



## Choosing to be Jewish Family Education Program

### **Introductory Information:**

- **Name and School:** Sharon Tash, Machane Temple Beth Ami, Rockville, MD
- **Type of School:** Reform Congregational School
- **Context in which the workshop is held:** The workshop is aimed at students and parents grades 7-12
- **Total Required Time: 90 minutes**

### **Introduction**

During this session families will learn the stories of several individuals who survived the Holocaust and then stayed in Europe after the war. They saw the destruction of the society in which they grew up and they lived through the harshest years of communist rule and ultimately they witnessed the fall of communism as well. During all this time they lived their lives and raised their families and ultimately chose to retain their Jewish identities. For the next couple of hours, participants will learn about these individuals and explore why they choose to be Jewish as they juxtapose aspects of their own Jewish identities with that of the individuals featured in the Centropa stories.

### **Enduring Understandings**

- In the modern world all of us have the choice to be Jewish and to choose what that means to us.
- Jewish identity is complex and layered and it is affected by our early Jewish experiences

### **Essential Questions**

1. What makes you Jewish?
2. What does it mean to be part of a Jewish community?
3. To what extent is it important for you to know that future generations of your family will identify as Jewish?

### **Questions to be addressed**

1. What was the greatest challenge to the individual's Jewish identity during the course of his/her experiences?
2. What aspects changed in society that made it harder and harder for practicing Jews who remained in Europe after the war?
3. What factors led the individual in the Centropa stories to continue to identify as Jewish after the war?

**Program breakdown:**

Part I- Jewish Life Before the Holocaust

Activity to define one's own Jewish identity, look at photos from the Centropa archive (in separate document) with the related excerpts attached to see how they lived as Jews. Compare with our own lives.

Part II- Disruption of Communities, Destruction- A Photographic Exercise

New World/New Rules/Communism

Watch two Centropa films – Ernst Galpert and Jozsef Faludi – to learn about the events that disrupted their lives and the choices they made to be Jewish afterwards

Part III- Choosing to be Jewish

Read excerpts from other interviews, look at a few photos, to hear about people's Jewish identities after the war. Discuss responses. Create Wordle (electronic or paper).

**Opening Activity: “What Makes Me Jewish?” (10 minutes)**

Each participant will receive a piece of paper – on one side at the top it should say “What makes me Jewish?” and on the other side at the top it should say “20<sup>th</sup> c Central and Eastern European Jews.” Place enough very small sticky notes on the table for all participants to use as many as they wish. Participants will have 3 minutes to fill as MANY sticky notes as they wish with single words/short phrases that describe WHAT MAKES YOU JEWISH? Put the sticky notes on the first side.

After exactly 3 minutes, participants will go around the table as many times as possible with the opportunity to share ONE of the words on their paper. This round-robin activity will last no more than 7 minutes.

Parents sit together at tables, teens sit separately. Each table must appoint a discussion leader.

**Part I- Jewish Life Before the War** (25 minutes)

Go to the document (attached): Pre-war photos and Excerpts. Print and, if possible, laminate the photographs of Jews from early 20<sup>th</sup> century Central and Eastern Europe from the Centropa archives. Ideally, you can print the excerpts of each photograph on the back of the photo so participants are encouraged to study the photograph before reading about it. Place all photographs on each table in the center. Larger groups will need more photographs, or you can duplicate them. (Photographs and excerpts can be found at [www.centropa.org](http://www.centropa.org), or contact Lauren Granite at [granite@centropa.org](mailto:granite@centropa.org).)

Participants will look at each of the photographs first and try to answer the question: what made these Jews Jewish? After looking at the photograph they can read the excerpt to give them some background. Then, using the sticky notes again, write words and phrases describing what made the Central European Jews Jewish – place them on the back of the page, with the heading, “20<sup>th</sup> c Central and Eastern European Jews.” Some questions you might consider include:

- What did they *do* to be Jewish?
- Do the photos show Jewish activities at home? With friends? Schools?
- What do you *see* in the photographs that show how they were Jewish?

Then, teens join parents, bringing ALL of their sticky notes. They compare their personal list of what makes them Jewish to their lists for Galpert and Faludi.

### ***FACILITATOR LEADS DISCUSSION WITH EVERYONE***

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- Which details in the photos indicate what Jewish life was like for the people in it?
- What aspects of the Jewish world before the war depicted in these photos are very different from YOUR life today?
- What aspects are similar?
- Are the differences because of choice or circumstance?

***Students move to sit with their parents.***

***\*\*Facilitator will set up the film here.***

### **Part II- Disruption of Communities and Destruction of a World- an exercise in Photographs**

(30 minutes)

In this segment of the program, we'll watch two Centropa films. As you watch these films, you may see other ways that people were religious in Central and Eastern Europe before the Holocaust and we also want participants to watch for the ways that lives and communities were disrupted.

After each film, families will have a few minutes to:

- Add to their descriptions of Jewish life in Central and Eastern Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century but writing more words on sticky notes.
- Discuss the changes that took place in society during the lives of Mr. Galpert, and then Mr Faludi, changes that had an impact on their Jewish lives.
- What changes in OUR society have caused Jewish life to change and adapt?
- How would you compare the changes in the lives of Mr. Galpert and Mr. Faludi with the changes in our society?

### **Part III- Choosing to Be Jewish** (20 minutes)

After the end of the war, Jewish survivors were faced with a severely altered Jewish landscape. Those who remained in Eastern bloc countries were immediately placed under the yoke of communism, which heavily discriminated against expressions and practice of religion. Others, in the absence of the organized Jewish life that existed before the war AND out of fear of antisemitism, chose to live completely secular lives.

Interestingly, many Jews (even some who converted to Christianity either just before or during the war) still sought to interact with fellow Jews because they felt a kinship and shared culture. After the fall of communism, many of the now-elderly Jews participated in and initiated Jewish life in their dwindling communities.

This segment of the workshop will examine some examples of "how they chose to be Jewish." Examples for the Facilitator to use include:

- the Centropa Cafes – two social groups that meet in Vienna and Budapest on a regular basis to celebrate Jewish holidays together, and get together socially;

- discussing Mr. Galpert's and Mr. Faludi's involvement in Jewish life: participating in synagogue life, teaching Hebrew and Yiddish;
- read and discuss the interview excerpts from the document, Post-War Jewish Life Excerpts, to the group (have participants read a few of them, pass around the photos).

Discuss Jewish identity today, referring to the sticky notes. Discussion questions include:

- For everyone: What factors do you think influences someone's choice to be Jewish?
- For Parents: What important aspects of your Jewish identity do you want to pass on, do you hope your children also have?
- For teens:
  - what do you think you would do if your ability to be Jewish were interrupted in such a big way?
  - what important aspects of Judaism do you want to choose to maintain once you're on your own?

**Wordle Activity** (10 mins)

Using the sticky notes that were created earlier in the session, either make a "hand-made" "WORDLE" OR have someone input the information onto an iPad and create a Wordle that can be printed out or emailed to the families after the program

**Program Summary/Conclusion** (5 minutes)

Facilitator can wrap ask a few families to quickly name one way in which their family is similar in its Jewish identity to those they saw in the photos and film, and one way their family is different.