

Cheshvan

Day of Tolerance: The Other and Me

This lesson will address the uniqueness and diversity that exist among people and the importance of tolerance.

Goals

- The students will learn about the unique nature of each and every human being, which creates differences between people.
- The students will understand the importance of a variety of opinions and the need for tolerance and acceptance of other opinions.

Sources

Mishnah: "Therefore, Adam was created alone"

Midrash: "Just like none of their faces are exactly alike"

Song: "Nitzotz HaAhava [Spark of Love]" by Ehud Banai

Ages



Grades 4–6



Can be adapted for Grades 1–3



Can be adapted for Grades 7 and up

Background for the Teacher

Day of Tolerance

The International Day of Tolerance is marked each year on November 16th. This special day was established by the United Nations in 1996. The main goals of the day are to promote the values of tolerance, mutual understanding, and respect between different cultures and peoples, as well as to raise awareness of the dangers inherent in intolerance, such as racism, discrimination, and violence. The Day of Tolerance serves as a platform for the promotion of values through a range of educational, cultural, and public activities. On this day, schools, organizations, and governmental institutions around the world organize workshops, discussions, exhibits, and events that encourage intercultural dialogue, encounters between different groups within society, and activities to fight preconceptions and stereotypes. In a world full of conflicts and tensions between different groups, the Day of Tolerance reminds us of the importance of building bridges of understanding and mutual respect, as a basis for a just, sustainable society.

Diversity of Opinions

Tolerance is, essentially, readiness to accept and respect beliefs, opinions, and behaviors that are different from our own, even when we do not agree with them. The main idea is not to necessarily agree with others, but to acknowledge their right to live according to their own beliefs and customs, as long as they are not causing anyone any harm. Pluralism is the idea that a variety of ideas, beliefs, and identities can exist side by side with one another, and that this diversity is itself positive and of social value. A pluralistic society does not only allow for the existence of different groups, it also encourages dialogue and cooperation between them, based on a belief that interactions between different ideas and cultures benefit everyone and lead to mutual enrichment.

The midrash "Just like none of their faces are exactly alike, their opinions are not the same" (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 21:12) expresses a basic principle of Jewish thought. The midrash reflects the idea that G-d purposefully created a world of differences and diversity. Just as people were created with different faces, they naturally have different opinions, approaches, and tendencies. Judaism recognizes that true equality does not require uniformity, but actually provides equal space for a variety of opinions and people. The tension between unity and multiplicity, between equality and diversity, does not contradict, but actually complements. It is the basis for a rich, complex society that develops through dialogue and constant discussion.

This principle is expressed in the fundamental Jewish concept of "70 faces of Torah," the idea of the existence and importance of a wide variety of interpretations of the one Torah.

Uniqueness and Difference

According to tradition, over the six days of Creation, animals and plants were created in groups that each included many different species. Only humans were created alone, as a single species. In the excerpt from the Mishnah: "Therefore, Adam was created alone" the Sages suggest several reasons for this. One reason is to emphasize the idea that every single person is a whole world. Other reasons are to demonstrate how all people are equal and to show how great G-d is, in that He created many, many people who are all different from one another from one mold (Adam). The metaphor of a mold used to mint coins illustrates how we all share something essential; we were all made from the same mold. According to Jewish tradition, we have all been created in G-d's image (b'tzelem Elokim) and, at the same time, each one of us is unique.

Activities

Opening Hook

Hand out to the students a page divided into nine squares. In each square, have the students write one characteristic, hobby, or unique piece of information about themselves. Then, have the students move around the room and find others who have written one of the same things on their sheets. When they find someone who wrote the same thing in one of their boxes, they should each sign the box on their paper with the shared item.

Discuss the findings from the game with the students. How many signatures were they able to gather? Were there boxes with things that were unique to them, that didn't match anyone else's boxes? How are they similar to other people and how are they different from other people? How does it feel to be similar to a lot of other people and how does it feel to be unique?

Explain to the students that, in honor of the Day of Tolerance, they will study Jewish sources that teach us that even though we are different, we need to respect one another.



Main Activity

Part 1: The Uniqueness of Every Person

Ask the students: Based on what we're told in the Torah, each animal and plant was created as part of a group, so why was Adam created alone? Why didn't G-d create many different people all at once?

Gather several answers and then read the mishnah together (Supplement A). Project it onto the board or distribute it on a printed page. Make sure that the students understand the metaphor of using a mold to mint coins. If possible, bring a rubber stamp to the class, to demonstrate the action. For enrichment, you can watch this [video](#) about the minting of coins.

 As a class, explain the mishnah and discuss it:

- How does the mishnah answer the question, "Why was Adam created alone?"
- What object does the mishnah compare the human to?
- According to the mishnah, every single person is created from the same mold. We can conclude from this that all of us share something in common. What things do all humans have in common?
- Where do we see the uniqueness? How is every person unique? In what ways are they unique?

