Peulat Erev: Current Topics in Israeli Culture

Location: Beit Am Beit

Goal: Teach chanichim about four prevalent topics in Israeli current events: LGBTQ rights, refugees, religious diversity, and the IDF. In addition, we want to emphasize the importance of reading beyond headlines and understanding how the media can skew people’s opinions on certain subjects and to understand there are more social issues within Israel that do not involve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

There will be headlines posted all over the Beit Am Beit. Chanichim will be given sticky notes and they will have 10 minutes to walk around (as quietly as possible) and can write down their reactions to the headlines and post them on them. MADRICHIM please help to have chanichim participate and you may add sticky notes yourself.

Then, we will break out into small discussion groups based on the chanichim’s preferences.

The 4 Mishlachat members will be assigned to cover their 2-3 groups. Machon madrichim will be leading and facilitating discussion, but through the discussion the Mishlachat members will float between groups to share their personal stories with the chanichim and answer any questions they have.

**\*\*\*\*Facilitators of the discussion should use the questions as jumping off points for a longer conversation. Do not feel rushed to answer all the questions. Encourage all to participate and expand on their thoughts.\*\*\*\***

Each group has questions for their specific topic. At the end, there are a list of questions that every group can discuss.

8:20-8:30 sticky note activity

8:30-8:35 Read info sheet

8:35-9:00 discussion questions about your topic

9:00-9:10 discussion questions about media

LGBTQ:

* Dozens of Israeli and U.S. Orthodox Rabbis Come Out in Support of LGBTQ Community (Haaretz)
* Hundreds of Members of LGBT Community Protest Surrogacy Law in Tel-Aviv [The government's surrogacy bill, which updates current legislation to grant state support for pregnancy via surrogacy for married heterosexual couples only, passed after a long debate in its third reading in the Knesset on Wednesday] (Jerusalem Post)
* Chief rabbi of J'lem against 'LGBT' flags (Arutz Sheva)
* Druze leader backs rabbis on LGBT terror (Arutz Sheva)
* **LGBT Jews say it’s increasingly difficult to be pro-Israel and queer. The complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is lost on many in the gay community leading to outright rejection of the Jewish state (The Times of Israel)**

Discussion Questions:

1. Had you heard about any of the events described in the article? If not, were you surprised by anything?
2. Where do you think the issue of gay marriage stems from and who is on the opposing sides?
3. Registered same sex marriage is illegal in Israel, but cohabitation and the recognition of same-sex marriages are legal. If you can get around the law, should the state just choose to have it be a firm law either against or for gay marriage?
4. Netanyahu stated that “every person was created in the image of God.” In your opinion, how does Israel being a Jewish state impact laws in general and specifically about gay marriage?
5. How does gay marriage in Israel compare to what you have witnessed and learned about in America? What is the route of the similarities and differences?
6. Which headlines stood out most to you and why?
7. Did you find any headlines hard to understand because of a lack of knowledge? If so, was that frustrating?
8. After learning more about these topics, do you feel like the headlines appropriately conveyed the information you had learned?
9. In what ways does this Peulah represent how we view and understand the media in America?
10. How do you think someone would react to these headlines if they had no previous information?

LGBT:

On Jan. 10, 1997, Tel Aviv District Court, acting as an IDF appeals committee, ordered the army to recognize Adir Steiner as the common-law spouse of the late Col. Doron Maisel and to grant him benefits as an IDF widower.

Maisel, who died of cancer in November 1991, had lived with Steiner since 1984. The two shared finances and their relationship was public knowledge. Steiner asked the army for the compensation it pays bereaved spouses and for recognition as Maisel’s spouse for memorial purposes. The army refused, saying that only heterosexual couples qualify.

Steiner’s attorney argued that the law does not rule out common-law spouses of the same sex and that the IDF’s position was discriminatory. The committee ruled that a woman in Steiner’s position would be eligible for the benefits—as the law applies to both married and common-law spouses—and that he was being denied them merely because he is male. The committee accepted the appellant’s claim that the law applies equally to relations between members of the same sex. The IDF appealed to Jerusalem District Court, claiming that the language of the law governing IDF pensions cannot be interpreted to entitle same-sex partners.

In July 2016 the city of Beersheba's first ever gay pride march was cancelled, after the route was altered by the Israeli Supreme Court due to concerns of violence in the area.

