Creating Balance in Your Jewish Life

Using This Lesson:
This lesson is appropriate for use with confirmation classes, youth groups, or high school seniors participating in a workshop on preparing for college.

Enduring Understanding: We learn from stories in the Torah that Jewish experience is made up of both the word of God (explicit religion) and the experience of God (implicit religion). If we rely on only one of these, we lose the richness of our tradition and the possibility of a more textured religious experience for ourselves.

Essential Questions:
1. What is the difference between explicit religion and implicit religion?
2. What happens if we don’t find a balance in our lives between explicit religion and implicit religion?
3. How can I create more balance in my life between explicit and implicit religion?

Reading Resources for the Teacher:

Numbers 11:24-30

Course Overview:
Set Induction (10-15 minutes)
Definitions (30-40 minutes)
Finding Balance in our Lives (20-30 minutes)

Materials:
- Definitions of Explicit and Implicit Religion handout
- Explicit and Implicit Stories handout
- Paper
- Pens or pencils

LESSON PLAN

Set Induction (10-15 minutes)
1. Ask your students: What courses are you taking this year that you are required to take? (required by your school or your parents). Make a list on the board of your students’ responses. Add a heading to the list that says “Required.”

2. Ask your students: What percent of your school schedule is made up of required courses? You will probably get a range of responses. Write this range (for example 50%-75%) next to the heading on the board.
3. Ask your students: What courses are you taking this year just because you want to take them? Make a list on the board of your students’ responses. Add a heading to the list that says “Electives.” (If you’re students can’t think of any “electives” that they’re currently taking, ask them about courses they would like to take if they had space in their schedules.)

4. Ask your students: What percent of your school schedule is made up of elective courses? You will probably get a range of responses. Write this range (for example 25%-50%) next to the heading on the board.

5. Discuss the following questions with your students:
   * Who requires you to take required courses? Why do they require these courses?
   * Do you think these courses should be required? Why? Why not?
   * How meaningful do you think your required courses are? Do you like these classes?
   * What if you only took electives?
   * Do you think your current balance between required courses and electives is a good balance? If yes, why? If no, how would you change it?

6. Explain that a balance between required courses and electives provides structure, things that we need, and an outlet for our interests. When we talk about a balance between required and elective courses we don’t necessary mean that you have to take 3 required courses and 3 electives, but rather that you are getting a mix that exposes you to material you need to know and material you want to know, a mix that helps you become an educated member of our community and allows you to explore your personal interests. Religions, all religions, also require balance – a balance between what we do because it’s God’s word/the fixed structures of the religious system and what we do because it helps us experience God or find spiritual meaning.

**Definitions (30-40 minutes)**

1. Distribute the Definitions of Explicit and Implicit Religion handout. Have someone read Rosenak’s definition of explicit religion and implicit religion. Make sure your students are comfortable with the vocabulary in these definitions.

2. Discuss the two definitions and the comparison chart. Ask your students to come up with a couple of examples of explicit religion and a couple of examples of implicit religion. Write these examples on the board.

3. Divide your class into small groups and provide each group with the Explicit and Implicit Stories handout. Have the groups read the stories and decide which stories are examples of explicit religion and which stories are examples of implicit religion.

   When the groups are done, have each one share what they came up with. The groups may not agree on all the stories. If they don’t agree, discuss the reasons for their decision.

   **ALTERNATE ACTIVITY:** Divide the class into 3 groups and provide each group with the Explicit and Implicit Stories handout. Assign one story to each group.
When the groups are done, have each one briefly share their story with the class, whether they think it is an example of explicit or implicit religion, and why.

4. What conclusions can we draw about explicit and implicit religion? What are the advantages or disadvantages to relying only on one part of religion or the other? [If your students have difficulty with these questions, remind them of some of the things you discussed during the set induction. While explicit and implicit religion are not exactly the same as required and elective courses, the definition of and need for balance, and the dangers of imbalance may be similar and may help your students relate to this issue.]

Finding Balance in our Lives (20-30 minutes)

1. Have your students make a list of Jewish things that they do. These can be things they do regularly like going to Shabbat services or giving tzedakah, or things they do occasionally like celebrating Jewish holidays at home or at the synagogue.

Ask your students to share some of the items on their lists with the class. Write these items on the board.

Choose 3-4 items from the list that you think are pretty common to the majority of your class. Use these items for a four corners exercise. Have your students go to different corners: 1) I do this because I’m commanded to; 2) I do this because I feel closer to God when I do it; 3) I do this both because I’m commanded to and because I experience God when I do it; 4) I’m not really sure why I do it.

After everyone has sat down again, ask your students:
* Did you find yourself gravitating mostly to one particular corner?
* Which corner did you gravitate towards? Why?
* What might be the downside of only doing things because you’re commanded to?
* What might be the downside of only doing things that make you personally feel closer to God?

Share the following quote by Isa Aron:
* To be faithful to your faith tradition and to be faithful to yourself, you need to have some balance between the explicit and the implicit. Everyone must create this balance for themselves. When both of these poles come into play, you have a living breathing religion that’s not just a private affair and not just inert ideas.

2. On the same piece of paper on which they wrote Jewish practices they already do, have your students write down 2-3 new Jewish practices they would like to try. Underneath the list have them take each practice and write what they might get out of the experience if they approached it from an explicit perspective and what they might get out of the experience if they approached it from an implicit perspective.

