



ISRAELI JUDAISM – THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US?



THE 4HQ OF IT...

In this session we address the nature of the Jewish People. Can we easily recognize ourselves and most Israeli Jews as being members of the same People? How much do we share in the Covenantal, Communitarian, and Cosmopolitan aspects of our People?

INTRODUCTION

Drawing on the research of Shmuel Rosner and Camil Fuchs ("#IsraeliJudaism: Portrait of a Cultural Revolution 2019"), we will be looking at the Jewish lives of Israeli Jews, and comparing them with the Jewish lives of the learners. Learners will engage with challenging differences and challenging similarities between Jewish practice in Israel, and their own Jewish practice in the United States, so as to assess their own belonging to the Jewish People:

Where do Israeli understandings of what it is to be a Jew fit or clash with my understandings of what it is to be a Jew?

AIMS

For the learners to:

- Challenge their own stereotypes of Israeli Jewish religious norms
- Apply the language of Peoplehood – Covenantal, Communitarian, Cosmopolitan – to their understandings of Israeli Judaisms
- Assess and discuss their own sense of belonging to a Jewish People that includes Israeli Jews

PREPARATION

- A line of tape on the floor marked with numbers 1% at the beginning, mark 10%, 25%, 50%, 75% & at the end 100%
- Print-out of the statistics

PART 1 - ISRAELI JEWISHNESS - 30 MIN

- Give the students background on the study by Shmuel Rosner and Camil Fuchs.
- Ask students to stand in the place on the line that they think represents the correct percentage in the following cases:
- After each statement, ask someone to share why they think where they are standing is the answer. Then stand by the correct answer.
- Where the difference between most answers and the correct answer is significant, ask everyone to walk from their assumption to the true statistic. ("Measuring the distance...")
- Where the question is marked in red, you can also ask learners to estimate the percentage of Americans who practice these things. Answers are in brackets.
- Pick several of the statements to expand the conversation: once the students have placed themselves and know the correct answer, ask them what percentage of the group does these things - i.e. How many of you eat apple and honey on Rosh Hashana, etc...

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF ISRAELIS:

- light candles every Friday night - 73% (23%)
- eat apple and honey on Rosh Hashana - 94% [The average Israeli will eat over one full jar of honey during the month of Tishrei - ~300g]
- fast on Yom Kippur - 67% (40%)
- hide the Afikoman on Seder night - 76% (70%)
- are Jewish - (80%) (2.4%)
- stand at the Yom HaZikaron siren - 94%
- barbecue on Yom Ha'atzmaut - 63%
- do not drive on Shabbat - 35%
- What percentage of cinemas are open on Shabbat in Israel - 98%

PART 2 - ISRAELI JEWISHNESS AND ME - 30 MIN



Put all the statistics up on the wall, for reference.

Ask everyone to write any number of sticky notes and post them on the wall around the statistics sheet. Each note must end with either a question mark, or an exclamation mark - something you are now pondering, or something that surprised you or enlightened you.

Draw a discussion from any or many of the notes on the wall.

In the discussion make sure that Israel and Israelis are part of the conversation. ie move away from talk that centers only on learners' own practice without reference to Israel.

PART 3 - AM I A GOOD JEW IN ISRAELI EYES? - 15 MIN

Read the following from the Rosner-Fuchs study:

"Most Jews in Israel believe that being Jewish means observing festivals, rituals and customs, and a majority believe that being a good Jew means raising one's children to serve in the Israeli Defense Forces..."

DISCUSS:

Why do you think most Israeli Jews see army service as a Jewish practice?

Encourage participants to use the 3c's language of Covenantal, Communitarian, and Cosmopolitan. For example, army service might emerge from the Communitarian commitment.

If a "good Jew" is someone who encourages their children to serve in the IDF, how might this definition "grade" Jews in America? How do you feel about this?

PART 4 - AND WHAT ABOUT TIKKUN OLAM? - 15 MIN

According to the Pew Report of 2021, 69% of American Jews, and only 47% of Israeli Jews agreed that:

"To live a moral and ethical life is essential to being Jewish"

You might wish to conclude your session with an exploration of the differences in this statistic.

Encourage participants to use the 3c's language of Covenantal, Communitarian, and Cosmopolitan. For example, a "moral and ethical life" might emerge from the Cosmopolitan commitment.