Six individuals were stabbed at the Jerusalem Gay Pride parade on July 30, 2015, by an Ultra-Orthodox Jew. The attacker, Yishai Schlissel, had been released from prison just weeks prior after completing a 12 year sentence for stabbing three individuals at the Jerusalem Gay Pride parade in 2005. Schlissel emerged behind spectators at the rally and began stabbing wildly and screaming, before being apprehended by security personnel. While being questioned, Schlissel asserted that he did not accept the rulings and authority of the Israeli courts because they were not based in the Torah. One of Schlissel's victims, 16 year old Shira Banki, died of her stab wounds a few days after the attack. Schlissel was convicted of murder and multiple charges of attempted murder on April 19, 2016, and he could face life in prison.

The Knesset officially designated February 23, 2016, as the state of Israel's official LGBT rights day. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke at the Knesset marking the occasion, claiming that he had come to say one thing to the Israeli LGBT community: every person was created in the image of God.

Israeli Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit announced on December 8, 2016, that the naturalization process for same-sex couples in Israel would from then on be the same as the process for heterosexual couples. For heterosexual couples the transition period to full citizenship took approximately four years; but the Israeli Gay Fathers Association asserted in a petition to Mandelblit that it was not uncommon for homosexual couples to have to wait seven years or more. On top of this, the couples were often granted permanent residency instead of citizenship. The organization lauded the decision as “a huge victory against discrimination for same sex couples.”

---Jewish Virtual Library

IDF:

* Women in the Israeli Military Just Aren't Cut Out for Combat Roles (Haaratz)
* Haredi IDF Enlistment Targets Not Being Met, Report Finds (Jerusalem Post)
* Women leap from the front lines to the headlines: Debate over mixed-gender IDF units rages in the pages of the Hebrew-language papers, after rabbis demand army chief's removal over his policies on females in combat (The Times of Israel)
* Thousands of NY ultra-Orthodox Jews rally against IDF conscription. Some 20,000 anti-Zionist men, mainly Satmar Hasidim, gather in Brooklyn to protest 'persecution' of their brethren in Israel (The Times of Israel)
* ISRAEL SHOCKED BY ULTRA-ORTHODOX MOB ASSAULT OF IDF OFFICER IN JERUSALEM (The Jerusalem Post)

Discussion Questions:

1. How does having certain members of Israeli society being exempt from the IDF affect Israeli culture?
2. What is your reaction to learning about the role of women in the IDF?
3. How would American culture differ if we had a draft the way Israel does? What would your life look like if you grew up in Israel instead of America?
4. The article said: “In July the Knesset passed a law establishing the penalty for inciting or seeking to persuade a volunteer soldier to desert the military, or for giving shelter to a volunteer who deserts, at three to 15 years in prison, which is equivalent to that already established regarding conscript soldiers. “ Do you think the Knesset’s law about someone who helps or persuades another person to desert the army is appropriate, too lenient, or too harsh?
5. Do you believe that the draft breeds a certain kind of Nationalism in Israel that doesn’t exist in America?
6. Which headlines stood out most to you and why?
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IDF

Military service is compulsory for Jewish citizens, except for Orthodox women. It is also compulsory for male citizens who are Druze, and male citizens in the 5,000-member Circassian community (Muslims originally from the northwestern Caucasus region who migrated in the late 19th century). Arab Christian and Muslim citizens are exempt from compulsory service, although the government encourages them to volunteer.

In July the Knesset passed a law establishing the penalty for inciting or seeking to persuade a volunteer soldier to desert the military, or for giving shelter to a volunteer who deserts, at three to 15 years in prison, which is equivalent to that already established regarding conscript soldiers. The sponsor of the law said he initiated it to deflect pressures away from Christian Arab soldiers who are volunteering in the military.

The law provides the minister of defense some discretion to provide exemptions from compulsory military service for conscientious objectors. A special committee evaluates applications for conscientious objection and may recommend exemptions if it determines an applicant objects to the inherent use of violent force in the military framework and to war in a way that prevents him or her from serving in the military. The committee is also authorized to recommend certain accommodations to conscientious objectors’ concerns, including permission not to hold weapons or wear uniforms. The committee chair is authorized to grant exemptions, and committee decisions may be appealed in writing to the Ministry of Defense or the courts.

Mandatory service for women in the IDF is 24 months, apart from roles specified in law which require a service length of 36 months.Women may be exempted from military service for reasons of religious conscience, marriage, pregnancy, or motherhood. A woman may receive an exemption on religious grounds under the following conditions:

1. She has declared that for reasons of conscience, or a religious way of life, she is prevented from doing military service and has proven this to the satisfaction of the exemption committee.
2. She keeps the laws of [Kashrut](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kashrut) at home and outside.
3. She does not travel on [Shabbat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shabbat).