Have your students share and discuss their list with a partner.
3. Explain that when we study the Torah and read stories like the one about Moses and Joshua, we learn that the Jewish experience is made up of both the word of God (explicit religion) and the experience of God (implicit religion). We’ve discussed tonight the need for balance in our own religious practice. Soon (next month, next year, in two years), many of you will be leaving home for college. You will get to make many choices about how you practice your Judaism. This can also be a time to find a religious balance that works for you.

Ask each student to choose one or two items on their list of practices to try, and give themselves a time by which they would like to have tried that practice.
Definitions of Explicit and Implicit Religion

Explicit religion concerns itself with what we believe and practice as loyal adherents of a specific faith, as members of a believing community; it sets down norms that prevail in our fellowship, norms that are incumbent upon whom ‘we’ will recognize as ‘religious.’

Implicit religion deals with existential encounters, occasioned by looking within and up in an attitude of faith; it connotes reverence, openness, and search for meaning. Implicit religion begins not with God’s demand but with human hopes and fears, with perception rather than tradition, with the depth of questions, rather than the authority of answers.

(definitions from Michael Rosenak’s book, Commandments and Concerns)

Explicit and Implicit: A Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explicit</th>
<th>Implicit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concerned with belief and practice</td>
<td>Concerned with the search for meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values adherence to tradition and loyalty</td>
<td>Values openness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stresses the particularistic</td>
<td>Stresses the universal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumes the truth is the sole property of members of the religious community</td>
<td>Truth is universal – different religions represent different embodiments of universal truths and insights</td>
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<tr>
<td>The halakha is an end in itself</td>
<td>The halakha is a means for reaching God</td>
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<tr>
<td>All members of the community are bound by the halakha</td>
<td>Individuals have the option to choose the halakha freely, if it is appropriate for them.</td>
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Explicit and Implicit Stories

Story #1: This story took place in Israel on the Friday of the Six Day War in 1967

We are riding in the desert. Zalman reminds me that it’s Friday. Almost candle-lighting time. We take all the muktze (objects that Jewish law forbids handling on the Sabbath) out of our pockets and put it into knapsacks. We say Shabbat Shalom and continue riding.

The convoy stops. We get off. Gather together a minyan. From the second jeep, the driver gets out, takes off his military cap and puts on a kipah… We begin L’chu neranenu (the opening psalm of the Sabbath eve prayers.) and other men join in… We finish our prayers… The Commanding Officer declares: “Zalman will make Kiddush (sanctification of the Sabbath over a cup of wine.). Zalman stands in the middle of the highway. In the desert echo the words: “…and in love and favor He has given us His Holy Sabbath as an inheritance, a memorial of the creation of the world.”

Questions to Think About:
1. What appears to be the soldiers’ priority? Does this surprise you? What would you have thought was their priority?
2. Why do you think this is their priority?
3. Does this story reflect explicit or implicit religion? Why?

Story #2: This story took place when Israel regained Jerusalem during the Six Day War in 1967

In the air hung a sense of great and holy hours. When I asked a fellow soldier, a member of Kibbutz Sha’ar Ha-Amakim, at the Rockefeller Museum, before the conquest of the Temple Mount, “What have you got to say?” he answered me with a verse from the Bible: “I was glad when they said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord. Our feet were standing in the gates, Jerusalem, Jerusalem that is built as a city is tied together.” The fellow smiled as he cited this verse. Maybe because it isn’t fitting for a member of Hashomer Hatzair (a secular Zionist organization) to speak thus. But I saw his eyes and I knew that that was what he felt. [Later at the Western Wall]… I looked at soldiers and officers: I saw their tears and their wordless prayers, and I knew that they sensed what I did… I understood that not only my religious [i.e. Orthodox] friends and I felt grandeur and sanctity, but that they ( secular or not Orthodox) too felt it, with no less power and depth…

Questions to Think About:
1. How does the soldier from Kibbutz Sha’ar Ha-Amakim feel about regaining Jerusalem?
2. Why do you think the Orthodox and secular soldiers feel this way?
3. Does this story reflect explicit or implicit religion? Why?

Story #3: This story from the Torah took place when the Israelites were wandering in the desert.

He [Moses] gathered seventy of the people’s elders and stationed them around the Tent. Then Adonai came down in a cloud and spoke to him; He drew upon the spirit that was on him
and put it upon the seventy elders. And when the spirit rested upon them, they spoke in ecstasy, but did not continue.

Two men, one name Eldad and the other Medad, had remained in camp; yet the spirit rested upon them – they were among those recorded, but they had not gone out to the Tent – and they spoke in ecstasy in the camp. A youth ran out and told Moses, saying, “Eldad and Medad are acting the prophet in the camp!” And Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ attendant from his youth, spoke up and said, “My lord Moses, restrain them!” But Moses said to him, “Are you wrought up on my account? Would that all Adonai’s people were prophets, that Adonai put His spirit upon them!”

- Numbers 11:24-30

Questions to Think About:
1. Who has the authority to prophesize according to this text? Why? How do they get it?
2. Who else prophesizes? Do they have authority to do this?
3. What are the different opinions presented by Moses and Joshua? Why do they disagree?
4. Does this story reflect explicit or implicit religion? Why?