

Just

Judaism Action Social Change

JCI CURRICULUM: *UNIT 1: CHAPTER 5 – SELF & COMMUNITY* LESSON 3: SELF VS. COMMUNITY

LESSON 3: SELF VS COMMUNITY

Goals

For students to:

- analyze Hillel's statement in Pirkei Avot: "If I am not for myself who will be for me? If I am only for myself what am I?"
- consider the tensions between self and community inherent in the above statement.
- interpret the connection between this first part of Hillel's statement, and the final part: "And if not now when?"
- apply Hillel's statement to their lives and to dilemmas they face

Materials

- 3 Poster boards prepared in advance, each with one of the following statements:

If I am not for myself, who will be for me?

And if I am for myself, what am I?

And if not now, when?

- Markers
- Pens
- Paper / journals
- Text handouts

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Procedure:

1) Framing exercise #1 (15 -20 mins)

a) Ask groups of students to act out the following 2 scenarios:

i)

Fifteen kids came out to play on the empty lot that summer day. Jason brought the football. Problem was, Jason wasn't very good even on a good day, and this wasn't one of those. After 45 minutes, Jason left because he was frustrated. He hadn't touched the ball once; was never in the center of the action and felt like he was being overlooked. He took the ball with him.

ii)

Fifteen kids came out to play on the empty lot that summer day. Jason brought the football. Problem was, Jason wasn't very good even on a good day, and this wasn't one of those. After 45 minutes, Jason left because his family was going to visit his grandparents. He took the ball with him.

b) Ask students: "Should Jason have taken the ball with him?" Discuss.

c) Ask students: Does it make a difference if Jason:

- left because he was frustrated. He hadn't touched the ball once; was never in the center of the action; felt like he was being overlooked.
- left because his family was going to visit his grandparents?
- left because he got hurt when he was being tackled?
- left because he got stung by a bee, to which he was allergic?
- was afraid to leave the ball because it was his father's high school game ball?

Discuss.

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- d) Ask students:
What were Jason's rights?
What were the teams' right?
What was Jason's responsibility to the players?
What was the players' responsibility to Jason?
Discuss.

2) **Text Study (20-30 mins)**

a) Introduce the text by explaining that it is a famous statement from a book called Pirkei Avot which means "Chapters of the Fathers" which is part of the Mishnah. The Mishnah is part of the Oral Torah (Torah Shebe'alpeh). It is a compilation of rabbinic commentary and discussions on the Torah that was originally oral but compiled and redacted between the 1st and 3rd centuries CE. Ask the students if they have heard of Hillel, and elicit/ explain that he was a great Rabbi of the Mishnah who is most famous for being respectful and humble towards Shammai, his greatest opponent in the Mishnah, and for preaching loving, non hateful behavior at all times.

b) Place the three statements in different corners of the room.

If I am not for myself, who will be for me?

And if I am for myself, what am I?

And if not now, when?

- c) Ask students to choose one of the statements that they most agree with and stand by it.
d) When there are a group of students by each statement, hand them the following questions to discuss for 5 minutes:

Discussion Questions:

- Why did you choose this statement?
- What do you think Hillel means?

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- e) Divide the students into new groups of three or more with at least one student from each of the initial groups in each new group. Hand them the following questions to discuss for 5 minutes:

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Discussion Questions:

- How are these statements connected to each other?
- Do they contradict each other or are they compatible?
- Is there a clear logic from one that leads to the next, or an order in which they must be said?

f) Regroup.

Discuss:

- How is Hillel's statement connected to the story about Jason that we discussed earlier?
- What can we learn from his statement about the tensions between self and community?

3) Conclusion (5 mins)

Ask students to write their responses to the following question in their journal/ binder:

Journal Question:

- How can you implement the demands of Hillel's statements in your own life? Think of one practice that you can adopt in general.

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Appendix:

i)

Fifteen kids came out to play on the empty lot that summer day. Jason brought the football. Problem was, Jason wasn't very good even on a good day, and this wasn't one of those. After 45 minutes, Jason left because he was frustrated. He hadn't touched the ball once; was never in the center of the action and felt like he was being overlooked. He took the ball with him.

ii)

Fifteen kids came out to play on the empty lot that summer day. Jason brought the football. Problem was, Jason wasn't very good even on a good day, and this wasn't one of those. After 45 minutes, Jason left because his family was going to visit his grandparents. He took the ball with him.

Hillel used to say: If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am for myself, what am I? and if not now, when?

Pirkei Avot 1:14

Discussion Questions:

- Why did you choose this statement?
- What do you think Hillel means?

Discussion Questions:

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Journal Question:

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