

UNDERSTANDING
COVENANTS
AND
Communities

JEWS AND LATTER-DAY SAINTS IN DIALOGUE

A DISCUSSION GUIDE

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THALIA HALPERT RODIS



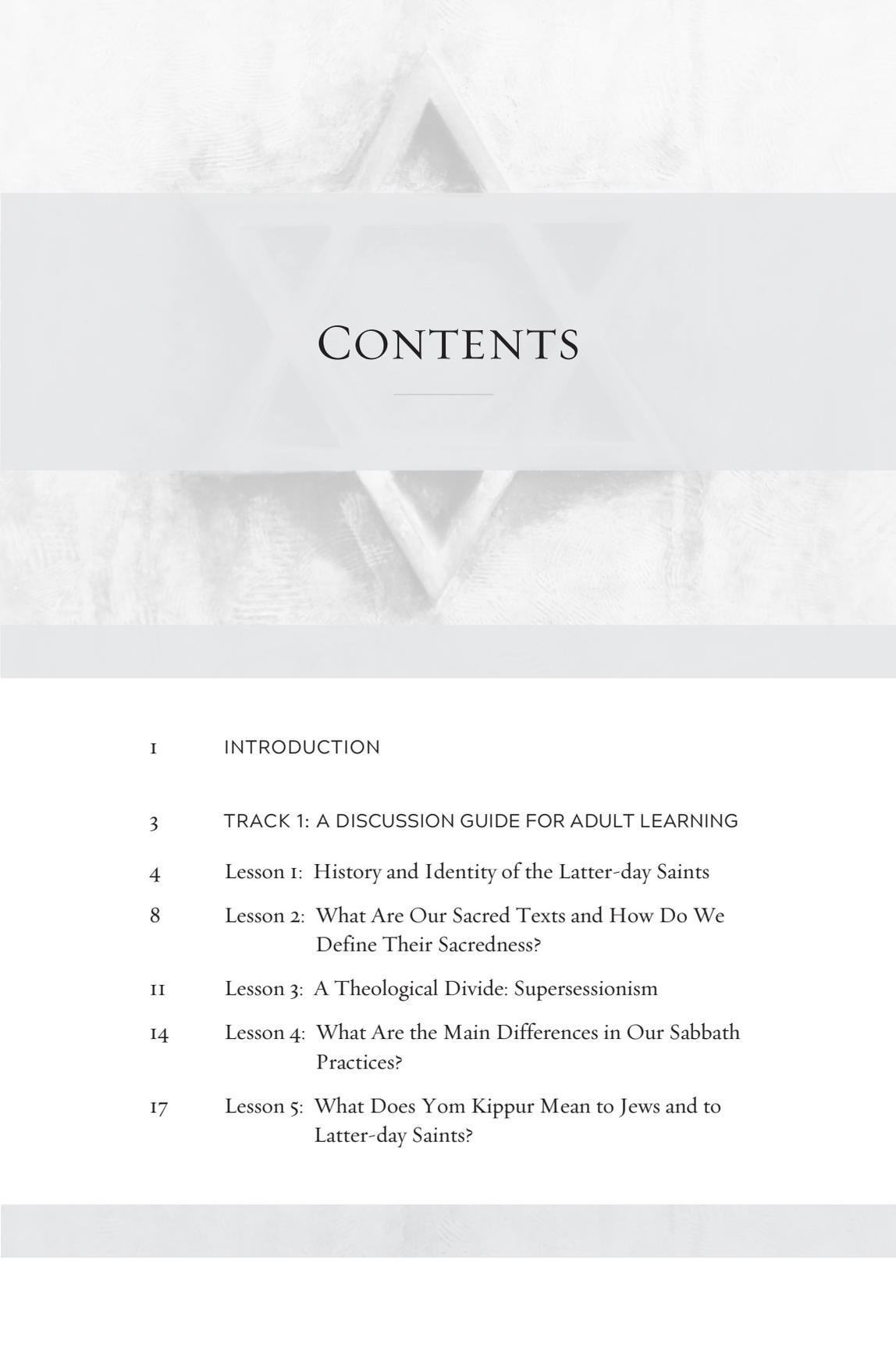
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INTRODUCTION

U*nderstanding Covenants and Communities: Jews and Latter-day Saints in Dialogue* is a copublication by the Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, and CCAR Press, the publishing house of the Jewish Reform Movement in North America. The book is based on a dialogue between Jewish and Latter-day Saint scholars that took place between 2016 and 2018. In the framework of that dialogue, the papers delivered by participants explored and deepened the relationship between the Jewish and the Latter-day Saint communities. They addressed the following questions:

