



Fateful Decisions by Wendy Aronson

Subject Area: *Jewish History and Culture, Jewish Living and Identity, Israel and Values*
Single Lesson Plan

Target Age Group: *High School students*

Lesson Objectives: *To make students aware of the similarities and differences of American and Israeli Culture.*

The Course Enduring Understandings for the Hebrew High School Israel Curriculum is as follows: *Knowledge of Israel helps students develop a personal relationship to the Land, State and People of Israel.*

I. GOALS: TEACHER (personal: what teacher wants to see occur, climate teacher wants to establish, etc.)

- A.** *After role playing and watching fellow classmates role play one of the Fateful Decisions, students will be able to talk about the importance of compulsory military service in Israeli society.*
- B.** *Students will understand the role that religion plays in dictating who and how Israelis get married.*
- C.** *Teacher will create a climate of openness so that students will be able to put themselves in the shoes of Israelis and think about the different choices they might make if they were Israeli citizens.*

II. a. CRITERIA OF ACCEPTABLE PERFORMANCE

- A.** *Students can articulate the similarities between Israeli and American teens (school pressure, family problems, drugs, sex etc.)*
- B.** *Students can articulate the differences between Israeli and American culture (American teens leaving high school go to college, Israeli teens go to the army then many travel before beginning college; the role that Orthodox Judaism plays in Israel as it relates to marriage as opposed to in America, the strong social component of the army for Israeli teens as opposed to how college impacts American teens, etc.)*
- C.** *Students can articulate the problem in their Fateful Decisions scenario and why the group chose the option they chose.*

II b. METHODS OF ASSESSMENT

- A.** *Participation in group presenting their role play to the class.*



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B Filling out the *Fateful Decisions* sheet

III. ACTIVITIES

A. Teacher welcomes the class and asks them who has begun thinking about college. What are they looking forward to? The independence from their parents? The chance to be away from home, living in dorms with roommates? The chance to honor and support their country? The chance to give something back to their country? The teacher transitions and explains to the class that Israeli high school juniors are not thinking about college, but they are thinking about which unit of the army they will be entering after they pass their exams and begin the army. Just like American teens, Israeli teens, too, are looking forward to greater independence, living with others and partying on the weekends, but in a very different setting. This is just one of the many cultural differences between Israelis and Americans. This lesson, *Fateful Decisions*, will teach them about three distinct differences between Israeli and American culture. (5 minutes)

B. The teacher breaks class up into three groups and has each group spend fifteen minutes discussing their scenario and planning a skit to present to the class. One group member becomes the note taker and fills out their answer on the sheet. Representatives from each group will explain the scenario and their decision in front of the class. All groups will be encouraged to role play or act out the scenario for the peers. (15 minutes)

C. The class watches all three groups perform and asks questions if they don't understand the scenes. (10 minutes)

D. Teacher wraps up the class by reiterating key points from each skit. They include: In Hadas and Simon's case, the role that the government plays in marriage. The Israeli government only recognizes Orthodox weddings performed in Israel. Israeli couples can decide to get married outside of Israel; (many liberal couples choose to elope to Cypress and just file paperwork when they return to Israel and are granted married status, but that excludes their family from the event.) Perhaps more important in Simon's case is the fact that although he was raised Jewish (and persecuted for it in the Former Soviet Union) the only Jewish nation in the world doesn't consider him to be Jewish! How would that make you feel? In the US, couples generally have a relationship with the rabbi that marries them. Hadas and Simon have to choose between getting married by a rabbi who knows them well (which means the State of Israel will not recognize their marriage) or getting married by an Orthodox rabbi who



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doesn't know them (and having an Orthodox ceremony which may not honor their personal relationship to Judaism.)

With the case of Avner, he too, has a difficult choice to make. Does he go to Boston with his family (keeping the family together and getting an amazing leg up in Israeli society by becoming a fluent English speaker) or does he stay in Israel, miss out on his family, but stay on track with his friends in terms of entering the army on time? This scenario has social implications for Avner personally, but also shows the pull of the military. For some, service is quite difficult, but for many Israelis, the army is a really social and enjoyable time. Since men continue to serve monthly until they are 40 (in the reserves) this social network tends to be one of the most important in an Israeli man's life.

Similar issues come up for Rami, who must decide the role the state of Israel plays in his life. Does he go to college first (and theoretically serve Israel in a much more skilled capacity years later) or does he stay on track with this social group (but not serve his county in the greatest capacity of which he is capable?)

One can argue that the role of the self takes a backseat to the role of the country in all three scenarios. This is a very different feel from American culture which is much more self-centered/self-serving.

