



## ACTIVITY

# Community First?

### Materials Needed

- Copies of Babylonian Talmud, Masechet Ta'anit 11a
- Copies of text from Hillel (see below)

### Time Needed

30-45 minutes

### Goal

To explore the tension between communal responsibility and individual needs.

## Before You Get Started

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

- Jewish tradition created a society where the members of the Jewish People have a responsibility to each other as joint participants in a collective.
- Judaism outlines ‘*Kol Yisrael arevim zeh lazeh*’ as an imperative. The word “*kol*” emphasizes that it is an obligation for each and every person.
- Jewish communities have always organized themselves according to this principle, building structures for mutual support of those in need.
- In the late 20th century there are numerous examples of when Jews mobilized in support of their brethren around the world based on this principle.

## Directions for Activity

1. Ask participants to share one way that they react when they hear that there is trouble in their community (all responses are welcome, and encourage participants to speak honestly.)
2. Present the Talmudic text about the tension between Individual vs. Communal needs to the whole group, Babylonian Talmud, Masechet Ta’anit 11a:

When the community is in trouble, a person should not say, “I will go into my house and eat and drink and be at peace with myself.”

3. Divide the large group into smaller ones and ask each subgroup to come up with a situation that reflects the dilemma in the text. Then act out that situation for the group.
4. After all the scenes have been acted out, have a discussion within the larger group about the principle.
  - How do people feel about exerting the kind of moral pressure that the text suggests?
  - Even if in general they think that it is a reasonable suggestion, how do they think the Rabbis should have presented it—as a suggestion or recommendation? Or should they have presented it as an expected rule which people are expected (or even commanded) to follow (which is the rabbinic formulation)?

- Have the group consider whether this text is altogether outdated. Perhaps the Rabbis opinion was written at a time when Jews had to rely on themselves to a large degree and in today's world where this is no longer true, perhaps the opinion is less relevant. Agree or Disagree?
5. To wrap up, bring in the quote from Hillel to give a different rabbinic perspective and to introduce the notion of balance:

If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, who am I? If not now, when? (Ethics of the Fathers, 1:14)

### Note to Educator

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