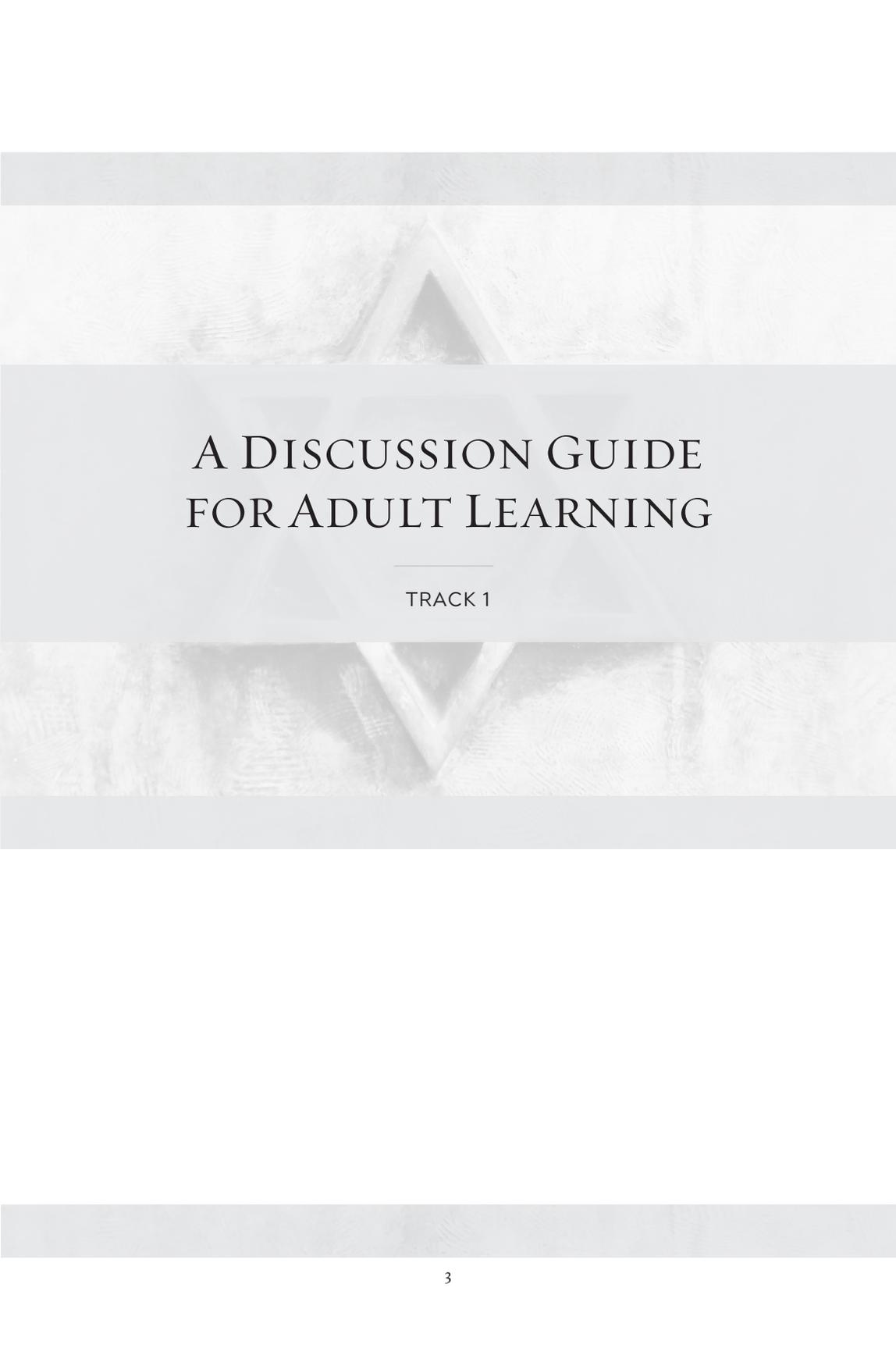
- In what ways are the histories and identities of these two communities similar to or different from each other?
- What are the main differences in our respective interpretations of the Hebrew Bible?
- What are our greatest theological divides?
- What are the main differences in our Sabbath practices?

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- What does Yom Kippur mean to Jews and to Latter-day Saints?
- How can members of both communities engage in an interfaith dialogue with each other? What might we learn from each other, and how can we embrace the differences between us?

This discussion guide was compiled to support rabbis (in “A Discussion Guide for Adult Learning”) as well as Jewish educators (in “A Discussion Guide for Synagogue Education”) in teaching their communities and classes about the Latter-day Saints. It is a guide to foster a better understanding of the other and a growing sense of our identity; it was created to make conversations and deep encounters possible and to shed light on both the values and histories we share, as well as on the theologies in which the two communities differ. Jewish and Latter-day Saint communities have at times disagreed, most notably over the Latter-day Saint practice of posthumous baptism. This discussion guide was created to deconstruct stereotypes and enrich our mutual understanding.

At a time when religious differences foster growing estrangement and lack of communication, it is our hope to encourage the members of our respective communities to encounter each other with curiosity, openness, respect, self-assurance, and information.



A DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR ADULT LEARNING

TRACK 1

LESSON 1

HISTORY AND IDENTITY OF THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS

On what basis do we people of different religious commitments meet one another? First and foremost we meet as human beings who have so much in common: a heart, a face, a voice, the presence of a soul, fears, hope, the ability to trust, a capacity for compassion and understanding, the kinship of being human. My first task in every encounter is to comprehend the personhood of the human being I face, to sense the kinship of being human, solidarity of being. To meet a human being is a major challenge to mind and heart. I must recall what I normally forget. A person is not just a specimen of the species called . He is all of humanity in one, and whenever one man is hurt we are all injured. The human is disclosure of the divine, and all men are one in God's care for man. Many things on earth are precious, some are holy, humanity is holy of holies.