Each year, 1,500 female combat soldiers are drafted into the IDF. Women currently make up 3% of the IDF's combat soldiers.Women were employed in full combat roles during the War of Independence and early years.

Religious Diversity:

* Number of Israelis Marrying Outside Rabbinate Rising, Even Among Orthodox Jews (Haaretz)
* Rabbinate said to double its rejections of wedding applicants’ Jewishness (The Times of Israel)
* Thousands of Converts, Divorcees Face Non-Recognition by Chief Rabbinate (Jerusalem Post)
* Rabbinate clarifies: There is no 'black list': Chief Rabbinate says private list was never meant to be any sort of blacklist (Arutz Sheva)

Discussion Questions:

1. In America, religion and state are separated, but in Israel they are not as separated. How does this impact Israeli culture? If you have been to Israel, can you give an example the intersection of religion and state?
2. What do you need to do in the U.S. and what do you need to do in Israel to be considered a Jew?
3. Israel’s Declaration of Independence states that Israel is a Democratic and Jewish state. Are there times when Israel should be more Democratic than Jewish and are there times when Israel should be more Jewish than Democratic?
4. What kinds of rights should religious minorities have in a Jewish state?
5. Registered non-orthodox marriages are not legal in Israel, but the recognition of non-orthodox marriages done outside of Israel are legal. If you can get around the law, should the state just choose to have it be a firm law either against or for conservative marriage?
6. Which headlines stood out most to you and why?
7. Did you find any headlines hard to understand because of a lack of knowledge? If so, was that frustrating?
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Religion:

The rabbinate and the functions of the rabbi in modern Israel differ fundamentally from their counterparts in any other part of the Jewish world, whether ancient or modern. A number of factors have contributed toward this unique state of affairs. In the first place there is the law of the State of Israel which establishes the halakhah as state law in all matters affecting personal status, which includes marriage, divorce, legitimacy, and conversion and affords the rabbinical courts the status of civil courts of law within that wide sphere. This, coupled with the fact that the Ministry of Religious Affairs was, apart from one brief interregnum, the prerogative of the (Orthodox) National Religious Party, has had the effect of making Orthodox Judaism to all intents and purposes the "established church" of the state, to the virtual exclusion of other religious trends in Judaism, Conservative and Reform, which have only a handful of congregations, mostly composed of recently arrived immigrants belonging to those trends in the countries of their origin.

A second factor determining the complexion and the functions of the rabbinate is the establishment of the twin Orthodox chief rabbinate (Ashkenazi and Sephardi) which are state appointments, and similar twin chief rabbinates in the larger cities. These local rabbinates and chief rabbinates are administered by the local religious councils, which are nominated through a complicated system of political party representation and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and it is to all intents controlled by the ministry. These councils consist of Orthodox Jews. All appointments of rabbis must be confirmed by the chief rabbis and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Religious courts operated by officially recognized religious communities have legal authority over their members in matters of marriage, divorce, and burial.

The government continued to implement policies based on Orthodox Jewish interpretations of religious law. For example, the only in-country marriages the government recognized for Jews were those performed by the Chief Rabbinate, which refused to perform marriages involving citizens without maternal Jewish lineage, because the Chief Rabbinate did not consider them Jewish according to halacha (Jewish law). Likewise, men with ancestry in the Jewish priesthood (cohanim) were not allowed to marry converts or divorcees, in accordance with halacha. The Chief Rabbinate required individuals who qualified to marry to follow a procedure which included sessions with a rabbi and classes for the bride to learn about her duties and responsibilities under halacha.

Those who self-identify but are not recognized by the Chief Rabbinate as Jewish, including Reform and Conservative converts to Judaism and others without Jewish matrilineage, were prohibited from accessing official Jewish marriage, divorce, and burial services in the country, although some Orthodox and non-Orthodox rabbis did officiate at these ceremonies outside of the Rabbinate.

