



ACTIVITY

Collective Responsibility Without Limits?

Materials Needed

- Copies of the Vidui (Confession) Text
- Paper
- Pens/Pencils

Time Needed

30-45 minutes

Goal

To explore how the concept of collective responsibility to other Jews can be both a burdensome and empowering.

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. Introduce the group to the Vidui (Confession) text. Do they know it? Where is it from? When is it recited?
2. Ask every individual to choose the “sins” that they think are applicable to them from this list. Concentrating on Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, do they think that it is reasonable to confess “their sins” (i.e. the relevant ones for them)? Why? Why not?
3. Now discuss the ones that they don’t think they have done? Ask why we are asked to confess sins that we ourselves have not committed? What logic can there be in such a “meaningless” confession?
4. After presenting the collective logic behind the idea (use the Explanation of Text to help frame the argument) discuss how they feel being saddled with everyone else’s sins? What do they think about the idea of collective responsibility for the Jewish People, which stands behind the ashamnu prayer?
5. Can they think of a current example of feeling responsible for another’s Jews’ misdeeds? (Jonathan Pollard on the one hand and Bernie Madoff on the other come to mind.) Is there something comforting about the feeling that other Jews are responsible for yours?
6. Create an opportunity for personal reflection. Ask everyone to take a page and write out 3-4 sins that they see as the sins of the collective (ex. “We have caused environmental damage” or “we have embezzled money” etc.) Then ask them to write down 1-2 steps that they as individuals will take to remedy those collective sins. Have participants share what they wrote and tease out the dynamic of individual’s responsibility toward collective problems.

Note to Educator

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