—Abraham Joshua Heschel (quoted on pp. xiv–xv)

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OPENING QUESTIONS

- Why should we, as Jews, engage in a dialogue with Latter-day Saints?
- What can we learn from exposing our beliefs and practices to communities and individuals different from us?
- At this point, what do you know about the Latter-day Saint community?

INFORMATION

Latter-day Saints in the United States

More than two million Latter-day Saints live in Utah, 60% of the state's population. California's Latter-day Saint population is more than 700,000, while Arizona and Idaho each have Latter-day Saint populations greater than 400,000. (p. 366)

Latter-day Saints in the rest of the world

Today, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints claims more than 16 million followers across the globe, higher than the estimated Jewish worldwide population of between 13.5 and 14 million. The worldwide Jewish population is growing at a modest pace, with a more robust increase in the United States. In contrast, the Church of Jesus Christ is growing much faster, thanks to high birth rates among Latter-day Saint families and to active proselytizing carried out by missionaries around the world. The Church is experiencing significant growth, especially in the United States (with an estimated population of 6.6 million Latter-day Saints), Mexico, Brazil, Peru, and the Philippines. (p. 366)

BELIEFS

Latter-day Saint theology is predicated upon the doctrine of continuous or continuing revelation, manifested in a lay hierarchy of prophets, presidents, bishops, and priests. While the Church of Jesus Christ [of Latter-day Saints] today is far more centralized than Judaism, continuing revelation allows the Church to evolve on matters of faith and ritual in much the same manner that Judaism evolves through the respective halachic processes of Jewish religious movements. (p. 367)

Latter-day Saint doctrine places special emphasis on their members making covenants with God in their temples. Church members speak of themselves as “covenant people” both collectively and individually and view their covenants as modern-day equivalents of biblical covenants. This authoritative covenant theology is the foundation of several notable Latter-day Saint practices, including tithing, volunteerism and mission service, and focus on families. (p. 371)

Most Christians see themselves as continuations of New Testament communities, building on the foundations of early Christians. Latter-day Saints instead view themselves as building on the foundations of the Hebrew Bible, and they see one unified program of God running through the two testaments. Joseph Smith’s prophetic project has been described by one scholar as seeking to heal or restore the brokenness of history, including the healing of broken family lines, broken marriages, the broken state of relationships between the multitude of Christian communities, and the broken nature between God’s biblical communities—Christians and Jews. (p. 21)

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QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

- What are you curious to learn about Latter-day Saints?
- What similarities do you imagine Jews and Latter-day Saints share?
- What do you imagine are major differences between Jews and Latter-day Saints?

CLOSING SONG

“This Land Is Your Land,” by Woody Guthrie

LESSON 2

WHAT ARE OUR SACRED TEXTS AND HOW DO WE DEFINE THEIR SACREDNESS?

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ revere the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price as sacred scripture, the word of God. (pp. 370–71)

OPENING QUESTIONS

- Which texts do Jews view as sacred?
- Which texts do Latter-day Saints view as sacred?

INFORMATION

How do Latter-day Saints relate to the Hebrew Bible?

The ways in which the Latter-day Saint faith builds on the foundations of the Hebrew Bible can be briefly summarized under the following topics: patriarchs, prophets, and high priests; the Abrahamic covenant; revelation (leading to additional sacred texts); the temple; and the longing for Zion. All of these concepts find regular expression in Latter-day Saint worship and practice

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but are relatively absent from traditional Christian practices. These ideas and practices do not function as exact mirrors of ancient behaviors but rather build on ancient foundations—real or perceived—in new ways in modernity. (p. 22)

What is the Book of Mormon?

[The Book of Mormon], published in 1829 before the new church was organized in 1830, surprisingly does not record God’s words to Joseph Smith. Instead, it is Smith’s English translation (through the “gift and power of God”) of ancient records from an Israelite people who were separated from those living in the kingdom of Judah around 600 BCE, before the destruction of the First Temple. (p. 28).

How is the Book of Mormon connected to the Hebrew Bible?

The Book of Mormon . . . is viewed as an ancient document transmitted *through* Joseph Smith and not simply created ex nihilo by him in the 1820s. As such, this book is believed to be a record of the events and history of a people closely connected with the house of Israel and originating from Jerusalem and its environs. The people, who leave Jerusalem and eventually settle in the Americas, are seen as a remnant of the house of Israel, a true branch of the original tree. Some of the record’s stated purposes from its title page are to show the modern descendants of these people the great things God has done for their fathers and to teach them the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever. Despite being separated geographically from the other branches or tribes of the house of Israel, the Book of Mormon peoples maintain a spiritual rootedness in God’s promises made to his Israelite prophets before 600 BCE (the time of departure from Jerusalem). For this reason, the teachings of prophets, principally Isaiah, remain influential throughout the Book of Mormon—the covenant promises have not yet all been fulfilled. (pp. 96–97)

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How do the Latter-day Saints see their story as it relates to the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament?

