

# Activities

## Activity 1

*How Jews Maintained Their Identity as a People: Jewish Life in the Diaspora*

**Preparation:**

**Estimated Time:** 2 class periods

**Introduction:** When people leave their country of origin and move to a new country, sometimes they lose their connections with the former at the expense of developing stronger connections with the latter. But sometimes they maintain strong connections with both countries. The activity will explore this issue.

**Materials:** Access to the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, a Jewish library and/or the Internet. Photocopies of short biographies (or chapters of biographies) of Jews living in the diaspora in different periods. Suggested biographies include:

Maimonides at [home.aol.com/lazera/rambam.html](http://home.aol.com/lazera/rambam.html)

Glickl of Hamburg in Natalie Zemon Davis' *Women on the Margins*, (1995), Chapter 1.

Rabbi Yehuda Alkalai at [www.zionism-israel.com/bio/alkalai\\_biography.htm](http://www.zionism-israel.com/bio/alkalai_biography.htm)

Moses Montefiore at [www.answers.com/topic/moses-montefiore](http://www.answers.com/topic/moses-montefiore)

Philip Drachman on the Arizona frontier at [www.ajhs.org/publications/chapters/chapter.cfm?documentID=206](http://www.ajhs.org/publications/chapters/chapter.cfm?documentID=206)

Isaac Leeser at [www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/loc/Leeser.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/loc/Leeser.html)

Informational Web sites about Jewish communities from different times and places include:

[www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/babylonian1.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/babylonian1.html)–

Babylonian Jewish community (6th century BCE – 5th century CE)

[www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/anti-semitism/iranjews.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/anti-semitism/iranjews.html)–The Persian Jewish community up through today

[www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/Ashkenazim.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/Ashkenazim.html)– Life of Ashkenazi Jews in Europe

[www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/spain1.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/spain1.html)– History of the Jewish people in Spain

**Lesson Plan:** Explain to students that for the past 2,000 years, Jews have lived all over the world but still maintained their sense of identity and peoplehood. The five short biographies are from different periods of history (13th, 17th, 18th and 19th centuries) and from widely different geographic regions, yet there are certain common themes that show how and why this sense of identity and community continued. Similarly, the Jewish communities mentioned above span different periods (second, 12th, 15th and 20th centuries). Students will examine the biographies and/or descriptions of Jewish communities and identify the practices and beliefs discussed in this unit.

**Activity:**

**Investigation:** Have students divide into six groups. Assign three of the groups a different biography to read. Tell the students in each group to note the place and dates their person lived, and what he or she did for a living. Then have students make a list of the aspects of the person's life that tied him to Jews and Judaism. Assign the other three groups a different historical Jewish community to research. Have the students make a list of influences that kept that community tied to Judaism. Each group should select a spokesperson before the class reassembles together. Each spokesperson should describe his group's person or community and the ties that bound him or it to

Judaism. Students can then compare and contrast the people's and communities' lives and identify the common themes.

### ***Discussion***

Many elements described in the unit should become apparent, particularly the following:

- Intermarriage
- An organized Jewish community led by a rabbi
- Regular communication between Jewish communities throughout the world
- International business relationships
- Schooling, shared rituals (even among the very assimilated)
- Parents passing the traditions on to their children, family cohesion
- A sense of responsibility for the well-being of other Jews
- Adaptation: found ways to maintain Jewish identity while contributing to the host country

Ask students to think about how these ties that bind are similar to or different from those of other immigrant groups.

***Wrap-Up:*** Jewish continuity was assured through the ties that bind and through the Jews' communal efforts to preserve and transmit their heritage.

