



ACTIVITY

Covenantal Belonging

Materials Needed

- Copies of Genesis text (Genesis 1-14)
- Copies of 'The Jews' by Yehudah Amichai

Time Needed

30-45 minutes

Goal

Participants will reflect upon their sense of belonging to the Jewish people through the lens of the biblical concept of Covenant.

Before You Get Started

Look at the list of enduring understandings. Which one would you like to emphasize through this activity?

1. Judaism is not (only) a religion. It is also a People and the national component of Jewish civilization is central to understanding Jewish texts, practices and culture.
2. Many of Judaism's norms, laws and mitzvot are articulated and relevant through the Jewish collective.
3. The Jewish People (and not its constituent individuals) is the carrier of Jewish religion and civilization. Sustaining the People and continuing its legacy is therefore a core Jewish value.
4. "The Jewish People are bound by a shared past (the covenant of fate) and a shared future (the covenant of destiny)" – Soloveitchik.

Directions for Activity

1. Look carefully at the motif of the covenant in the poem.
2. Consider the role of circumcision as a key moment in becoming part of the Jewish People. What does it add to the poem that Amichai focused on this expression of covenantal belonging?
3. Discuss the notion of covenant with your students. What is a covenant? How is it different from an agreement?
4. Look at the excerpt from Genesis in which God makes a covenant with Abraham. What does God promise to Abraham and what does Abraham need to promise in return? How do your students relate to this notion? Do they feel part of a covenant with the Jewish People, and if they do, how do they join?
5. For older students, you might want to raise the (controversial) issue of brit milah (circumcision) as a concept. There are some contemporary debates about circumcision, in several frameworks. Some countries or local authorities are considering outlawing it, and some parents are against it also, considering it too "tribal." Others take brit milah as a normative practice for their community (this is true of Orthodox and traditional Jews and even secular Israelis.) Ask participants what they think about the practice of Brit Milah as being a sign of connection to a tribe. What is powerful about that kind of "sign" of a covenant or holy agreement? Are there other ways in which this commitment to a tribe is/ should be expressed in our day?
6. Sum up the discussion and ask participants to share a question or idea they are left with.

Note to Educator

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