Most Christians see themselves as continuations of New Testament communities, building on the foundations of early Christians. Latter-day Saints instead view themselves as building on the foundations of the Hebrew Bible, and they see one unified program of God running through the two testaments. Joseph Smith's prophetic project has been described by one scholar as seeking to heal or restore the brokenness of history, including the healing of broken family lines, broken marriages, the broken state of relationships between the multitude of Christian communities, and the broken nature between God's biblical communities—Christians and Jews. (p. 21)

QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

- What holy texts do Jews and Latter-day Saints share?
- What place does the Jewish community inhabit in the story of the Latter-day Saints?
- Just as the Latter-day Saints see themselves as “building on the foundations of the Hebrew Bible,” how do Jews today build on this same foundation?

CLOSING SONG

“America the Beautiful,” lyrics by Katharine Lee Bates, music by Samuel A. Ward

LESSON 3

A THEOLOGICAL DIVIDE: SUPERSESSIONISM

Supersessionism (also sometimes called “replacement theology”) is the claim, expressed in its starkest form, that by rejecting Jesus and then killing him, the Jews have lost their role as a people in covenant with God, and that the promises made to Abraham now apply only to the followers of Jesus. In other words, this view regards Jews and Judaism as having been superseded by or replaced with Christians and Christianity.

—Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, *Jewish Annotated New Testament* (quoted at 33n9)

OPENING QUESTIONS

- How does this statement sit with you?
- Is this a belief you are familiar with?
- What are the ways that Jews have maintained their covenant with God?

INFORMATION

With whom does God have a covenant?

Thus for the Book of Mormon, the covenant people are neither the Jews nor the Gentiles, but those who repent and believe in Jesus as the Messiah and God's Son. The same requirements for achieving salvation pertain to all, both Jew and Gentile. However, *who* plays the primary role in bringing forth God's word to the remnants of the house of Israel varies through time depending on the faithfulness of the people: first the Jews, then the Gentiles. (p. 107)

Is supersessionism unique to Latter-day Saints?

Every religion with which I am familiar manifests supersessionism in one manner or another. That Christianity and Islam have traditionally done so goes without saying; each of those traditions has seen itself in relation to God's covenant with Abraham as a belated, yet superior, dispensation that renders former dispensations at best insufficient, at worst obsolete. But Judaism, too, especially in its expressions of strident monotheism emerging in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE, dismisses previous manifestations of Canaanite religion and aggressively posits itself as the newer, superior alternative. (p. 139)

How does the Latter-day Saint view of Jews through the lens of supersessionism conflict with Jewish views of Judaism?

The Book of Mormon does not deal with rabbinic Judaism whatsoever, nor do Latter-day Saints writers of the last two centuries in any significant way. The result, I fear, is that Jews today are not seen as people in the fullest sense, nor Judaism as a living, breathing religion; both are seen more so as avatars that stand in for the real Jewish people who either lived in the hoary past or will live again in an ideal future. To put it in the terms of contemporary cultural studies, Latter-day Saints still appear to

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cast upon Jews the domineering Christian gaze accompanied by the certainty that Jews are not who they think they are. Jews are rather who Latter-day Saints think they are, and who they need them to be in order for Latter-day Saint theology and history to make sense. (pp. 141–42)

Where do these differences in view leave us?

Latter-day Saint thought often highlights the continued importance, relevance, and potential of Jews within God’s salvific work with humankind, while also acknowledging the centrality of Jesus as the Messiah in carrying out God’s plan of salvation. How these seemingly contradictory notions can or will be resolved is largely unknown at this time and seems to be in God’s hands. (p. 125)

QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

- What was surprising for you to learn?
- In which ways do Jewish and Latter-day Saint ideologies converge and in which ways do they clash?
- If you had the opportunity to talk with a Latter-day Saint about what you learned today, what would you ask them?
- What would you like to share about your own view of Judaism?

CLOSING SONG

“God Bless America,” by Irving Berlin

LESSON 4

WHAT ARE THE MAIN DIFFERENCES IN OUR SABBATH PRACTICES?

Most Latter-day Saints have holy envy for the Jewish view of the Sabbath as a time of joy and celebration. Rarely do Latter-day Saints speak of “celebrating” Sabbath, even though that is exactly what God has commanded his people to do (see Leviticus 23:32). Instead of *celebrate*, the word most often used today within Latter-day Saint culture would be *observe*. (pp. 229–30)

OPENING QUESTIONS

- Have you ever experienced “holy envy” when it comes to the ways that other people connect to the sacred?
- What might be the difference between “celebrating” and “observing” the Sabbath?

INFORMATION

What is the importance of a Sabbath for Latter-day Saints?

Joseph Smith, the founder and first prophet of the Church, reiterated the importance of the Ten Commandments, particularly

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keeping the Sabbath Day holy. In his sermons, journals, and revelations, the Sabbath is seen as a day of joy, a day of gospel instruction, a day of reflection, meditation and revelation, a day of ministering to the sick and confirming the faith of others. As these early Latter-day Saints sought to establish a “new Zion” on the American continent, keeping the Sabbath day holy was considered essential to the realization of that objective. (p. 230)

What is the purpose of the Sabbath for Latter-day Saints?