---Jewish Virtual Library

Refugees:

* Israel to deport 40,000 African refugees without their consent (DW)
* Israel’s Got Its Own Refugee Dilemma: African ‘Dreamers’ (NYtimes)
* African Deportations Are Creating a Religious Controversy in Israel (The Atlantic)
* Asylum Seekers Deported From Israel to Rwanda Warn Those Remaining: ‘Don’t Come Here’ (Haaretz)
* Israel faces ugly reckoning on refugees and racism (CNN)
* Inside Israel’s campaign to deport tens of thousands of African migrants. African migrants from Eritrea and elsewhere could face indefinite detention if they choose to stay. (Vox)
* African Deportations Are Creating a Religious Controversy in Israel. Thousands of vulnerable migrants may soon be deported, which many Jews see as inconsistent with their faith. (The Atlantic)
* Asylum Seekers Deported From Israel to Rwanda Warn Those Remaining: ‘Don’t Come Here’ 'I thought maybe it would be better for me in Rwanda than in prison, but it has become like a prison for me here,' says an asylum seeker who left Israel (Haaretz)

Discussion Questions:

1. The article says that: “At various points, the government has suggested that the asylum seekers posed either security threats or a demographic threat to Israel’s status as the Jewish state.” What is your reaction to this statement?
2. This refugee crisis is the worst since World War II. In a country founded as a refuge for Jews fleeing persecution, the situation has raised a fundamental question: What is the Jewish state’s obligation to others, even if they are not Jewish?
3. Do you believe the Israeli government is appropriately handling the situation with refugees? Why or why not? What do you think is the appropriate reaction to the refugee crisis?
4. A lot of this issue stems from the disagreement about whether these people are migrants or refugees. Who should be the one to decide whether they are migrants or refugees? How would you classify them based on what you know?
5. Is this social issue similar to or different from the events in the U.S. concerning immigration?
6. Which headlines stood out most to you and why?
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**Summary:**

In the mid-2000s, with the African states of Sudan and Eritrea racked by unrest and violence – and, in the case of the Darfur region of Sudan, even attempted genocide – some citizens chose to flee. They embarked on a hazardous journey that eventually led them from Egypt’s Sinai Desert into Israel, paying Bedouin smugglers to get them over the border and in some cases arriving with tales of torture that they endured along the way.

**How many African asylum seekers are there in Israel?**

There are about 38,000 adult African asylum seekers currently in the country, according to figures from the Interior Ministry’s Population, Immigration and Border Authority, with a further 4,000 children. The authority says the vast majority of the asylum seekers, 72 percent, are from Eritrea. An additional 20 percent are from Sudan, with another 8 percent from other African states including Nigeria, Ghana, the Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone, or other countries.

**What was Israel’s response to the asylum seekers?**

As well as erecting the southern border to stem the flow, Israel has attracted criticism from UN refugee agencies and, increasingly, Diaspora Jews for its hard-line approach to the asylum seekers. They say the individuals in question are refugees, since they are fleeing war zones and seeking a safe haven in Israel. Israel, however, says that the majority are economic migrants, not refugees, and that they can therefore be deported.

The majority of the asylum seekers – some 15,000 to 22,000 – live in shared apartments in south Tel Aviv (Eilat and Jerusalem are other hubs), causing tensions in these already poor and overcrowded neighborhoods. Some south Tel Aviv residents have complained that they alone have shouldered the burden of living with the asylum seekers. There have also been accusations that the Africans were responsible for an increased crime rate, claims that have been refuted.

At various points, the government has suggested that the asylum seekers posed either security threats or a demographic threat to Israel’s status as the Jewish state. They have also said that Israel is not equipped to handle resettling them. Many nonprofit organizations working with the asylum seekers say the government has employed harsh measures that suggest they are trying to make life difficult for the asylum seekers: They have no social, labor or health rights, and because they are not granted work permits, their job situation is often unstable. They perform mainly menial labor in restaurants and cleaning.

The government built a special facility in the Negev, Saharonim Prison, to house some of the illegal immigrants that it had detained. The prison opened in July 2007, and asylum seekers were sent there under the Prevention of Infiltration Law. Six years later, Israel opened another detention center in the desert, called Holot (“Sands”).

**How is Israel handling the Africans’ asylum claims?**

The Interior Ministry is checking the Africans’ asylum requests, but critics say the pace has been slow and the processing itself has been problematic. Of the asylum seekers currently in Israel, some 15,400 have submitted claims for asylum since they were allowed to do so, the government says.

~Haaretz

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Tzrif:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Rank 1-4 which subject about Israel you would like to discuss for a peulah

\_\_\_\_Refugees \_\_\_\_LGBTQ

\_\_\_\_Religious Diversity \_\_\_\_IDF

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Tzrif:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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