



CORNERSTONE 2016 RESOURCE

Don't Be a Stranger: Building Inclusive Camp Communities Rooted in Justice, *Elective 1*

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| AUTHOR: | Sarra Alpert |
| SUMMARY: | Three different approaches to the idea of welcoming the stranger: one activity to highlight how we actively help new people get comfortable, one activity to draw on diversity in the Jewish community, and one activity to celebrate the variety in our identities. - <i>Submitted by Sarra Alpert</i> |
| TOPICS: | Community Building, Group Dynamics, Identity, Jewish Culture, Jewish Values, Leadership Development, Social Justice, Team Building |
| LEARNING OBJECTIVE: | Participants will have new ideas for how to help their campers better extend a welcoming hand or how to celebrate what makes them feel different. Participants will also have connection points to highlight between these kinds of personal experiences and current events. |
| AUDIENCE: | Most of the activities can be adjusted for most camper ages. The current events connections will generally be best for older campers. |
| LENGTH: | 90-120 Minutes (can be broken down into 30-45 minute activity blocks) |
| APPENDIXES: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text Study: Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:33-34 • Text Study: Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5 • "Who Are You" worksheet • Article: "Welcoming the Stranger, Living Our Values" • Article: "Owning My Identities" |
| MATERIALS: | Copies of handouts for all participants, flip chart paper, markers, pens. If possible, it's great to be able to show a short video (but there are written materials in place of that if you don't have an A/V setup). |
| SETTING: | Chairs in a circle |

Session Description:

1) Framing with text study:

The commandment to welcome the stranger is repeated 36 times in the Torah. Let's study one of those examples together:

When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong them. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the Lord am your God. [Leviticus 19:33-34]

Questions for discussion:

- Why do you think this commandment comes up so many times?
- What's the connection between this commandment and "I am the Lord your God"?
- What is the difference between not wronging the stranger and loving the stranger as yourself?
- Who are some examples of people who might be considered or treated as strangers in your camp community? In the Jewish community? In your country?

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There are three approaches that we can take to engage with how well we're doing this -- each of today's activities will highlight one.

- a) Am I actively welcoming those who are new to my community?
- b) Am I learning about who does not always feel welcome in my community so that I can help to build a more genuinely inclusive environment?
- c) Am I looking for ways to celebrate the many identities of the people around me so that everyone can be their full selves?

2) Activity Set #1: Am I actively welcoming those who are new to my community?

Split into two groups.

Each group goes to a different part of the room (two rooms side-by-side would be even better – groups should be far enough apart so that they are unable to hear each other or even see clearly what the other group is doing, but close enough that you can easily switch people between them).

Each group is given these instructions (it is very important that the groups get their instructions separately – the explanatory instructions are the same, but the “customs” are different – also it’s important that the groups not know that they are getting similar instructions):

You are now your own society. You are going to sit here and have a normal conversation, except that you will follow these customs of “your society.”

- Group One Customs:
 - The word Cornerstone is now the equivalent of a very funny joke – every time someone says it, everyone should laugh.
 - No one looks anyone in the eye, ever. When you are speaking directly to someone, you should look at their left shoulder. When you are not speaking directly to anyone, you can look anywhere except in anyone’s eyes.
 - Every couple of minutes, an assigned leader should call out “Greet!” Whenever that happens, everyone shakes the hand of the people to their right and left in the circle.
- Group Two Customs:
 - Every time someone says the word “fun”, everyone in the group has to respond in unison “Have a nice day!”
 - Every couple of minutes, an assigned leader should say “Let us pray” and everyone should hold hands and hum for a few seconds.
 - Whenever anyone in the group starts to speak, everyone else in the group should point at them for a few seconds.

After relaying the instructions and taking questions (the “customs” cannot be written down, so everyone needs to be able to remember them), give each group a very basic discussion framework/question – i.e. go around and share something you're excited to take back to

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camp). They should start talking, keeping to their new society customs.

After a few minutes of this, start taking people from one group and putting them in the other group. Do not give any instructions either to the person you're switching or to the groups as a whole about how they should handle the new people or handle being in a new group. Let them make their own spontaneous decisions about their response.

Do this for about ten minutes total – not everyone needs to be switched, and it shouldn't become hectic (like there is constantly someone moving back and forth). Make sure that about half of each group stays in its original place (you can give them some sort of marking to make this all easier to keep straight – i.e., each group wearing a different color sticker).

Come back together and discuss:

- For the people who were switched:
 - How did you feel when you came into the new group? Did you feel welcomed? Comfortable? Overwhelmed?
 - Did you ask someone to explain the things that were being said and done which were unfamiliar to you?
- For everyone:
 - How did the group react as a whole to having a new person in the circle?
 - Did anyone try to explain your group's customs to the new people?
 - If not, was it funny to watch someone who didn't "get" what was going on around them?
 - How did you think the group was "supposed" to act in relating to a new person who didn't know your customs?

