his red eyes and realized he had been crying. As you looked behind his shoulder you could see that there were some boxes in the house and Dan’s Mom seemed busy packing. “What is going on?” you asked surprised.

“We’re moving. To Israel,” said Dan. “I won’t know anyone there and you know how I hate Hebrew, and I just don’t understand how they can take me away from my friends and school.” Dan looked at his Mom with anger.

“Dan, we discussed this a million times,” said his Mom. “There will be a special English speakers’ class in your school. There are many kids with families who made *Aliyah* (immigration to Israel) there. We decided we want our family to live in the Jewish Homeland.”

“But nobody asked me,” said Dan. Now you feel confused. Your best friend is moving away to Israel. You’ve been there a few times visiting your cousins, so you know how beautiful and welcoming this country is... but to not see your best friend everyday? What do you say to him? How do you make him feel better? Why are Dan’s parents doing this to him?

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think made Dan’s parents decide to make *Aliyah* (immigrating to Israel)?
2. Try to imagine how Dan’s life might look in Israel? Would his school be like yours? Would he study the same things and play the same sports? What might his challenges be? What are the good things about living in Israel?
3. What is hard about moving away to another place? Is it different to move to another country rather than moving to a distant part of this country? Would it be different moving to Israel than moving to, perhaps, France?

SHABBAT SHALOM?

Alex is very excited. Here she is, in the amazing Land of Israel for the first time, sipping from her tasty milkshake on the beach while chatting with her Israeli friend, Noya. Alex’s family is staying with Noya’s family for the second week now, and the reason Alex is so excited is because she was just invited to Noya’s friend’s 10th birthday party that afternoon. It’s late Saturday morning and suddenly Noya realizes they didn’t get a chance to buy gifts for Shani, her friend. “Oh, Shani is going to be so disappointed when we show up empty handed,” said Noya.

“I don’t understand the problem,” said Alex, “why don’t we ask your Mom to drive us to the mall so we can pick up a few gifts before we get to the party.”

“No, we can’t,” Noya replied, “it’s *Shabbat* and on *Shabbat* the mall is closed.”

“How come?” said Alex, “this is the best day for shopping.”

“I agree,” said Noya, “it is very annoying not to be able to shop for a gift on *Shabbat*. Not to mention the fact that there are some cities here that won’t even have buses running on *Shabbat*, movie theaters are closed and more.”

“Why is that?” asked Alex.

“It is because of the ‘*Shabbat* Law,’” said Noya’s Mom, who was listening to the conversation with a big smile. “Since according to the Jewish law you’re not supposed to work on *Shabbat*, and Israel is a Jewish State, they have a law preventing businesses from being open on *Shabbat*,” she explained.

“But we’re not WORKING, we’re just SHOPPING. This is a modern country,” said Noya. “As an Israeli Jew, I think this law needs to change!”

“But clerks in the stores would be working,” said Noya’s Mom as she turned to Alex, who seemed confused and puzzled. “What about you Alex?” she asked. “Do you agree with Noya? Should we change the law of *Shabbat*?”

Please try to come up with a solution to this dilemma and present this as a skit to your class members.

Discussion Questions:

1. As we learned from this dilemma, Israel has rules that try to preserve its Jewish nature. Are there more Jewish laws you know of that are observed in Israel?
2. Noya is an Israeli girl who thinks some of the laws should be changed. What does this teach us about the way Israelis approach this issue? Do you think there are Israelis who would disagree with Noya’s approach?
3. What do you think about these kinds of laws? Are there (or were there) similar laws in this country? Do you think *Shabbat* observance/celebration is different or easier in Israel than in North America?