



## ACTIVITY

# Jews and Baseball

### Materials Needed

- Video clip
- internet connection and screening device

### Time Needed

30 minutes

### Goal

- To learn about Sandy Koufax and his decision to prioritize his Jewish identity over his professional one as a major league baseball player.
- To become aware of how decisions we make reflect our priorities and values.

## Before You Get Started

Look at the list of enduring understandings. Which one would you like to emphasize through this activity?

1. Jewish tradition and texts are concerned with particular and universal values. There are debates about questions of responsibility (for example, the debate of “*aniyei ircha kodmim*”) and the role of the Jewish People to improve the world as a whole (for example, the concept of “*Tikkun Olam*”).
2. In the 21st century, a commitment to Jewish Peoplehood can exist fruitfully with tension between particularistic values that ensure the existence and well-being of the Jewish People and a universalistic commitment to general causes.
3. The two agendas can conflict but the solution has to be in the form of a compromise.
4. A People which only cares about itself lacks soul and purpose.
5. A People that neglects developing its own identity and strength risks losing the power to do good all together.

## Directions for Activity

1. Ask participants to think about a situation they were in when they had to decide between two aspects of their identities, which were in conflict. It could be as a son/daughter and a student, or a professional and a parent or something else. How did they resolve the conflict? Ask them to articulate the value that their decision expressed. (Example: a decision to go to a family reunion instead of a final sports tournament reflects your prioritizing family over your sports team.)
2. Introduce and then view the clip from the film, “*Jews and Baseball: An American Love Story*” about Sandy Kofax’s decision to observe Yom Kippur instead of pitching for the 1965 World Series ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CCjzMRoCHg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CCjzMRoCHg)). His personal decision to honor his tradition over his professional advancement ended up turning him into a Jewish hero.
3. Discuss the clip with your participants. Frame the conversation as a tension between the Jewish value of observance of Jewish tradition, and the universal value of commitment to one’s professional obligations and team. In particular:
  - What were the particular Jewish values that he prioritized (note that he was not an Orthodox Jew).
  - Bring in the following statistic from the 2013 Pew Research Study on American Jewry about the declining importance of Yom Kippur among American Jews. What are some of the other

reasons that one might refrain from “going to work” on Yom Kippur, especially if you don’t see yourself as religiously observing the holiday?

Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement, is an important annual Jewish holiday traditionally marked by fasting. About half of U.S. Jews say that on Yom Kippur in 2012, they fasted for all (40%) or part (13%) of the day. As with participating in a Seder, the share of Jews who report fasting on Yom Kippur seems to have declined somewhat in recent years. In the 2000-2001 NJPS, six-in-ten Jews said they fasted for all or part of the previous Yom Kippur.

- From Pew Research Center’s 2013 Report, A Portrait of Jewish Americans Ch 5 “Religious Beliefs and Practices” ([www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/chapter-4-religious-beliefs-and-practices/](http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/chapter-4-religious-beliefs-and-practices/))

- Was there a time when you had to decide between Jewish values on the one hand and universal values on the other? How did you make that choice?

### Note to Educator

Did the enduring understanding that you set out to teach surface during this activity?