Go through the customs from both groups. For each of the following categories, brainstorm a few examples of customs/practices/expectations which most people understand but which are not explicitly spelled out to newcomers:

-- Your country

-- The Jewish community

-- Your camp

(For example: prayer/religious customs, camp slang, norms in how people talk to each other and touch each other, humor, idioms, camp traditions, forms of greeting, etc)

Pair and share:

- When have you had to make a major transition?
- What was scary or difficult about that? What did you have to learn or get used to?
- Who helped you through that time? How did you get comfortable with the new place/thing/experience?

Current events connection: Discuss the current refugee situation and what groups like HIAS are doing to address it. These readings and links will be helpful:



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- <http://www.jewishexponent.com/opinion/2016/01/welcoming-the-stranger-living-our-values>
- <http://www.hias.org/work/advocacy>

3) Activity Set #2: Am I learning about who does not always feel welcome in my community so that I can help to build a more genuinely inclusive environment?

Ask participants to call out some of the assumptions that are commonly made about various shared characteristics within the Jewish community. For example: Jews are white, Jews come from Eastern Europe, Jews love bagels and lox, Jews aren't athletic, Jews are smart, Jews are well-off.

We know that these assumptions are far from accurate. Within the Jewish community, there are people from many ethnic backgrounds, racial identities, Jewish beliefs and practices, gender identities, class backgrounds, sexualities, and personalities, with a wide range of Jewish rituals and customs, some of which are inherited and others of which are created.

(You can share a few facts as examples:

-- From the Pew Study: 20% of U.S. Jews report household incomes of less than \$30,000 per year; about six-in-ten Jews in this low-income category are either under age 30 or 65 or older.

-- From the Institute for Jewish and Community Research: We estimate at least 20% of the U.S. Jewish population is racially and ethnically diverse, including African, African American, Latino (Hispanic), Asian, Native American, Sephardic, Mizrahi and mixed-race Jews by heritage, adoption, and marriage.)

Watch the Kaleidoscope trailer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AnjuJ0wm_bM and then read

<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/jewish-and/owning-my-identities/#>

(You can find other great examples of relevant stories at the Jewish Multiracial Network's blog (<http://www.jewishmultiracialnetwork.org/jmn-blog/>) or the Bechol Lashon "Real People, Real Stories" page

(<http://www.bechollashon.org/resources/holidays/real/real.php>). Choose the right selections based on the age group you're working with and the amount of time you have.)

Discuss:

- What do you find especially eye-opening or thought-provoking about this person's perspective and experience? What themes did you notice?
- When have you had similar experiences to the ones these storytellers were describing? How did you feel? Was there anyone who actively helped to welcome you?
- Why might someone be alienated or feel disrespected by someone asking the question "What are you?" What are other similar questions that someone might ask



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in a Jewish community space that might make someone feel labeled as an outsider?

- One of the ways that questions about someone's identity often go wrong is when those questions aren't grounded in real, deep relationship-building. How can we create camp spaces for people to genuinely get to know each other's stories of who we are and where we come from?

Study this text: Furthermore, only one person, Adam, was created for the sake of peace among humans, so that no one should say to their fellow, 'My ancestor was greater than yours.... Also, Adam [was created singly] to show the greatness of the Holy One, Blessed be God, for if a person strikes many coins from one mold, they all resemble one another, but the King of Kings, the Holy One, Blessed be God, made each person in the image of the first, and yet not one of them resembles their fellow. Therefore every single person is obligated to say, 'The world was created for my sake.' (Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5).

Discuss:

- What would it look like to live this idea in our day-to-day life as individuals?
- What would it look like for this idea to play out in our societal structures?

Current events connection: Discuss the work that groups like the Jewish Multiracial Network, Jews of All Hues or Bechol Lashon are doing to increase awareness of diversity in the Jewish community.

4) Activity Set #3 - Am I looking for ways to celebrate the many identities of the people around me so that everyone can be their full selves?

Give everyone the handout of a page divided into three categories with the headings: Who I Am, Who I'm Not, Who I Hope to Be. Explain:

- The first list is for names/terms/titles that you wear proudly (for example: sibling, smart, feminist, Jew, mensch)
- The second list is for names/terms/titles that you don't like and which have either been applied to you or that you worry have been applied to you (for example: JAP, bossy, not really a Jew, bitch)
- The third list is for names/terms/titles that don't apply to you yet but which you hope will someday (for example: parent, graduate, ally).

