



SHOULD I PUT UP A POLITICAL LAWN SIGN?

PREP FOR THE SESSION

Session Objective

Through exploring the value of **humility**, particularly in situations where we feel pressure to stand behind a catchy slogan or definitive opinion on the Israeli/Hamas War, learners will develop insights that support their ability to authentically express themselves while being open to listening to and considering the views of others.

At-a-Glance:

We know that a lawn sign cannot capture our full feelings or thoughts about anything, let alone the Israel/Hamas war. But who hasn't made a snap judgment about someone based on a sign outside of their home? How can we connect with the people and stories behind the lawn signs? This resource begins with an activity around how we react to and respond to political lawn signs. Then, learners engage with a Jewish text around balancing humility with pride and self-confidence. The resource wraps with learners reflecting how to practice humility in their conversations with others about the Israel/Hamas war through a hands-on project.



Time Estimate:

60 minutes



Best Uses:

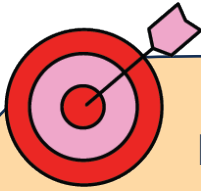
- All ages from teens to adults. Can be in person or online.
- Seating arrangement where learners have a writing surface and can easily see each other



Material:

- [Printouts of sample lawn signs](#)
- Paper and markers
- Jewish Wisdom handout
- Prepare guiding questions for the opening and closing activities on a chart paper or whiteboard.
- Two small pieces of paper per person (optional: lamination paper)

LET'S GET STARTED



FRAME THE ISSUE

Imagine for a moment that you are going for a walk around your neighborhood. On that walk you pass various lawn signs (or window signs if you are in the city) featuring political slogans.

20 min



Facilitator prompts the group:

- What are the messages on those signs that you just imagined?

Okay now we are going to pretend that this room is a neighborhood that we are walking through. As you walk around and look at the signs on the walls, notice any thoughts, feelings, or reactions that you have.

Once learners have walked around and looked at the signs, facilitator prompts group:

You probably had some kind of reaction to these signs! We are going to do a bit of writing and a bit of sharing in pairs. Then as a group we will unpack this.

First, I want to invite you to journal in response to these prompts:

- Which sign did you feel most challenged by? How did you feel in your body when you saw this sign? What assumptions did you make about the people who might put the sign outside their home?
- Which sign feels most aligned with your perspectives? What of your views does the sign *not* acknowledge? If you put that sign outside your house, what assumptions do you think people might make about you?

Now, turn to a partner and discuss:

- What are the benefits of putting up a lawn sign? What are the drawbacks?



EXPLORE THE VALUE: HUMILITY

35 min



We know our own complicated and perhaps conflicting views about Israel, but often all we know about another person's views are the words on the sign outside their house, the quote they posted on social media, or a single comment they made in a conversation. We may make a snap assumption like, "well this person clearly knows nothing about ____." Or "I am much better at holding complexity than ____." But we do not have all the information!

Here is where humility may be able to help us. Humility rests on the idea that we are not more valuable or important than any other person, yet each of us has a unique purpose in this world, worthy of honoring and feeling proud of. How can we practice humility in the context of interacting with others about Israel and the war in Gaza? Let us dive in!



JEWISH WISDOM

Rabbi Toba Spitzer, a Renewal rabbi at Temple Dorshei Tzedek in Newton, MA wrote a book called, *God is Here - Reimagining the Divine*. In a 2010 Yom Kippur sermon which inspired portions of the book, she shares a unique year-round practice of a Chassidic Rebbe and uses it to remind people to not only spend the day thinking about their mistakes, but also about things that they did well;

"It was said of Reb Simcha Bunem that he carried two slips of paper, one in each pocket. On one he wrote: Bishvili nivra ha-olam—"for my sake the world was created." On the other he wrote: V'anokhi afar v'efer"—"I am but dust and ashes." He would take out each slip of paper as necessary, as a reminder to himself. I think the notion of these two slips of paper can be very helpful to us in our work of teshuvah. The two pockets suggest a kind of balance that we need to achieve, as we walk through this world. You may want to think about which pocket you need to look into this Yom Kippur. My suggestion would be to look into the one that feels a bit difficult, or alien. The one that is less natural to you..."



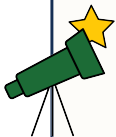
Most of us, I would imagine, fall somewhere between these two pockets, sometimes knowing that the world was created for my sake, sometimes feeling like dust and ashes. It is good to move back and forth between the two pockets, as Reb Simcha Bunem used to do. And perhaps best of all is to experience both at the same time: the radical humility of “dust and ashes,” and the acceptance and love of self of “the world was created for my sake.” We can spend this Yom Kippur seeking that integration, trying to cultivate both of these qualities within ourselves. May each of us find the balance that will allow us to walk through this world gently but powerfully, offering each of our gifts to the task of creating a world of wholeness, and peace.



Facilitator prompts the group:

- Taking this notion beyond the context of Yom Kippur, when, if ever, have you experienced both humility and pride at the same time?
- Now focusing on our context; when you are having a conversation about the war, or seeing a visual representation (like a lawn sign) about the war, how do you express (or simply acknowledge) your view while ALSO making space for the views of others?
- What keeps you from expressing your full view, or from being curious enough to learn about the views of others?

Note to Facilitator: It may be helpful to note for your group that sometimes it is in our best interest not to entertain a particular opinion, in order to protect ourselves physically or psychologically, or simply because we recognize that we need to draw a boundary.



ACTIVITY

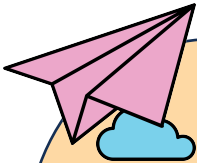
Think back to our opening lawn sign activity. We are now going to take 10 minutes and try writing a new and improved lawn sign – or even better, two signs, representing different opinions with at least one of them (maybe both!) being a sign that you can stand behind. These signs do not have to be catchy or concise or even look good. Obviously our fully expressed views will not fit on a sign, or even two signs. Invite the messiness in and make it more than just a slogan and as long as needed. The goal is for them to open up conversation!



An example of a sign might be: "Standing with all who have been impacted by the horrific events in the Middle East on and since Oct 7th. Heartbroken and deeply aware that the fates of Israelis and Palestinians are inextricably linked."

After learners have completed one or two signs, prompt them to share their signs and discuss some or all of the following questions together:

- Would you share what you created publicly in a conversation, in front of your house, or online? Why or why not?
- What, if any, assumptions are you afraid people might make about the sign(s) you created?
- What from the other signs do you agree with? What do you have questions about?



REFLECT AND PROMPT ACTION

Let us return to the story that Rabbi Tovah Spitzer shared in her sermon: the Chasidic Rebbe who carried two slips of paper. One said *bishvili nivra haolam* - for me the world was created. The second said *ani kaafar vefer* - I am but dust and ashes.

Consider, what are two reminders that would be helpful for you when you are engaging with others' opinions about the Israel/Hamas war? These might be double sided messages like in the story, but they do not necessarily need to be.

Some examples might be:

- My opinions and feelings about ___ are valuable to everyone around me.
- I have a lot to learn from those around me about...
- Even though I don't know everything about ___, I will share my views by___.
- I am quick to dismiss others' ideas about ___. One way I will try to listen to these ideas in the coming weeks is ___.

After learners have written down their two messages to themselves, close by prompting:

What is one new thing that you would like to try in the next week or two when encountering others' views on the Israel/Hamas war?

