

Activity Cards

An Introduction to Jewish Ritual, Prayer and Holidays

Instructions to the Teacher: Print the following pages and prepare these separate activity cards to distribute to different groups of students. See Activity 2 for details of the lesson plan.

Card 1

Instructions for Students: How does the following practice (ritual, prayer or holiday) reinforce a connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel?

From the Amida (silent prayer, central to each of the three daily prayer services): “Have mercy, O Lord, and return to Jerusalem, Your City; May Your Presence dwell there as you Promised. Rebuild it now, in our days and for all time. Reestablish there the majesty of David, your servant. Praised are You, O Lord, who rebuilds Jerusalem....May our eyes witness Your return in mercy to Zion. Praised are You, O Lord, whose Presence returns to Zion.”

From the Torah Service (conducted during morning services every Monday and Thursday as well as during the Shabbat service every week): “When the ark was carried onward, Moses exclaimed: Arise, O Lord, that Your enemies be scattered and those who would deny You be put to flight. For out of Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the word of the Lord out of Jerusalem.” (Note: The word “Zion” refers to Jerusalem in specific and Israel in general.)

Card 2

Instructions for Students: How might the following practice (ritual, prayer or holiday) reinforce a connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel?

From the daily blessings after meals (Birkat Hamazon):

“We thank you, Lord our God, for having given us a beautiful, good, and spacious land; for having taken us out of Egypt and redeemed us from the house of slavery; for your covenant which You sealed in our flesh; for your Torah which You have taught us; for the life, grace and kindness You have granted us; and for the food which sustains us at all times....Have mercy, Lord our God, on Israel your people, on Jerusalem your city, on Zion Your dwelling place, on the house of David your anointed messiah, and on the holy Temple that bears your name....Rebuild Jerusalem the holy city quickly in our days. Blessed are You, Lord, who rebuilds Jerusalem in mercy. Amen.”

Card 3

Instructions for Students: How might the following practice (ritual, prayer or holiday) reinforce a connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel?

From the Jewish wedding ceremony (part of the “seven blessings” said during the Jewish marriage ceremony): “Let the barren city be jubilantly happy and joyful at her joyous reunion with her children. You are blessed, Lord, who makes Zion rejoice with her children....You are blessed, Lord our G-d, the sovereign of the world, who created joy and celebration, bridegroom and bride, rejoicing, jubilation, pleasure and delight, love and brotherhood, peace and friendship. May there soon be heard, Lord our G-d, in the cities of Judea and in the streets of Jerusalem, the sound of joy and the sound of celebration, the voice of a bridegroom and the voice of a bride, the happy shouting of bridegrooms from their weddings and of young men from their feasts of song. You are blessed, Lord, who makes the bridegroom and the bride rejoice together.”

At the very end of the wedding ceremony, the new husband recites the verse: “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its cunning, may tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I forget thee and do not place Jerusalem as my highest joy.” He then breaks a glass, in memory of the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E.

Card 4

Instructions for Students: How might the following practice (ritual, prayer or holiday) reinforce a connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel?

The First Fruits Ceremony and the Passover Haggadah

There is a very interesting connection between the first fruits ceremony (conducted before the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E.) and the Haggadah that is used during the festival of Passover (which evolved after 70 C.E.).

During the time when Jews were living in the ancient land of Israel, every year they observed the “first fruits ceremony,” as described in Deuteronomy, Chapter 26, verses 1-11. Read these verses. They describe a ceremony in which the Jewish farmer (the typical Israelite) expressed his gratitude for living in the land of Israel.

In summary, the verses command the ancient Jewish farmer to bring a basket of his first fruits to the Temple in Jerusalem and say to the priest: “I acknowledge this day before the Lord your God that I have entered the land that the Lord swore to our fathers to assign us.” The priest then took the basket and set it down in front of the altar in the Temple. Then the Jewish farmer would recite a subpassage that was later incorporated in the Passover Haggadah. This subpassage begins with the words: “My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and lived there.” It continues to tell the story of the Jewish people’s slavery in Egypt and the redemption from Egypt. It ends with the words: “He (God) brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Wherefore I now bring the first fruits of the soil which You, O Lord, have given me.” The verses continue to command the farmer to “bow before the Lord your God” and ends with the following words: “And you shall enjoy, together with the Levite and the stranger in your midst, all the bounty that the Lord your God has bestowed upon you and your household.”

After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., the Passover Haggadah as we know it began to develop. The central commandment on Passover is “to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt.” In the Haggadah, the rabbis chose the same verses quoted above (starting with “My father was a fugitive Aramean” but ending before the words: “He (God) brought us to this place”). What might be the significance of choosing these words, the same words used in the first fruits ceremony to express the typical Israelite’s gratitude for living in Israel, at a time when Jews were exiled from their homeland?

At the close of the Passover Haggadah, Jews say: “Next Year in Jerusalem!”

Card 5

Instructions for Students: How might the following practice (ritual, prayer or holiday) reinforce a connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel?

The Ninth Day of Av (fast day for the destruction of the Second Temple):

Each year, Jews fast on the ninth day of the month of Av, in memory of the destruction of the First Temple and Second Temple, which were located on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. To find out more about this observance, enter “Tisha B’Av” at Google.com

Today, the Temple site is occupied by two Muslim mosques: El-Aksa and the Dome of the Rock.

Other possibilities: The teacher can prepare other activity cards regarding other Jewish holy days such as Chanukah, Shavuot, Sukkot and Tu B’Shvat.

Note to Teacher: Your students will probably discover that some holidays (e.g., Tu B’Shvat, which celebrates the fruits of the land of Israel) are more connected to the land of Israel than others (e.g., the Jewish Sabbath, which celebrates the creation, God’s resting on the seventh day as a model for human behavior, and the Exodus from Egypt). The three central holidays (Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot) all have names and significance that focus on Israel’s agricultural cycle. Also, most fast days (e.g., the Ninth of Av, when the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem were destroyed) are strongly connected with the city of Jerusalem. Thus, throughout Jewish history, the holidays and fast days have acted to connect the land of Israel to Jews, even when they lived outside Israel.

Resources

Overview

“How Did the Jews Maintain Their Attachment to Zion (Israel) Throughout the Centuries of Exile?”
www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/biblejew.html

“The Jewish Claim to the Land of Israel”
www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/The_Jewish_Claim_To_The_Land_Of_Israel.html

Centrality of Jerusalem and Zion to Judaism throughout the centuries—www.zionism-israel.com/his/Jerusalem_history.htm

Repeated Jewish immigration to the Holy Land, 1240-1840 at Arie Morgenstern, “Dispersion and the Longing for Zion, 1240-1840,” Azure, Winter 5762 / 2002 –www.azure.org.il/12-mor.htm

“Heritage: Civilization and the Jews” (Web resources based on Abba Eban’s PBS TV series, book and the interactive DVD-ROM)—
www.pbs.org/wnet/heritage/resources.html

Timeline from Heritage—www.pbs.org/wnet/heritage/timeline.html

Prayers and Ritual

Birkat HaMazon (English translation of complete text of Grace After Meals)—
www.lookstein.org/lessonplans_output.php?id=322433&existing=%3Ci%3EBirkat%20Hamazon%3C/i%3E

Amidah (prayer of silent devotion)—
www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/amidah.html. (See “Laws and Customs,” paragraph one.)

Jewish marriage ceremony—www.chabad.org/library/howto/wizard.asp?AID=476772. (See paragraph five.)