Be sure to tell them that they will be sharing this list with other people. If they'd like to write down terms they don't want to share, they should put those on the back.

Give everyone time to fill out their lists.

Form concentric circles. Each person should allow their partner to read through their list, and then each person should choose one of the terms on their partner's page and ask them to share more about it.



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(If you have more time to spend with this activity, you can add an art project where everyone makes posters that represent their "Who I Am" list.)

End with a game that's a variation of "Who's in the Room?" or "The great wind blows for...".

- In the usual version of this game, everyone stands in a circle with one person in the middle. That person shares an I statement -- i.e. I have brown eyes, I like to eat ice cream in the winter -- and everyone else who also identifies with that statement switches places within the circle, with someone new taking the center spot.
- In its original incarnation, the goal of the game is to identify commonalities.
- In this variation, we'll alternate between finding commonalities and intentionally seeking out unique differences that we can celebrate.
- For the person standing in the middle, their mission is to find an I statement that is completely unique to them.
- Until that happens, they remain in the middle (other people who share the statements along the way still step in and switch places around the circle).
- Once the middle person finds a completely unique identifier, everyone applauds them and someone else takes their place in the circle.

Current events connection: Learn about and get involved with The Validation Project (<http://www.thevalidationproject.com/>)

APPENDIXES:

Text Study #1: Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:33-34

| Translation | Original |
|---|--|
| When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong them. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the LORD am your God. | <p>וְכִי יִגּוּר אֶתְךָ גֵר בְּאַרְצְכֶם לֹא תוֹנוּ אֹתוֹ:</p> <p>כְּאֶזְרַח מִמֶּנּוּ יְהִיֶה לָכֶם הַגֵּר הַגֵּר אֶתְכֶם</p> <p>וְאָהַבְתָּ לוֹ כְּמוֹךָ כִּי גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ</p> <p>מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:</p> |

- Why do you think this commandment comes up so many times?
- What's the connection between this commandment and "I am the Lord your God"?
- What is the difference between not wronging the stranger and loving the stranger as yourself?
- Who are some examples of people who might be considered or treated as strangers in your camp community? In the Jewish community? In your country?

Here are three ways to consider whether/how we're fulfilling the spirit of this commandment:

- Am I actively welcoming those who are new to my community?
- Am I learning about who does not always feel welcome in my community (so that I can help to build a more genuinely inclusive environment)?
- Am I looking for ways to celebrate the many identities of the people around me so that everyone can be their full selves?



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Text Study #2: Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5

Furthermore, only one person, Adam, was created for the sake of peace among humans, so that no one should say to their fellow, 'My ancestor was greater than yours.... Also, Adam [was created singly] to show the greatness of the Holy One, Blessed be God, for if a person strikes many coins from one mold, they all resemble one another, but the King of Kings, the Holy One, Blessed be God, made each person in the image of the first, and yet not one of them resembles their fellow. Therefore every single person is obligated to say, 'The world was created for my sake.'

- What would it look like to live this idea in our day-to-day life as individuals?
- What would it look like for this idea to play out in our societal structures?



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What I Am

(names/titles/descriptors that you were proudly)

What I'm Not

(names/titles/descriptors that you don't like and which have either been applied to you in the past or that you worry have been applied to you)

What I Hope to Be

(names/titles/descriptors that don't apply to you yet but which you hope will someday)



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Welcoming the Stranger, Living Our Values

January 20, 2016, *Jewish Exponent* (<http://www.jewishexponent.com>)

“You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Exodus 22:20

The commandment to welcome and embrace the stranger appears 36 times in our Torah. Suffice it to say, it is a crucial element of our tradition, one that should guide and permeate our actions. Simultaneously, the tradition guides us to view others as created *B'tzelem Elohim*, made in God's image.

These two concepts can serve as the starting point for the American Jewish discussion about the current humanitarian disaster in Syria and Iraq and the hundreds of thousands of people in dire need of refuge. I am proud that many segments of our Jewish community have taken a sensible, compassionate approach to the issue.

As an historian of American Jewry, and as the granddaughter of immigrants, I must point out that our people have both benefited from, and been victimized by, changes in U.S. immigration policy. Starting in 1881, with the assassination of Czar Alexander II, and the terrible wave of pogroms that followed throughout the Russian empire, masses of eastern European Jews sought refuge through America's liberal immigration policy. Over the next 40 years, some 3.5 million Jews immigrated to America — a migration that forever transformed our people and our country.

The Immigration Act of 1924, prompted by growing nativist sentiments, had disastrous consequences for European Jewry. In the 1930s, the majority of the American public opposed admitting European refugees, including Jews. How many victims of the Holocaust could have been saved had our national leaders taken a more principled stand?

