



ACTIVITY

The Songs We Sing, Rav Kook

Materials Needed

- Text of The Fourfold Song by Rav Kook

Time Needed

30-40 minutes

Goal

- To explore notions of different types of belonging and connection through a core text by Rav Kook and to consider the differences between belonging that privileges the particular and belonging that aspires to the universal.
- To expose learners to a piece of Jewish thought that comes from one of the most important Jewish thinkers of the 20th century.

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. Set the tone and start the activity by singing a nigun (a melody without words). You can find many examples to choose from on Youtube (just search for “nigun”) or teach a tune that you know (it doesn’t have to be Jewish). It should be easy to remember, repetitive and good for creating a reflective tone and space in the group. Sing the nigun a few times until the group are all singing.
2. Introduce the topic for the discussion. The group will be learning about notions of belonging. The text is a by Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Hacohen Kook, the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of mandatory Palestine. Introduce and learn the text in pairs.
3. Do a close reading of the whole text with your students. Give out copies of the text and have the students read it together slowly in pairs. Encourage them to read out loud, and ask each other questions as they listen.
4. Focus first on understanding what is going on. Give the students a piece of paper, folded into four quarters. On each quarter write the title of each of the four “songs” that Rav Kook describes:
 - Song of the Self
 - Song of the People
 - Song of Humanity

- Song of the World

As the students read the text, have them make some notes about the characteristics of each Song. What does it consist of? What are its characteristics? Who sings it?

Ensure that everyone understands what Rav Kook is saying before you move onto the next part of the discussion.

When you have basic clarity about the different levels of song, ask your students the following questions:

- What do you think Rav Kook means by “song”? What does it mean to sing a song throughout your life?
 - How does each singer or song contribute to the world?
 - Have your students think about what song they sing most in their lives? Which song feels most comfortable to them? Do they sing more than one song at the same time? How do others know what song/s you are singing?
 - What do you think of the order of songs that Rav Kook presents? Do you think he is presenting a natural, direction that starts with the particular and expands to the universal? Is it possible to start with the universal songs?
 - What do you think the harmony of the complete song would sound like? Is such harmony possible in our world?
5. End with singing the nigan again. This time the participants should be internalizing some of the ideas about their own “songs” and the nigan will be more meaningful and powerful for the whole group.

Note to Educator

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