

Jewish Mutual Responsibility

Lesson Plan

Introduction

In this lesson, students will learn about the concept of Jewish mutual responsibility.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to understand the importance that Judaism places on our caring for the needs of other Jews.

Materials

blindfolds, tongue depressors, masking tape, story (attached)

Background

A famous phrase from the Talmud states: כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲרֻבִים זֶה בָּזֶה – *kol yisrael eraiveim zeh baze*: everyone in Israel is responsible for everybody else (the phrase appears for example in Shevuot 39a).

This concept of *areivut* - mutual responsibility - is expressed in many of Judaism's laws. The Torah places great emphasis not only on how we serve God, but also in how we treat our fellow Jews. Laws such as charity, visiting the sick, and returning lost objects are just a few examples of these.

Another important mitzvah of mutual responsibility is that of redeeming captives (פְּדִיּוֹן שְׁבוּיִים). The Soviet Jewry movement exemplified the concept of *areivut* as Jews from around the world stood up and took responsibility for their Russian brothers. They succeeded in releasing individuals imprisoned by the Soviet authorities, and in eventually freeing all of the Jews locked behind the **Iron Curtain**.



Procedure

Ask the students if they can think of commandments in the Torah that require Jews to help one another.

Discuss the concept of *areivut* and connect it to the Soviet Jewry movement.

The following exercises will allow them to feel responsible for their peers on the one hand, and dependent from them on the other hand. (Activity credit: Rabbi Jonathan Mishkin)

Exercise #1

- Divide the class into pairs and blindfold one member of each pair. The task of the non-blindfolded student is to lead his partner through an obstacle course using only speech – the seeing student is not allowed to touch the blindfolded one. Run this exercise through the halls of your school, through a playground or on an obstacle course.
- Before beginning, map out the path that you want the students to take and tape arrows indicating the route that the pairs have to follow. Make it difficult so that the blindfolded member really has to rely on his partner to avoid falling or bumping into things.
- After the pairs complete the route, have the blindfolded children give the blindfolds to their guides and redo the course, backwards.
- When everybody has had a chance to be a leader and a follower, discuss the experience with the group. Consider these questions:
 - Did the children prefer to be led or to lead?
 - How did they feel being dependent on others for their safety?
 - How did it feel having the responsibility for making sure their partners didn't walk into a tree?
 - What other situations might arise when we are asked to take care of people who need assistance?
 - Are we generally eager to help out others or would we rather just be left alone?
 - Conversely, are we too proud and reluctant to ask other people for help or do we realize that nobody is completely self-sufficient?



Exercise #2 – to be done in a framework where children eat together

- Tape three tongue depressors together to create splints. You will need two splints for every child.
- Gather the students and, using masking tape, fasten the splints to the *inside* elbow of each arm. The idea is to tape the arms so that the kids cannot bend their elbows. Do not explain to the students why you are doing this, just tape them up one at a time. (You might want to ask a couple of other staff members to assist you.)
- Send the class off to lunch. The kids will realize very quickly that they are unable to eat in the current situation.
- When the meal is over (and your students are all covered in food) discuss their dining experience using these questions as triggers:
 - Why did some kids prefer to eat with their faces rather than ask another child for help?
 - Did anybody feel a sense of power knowing that his neighbor could only eat lunch if he helped? Did that make the feeders act gently or impatiently?
 - How did students feel having something as basic as eating taken out of their control, forcing them to rely on somebody else just to eat and drink?
 - Most children depend on their parents or other adults to provide them with food, buy them clothes and keep the bathroom stocked with soap, toothpaste and toilet paper. Does this situation also make us feel dependent, or are we glad that people help us take care of some of our needs? Is there a difference between somebody buying our food and somebody feeding it to us?
- Read the class the attached story which inspired this activity.