Israeli Dance

*Specialty Track 1*

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| **Author(s):** | Erica Goldman |
| **summary:** | Israeli dances and methods for teaching them, as well as how to utilize Israeli dance to teach about Israeli culture and Jewish values. - *Submitted by* *Erica Goldman* |
| **Topic(s):** | Dance-Movement, Community Building, Arts and Culture, Israel  |
| **Learning Objective:** | Participants will learn Israeli dances (both classics and modern ones), tips about how to teach them, ideas about how Israeli dance can be used as a ritualistic bonding activity for a camp group, and ideas about how Israeli dance can be used to teach aspects of Jewish and Israeli culture and history. |
| **Audience:** | Group size: 6-60 people |
| **TIMING:** | 70-90 minutes |
| **AppendiCes:** | Israeli Dance-Handout1.docx |
| **Materials Needed:** | Sound system and music, plus handouts |
| **Set-UP DETAILS:** | Usually larger, non-carpeted indoor spaces, with open space to dance, but some places to sit during discussion components, too. |

**Session Timeline & Outline:**

**1. Simon Says Warm Up [5 Minutes]**

Leader will invite everyone to spread out in the room and face the leader for a quick game of Simon Says (with no “outs”; everyone keeps playing even after mistakes.) The idea is to get everyone moving a little bit and feeling comfortable moving. After a few minutes, leader will ask if it really felt terrible when someone accidentally did the wrong movement or moved when they weren’t supposed to, and hopefully participants will say “No,” or, “It’s just a game,” or “It doesn’t really matter.” Leader will point out that Israeli dancing should feel the same way: there is no “cost” to doing the wrong step or using the wrong foot. It’s ok to make mistakes.

Teach people the mantra: “You don’t have to know a dance to do a dance.” The communal idea of all folk dancing, including Israeli dance, is just to participate and learn as you go by following the leader (everyone around you) and having fun, more than focusing on getting it right or wrong. The idea is to play the game.

**2. A few classic dances [10-15 Minutes]**

Leader will introduce the format of all three Israeli dance sessions: learning/doing a few Israeli dances followed by an activity and conversation, then some more dances, then another activity, and so on.

Teach: mayim step, with mention of or eliciting the idea that the word mayim means “water” and that the step flows continuously and smoothly in one direction like water. Teach “correct” way to hold hands at some point, with left hand over and right hand under, but no explanation yet of why. (Trick: where are the leftovers? They’re right under the bread!). Teach the dance Mayim Mayim and then do it with the music. Without stopping or teaching, lead the dance Nigun Atik, calling out instructions as necessary, but during the dance, while the music is already playing. Stop after this one, teach the tzerchessia step, pointing out that it comes from the Caucasus Mountains in Russia (as does the word Caucasian) and that Circassians are a minority group living in Israel today. Teach and do the dance Od Lo Ahavti Dai.

**3. You don’t have to know a dance to do a dance [10 Minutes]**

Leader will lead a short conversation about the experience of doing Nigun Atik without being taught it and how that felt, pointing out that anyone who didn’t know it at all at the beginning slowly learned it over the course of the dance and had mastered it by the end. Discuss what about these dances makes them good “folk dances” and what folk dances are, including a) circle formation allows any number of people to join in, b) holding hands help people who don’t know the steps to go in the right direction and learn what to do, c) repetition makes it easier to learn, remember, practice, d) simple steps so teaching in advance not necessary, and d) social aspect of circle allows everyone to see each other, feel physically connected to the entire community, make eye contact with anyone else at any time, etc.

**4. Two more easy circle dances [10 Minutes]**

Teach and do Niguno Shel Yossi and Debka Kafrit, including the noises (like “shhhhh-tch-tch” in Debka Kafrit) and using “Cornerstone” and individual camp names during chanting parts.

**5. Conversation about rituals and comfort [15 Minutes]**

Leader will invite everyone to sit down in a circle and will find out whose birthday is closest to that day. Declare today to be that person’s Cornerstone birthday and invite a few different people to explain how birthdays are celebrated at their camp, if they have particular rituals that everyone knows. Leader will lead a discussion about the ritualistic elements of birthdays and point out how campers find comfort in those rituals: they know exactly what to expect and what they need to do to participate. Leader will ask participants to think of other ritualized moments at camp and how the “always the same” aspect makes the activity more enjoyable or comfortable (for example, maybe their Friday night services always start with Lecha Dodi and end with Adon Olam, or perhaps the order of meals from Monday-Friday is always the same…). Make the connection to dancing and how it may be scary the first time, but it is very repetitive and therefore becomes comforting. Introduce concept of “division dances” or specific dances “owned” by different age groups or bunks or however it might work for a particular camp. Key points are that that the group should always start with that same dance, every single time, and that calling out words or making noises must be included. Leader will explain how not everyone may get the steps right but everyone can say “Cornerstone” or “Yeah!” at the correct time.

Therefore they have opportunities to be included and have success (just like people who are bad at or uncomfortable singing can find success in clapping, for example, during a song session), mixing up relevant abilities, learning styles, etc. Leader will invite participants to think of times at camp when doing their “bunk dance” might be a good way to warm up the group for another activity and help them feel comfortable, or energize them, or otherwise add a ritualistic moment to the course of a camp day.

Do Debka Kafrit again, if there is time and group wants to, with ritualized aspects and vocal aspects now explicitly understood.

**6. Two modern line dances [15 Minutes]**

Teach the line dances Shemesh (aka Le’olam Be’ikvot Hashemesh, aka the Penguin Dance) and Or. Be sure to point out “Shemesh” means sun and “Or” means light and that the movement matches the movement on the word “Koach” (which means strength/power) in Or.

**7. A mixer [10 Minutes]**

If there is time, leader will point out that there are three formations of dances in Israeli dance: circles, lines, and partners. Participants have already done some circles and lines and now they’ll learn a special kind of partner dance, one in which dancers switch partners every repetition – dances of this type are called “mixers”. Teach and do Bim Bam Bom.

**Additional Notes for Bringing it Back to Camp:**

These specific dances can be used with almost any size group of any age entering-fourth grade and up. Specific camp-adaptations are included in the description above.