

**JCI CURRICULUM: UNIT 1: CHAPTER 7 – UNIVERSALISM &  
PARTICULARISM  
LESSON 1: CIRCLES OF CONCERN**

**LESSON 1: CIRCLES OF CONCERN (45 mins- 1 hr)**

**Goals**

**For students to:**

- Understand the tension between the Jewish values of particularism and universalism.
- Apply Jewish texts about particularism and universalism to their own lives.
- Attempt to reach a synthesis between the values of particularism and universalism in their personal Jewish worldviews.

**Materials:**

- Poster board
- Markers
- Large pieces of paper and colored pens/ crayons/ pencils
- Pens
- Paper / journals
- Text handouts
  - Rambam Gifts to the Poor 7:13 and related questions
  - Pirkei Avot 3:14

**Procedure**

**1) Framing exercise #1 (15 -25 mins)**

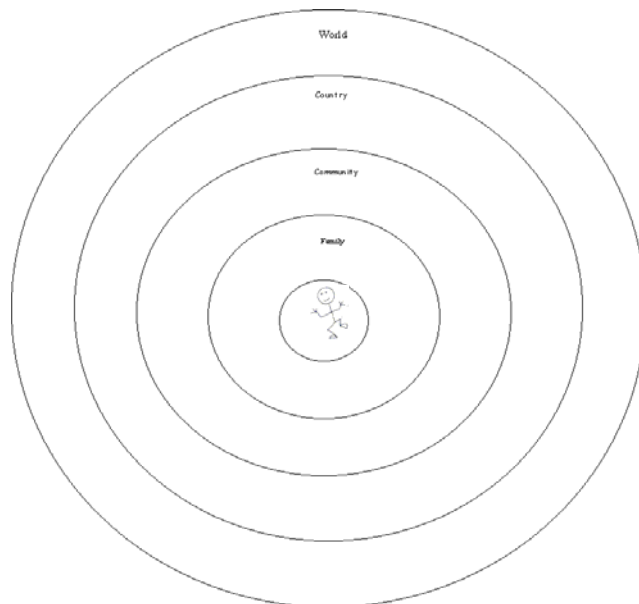
- a) Hand out large pieces of paper and colored pens
- b) Ask each student to draw a stick figure of themselves in the center of the paper. Then ask them to draw concentric circles around the figure. The circle closest to the figure should represent those that they care about the most. The second circle those who are next most important to them, etc. Each circle can contain as few as one member or as many as the whole world.
- c) Depending on the length of your lesson, give students an appropriate amount of time to label each circle/ draw pictures in each circle/ color in etc.  
(See Example drawing below)
- d) Hand out another sheet of paper. Again ask students to draw themselves in the center. This time ask them to draw concentric circles representing those who they have influence over, with the closest circle being those they have most influence over, etc.
- e) Again, depending on the length of your lesson, give students an appropriate amount of time to label each circle/ draw pictures in each circle/ color in etc.

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- f) Hand out another sheet of paper. Again ask students to draw themselves in the center. This time ask them to draw concentric circles representing those towards whom they have a responsibility, the closest circle representing those towards whom they have the greatest responsibility etc. (Responsibility to help when in need, responsibility to hold as a priority in situations of conflict etc)
- g) Again, depending on the length of your lesson, give students an appropriate amount of time to label each circle/ draw pictures in each circle/ color in etc.
- h) Ask students to look at all three of their own drawings and see where there are similarities and differences.
- i) If you have a longer lesson spend time sharing drawings and reflections in pairs before sharing as a group.
- j) Share as a group (use questions below). Perhaps ask one student to answer a question and then get a show of hands for who agrees and disagrees. Repeat for each of the questions. Keep this discussion short – do not go into details about the students reasons behind their drawings. Tell them that you will discuss their reasons for their opinions later in the class.

**Questions:**

- Who do you care about most?
- Over whom do you have most influence?
- Towards whom do you have most responsibility?
- Who do you care about least?
- Over whom you have least influence?
- Towards whom do you have least responsibility?



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2) **Main Activity (15-20 mins)**

- a) Divide students into pairs and hand out the following text and questions.
- b) Allocate 5-10 minutes for chavruta discussion.

: עני שהוא קרובו, קודם לכל אדם; ועניי ביתו, קודמין לעניי עירו; ועניי עירו, קודמין לעניי עיר אחרת:

“The needy who is your relative should be helped before all others; the needy in your neighborhood come before the needy in your city; the needy in your city come before the needy around the world.” (Rambam, Gifts to the Poor, 7:13)

Chavruta Questions:

- Why do you believe Rambam argues this way?
- What are the benefits of such a system?
- Is this something we follow today?
- How do you make decisions about how to give of your time, your money and your caring?

c) Regroup and discuss as a class. (15 -20 mins)

Ask students:

- Explain what the Rambam says.
- Why do you think he argues for this system of priorities?
- How does his system compare to yours in your drawings about responsibility earlier?
- Do you feel most responsible towards those you care most about and those over whom you have most influence? Why/why not?
- According to the Rambam, should we help other Jews before our non-Jewish neighbors? Should we help Israeli Jews before we help our American neighbors?
- Do you think that Rambam would still hold by the same hierarchy of responsibility if he was alive today in a world with internet and access to global news footage?

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d) Hand out the following text and ask a student to read it aloud:

חביב אדם שנברא בצלם  
“All people are beloved, for they are created in the image of God.” (*Pirkei Avot*- Ethics of our Ancestors, 3:14).

- e) Ask students: Is there a contradiction between *Pirkei Avot* and the Rambam? Is it possible to treat all people as though they are created in the image of God, and yet help our own relatives and neighbors and people before the rest of the world? Discuss (approx 10 mins)
- f) Elicit/Explain the meaning of the terms particularism and universalism:

**par·tic·u·lar·ism:**

Exclusive adherence to, dedication to, or interest in one's own group, party, sect, or nation.

**u·ni·ver·sal·ism:**

Adherence to, dedication to, or interest in all of humanity without preferencing one's own particular group, party, sect, or nation.

- g) Ask students: Is Rambam a particularist or a universalist? Is *Pirkei Avot* particularist or universalist? Are you a particularist or a universalist?

### 3) Conclusion (5 - 10 mins)

Journaling time:

**Journal Question:**

- Can I be a good person, help as I can around the world, and still give preference to my people when times get tough?

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Text Handouts:

Handout 1:

עני שהוא קרובו, קודם לכל אדם; ועניי ביתו, קודמין לעניי עירו; ועניי עירו, קודמין לעניי עיר אחרת:

“The needy who is your relative should be helped before all others; the needy in your neighborhood come before the needy in your city; the needy in your city come before the needy around the world.” (Rambam, Gifts to the Poor, 7:13)

Chavruta Questions:

- Why do you believe Rambam argues this way?
- What are the benefits of such a system?
- Is this something we follow today?
- How do you make decisions about how to give of your time, your money and your caring?

Handout 2:

חביב אדם שנברא בצלם  
“All people are beloved, for they are created in the image of God.” (*Pirkei Avot*- Ethics of our Ancestors, 3:14).