Brigham Young taught that honoring the Sabbath would be “for our own temporal good and spiritual welfare.” Keeping the Sabbath holy acts as a “guardian of faith,” a protective power, and the means whereby we keep in remembrance “our God and our holy religion.” (p. 232)

Why might Latter-day Saints *observe* rather than *celebrate* the Sabbath?

For many decades, however, Church leaders focused a great deal on what activities should be avoided on the Sabbath, just as Brigham Young had decried “skating, buggy riding,” and going “on excursions on the Sabbath day.” “When we see a farmer in such a hurry, that he has to attend to his harvest, and to haying, fence-making, or gathering his cattle on the Sabbath day, as far as I am concerned, I count him weak in the faith. He has lost the spirit of his religion, more or less. Six days are enough for us to work, and if we wish to play, play within the six days; if we wish to go on excursions, take one of those six days, but on the seventh day, come to the place of worship, attend to the Sacrament, confess your faults one to another and to our God, and pay attention to the ordinances of the house of God.” (quoted on pp. 232–33)

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What are the key tenets of observing the Sabbath in the Latter-day Saint faith?

The Latter-day Saint doctrine of Sabbath—a fundamental expectation for Church members—seems to boil down to these two phrases from Joseph Smith’s 1831 revelation: “rest from your labors” and “pay thy devotions unto the Most High.” All of the teachings and commentaries by Church leaders from Joseph Smith to the present and the many developments—such as changes to Church structure, meeting schedules, and curricular emphases—reflect and build upon those two things. (p. 238)

QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

- What are the similarities between the Latter-day Saint and the Jewish observances of the Sabbath?
- Have you ever felt like Sabbath was more of an obligation than a celebration?
- What would you like to understand about the observance of Sabbath in the Latter-day Saint faith?

CLOSING SONG

“America the Beautiful,” lyrics by Katharine Lee Bates, music by Samuel A. Ward

LESSON 5

WHAT DOES YOM KIPPUR MEAN TO JEWS AND TO LATTER-DAY SAINTS?

Although Latter-day Saint worship is certainly not known for its liturgical richness, its worship patterns and religious rituals do exhibit biblical features, particularly those mirroring the divine ascent into the presence of God. The use of psalms, both in singing during sacrament worship services and in thematic connection with temple worship, and the application of Day of Atonement imagery demonstrate the desire to connect with the divine by building on the foundations of biblical understandings and practices. (p. 292)

OPENING QUESTION

- The Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, is one of the most important days in the Jewish calendar. What significance do you imagine Yom Kippur could have in Latter-day Saint practice?

INFORMATION

What is the relationship between Yom Kippur and Latter-day Saint theology?

The imagery from the Day of Atonement, the most sacred festival of the Jewish year, was prevalent in descriptions of Jesus's redemptive mission as found in the Epistle to the Hebrews and elsewhere. It also supplied symbolic imagery for Christian sacraments such as the communion or Eucharist. In similar ways, Book of Mormon authors relied upon images and themes from the Day of Atonement. (p. 281)

How do Latter-Day Saints view Yom Kippur?

Christ, on the other hand, entered into the presence of God by virtue of his own blood (Hebrews 9:12). After reviewing the significance of Jesus's offering, Hebrews uses the imagery of the divine ascent to encourage Christians forward into the presence of God. In the past only the high priest could enter God's presence, and this only as symbolized by the earthly tabernacle. Now all can walk the divine way (see Hebrews 10:20), entering into God's presence in heaven because of Jesus's atoning sacrifice: "Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:20–22). In these verses, the imagery of the Day of Atonement serves to remind Christians of the importance of faith in the atoning blood of Christ sprinkled upon them and of having their bodies washed with pure water (using the imagery of the laver, probably to suggest Christian baptism). (p. 284)

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How do Latter-day Saints repent of sins?

The imagery of the divine way or ascent begins outside the temple/tabernacle with the preparatory behavior of repentance, moving by faith to and then past the altar of sacrifice—which Jesus states is the sacrifice of a repentant, “broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:20)—then to the ordinance of baptism, symbolized by the laver of water. Baptism by water then leads along the strait path or way (as in Hebrews 10:20). The way or path leads through the narrow gate symbolized by entrance into the temple proper. Here, inside God’s house, as a covenant member of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19), the worshipper can receive the baptism of fire and see by the light of the Holy Ghost, potentially symbolized by the blazing menorah or lampstand inside. As Nephi states it, “Wherefore, do the things which I have told you I have seen that your Lord and your Redeemer should do; for, for this cause have they been shown unto me, that ye might know the gate by which ye should enter. For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 31:17). Again, repentance (symbolized by the altar of sacrifice) and baptism (symbolized by the laver of water) lead the worshipper through the narrow gate (symbolized by the temple doors) and into the covenant community (symbolized by the temple). Then the disciple receives the Holy Ghost (symbolized by the blazing menorah) and is prepared to move forward. (p. 286)

QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

- As Latter-day Saint theology infuses elements of Yom Kippur into daily practice, how might Jews infuse elements of Yom Kippur into daily life?

UNDERSTANDING COVENANTS AND COMMUNITIES

- Is repentance an important aspect of your religious life?
- How would you describe the significance of Yom Kippur to a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

CLOSING SONG

“God Bless America,” by Irving Berlin

LESSON 6

HOW CAN MEMBERS OF BOTH COMMUNITIES ENGAGE IN AN INTERFAITH DIALOGUE?

