

NON-CLASSROOM ENRICHMENT

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Beit Café – Israeli Coffee House/Salon

The traditional salon, a European invention of the 16th century which flourished in the 17th and 18th centuries, was a gathering place where intellectuals would come together to discuss the issues of the day and to increase the knowledge of the participants through conversation and discussion. Emerging from the salon movement, the coffee house expanded the concept and opened it up to the masses. Whereas the salon had been held in private residence, the coffee house allowed for learning and discussion in a public venue.

How does one facilitate a coffee house or salon program?

From an experiential education model, the salon or coffee house is a wonderful way to engage participants in an informal learning through conversation activity, preferably together with a cup of coffee, tea, or other refreshments. The key is to create an opportunity for an open exchange of ideas and debate among the participants that offers the chance for reflection and participation.

1. In either model, choosing an appropriate venue for this type of program may help attract a more diverse group of participants than might otherwise participate in your organization's programs. For example; an actual coffee house or the home of a member of your group, if following the salon model, are both unique venues for engaging participants.
2. No matter which model you choose to base your program, time should be dedicated at the conclusion of the activity for whole group dialogue, summations and reflection. In the example given below, we present a diverse array of dilemmas for use and discussion. In planning your own program, you can choose to focus on one specific arena or topic, i.e.: Israel and Iran, or try and offer a series of different discussion topics for participants to wrestle with.
3. While this project can be used as a community or youth group program, it also is a great family discussion trigger project as well. Depending on the age of your children, choose some dilemmas, like the ones that are given below in our sample program plan, and choose a different one for dinner time discussion during one family meal a month. This will give your family an opportunity to engage in meaningful discussion as a preparation for a family trip or just as a way to maintain, build, or strengthen your family's connection to Israel.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING
CASE LEARNING ACTIVITY
BEIT CAFÉ ISSUES IN ISRAELI SOCIETY

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

In this program, participants will take part in a series of discussions related to real life dilemmas that Israel and Israelis are currently facing in areas of politics, foreign policy, religion in society, and culture. Participants will engage in discussion with each other over four dilemmas and discuss how they would respond to each of the dilemmas being posed. After a period of time, participants will switch tables and move on to another dilemma.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING

Israel and Israelis face a variety of difficult choices and decisions on a daily basis that have impacts on the social and political direction of the nation.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What are some the dilemmas and challenges that Israel is facing as a society?
- What are some strategies for best resolving these dilemmas?
- What lessons can we learn from Israel's history in dealing with these ongoing dilemmas?

OBJECTIVES:

Participants will:

- Learn about the issues of actual Israeli dilemmas
- Participate in a series of conversations centered around real life issues
- Debate their personal feelings in relation to real-life dilemmas
- Reflect on their discussions

TIME RECOMMENDED:

60-90 Minutes

GRADE LEVEL:

Teens/Adult

ASSESSMENT:

For this project, the assessment is the concluding activity where participants reflect on what they have learned. As an extension, assign participants to research specific aspects of the issues discussed or create reading lists to be distributed to other members of the organization based on the discussion and that will provide more in-depth information on the topics.

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ACTIVITIES AND PROCEDURES:

Activity One:

1. Set up the space into four seating areas/tables and divide your participants into four groups. Assign each group to one of the seating areas. How you set up the seating areas is dependent on what you have available, but we suggest that you try and make it as authentic as possible to look like a real café, be sure to include refreshments – if you can have the program in an actual café, even better. You can also get creative and have the dilemmas represented as menus or even have facilitators dress as waiters.
2. Once you have set up the space, assign one dilemma to each station. Participants will rotate through each of the stations – you can also have the participants stay at their stations and rotate the dilemmas, but having the participants rotate, you will create new groups for each discussion – which will enhance the diversity of opinions that every participant will be exposed to during the program as well as encourage socialization among the participants. If you have a limited amount of time, you may want to have each person participate in only two discussions instead of four (still offer all four to encourage smaller groups and provide choice).
3. The dilemmas: In addition to each dilemma, we have provided some resources that you may want to have available to help focus the discussion.