You can do a **creative activity** inspired by the midrash. Each student can draw two big circles on a piece of paper, to represent two sides of a coin. In one circle (one side of the coin), have the students write how they are similar to every other person in the world. In the other circle (the other side of the coin), have them write how they are special and different. They can then use scissors to cut out the circles and then tie the two circles together with a piece of string. Then, hang the "coins" around the classroom.



Instead of reading the mishnah, you can demonstrate the idea using two coins. Ask the students whether there is any difference between the two coins. Are they completely identical? How is it that they are so similar to each other? Explain how coins are minted. According to the mishnah, people are similar to coins in that they are all created from the same mold (Adam), but they are also very different from one another.

Ask the students what makes people unique and what things we all have in common.

Part 2: Differences Between People and Tolerance

Divide the students up into pairs and give them copies of the midrash on differences of opinion among different people (Supplement 2). Ask the students to read the midrash and discuss it with their partner, using the questions on the page.

Bring the class back together and explain the midrash. Ask the students why they think the midrash starts off with differences in appearance among people, in order to address the differences in their ideas. Ask what they see as the difficulty in making space for a variety of ideas or opinions that are different from our own. What are some ways of dealing with this? Address the difficulty of making space for different or opposing opinions and ask the students to suggest ways of making space for and listening to a range of opinions. Ask the students to think about a time when it was hard for them to accept that another person held an opinion that was different from their own. Ask them to share why it was difficult and how they dealt with that.

Explain what tolerance is and the International Day of Tolerance.

Then, listen to the song "[Nitzotz HaAhava \[Spark of Love\]](#)" by the Israeli artist, Ehud Banai. The song lyrics can be found [here](#). You can use AI to translate the lyrics and then print them out and distribute them to the students.

Direct the students' attention to the fact that the song is performed by two singers, with the two different voices highlighting their different perspectives.

Assignment related to the song: Divide the students into pairs. Ask each pair of students to write two new verses for the song about the differences between them. Suggest that they use the formula of the original song: "What I..." "You" and fill in the blanks accordingly. Invite some of the pairs to present the verses that they wrote.

Ask:

- When can disagreements be a problem?
- How can a "spark of love" help in those situations?



Conclusion

Ask the students to draw up a list of do's and don'ts for safeguarding the uniqueness of each student in the class, to allow for the expression of a range of ideas and to strengthen the capacity for tolerance among the students and outside the classroom. Write the list on a big piece of paper and hang it up in the classroom. (You can make suggestions, for example: Really listen – Listen to someone else's idea all the way through without interrupting; Respect differences – No making fun of differences or of other opinions; Try to understand – Take a sincere interest in reasons for ideas that are different from my own; etc.)



An Interactive Game

Wheel of Ideas



A debate exercise to practice listening and tolerance

Project the activity onto the board. Each round, choose two students to express their opinions on different subjects, in terms of pros and cons.

Each student should choose one character from the list with whom they identify. Drag the characters to an appropriate place at the bottom of the board and spin the wheel. The subject the wheel lands on will be the subject of the debate between two of the students. Tell the students which opinion they will each be representing and then have them take turns presenting their assigned positions. Give each student one minute to make their argument.

Emphasize tolerance, listening, and allowing the other person a chance to speak, even if we do not agree with them. After each debate between a pair of students, invite the other students to express their opinions on the subject.

At the end of each round, click "Return" to return the characters to their places and allow another spin of the wheel.

At the conclusion of the game, emphasize the values that we learned about in the lesson: tolerance for other voices, listening, and making space for other people's opinions even if they are very different from our own.

Supplement 1

Why Was Adam Created Alone?

Therefore, Adam was created alone

[...]

to testify to the greatness of the Holy One
Blessed Be He.

When a person mints several coins using
the same mold, all the coins look alike.

But, the King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed
Be He forms each person in the mold of
Adam the First, yet every single one of them
is different from all the others.

(From the *Mishnah*, Tractate Sanhedrin 4:5)

לפייה נברא אדם יחידי,

[...]

להגיד גודלו של הקדוש ברוך הוא:

שאדם טובע כפתה מטבעות בחותם
אחד, וכלן דומה זה לזה;

ומלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך
הוא טبع כל האדם בחותמו של אדם
הראשון, ואין אחד מהן דומה לחברו.

(על פי המשנה, מסכת סנהדרין, פרק ד, משנה ה)



Supplement 2

Different on the Outside and on the Inside

Just like none of their faces [the faces of people] are exactly alike, their opinions are not the same.

Rather, each and every person has ideas of their own [...].

(From *Bamidbar Rabbah* 21:2)

Activity

Find three things that you and your partner agree on and three things that you think differently about.

Similarities	Differences

Questions

1. Do most people accept the fact that different people have different opinions?

2. Do you think it's a good thing the people are different from one another and have different opinions?

3. What is the disadvantage of the differences between people? What's the advantage?

4. Do you generally prefer to hang out with people who are similar to you or with people who are different from you?
