

Mini Lesson: Areyvut

All of Israel are responsible for each other



Mini Lesson

Subject Area: Jewish identity, Holocaust education

Topic: *Areyvut*: All of Israel are responsible for each other

Grade Level: 8th - 10th

Duration: 30 minutes

Learning Aim: Students will

- Identify the meaning of *areyvut* and being responsible for one another
- Deepen their understanding of survivor experiences
- Identify the primary and central ideas presented in testimony
- Enhance their listening and communication skills

Description of the Lesson:

The word “*Arev*” literally means “co-signer” and in practice can be translated as “responsible.” In this activity, students will broaden their understanding of *Areyvut* by exploring the power of taking responsibility for one another. Exploring *areyvut* through the lens of *halacha* and Jewish thought, students will reflect on the impact of *areyvut* for three Holocaust survivors. Students will be challenged to consider times when they have helped someone else and the ways they might demonstrate *areyvut* in their own lives.

Consider

- To prepare, have students take out pen and paper.
- Pass out the handout titled “*Arev*”.
- Write the word “*Arev*” and its definition “responsible” on the board.
- Ask volunteers to read one paragraph at a time:
 - The word “*Arev*” literally means “co-signer” but in practice can be translated as “responsible.” In Jewish tradition, *Arevut* often refers to the importance of taking responsibility for one another. Throughout Jewish tradition, examples of *areyvut* permeate our collective understanding of what it means to be a part of the Jewish community. For example, in the story of Esther, during a time of great strife and danger for the Jewish people, she risked her own life in order to speak with the King in defense of her community.

Arevut is used for the first time in the Torah when Yehuda takes responsibility for Binyamin. Before he travels to Egypt, Yehuda promises his father Yaacov “*anochi Aarvenu*,” I will take responsibility for him. It is the first mention in the Torah of one’s responsibility for his/her brother.

This idea of *arev*, co-signer, inspired Chazal to formulate the phrase: “Kol Yisrael Areyvim Zeh Lazeh” - all of Israel are co-signers for one another. In *Halacha*, Jewish law, this means that if one member of the Jewish people has a *mitzvah* (commandment) to do, like to blow a *Shofar*, then another person can fulfill the obligation for them, and thereby is responsible for them. . If someone has not heard *kiddish* you can say *kiddish* for them. You can keep repeating the *kiddish* with G-d’s name because of this concept.

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Consider (continued)

- Ask students to respond to the following questions:
 - *What do you think we can learn from this?*
 - *What does this description of areyvut make you think about?*
 - *What might this term mean to you in your life?*
- Share with students that during the Holocaust, survivors talk about feeling a sense of *areyvut*. Even in such extreme circumstances, the notion of being responsible for one another can be found. Survivors talk about people offering each other support, risking their own lives to do a little something that would prolong the life of someone else, and they give examples of people looking out for one another and reminding each other they were in it together.
- Tell students that testimony offers us a glimpse into the lives of our historic Jewish community. *(Note for teachers: this is an opportunity to expand and mention operations to get Jewish people out of Syria, Yemen, Ethiopia, the former Soviet Union, etc.).*

Collect

- Hand out biographies for each of the survivors that students will be introduced to in the following clips of testimony. Read each bio together prior to viewing each clip.
- As students view the testimonies, have them take notes on the ways each survivor expresses the ways that they experienced *areyvut* during the Holocaust.
 - **Hersi Berkowitz** describes that when he arrived at Auschwitz someone told him to say that you practice a trade and that you can work. Later, when he was struggling, he adds that he still managed to share some of his own food.
 - **Clare Parker** shares that the reason she is here is because someone told her to lie about her age.

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Construct

- After viewing the clips, ask students to write their response to the following question:
 - *What we can learn from these survivors about the interconnectedness of community and our responsibility towards others?*
- Invite two or three students to share their responses with the class.
- Then ask them to discuss the following questions with a partner and take notes highlighting what they've discussed:
 1. *Areyvut* suggests that Jewish people are responsible for one another. What impact did that have on these survivors? What impact do you think this has on you?
 2. Think about a time when you have helped someone – how did it make you feel?
 - *What is the essence of what these survivors are saying about acts of kindness, even when it is an act of kindness to help a stranger?*
 - *Do you think it is easier to act on behalf of a stranger vs. someone you know? Why?*
 3. Can you think of a story from *Tanach*, an event in history, or even an example from today (either from current events or your own life) that illustrates different examples of *areyvut*? Please explain.

Communicate

- Invite each partner group to share their responses with the full class.

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Hersi Berkowitz

Hersi Berkowitz was born in Romania on January 10, 1924. He grew up in a Chassidic Jewish family that was part of the Vishnitz Chassidim. Prior to the war, he remembers that they were a very close family and that his father was very strict with the children. During the war, Hersi and his family were forced to live in the Bistrita ghetto. They were deported to Auschwitz II-Birkenau and managed to stay with his father and his brother throughout much of the war. He was liberated from Mauthausen by the United States armed forces. His interview took place on May 28, 1998 in Brooklyn, New York.

Clare Parker

Clare Parker was born in Budapest, Hungary on January 13, 1932 in a Jewish family. Prior to the war, she recalls that she and her family were forced to wear yellow stars and her father drafted to forced labor. During the war, Gerda and her family were forced to live in the Pestscenterzsebet ghetto. They were deported to Auschwitz. She was liberated from Mauthausen by the United States armed forces. Her interview took place on July 30, 1996 in London, England.