a. The Ashkenazi-Sephardic Struggle

As a state that is home to Jews of all kinds, Israel is supposed to be a branch under which all Jews can unite regardless of ethnicity, origin, or any other cultural difference. However, this is not always the case. One conflict that exists in Israel which receives far less attention than those pertaining to national security is the hostile environment that sometimes exists between Ashkenazi Jews and Sephardi Jews. Historians argue that the cultural divide that exists in Israel between these two ethnic groups is as a result of one group claiming a deeper connection to the religion, an entitlement towards Judaism, and other intangible claims.

Why do you believe these conflicts exist? Does this conflict date back to the Diaspora, when both Sephardim and Ashkenazim were struggling to maintain their religious roots? Do the waves of immigration contribute to this divide? Discuss.

Resources for this dilemma:

- [What are Sephardim and Ashkenazim?](#)
- [The Ashkenazi-Sephardi Split](#)
- [Israel's Vibrant Jewish Ethnic Mix](#)
- [Example of a Present-Day Conflict](#) and [Another example](#)

b. The Israeli Position Towards Iran

As most of the Western world knows, regardless of religion, Israel faces an existential threat from Iran due to the Islamic country's desire to build a nuclear weapon. Israel has been absolutely clear that it will take whatever measures it needs in order to prevent the oil-rich, anti-West nation from acquiring a weapon of mass destruction, however avoiding war at all costs is clearly in the best interest of all parties involved. While Israel must stop Iran from acquiring a weapon, it must also deal with Iran as the bankroller of terrorist groups in Israel's backyard, such as Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in southern Lebanon.

How can Israel, with the United States as a pivotal actor, eliminate arguably the most pressing national security threat Israel has ever faced? What is Israel's Red Line? What are the consequences of acting alone or not at all?

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ACTIVITIES AND PROCEDURES:

b. The Israeli Position Towards Iran (continued)

Resources for this dilemma:

- [Policy Analysis: Iran – Washington Institute](#)
- [Prime Minister Netanyahu's Speech to Congress, March, 2015](#)
- [Israel, Iran, and the United States](#)
- [Iran: A Clear and Present Danger](#)
- [Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies: Topic Iran](#)

c. The Conflict Between Secular and Religious Jews in Israel

Most in Israel, regardless of positions towards the 2-state solution, taxes, or other social issues, recognize Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state. However, to what extent must a Jewish inhabitant of Israel tap into his religious roots? Is this Jewish person obligated to adapt an ultra-orthodox lifestyle as a citizen of the Jewish nation? Or is a secular Jew, who puts his life on the line while serving in the IDF, an acceptable form of exhibiting one's connection to his roots? What place do modern Jewish movements like Reform and Conservative Judaism have in helping Israelis develop and maintain some type of Jewish identity beyond their Israeliness? What religious rights and responsibilities should be granted to women?

Resources for this dilemma:

- [Background article](#)
- [The Tal Law](#)
- [Women of the Wall](#)
- [Orthodox and Non-Orthodox Judaism](#)

d. Israeli-Palestinian conflict

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is perhaps the most regularly documented issue covered in the Middle East. Despite recent events such as the Arab Spring and the civil war in Syria, Israel and its Palestinian neighbors receive unprecedented amounts of attention in other Western nations. While we could ask millions of questions about the issues, the overarching question is: Will the Israelis and Palestinians ever find peace? What will that peace look like? What is necessary for it to happen?

Resources for this dilemma:

- [Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs: Palestinians](#)
- [1993 Oslo Accords](#)
- [Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies: Topic: Palestinians](#)
- [Policy Analysis: Palestinians – Washington Institute](#)

Activity Two: After participants have rotated through the stations, spend at least 15 minutes for whole group reflection. What did participants learn? What surprised them? What are some topics they wish to explore more in-depth and what are some ways to do that in your organization/community?