

Limits of Labels:
Addressing the Challenges to Jewish Unity

"AM YISRAEL" CAN WE CALL OURSELVES ONE?

ICEBREAKER:

(Read aloud): We all have our own ideas surrounding how we identify with being a Jew. For some it is their level of religious observance; for others it is in regards to their ethnic background; and for others it is the innate connection they feel to the land of Israel - the home of the Jewish people.

Have the group respond to the following "Trigger Statements:" Answers can be called out at random, or written down on paper. (10 minutes)

- Being "part of the Jewish people" makes me feel like ...
- Being "part of the Jewish people" connects me to ...
- Being "part of the Jewish people" gives me the opportunity to ...
- Being "part of the Jewish people" adds meaning to my life because ...
- Being "part of the Jewish people" positively shapes the way I ...
- Being "part of the Jewish people" helps me to ...

AFTER TRIGGER STATEMENT DISCUSSION:

Have participants discuss a comment thread between their responses to the above. How would they define "the Jewish people?" Do they feel a sense of connection to "the Jewish people?" Why or why not? (This will help guide the narrative for the activity).

INTRO: (Read aloud)

Many of us identify with various labels when it comes to our Jewish background - Ashkenazi Jew, Ethiopian Jew, Diaspora Jew; the list is endless. While these labels are not negative, they do create an unnecessary separation at times and lead many to feel isolated if they don't directly belong to such a subcategory. Further, the immense subcategorization causes us as a Jewish Nation to be disunified, making it harder to defend ourselves both internally and externally. This activity looks to explore how we can still identify with these labels while still remaining cognizant of the fact that we are part of a Jewish Nation; or a Jewish Peoplehood.

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We are now going to assess various quotes and videos that will cultivate a greater discussion around this topic. There will be a couple of guiding questions in between the sources along with ones that create a discussion around the topic as a whole.

QUOTES: (Read Aloud)

“Both those who meticulously define subgroups and those who refuse to play the labeling game take denominational designations way too seriously. If the recent and much-discussed Pew Research Center study of American Jewry is any indication, American Jews treat denominational affiliation as a function of identity and even use the terms “identity” and “affiliation”— two distinct concepts — almost interchangeably. For Pew, the opposite of a denominationally identified Jew is an unaffiliated Jew.” - [Elli Fischer](#)

“The bonds of Jewish peoplehood are not unbreakable. If we keep dividing ourselves, pushing away that which we don’t like and clinging only to what’s comfortable, we’ll wake up one day without a Jewish people. We’ll have small circles of like-minded people, but no eternal bond, linking us through time and space.” - [Samantha Vinokor](#)

“...I am arguing for a perspective through which all of Jewish life is seen as constitutive of the broader Jewish collective, of Jewish Peoplehood. If we hold onto a Jewish Peoplehood consciousness, we won’t consider any of these issues without bearing in mind that the Jewish People is a global collective, with a multi-faceted civilization that provide sources of inspiration and resources for the future, for all Jews wherever they are.” - [Clare Goldwater](#)

Open up for comments before moving on to the videos.

WATCH:

Why am I a Jew? - Rabbi Sacks

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=380&v=CAbiFbpQP8o (6.5 minutes)

Lack of Jewish Unity is the Source of Anti-Semitism (recommended but may skip this if you are short on time)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ofr6PtsSS0> (3 minutes)

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

(can break up into groups or do as a collective group)

What really makes you Jewish? Do you feel part of a “Jewish Peoplehood” as it’s portrayed above?

How would you describe the concept of “Jewish Peoplehood” in your own words?

Why do you feel non-Jews see us as one Jewish nation (i.e. anti-semitism is directed at all of us - not one group versus another) but we ourselves don’t feel this unity?

If we take away the ability to label, would you still be able to describe your Jewish identity?

How can we maintain these labels while still seeing ourselves as a collective “Jewish People”?

How does recognizing Jewish Peoplehood as a central component of Jewish identity help us better connect with the Jewish state? And how does our connection to the Jewish state of Israel help us better appreciate our inclusion in the global Jewish peoplehood?

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