The late Krister Stendahl, who served as Lutheran bishop of Stockholm, Sweden, and later as a professor and dean of the Harvard Divinity School, was a noted champion of religious understanding and tolerance. Amid vocal opposition to the building of the Latter-day Saint temple in Stockholm, Stendahl came to the defense of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. At a press conference in 1985 about the Church's intent to build a temple in Sweden—attended by many opponents of the Church—Stendahl proposed what has become known as “Stendahl’s Three Rules of Religious Understanding.” Beyond his comments to the press, Stendahl’s life and ministry genuinely reflected these principles.

1. When you are trying to understand another religion, you should seek information from the adherents of that religion and not its enemies.
2. Don’t compare your best to their worst.
3. Leave room for “holy envy.” (p. 227)

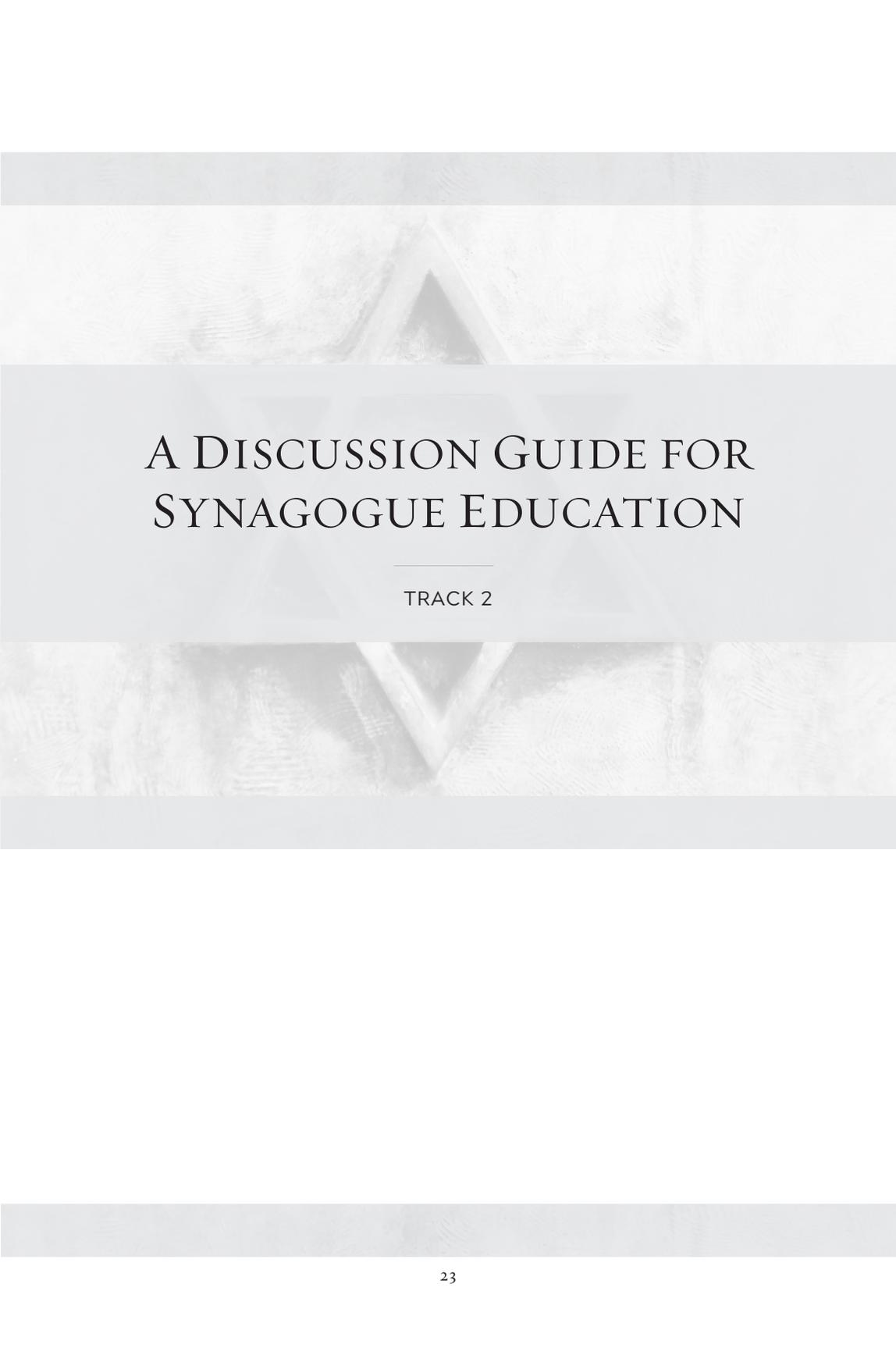
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QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

- What does this set of rules ask us to do as we explore a faith different from our own?
- Keeping Stendahl's rules in mind, what have you learned by engaging in studying about Latter-day Saints?
- What is holy envy? What is its value?
- What challenges might we face when engaging in interfaith dialogue?
- What can be gained when engaging in interfaith dialogue?
- If you were to write your own set of rules, what would they be?

