

Jewish Identity

I am Jewish because...

Divide the 48 participants into groups of 4 groups of 12, each with 2 Israeli soldiers and 1 madrich per group.

Trigger:

Tell the story of Daniel Pearl and pass round quotes from the book 'I am Jewish' written in his memory. In 2004 a book titled "I am Jewish" was published in his memory. The book consists of essays by some of the world's most prominent Jewish figures ranging from Ehud Barak to Natalie Portman, from Milton Friedman to Nadine Gordimer. It motivated people throughout the Jewish world to think about, analyse, and debate the meaning of what it is to be a Jew. Ask people to read out some of the quotes...

Ask each person to go round the circle and as best they can in a sentence describe what it means to them to be Jewish. Everyone should start with the sentence I am Jewish...

Method:

Divide the 12 people into pairs and give each pair an envelope with slips of paper in it describing various elements of Judaism. Ask them to discuss and try to agree/compromise on a list of their priorities and what is most important for them as a Jew. They should arrange the pieces of paper in a list form with the most important at the top and least important at the bottom. If this looks as though it is taking too long, ask them to prioritise the 5 most importance and the 5 least important.

Slips of paper for pairs to prioritise:

Studying Jewish texts and the Torah

Friday night (Shabbat) dinner with family

Finding a Jewish partner

Supporting Jewish charities

Keeping kosher

Eating bagels on a Sunday morning

Belief in G-d

Going to synagogue on High Holidays

Learning to speak Hebrew

Speaking Hebrew

Having Jewish friends

Belonging to a Jewish organisation/student society

Tackling anti-Semitism

Having a mezuzah on doors

Visiting Israel

Living in Israel

Attending pro-Israel events/rallies in the UK

Doing voluntary work

Spending time with family

Ask the group pairs to come back together in their group of 12 and ask if anyone will read out their list.

- Why did you order the things the way you did?
- Do any other pairs have anything very different?
- Did any of you disagree with your pair whilst coming up with the list?
- If so, what did you disagree on?
- How do you think your Jewish identity has been formed?
- What things have affected the way you see yourself as a Jew?

Remain in the four groups of 12 / double up to form two groups of 24 / come together in one large group of 48

Open discussion:

- What does Israel mean to you as a Jew?
- Do you think it is important for Jews to live in Israel? Why/why not?
- Do you think the Jewish religion is integral to Jewish culture?
- How would you describe yourself to other people – would you describe yourself as Jewish? For example, would you describe yourself as a British Jew (Jewish is more important) or as a Jewish Brit (British is more important)?

Jewish scenarios:

(1) Dating and Marriage

You have gone out with both Jewish and non Jewish people (not at the same time!). However you have friends who ultimately want to marry Jewish and don't go out with non-Jewish people because they fear it will develop into something more serious and then it will be too hard to break up.

- Which perspective do you agree with?
- Do you think marrying Jewish is important?
- Why / Why not?

(2) Brit-Circumcision:

You and your beautiful loving partner, who you met while on a ten-day trip to Israel in July 2009, are the proud parents of a baby boy!

- Would you give him a Brit Milah?
- Why / Why not?

(3) Children and Jewish schools

You have the option of deciding as a parent whether you want your child/children to attend a Jewish school (primary and/or secondary)

- What would you decide?
- Why / Why not?

Background information on Daniel Pearl:

Daniel Pearl was a writer and journalist at the Wall Street Journal. He started out in their Atlanta bureau in 1990 and moved successful to the Washington DC and London bureaus, serving as a Middle East correspondent. In 1998 he met Marianne and moved with her to Paris where they were married a year later.

In October of 2000 they moved to Bombay, where Pearl became the Wall Street Journal's South Asia Bureau Chief. It was Daniel Pearl who uncovered that the US had mistakenly bombed a Sudanese pharmaceutical plant, believing it to be a weapons factory, and later broke the story of Al Qaeda's money laundering through international jewellery market. And it was from Bombay that Pearl covered the "war on terrorism" occasionally venturing into Pakistan. It was here, retracing the steps of "shoe bomber" Richard Reid and hoping to meet Sheikh Gilani, that he was abducted by a militant group in Karachi on January 23, 2002.

For weeks, people around the world – including heads of state, religious leaders, and A-list celebrities – rallied for Daniel Pearl's release. In Pearl, the terrorists believed they had abducted a media figure, an American, a Jew.

Nine day later, Pearl was beheaded. His body was found cut into ten pieces and buried in a shallow grave in the outskirts of Karachi on May 16. A videotape titled 'The slaughter of the spy-journalist, the Jew, Daniel Pearl' was released. It showed the last hours of Pearl's life, including his words: "My father is Jewish. My mother is Jewish. I am Jewish." The video later shows Pearl's mutilated body.

Two days before his abduction, Danny had learned that his wife Marianne was expecting a baby boy; he chose the name Adam for their son. In May, just 3 months after his murder, Marianne gave birth to Adam.

Following his murder, Danny's family and friends established the Daniel Pearl Foundation to carry on his legacy, using music and words to address the root causes of the hatred that took his life.

In 2004 a book titled "I am Jewish" was published in his memory. The book consists of essays by some of the world's most prominent Jewish figures ranging from Ehud Barak to Natalie Portman, from Milton Friedman to Nadine Gordimer. It motivated people throughout the Jewish world to think about, analyse, and debate the meaning of what it is to be a Jew. Marianne later wrote the memoir 'A might heart' which was later adapted into a film starring Angelina Jolie.

'I am Jewish' quotes:

I am Jewish. It began at birth purely by chance. It continues through my life as a great challenge and will end in the final moments of my life. What is most amazing, though, is that even after I'm gone, Judaism will continue.'

- Avraham Burg (senior member of the Israeli Labor Party)

I am Jewish because when my mother despairs telephonically because my wonderful children either have no partners or non-Jewish partners I defend their choices vigorously and berate her for caring only about what others think. Then, in the bath or over Shabbat candles or on a long walk with a friend, I wish for miracles like Jewish grandchildren, Jewish in-laws, and the approbation of people I don't even know.

- Maureen Lipman (British actress and writer)

I am Jewish and it colours everything I've done, do and will do/

- David Horovitz (editor of the Jerusalem Post)

I was born in Wales and when people ask me if I am Welsh, I say "I am Jewish, and that's enough to be getting on with." It sounds as if being Jewish is a burden, and in a way it is. But it's also a blessing.

- Bernice Rubens (Man Booker award-winning novelist)

When I say I am Jewish, it means to me that I have people taking care of me. It means family.

- Spencer Newman (10 years old, Miami)

For me being Jewish and being an Israeli always get mixed up together. It's being proud of who you are an loving Israel so much that you start hating all that's going on there, and understand how much you love it again. But above all, being Jewish means first and foremost being a good, valuable human being.

- Eran Rotshenker (22 years old, Jerusalem)

To be a Jew is to watch with good humour how this planet has treated its Jews, and to remain humorous.

- Jackie Mason (American comedian)

I can no more answer why I am a Jew than I can answer why I am a woman or an American. So I was born. I do, however, know that my Jewish identity has sustained me at pivotal moments.

- Deborah E. Lipstadt (Professor Lipstadt was the professor sued by David Irving in the case that found him guilty of being both an anti-Semite and Holocaust denier)

I am Jewish. This means, above all else, that I was present at Sinai, and that when The Torah was given on that mountain, my DNA was to be found in the crowd.

- Eric Yoffe (Rabbi and President of the World Union for Reform Judaism)

I am Jew. To be a Jew, to be black – it is simply something you are. There is no pride in belonging to one particular race, colour, or designation, and no denigration whatever your identity. Recently I was asked in a questionnaire what I would want to leave behind me in the world. My answer is: recognise yourself in others.

- Nadine Gordimer (Author of 13 novels and winner of the Nobel Prize in literature)