In the Jewish media, I have seen a considerable amount of debate devoted to the question of whether or not today's refugees from the Middle East are analogous to Jewish refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe. Of course, the two situations aren't the same; history rarely affords such complete parallels. But what is clear is that the Syrian Muslims and Christians and other religious and ethnic minorities, such as the Yazidis, are fleeing for their lives, trying to escape a calamitous civil war in which all sides are pursuing scorched-earth policies.

I understand and would never dismiss the public's concern. Recent events have only served to remind us that the United States faces a very real threat of terrorism. The Reconstructionist movement embraces nuanced discussion. The U.S. approach to the new refugee crisis should be rigorous, with due diligence taken.



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Between 1991 and 2008, the United States admitted some 50,000 refugees from Iraq. By nearly all accounts, this resettlement has proved successful. Why would we expect our experience with Syrian refugees to be dramatically different? Can our system guarantee the absence of risk? Probably not. But there are few such guarantees in life, and living in an open society guided by certain values has always entailed some risk.

In the wake of the recent attacks in Paris and California, Muslim-Americans are facing increased scrutiny and suspicion. The Reconstructionist movement believes it is incumbent upon American Jews to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our Muslim neighbors. In fact, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College is a founding member of an interfaith coalition named Shoulder to Shoulder. Our movement is proud to have congregations, faculty and rabbinical students who are actively engaged in building Muslim-Jewish relationships, and who are working closely with our newest refugee communities. We, too, were once recent arrivals to this country, facing mistrust and discrimination. That experience guides us.

For all these reasons, last month I was one of more than 1,200 rabbis, including at least 160 Reconstructionist rabbis, who signed a HIAS-sponsored letter calling on our elected officials to exercise moral leadership for the protection of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

To conclude, I'd like to cite the letter. The "heartbreaking attacks in Paris and Beirut are being cited as reasons to deny entry to people who are themselves victims of terror. And in those comments, we, as Jewish leaders, see one of the darker moments of our history repeating itself." It goes on to state, "in 1939, our country could not tell the difference between an actual enemy and the victims of an enemy. In 2015, let us not make the same mistake."

Join me in calling for a national policy that welcomes and protects the stranger, a policy that lives up to the highest ideals of our faith and our country. Join me in defending our cherished values of welcoming and embracing the stranger.

Rabbi Deborah Waxman, Ph.D., is president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and Jewish Reconstructionist Communities.

Owning My Identities

By Evan Traylor, myjewishlearning.com

Since I was a little kid growing up in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, I've always known that I was somehow different in the Jewish community. I didn't look like the other kids in Hebrew school. I was the only one to have Black family members at their bar mitzvah ceremony. And I eventually took on the expectation of providing the perspective and feelings of Black people to my Jewish friends in youth group and at camp. And for most of my life, I made the conscious decision to go with the flow. I figured that just letting these things happen and not really questioning their importance or impact on myself would allow me to somehow continue my life as usual. However, throughout my time at college, I've had incredible professors, organizations, and friends that have challenged me to explore the roots of my past, including my relationships, and how they have shaped my life.

For the very first time in my entire life, as a half-Black, half-White member of the Jewish community, I have begun owning my identities.

I no longer squeamishly describe my race – I proudly tell others of my diverse background and family makeup.

I no longer stay silent when racism pervades its way into the Jewish community – I am an advocate for protecting the dignity of all people, especially Jews of Color.

I no longer try to “play the part” of the Black person at Jewish summer camp or the lone Jewish student at public school – I am myself and act according to my personality and passions.

I no longer shy away from using my roles in the Jewish community to talk about race and privilege – I have realized how important it is to have these conversations.

I no longer provide a short answer when an acquaintance asks, “How did you decide to major in Jewish Studies, that's so random?” – I understand which assumptions they are utilizing and provide them with a fully developed response that will make them think and grow.

Overall, I am a somewhat reserved and polite person, usually striving to avoid conflict and serve the “people pleaser” role. While, my natural inclination is to just allow events and ideas to pass without raising objection, my growth over the past few years has me asking a lot of questions and striving to orchestrate tough conversations in the Jewish community:

Are Jews truly committed toward helping people of color succeed?

How are congregations ensuring that they are inclusive and welcoming of Jews of all backgrounds?

How do White Jews truly understand and own White privilege in America?

While I think I have some of the answers to these questions, I am by no means the expert of this important and holy conversation. Additionally, I'm not completely sure there are “right” answers to these complex challenges. Unlike most articles, this one doesn't have a pretty bow to tie up all of these thoughts. While I'm anxious to continuing thinking about and discussing these challenges, I'm excited for what the future could hold for the Jewish community if we just take a leap of faith toward meaningful conversations, strong relationships, and inspired action.