CLOSING SONG

“This Land Is Your Land,” by Woody Guthrie



A DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR SYNAGOGUE EDUCATION

TRACK 2

LESSON 1

WHO ARE WE AND WHO ARE THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS?

OPENING QUESTION

- What do you know about Latter-day Saints? (Write answers on board.)

INFORMATION

- Latter-day Saints prefer not to be called Mormons.
- Latter-day Saints consider themselves Christians.
- Latter-day Saints believe in one God.
- Latter-day Saints believe in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God.
- Latter-day Saints observe the Sabbath on Sundays.
- Latter-day Saints do not practice polygamy—the practice was officially discontinued in 1890.
- Latter-day Saints attend local meetinghouses (“chapels”) for regular Sunday observance, community meetings, and activities. They attend temples for special occasions such as proxy baptisms for the deceased, marriages, and religious ceremonies.

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- Latter-day Saints believe that prophecy from God continues today, resting with the Church president.
- Latter-day Saints have several sacred texts. These include the Hebrew Bible, the Christian New Testament, and three books that are specific to the Latter-day Saints: the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price.

For more facts, visit the Church of Jesus Christ's website at <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/frequently-asked-questions>.

ACTIVITY

- Participants individually write a list of five to ten "I believe X" statements.
- In pairs or in a group, participants write a list of "Jews believe X" statements.
- As a whole group, participants write a list of "Latter-day Saints believe X" statements.
- Identify differences and similarities on the lists with a matching game.

CHECK-IN

- What does it feel like to write out what you believe?
- How do you feel about the differences between Jewish and Latter-day Saints beliefs?
- What do you feel most curious about now in regard to the Latter-day Saints?

CLOSING SONG

"This Land Is Your Land," by Woody Guthrie.

LESSON 2

ZIONISM

OPENING QUESTIONS

- Which city is referred to as “Zion” in Judaism? (Write answers on board.)

Zion in Judaism refers to Jerusalem (or sometimes to Israel as a whole). The city is the focal point of much Jewish liturgy and thought.

- What is the definition of “Zion” according to Latter-day Saints?

Originally viewed as a specific gathering place—such as Independence, Missouri, or Salt Lake City, Utah—Latter-day Saints now generally teach that Zion is “the pure in heart” and not necessarily a city or location.

INFORMATION

How Latter-day Saints feel about Zion:

Latter-day Saint theology borrows freely from biblical symbolism of Zion and the lost tribes and holds: “We believe in the lit-

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eral gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent.” Latter-day Saints view Salt Lake City as the ideological and religious center of their faith. For many members of the Church, Salt Lake City is the new Zion, and America is the new Israel. More than two million Latter-day Saints live in Utah, 60% of the state’s population. California’s Latter-day Saint population is more than 700,000, while Arizona and Idaho each have Latter-day Saint populations greater than 400,000 living in close proximity to temples and other Church institutions. (p.366)

When they were driven from Missouri, the location of their first planned temple and their promised Zion, they found solace in understanding themselves as modern Israel who would long for the return to Zion, much as their Jewish sisters and brothers longed for their return to Jerusalem. When Joseph Smith was martyred, they saw him as following a long line of biblical prophets who suffered for their teachings. When they were driven from the then-current boundaries of the United States and made their home in the Rocky Mountains, they saw their journey as the exodus of modern Israel to a new promised land, led by their modern Moses—Brigham Young. Their suffering seemed to them as part of the common lot of Israelites throughout time. (p. 30)

Latter-day Saints do not reject Jerusalem as Israel’s promised land. Rather, they show a strong sense of affinity with biblical lands, modeling locations in Utah after the biblical pattern. They pray for the return of Israel to their land in Jerusalem—even sending an early apostle, Orson Hyde, to dedicate that land in 1841 for the return of the Jews—and also pray for the New Jerusalem in Missouri. They seek to create Zion-like communities wherever they are spread throughout the earth. For Latter-day Saints, as for ancient Jews, a Zion community is centered and strengthened by the sacred space that is found uniquely in the temple of God. Temples are the earthly center of the Latter-day

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Saint cosmos, providing stability and order to their society. Thus Latter-day Saints build temples whenever and wherever their prophet directs, seeking to build up Zion throughout the earth. (p. 30)

ACTIVITY: FOUR CORNERS GAME

- Label each of the four corners of the room as: “strongly agree,” “agree,” “disagree,” or “strongly disagree.”
- List statements about Jewish Zionism and Latter-day Saint Zionism.
- After each statement, give participants ten seconds to find the corner they feel the most comfortable in relationship to the statement.
- Ask participants why they chose their corner.

CHECK-IN

- What is something new that you did not know before today?
- How would you define Zionism?
- Where does Zion fit into your Jewish identity?

CLOSING SONG

“This Land Is Your Land,” by Woody Guthrie

LESSON 3

SACRED TEXTS

OPENING QUESTIONS

What are our sacred texts?

- Hebrew Bible (TaNaKh): Torah, Prophets, Writings
- Rabbinic Texts: Tosefta, Mishnah, Talmud, Midrash

What are the sacred texts of Latter-day Saints?