*The final *sikkum* (wrap up) to the discussion ends with an understanding that neither culture is right or wrong; this activity was meant to point out similarities and differences. The teacher can ask students to reiterate some of the new points they may have learned as a way of testing how well information was retained from the beginning of the class until the end.*

IV. PRE-REQUISITE KNOWLEDGE/SKILLS

A. Ability to work in a group presenting their *Fateful Decisions* role plays to the class.

V. MATERIALS/EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

- A. Copies of *Fateful Decisions* dilemma cards and pens**
- B. Israeli army jacket**
- C. Bridal Veil**



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FATEFUL DECISIONS

Based on a program found in CAJE library, most likely from a Masada summer programs choveret. What follows is Wendy Aronson's adaptation. This material is not copy written.

Dilemma One: Where's the Wedding?

Hadas, a secular Israeli and Simon, an immigrant from the former Soviet Union, met in architecture school at the Techniyon in Haifa. After seriously dating for a year they decide to get married, and hope to have the rabbi who runs the Masorti (Conservative) synagogue in Zicharon Ya'akov perform the ceremony. The rabbi responds that while he would be delighted to perform the wedding he doesn't recommend it because the Israeli government only recognizes weddings performed by Orthodox rabbis.

Hadas and Simon are disappointed, but turn to the Orthodox rabbinate to arrange their wedding. At the Ministry of Religion, they discover that there can be no wedding until Simon can prove that he is, in fact, Jewish according to Jewish law. Simon insists that he is, but since many immigrants from the former Soviet Union have said they were Jewish when they were not and moved to Israel to escape the financial horrors of the FSU, the rabbinate tells Simon that he will have to have a full Orthodox conversion if he cannot produce the papers to prove that he is Jewish.

Frustrated and angry, the couple researches the options available to them. They can:

- A) go to Cyprus (or anywhere outside of Israel) to get married, and upon their return to Israel, register with the government as a married couple*
- B) have the Masorti rabbi perform the wedding and live together as husband and wife without government recognition of their marriage*
- C) postpone the wedding so that Simon can have an Orthodox conversion and be married in another year by an Orthodox rabbi*

Reasons for A:

Reasons for B:



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Reasons for C:

The decision: _____.

Dilemma Two: Which way do I go?

Avner is a 16 year old eleventh grade high school student who lives with his family in Tel Aviv. He is a good student, is on the soccer team and has a lot of great friends. He hasn't thought too much about the future, but hopes that he will get into a very good unit in the army after he finishes high school next year.

Avner's mother, Shira, came home from work last week with big news: she has been offered a position opening a new Hebrew Intensive high school in Boston, MA. The whole family will be flown to Boston to live for three years, with the possibility of extending their stay if the position is a good fit. Shira is very excited with this career opportunity and the great experience of providing her children with living in another culture and learning to speak English.

Avner is devastated. While he couldn't imagine living without his family, moving now would mean that finishing high school in another language would be a real challenge and take him out of the running of getting into a good army unit with his friends. His best friend invites him to move in with his family for the year, so that he can graduate and start his army service as planned. Shira does not like the idea of her family being separated for three years or for her oldest son to be in the army while she is so far away, but she decides that Avner is old enough to make the decision for himself.

If you were Avner, what would you do?

Reasons for staying in Israel while Avner's family moves to Boston:



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Reasons for going to Boston with Avner's family:

Decision:





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Dilemma Three: How shall I serve?

Rami is sixteen years old and in tenth grade. Although he will not be drafted into the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) for another two years, he and his friends have already begun to think about what they want to do in the army. Dani and Tal, his two best friends, are working hard at improving their physique so they can be in excellent shape when they try out for prestigious combat units; Oren wants to serve as a medic and has already started volunteering on an ambulance to experience; Aviva is studying English and Arabic very seriously to enable her to do intelligence work; Boaz just wants to get his service over with as easily as possible and will try to be in an infantry unit.

*Rami has always been very interested in computers and cannot get enough of them. He has heard of a program called *Atuda*, which would allow him to go to university in computers while in the army and then work for the IDF after that as a high level computer specialist. This would be a great career move for Rami, and would allow him to do what he loves best and not be cut off from advancements in the computer field during three years of army service.*

*There is one big problem with the scenario. If Rami goes into *Atuda*, he will be basically cut off from his friends. While they are going through basic training, he will be living the student life. What will he talk to them about when they are home on leave after a tough week of army exercises—how he sweats in the computer lab? What’s more, when he finally does become a soldier, he will be a lot older than all of the other guys in his unit.*

*Should Rami try out for *Atuda* and pursue his interest in computers? Should he enter the army directly after high school to stay with his friends? If you were Rami, what would you do?*

*Reasons to apply for *Atuda*:*

Reasons for entering the army after high school:



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Decision:
