

Moving Land Acknowledgments from Page to Practice, *Afternoon Experience*

AUTHOR(S):	Ariella Rosen and Yoshi Silverstein
TOPIC (S)	Nature, storytelling
SUMMARY	This session explores how Jewish ideas about land offer perspective in better understanding the relationships indigenous peoples have with the North American continent (also called Turtle Island) through an interactive workshop.
GOALS:	Participants will be able to understand different Jewish traditions around land, and through that, be able to express empathy with the indigenous peoples of North America. Participants will have found a personal way to express that relationship as well.
AUDIENCE:	Ideal size is under 20 participants, but this can be made to work with a group of any size. These concepts might be challenging for younger campers to grasp, but are appropriate for older campers and staff.
TIMING:	75 minutes
APPENDICES:	Jews and Indigenous Relationship to Land slidedeck
MATERIALS NEEDED:	Access to outdoors (ideally with many rocks or pebbles around), ability to share slidedeck (either on screen or printed out), paper and pen/pencil/drawing materials
SET-UP DETAILS:	This session can take place in any space that is conducive to both large group conversation/presentation and individual and small group work. Ideally, the space should have easy access to the outdoors.

SESSION TIMELINE

- 00:00-00:10- Welcome and Opening
- 00:10-00:20- Jews and Indigenous Relationship to Land
- 00:20-00:30- Modern Land Acknowledgment
- 00:30-01:00- Workshop
- 01:00-01:10- Sharing and Gallery Walk
- 01:10-01:15- Close

SESSION OUTLINE:

00:00-00:10- Welcome & Opening

Ask participants to share their name and the locations of their camps (using <https://native-land.ca/> to find out which indigenous peoples have historically inhabited that land.) (Do this in the chat if not in person. If everyone is from the same camp, ask people to find out about the land of their hometown.)

Open with a story, a retelling of the story of Jacob's dream from the perspective of the rock he uses as a pillow. This should be a hidden reveal- though some participants might figure it out, don't give away the context of the story until the end.

For example, "It was a typically hot day, and for a while, it seemed like it was just going to be another day in the desert. As the sun was setting and the air started cooling, this guy stumbled by, clearly looking tired. He sat down to catch his breath, and I guess he realized nightfall was approaching, because next thing I know, he's unpacking his dinner and settling in for the night. Then, with no warning, all of a sudden I felt this weight on me- it was this guy's head, and he was using me as a pillow! I can't say I enjoyed the experience (he was pretty sweaty), but there wasn't much I could do about it. Then, he must have been having this intense dream, because he was tossing and turning and mumbling about angels and ladders, and other nonsense. Eventually, he settled down and we had a peaceful night. In the morning, he tilted me up on my side and poured oil on me! Can you believe that?! I think I also heard him say something about calling this place Beit El, which is news to me, because I always thought it was Luz. And I, his pillow, am now supposedly God's pillow? So now I'm stuck sideways, and oily, and unless someone else comes stumbling by here, I think I might stay this way forever. One thing I won't forget, though. He called this place *norah*, or awesome. I've never heard that before, but I've always thought this place was awesome. I'm glad someone else noticed..."

To get a sense of the story, check out Bim Bam's [video](#) (minute 1) or read [Genesis 28:10-22](#).

Ask participants to draw a place that is special (*norah*) to them.

Discuss: What does this place feel like when you're in it? What do you think it feels like when you're not in it?

00:10-00:20- Jews & Indigenous Relationship to Land

Use the [sliddeck](#) prepared by Yoshi Silverstein of the Mitsui Collective to explore some of the different ways that Jews relate to land.

Depending on time, utilize all of the ideas/concepts or pick what will work best for the group.

Ask participants if they have any questions along the way (this part of the session is a bit more frontal, so it's important to make sure to check for understanding).

00:20-00:30- Modern Land Acknowledgement and Empathy towards other indigenous folks

Spend a few minutes sharing background on verbal land acknowledgments. (The [Native Governance Center](#) is a helpful resource.)

Ask participants:

- Why might it be important to participate in land acknowledgments?
- How does a land acknowledgment make you think differently about the space you are on?
- What impact does it have on the way you relate to the land on which your camp sits?

00:30-01:00- Workshop

Breakout Group Sharing & Learning (15 min.)

Sort participants into groups of 3-4. Invite participants to take 5 minutes to go outside and find a rock. (This may take less time if this session is being held outdoors or just indoors.)

Once participants have a rock in their hand, they should return to their groups and take turns sharing:

- Why did I pick up this rock?
- Tell the story of this rock- what has it seen, experienced etc throughout “history”
- Why does it feel meaningful to be holding it now?

Return to the large group, share brief highlights of learning from the groups (either verbally or on a platform like Jamboard).

Note: some participants may wonder why they are being instructed to “take” things from the land for personal use. This is a good time to reinforce consciousness around *borrowing* - land / nature & ownership.

This is also an opportunity to connect the rock to the Jewish tradition involving rocks and gravestones. (The earliest graves were actually caves sealed by rocks rather than burials, and even today, there is the custom of placing rocks at graves. This relates to permanence, as well as the idea of coming from dust, returning to dust so rock represents the returning and that everything we have, do etc in life is a “borrowing.”

Return to breakout groups for 15 minutes of final workshopping, choosing between two options:

1. Create a land acknowledgement ritual practice using your rock, your space, other elements- working together with your group. (Note: a ritual practice need not be intricate. It is simply whatever feels like a meaningful way to actively connect the original stewards of this land with the selected rock.)
2. Use the time for artistic practice inspired by / using the rock and other elements to serve as an artistic land acknowledgement (some sort of composition using the rock/inspired by the rock) working individually but the group is there to help/offer guidance/feedback

For participants who might want more guidance, once again the [Native Governance Center](#) has some helpful tips.

As well, participants might find this definition of ritual by Vanessa Ochs helpful:

“Rituals connect us to groups, they connect us to the divine, they suggest a deeper world of meaning beyond the mundane habits of the everyday. They can transcend time, connecting us to our ancestors and to those who will come after us.”

01:00-01:10- Sharing and Gallery Walk

Return to the large group and shareback (verbally, in chat, or on a jamboard or slide, depending on time.) (If this session is virtual and there's time, ask participants to take a photo of what they have designed so far and upload it to a jamboard for a virtual gallery walk.) Do a gallery walk, inviting participants to explore and experience what each other has created.

Reflect on the experience of creating these rituals/artistic representations.

- What did you notice?
- What questions do you have?
- What feels like it's still missing for you?

01:10-01:15- Close

Empowering participants to actually use what they created in some sort of sustaining way. (Whether at home or at camp.)

Reminder around how land acknowledgements are helpful and also how they're limited — discuss thoughts for where to take it deeper over time.

Final Close —ask participants to share a one word takeaway.

BRINGING IT BACK TO CAMP & SHIFTING TO IN PERSON:

- This conversation might feel especially powerful/intense for those returning to camp after a summer of not being able to access camp.

CORNERSTONE 2021 RESOURCE

- A version of this session could be a powerful first day of camp activity for a cabin or unit to appreciate the sacredness of camp land on many levels, and to establish a daily way of recognizing it.
- This session will work more smoothly if the facilitator makes sure they are familiar with the concepts covered in advance (Jewish connections to land, history of land acknowledgments, etc.)
- Note that this session's content will apply most directly to participants from and in North America. Participants from Israel or other continents may relate to these concepts differently, and it's important to be sensitive to that.