- Christian Bible
- The Book of Mormon
- Doctrine and Covenants
- Pearl of Great Price

ACTIVITY: LINE ACTIVITY

- List quotes from both Jewish and Latter-day Saint sacred texts
- Have participants stand on a line. They will step back/forward in one direction if they think a statement is from Jewish sacred texts (rabbinic texts), or they will step in the other direction if they think a statement is from Latter-day Saint sacred texts (the Christian Bible, the Book

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of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, or the Pearl of Great Price).

CHECK-IN

- What was the most surprising text in this activity?
- Which ones were the most difficult to choose between?
- What do you want to learn more about?

CLOSING SONG

“This Land Is Your Land,” by Woody Guthrie

LESSON 4

SABBATH

OPENING QUESTIONS

- What is the Sabbath for?
- What do we do on the Sabbath?
- How do we create holy space on the Sabbath?

ACTIVITY

- Have a Sabbath meal, starting with the three elements of Sabbath (candles, wine, challah) and their blessings.
- Over dinner, ask: What makes this a Jewish celebration of Sabbath? Is there such a thing as a non-Jewish celebration of Sabbath?

UNDERSTANDING COVENANTS AND COMMUNITIES

INFORMATION

Latter-day Saints observe the Sabbath on Sundays

Joseph Smith, the founder and first prophet of the Church, reiterated the importance of the Ten Commandments, particularly keeping the Sabbath day holy. In his sermons, journals, and revelations, the Sabbath is seen as a day of joy, a day of gospel instruction, a day of reflection, meditation and revelation, a day of ministering to the sick and confirming the faith of others. As these early Latter-day Saints sought to establish a “new Zion” on the American continent, keeping the Sabbath day holy was considered essential to the realization of that objective. (p. 230)

Many Latter-day Saints feel holy envy of our Sabbath celebrations

Most Latter-day Saints have holy envy for the Jewish view of the Sabbath as a time of joy and celebration. Rarely do Latter-day Saints speak of “celebrating” the Sabbath, even though that is exactly what God has commanded his people to do (see Leviticus 23:32). Instead of *celebrate*, the word most often used today within Latter-day Saint culture would be *observe*. (pp. 229–30)

CHECK-IN

- What does the Sabbath mean for you?
- Do you see a difference between celebrating and observing?
- Have you ever experienced holy envy about the way someone else practices their religion?

CLOSING SONG

“This Land Is Your Land,” by Woody Guthrie

LESSON 5

EXPLORING REPENTANCE

ACTIVITY

- Participants write something they want to let go of with washable marker on a piece of paper and dunk it into water so what they have written is erased.

QUESTION FOR CONVERSATION

- What Jewish ritual does this activity remind you of?

Tashlich, the casting away of sins, which prepares us for Yom Kippur.

INFORMATION

Latter-day Saints also value repentance.

The imagery of the divine way or ascent begins outside the temple/tabernacle with the preparatory behavior of repentance, moving by faith to and then past the altar of sacrifice—which Jesus states is the sacrifice of a repentant, “broken heart and a contrite

UNDERSTANDING COVENANTS AND COMMUNITIES

spirit” (3 Nephi 9:20)—then to the ordinance of baptism, symbolized by the laver of water. Baptism by water then leads along the strait path or way (as in Hebrews 10:20). The way or path leads through the narrow gate symbolized by entrance into the temple proper. Here, inside God’s house, as a covenant member of the household of God (see Ephesians 2:19), the worshipper can receive the baptism of fire and see by the light of the Holy Ghost, potentially symbolized by the blazing menorah or lampstand inside. As Nephi states it, “Wherefore, do the things which I have told you I have seen that your Lord and your Redeemer should do; for, for this cause have they been shown unto me, that ye might know the gate by which ye should enter. For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 31:17). Again, repentance (symbolized by the altar of sacrifice) and baptism (symbolized by the laver of water) lead the worshipper through the narrow gate (symbolized by the temple doors) and into the covenant community (symbolized by the temple). Then the disciple receives the Holy Ghost (symbolized by the blazing menorah) and is prepared to move forward. (p. 286)

CHECK-IN

- How did you experience Yom Kippur last year?
- Why do you think the theme of repentance is so central to many religious traditions?
- If you could construct your own Yom Kippur ritual, what would it be?

CLOSING SONG

“This Land Is Your Land,” by Woody Guthrie

LESSON 6

THE VALUE OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

- What surprised you when learning about Judaism?
- What surprised you when learning about the Latter-day Saints?

ACTIVITY: WHO'S WHO?

- Assign two participants the role of “Jewish” and two participants the role of “Latter-day Saint.” They sit or stand in a line at the front of the room.
- The rest of the participants ask the participants at the front of the room about their beliefs and practices.
- Do not use key words like *Judaism*, *Sabbath*, or *Torah*. Encourage the students to translate and speak in depth about their core beliefs/practices.
- Once the group is able to identify who's who in the front of the room, other participants can take a turn playing a role and answering questions.

UNDERSTANDING COVENANTS AND COMMUNITIES

CHECK-IN

- If you were to invite Latter-day Saints to your Sabbath table, what would you want to talk with them about?
- How would you describe the beliefs and practices of Latter-day Saints to someone else?
- What is the value of learning about a different religious tradition?

CLOSING SONG

“This Land Is Your Land,” by Woody Guthrie