



**JWB Jewish
Chaplains Council**

Serving Jews Who Serve

a signature program of  JCC Association
of North America

TAG-tivities
TAG: Daily Living Through a Jewish Lens

TAGtivity:

An American Talmud

TAG: Issues of Daily Living Through a Jewish Lens is a resource library of interactive and thought-provoking activities originally developed for JCC day and overnight camps and after-school programs. TAG activities—which address all aspects of life from hospitality, kindness, and sportsmanship to body image, diversity, friendship, community, and more—trigger conversation and reflection about Jewish meaning in today’s world. They incorporate drama, discussion, games, art, music, storytelling, and Jewish text study, enabling participants to access the relevancy of Jewish wisdom through various channels.

Initiated in 2004 by the Mandel Center for Jewish Education (MCJE), TAG resources provide flexible, engaging Jewish learning materials that reflect the JCC Movement’s pluralistic and inclusive philosophy. Designed to be used by camp counselors without specialized background or training in Jewish content or educational methods, TAG lets them adapt the materials to meet their needs and incorporate informal learning and Jewish wisdom into their campers’ experiences.

These **Fourth of July TAGtivities** are the newest addition to the TAG library, designed to help JCC campers and staff explore American ideals through a Jewish lens. JCC Association is happy to make them available to all Jewish camps and community organizations looking for meaningful ways to celebrate America’s birthday.

ACTIVITY SUMMARY:

Format: Small or medium group quote activity

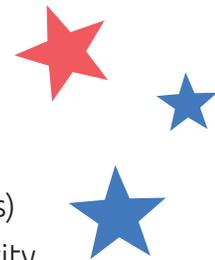
Target Audience: Fourth grade and older

Setting: Outside, on a paved surface (can also be done indoors – see below)

Activity Time: 30-60 minutes

Materials:

- Image of a Talmud page, image of a blank Talmud page with a quote in the middle (selected from the provided list)
- Sidewalk chalk (or substitute chart paper and markers if indoors)
- Quotes selected from the list provided at the end of the TAGtivity



OVERVIEW:

The Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution are the two primary “foundation documents” of American society. Some scholars even call them “sacred civil scripture” because of their status and influence. But they were written a long time ago, and language has changed since then. Different schools of interpretation have evolved to determine their meaning (mostly, this applies to the Constitution).

Originalists claim the Constitution means only what the original authors intended. Living Constitutionalists claim its meaning evolves along with society. This activity uses the graphic image of a Talmud page as a graphic model of the Jewish interpretive tradition. (In a typical page of Talmud, the primary text appears in large print in the middle of the page, and the various commentaries surround it in smaller print. The Talmud documents an ongoing, intergenerational conversation about what a text can mean.) It asks participants to apply their own interpretive lenses to write their own commentary, clarifying what the Constitution means to them.

PREPARATION FOR THE ACTIVITY:

Assemble all the materials. Select a few of the quotes (from the list); the number of quotes will depend on how large a group you have. Before the group arrives at the location of the activity, use sidewalk chalk to write these quotes on the ground. Make sure to leave enough space around each quote for participants to gather and then to add their own interpretations. If not using chalk, write the quote in the middle of the chart paper with room for commentary around it.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Gather the participants in one spot.
2. Ask the participants if they've ever read the U.S. Constitution.
(It's likely they have done so in school.)
3. Follow up by asking if they know what the Constitution's role is in American life.
(It's the legal foundation for the governmental structure and the rights of individuals.)
4. Ask if they can name any of the rights expressed in the Constitution (including the Bill of Rights).
5. Explain: it's not always clear how words written in 1789 should be understood in 2020. This issue is not unique to the Constitution; it also applies to Jewish religious texts (and texts from other faith traditions, too). Jewish thought has always valued different opinions, and emphasizes the importance of respecting other views, even when there's a disagreement. This is modelled nicely by the Talmud page.
6. Show the group the Talmud page and explain: In the Talmud (edited in ~500-600 CE) the large text in the middle is the record of the rabbis' arguments about Jewish life. The smaller print surrounding the Talmud text are later commentaries expressing different opinions about the rabbis' arguments. The Talmud preserves all sides of the case, even those of later generations. We're going to use the Talmud page as a model for thinking about some American documents: the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.
7. Provide each participant with a piece of chalk or marker.

INSTRUCTIONS (continued):

8. Show the group one of the quotes surrounded by blank boxes. Explain:
 - a. Read the quote. Think about what it means to you.
 - b. Take your piece of chalk and without speaking to anybody, write down that idea in one of the boxes surrounding the quote (alternately, draw an icon or image to represent the idea). Make sure to leave room for other people to do the same. (Stress the importance of doing this activity silently.)
 - c. When you've finished with one quote, move to another one and do the same thing.
9. When it looks like the group has finished, reconvene the group. Depending on the size of the group, you can conclude the activity as follows:
 - a. Have participants go to their favorite quote to read the interpretations that others provided. A staff member can be present at each quote to lead a discussion using the following questions:
 - b. Have the entire group visit all quotes to read and reflect on the interpretations of the text. Then facilitate a discussion with the entire group using the following questions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Were any of these quotes familiar to you? Were any of the quotes unfamiliar?
2. Was it easy for you respond to the quotes? Hard? Why?
3. Which quote is most meaningful to you? Why?
4. What do the variety of comments to the individual quotes teach?
5. Do you think people in the U.S. think about the meaning of these documents much? Why? Why not?
6. How do these quotes apply to life in camp?
7. Explain: There is a *midrash* (rabbinic explanation) that explains the Torah has 70 "faces" (*Bamidbar Rabbah*, 13:15-16). This is generally understood to mean that every letter, word, and verse, and word of the Torah can be interpreted in many ways – and they all can be correct. Does that "work" with documents like the U.S. Declaration of Independence and Constitution?
8. Close by explaining text study is a part of every Jewish holiday celebration. Now it's become part of their Fourth of July celebration, too.

QUOTES:

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

1. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."
2. "That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed..."
3. "...whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it..."
4. "And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor."

U.S. CONSTITUTION

1. "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union..."
2. "...establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity..."
3. "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."
4. "Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press..."
5. "Congress shall make no law... abridging the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a list of grievances."
6. "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated..."
7. "...no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized."
8. "Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted."
9. "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. "
10. "No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States..."
11. "...nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."