



IS EXCLUSION EVER GOOD?

PREP FOR THE SESSION

Overview

This resource unpacks the issue of **Cancel Culture** through the lens of **Community**.

At-a-Glance:

This resource provides an opportunity to explore the value of community in a world where cancel culture impacts the way we think about what it means to draw lines of who is in and who is out. It integrates a Jewish historical event as a test-case for how communities need to carefully consider what membership within them means. Learners will engage in a personal exercise to explore their own commitments to community-building and tensions between determining who is in and who is out. It concludes with an opportunity to strengthen our own capacities for keeping values-based communities intact and weighing what we stand to gain or lose by doing so.



Time Estimate:

55-60 minutes



Materials Needed:

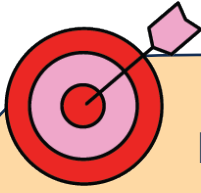
- Blank paper and pens for the Debate and Take Action Prompt



Best Uses:

- For group reflection or in pairs
- Discussion groups in semi-formal settings
- Opportunity for close-reading and thinking about Jewish historical precedents

LET'S GET STARTED



FRAME THE ISSUE

While not a new phenomenon, the notion of “cancelling someone” for a wrongdoing or even a perceived wrong-doing is everywhere these days. On one hand, the impulse behind it can be a force for good: leading to social change, combating inequality and even helping to build community by gathering those who are like-minded to stand for shared values and norms. On the other hand, cancelling can lead to social ruin, foster deep depression and shut down the possibility of fruitful conversation among people with differing viewpoints.

The moment we are in is one where we are tested to think about community, since in many ways communities are often about drawing lines, and considering, who is in and who is out.

Membership in communities comes in different ways. Sometimes an individual may choose to be part of a particular community. In other instances, one may have been born into a community without having made an active choice.

In either case, communities come with their own particular rules for membership and norms to adhere to.

- How do we navigate all the different ways to build community? Where does keeping people “out” fit in? Does it ever?



Facilitator prompts the group:

- Have you recently found yourself in a conversation about “cancel culture”? What was it about?
- Have you ever felt the need to censor yourself in a group setting for fear of being ostracized? Explain the circumstances.

Conclude this section:

When thinking about building communities, it's natural to draw lines, and even disinvite people whose values differ from the core ones. The question we will be exploring together is how does the value of community impact whether we choose to marginalize or even cancel others?

10 min





EXPLORE THE VALUE

10 min



Open this section by leading into the values exploration and posing the question:

Let's spend a few minutes thinking about the value of community, how we build it, and how it can help us understand some of the underlying issues that are involved in a culture of cancelation.



Facilitator prompts the group:

- What does "community" mean for you?
- What communities are you a part of?
- In these communities, are there rules who govern who is in and who is out? If so, who makes them?
- If someone violates a community rule, what happens?

Now let's connect the value of community, to the act of exclusion and its related concept of "cancelation."

Priya Parker in the *The Art of Gathering* writes: "You will have begun to **gather** with purpose when you learn to **exclude** with purpose. When you learn to close doors."



Facilitator prompts the group:

- What does Parker mean in the quote above?
- Think of a time when you needed to exclude someone from a community that you are a part of. Describe the circumstances and how you felt about it.
- Do you view this as having "canceled" them? Explain why/why not.

15 min



ANCHOR IN JEWISH WISDOM

Share the following historical case in Jewish history to explore the tension between community-building and banning:

Background:

In Jewish tradition the concept of banning or keeping people out of a community is called *cherem* – excommunication. The main purpose of *cherem* is to preserve the character and integrity of the Jewish community. Let's look at one of the most famous cases of *cherem*/banning in Jewish history, and then think about what it means for community-building in our own world where cancel culture is a force that surrounds us.

Read for context:

The Historical Case:

One of the most famous instances of *cherem* was the excommunication of Baruch Spinoza in Amsterdam in 1656. Spinoza was excommunicated for his heretical views about God and skeptical views about religion, which the religious authorities deemed a deep threat to the Jewish community.

Before banning him, the leadership tried very hard to get Spinoza to change his ways and to stop writing and publicly sharing his views with others in the community.

Ultimately, the official leadership of the community, decided that Spinoza posed too much of a threat and needed to be excommunicated and expelled from the people of Israel. They did so through a document [pictured below] on July 27, 1656/6th of Av, 5416.

The proclamation of the excommunication concludes with the following famous lines of the actual warning:

"That no one should communicate with him neither in writing nor accord him any favor nor stay with him under the same roof nor within four cubits in his vicinity; nor shall he read any treatise composed or written by him."



Facilitator prompts participants to reflect in havruta/pairs:

- What did the community leaders do before banning Spinoza?
- Why is this important? How does it differ from how we experience cancel culture today?
- The proclamation does not offer a specific reason why Spinoza was excommunicated, but it has to do with communal norms. What ideas about community would you add to this proclamation if you were writing it?

10 min



ACTIVITY

Introduce the activity:

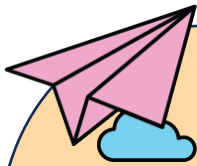
Debating through the lens of community:

The case of Spinoza presses us to think about the requirement of setting boundaries in order to build community. In the activity below you will have the chance to further deepen your understanding of how community sits at the core of this discussion.

Instructions:

- Divide yourselves into two groups. One half represents the official leadership of the community, and the other represents Spinoza and his supporters.
- Spend a few minutes preparing a one minute oral argument in support of the side you are on. **The key focus should be on the value of community as it relates to your position.**
- After writing a script or some bullet points, each group presents to the other side.
- The opposition has the opportunity to ask 2 follow up questions which should be answered briefly.
- Now switch sides and repeat the exercise.

5 min



PROMPT ACTION

Use the exercise below to tie back what we understand about *cherem*, excommunication and community-building to cancel culture.

A Script for the Difficult Conversation:

1. Think about the organization you are a part of and list the rules or norms that exist for inclusion in this community? Are there hard lines for who is welcome and who is not?
2. If someone has different beliefs from the shared norms (i.e. as relates to Israel, issues of gender, sexuality, etc) – would they be welcome in the community? Reflect in writing.
3. Imagine that someone within the organization has violated one of the above norms and threatens the values of the organization.
 - **What would you say to them? Write a script to use in a conversation with them, as a prelude to any drastic action or banning.**

5 min



CLOSE WITH INTENTION

In the exploration we have just experienced, we took a contemporary issue – cancel culture – and explored it through the value of community. Doing so offers a way to think about why people may choose to marginalize or cancel others. Community-building raises tensions as it demands of us to draw lines. When and how we make those determinations is complex. Today's conversation provided a chance to explore how we go about building communities of like-minded people with shared values systems. Strengthening our understanding and commitments to the value of community prompts us to consider how we build and live according to shared values.



Facilitator prompts the group:

- As a result of this session, I am now thinking differently about ...
- To strengthen my commitment to the communities I am a part of, I will now....