

# Sigd: A Celebration for All

## How might Jews in the U.S. celebrate Sigd while honoring the history and culture of the Beta Israel community?

Sigd is an ancient Jewish holiday preserved by the Beta Israel community, the Jewish community of Ethiopia. It is now a national holiday in Israel. This lesson explores the research of Scholars Ruth Abusch-Magder and Bezawit Abebe and provides an opportunity to learn more about the holiday and explore what celebrating Sigd with intention in the United States might look like.

### GOALS

- Participants will explore the meaning and celebration of Sigd.
- Participants will learn about Beta Israel's move to Israel.
- Participants will understand how to be intentional about planning to celebrate Sigd in ways that honor the culture of Beta Israel.

### MATERIALS

- Introduction video by Bezawit Abebe  
<https://vimeo.com/784604281/4da13aa344>
- The Festival of Sigd Video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MofKd9YjQgs>
- What is Sigd? Infographic [https://globaljews.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Sigd\\_infographic-1.pdf](https://globaljews.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Sigd_infographic-1.pdf) (if possible, provide a hard copy)
- Paper and pens/pencils

## LESSON

*Warm-up and Introduction: 10 minutes*

- Who has heard of Sigd?
- Do you celebrate Sigd? Why or why not?
- Are there any holidays that your family celebrates that are not well-known in your larger community?

If you haven't guessed already, we will be talking about the religious holiday, Sigd. But before we dive into the meaning and celebration of Sigd, let's first get some background information on Beta Israel from scholar Bezawit Abebe.

Watch Introduction [video](#)

- Do you have any reactions or questions about what we just heard on the video?
- For those who knew of the Beta Israel or Jews from Ethiopia before today, does information about Beta Israel taking the main active role in the decision to move to Israel confirm or refute what you learned in the past?

*Discussion: 10 minutes*

Watch The Festival of Sigd

The scholars Bezawit Abebe and Ruth Abusch-Magder bring up concerns about how people in the U.S. will celebrate the holiday. The concerns include how few Beta Israel live in the U.S. which might lead to people celebrating the holiday in artificial and inauthentic ways or appropriating the holiday. Cultural appropriation is the theft of cultural elements—including symbols, art, language, customs, etc.—for one's own use without understanding, acknowledging, or respecting the value from the original culture. Why do you think those are valid concerns?

*Planning Sigd Celebration Activity: 20 minutes*

Provide the infographic ([https://globaljews.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Sigd\\_infographic-1.pdf](https://globaljews.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Sigd_infographic-1.pdf)) for support and written prompts

In small groups, use the following prompts to plan the planning of a Sigd celebration in your Jewish community.

- Who might you invite for the planning?
- What elements might you want to include? Food, prayers, gathering, etc? How will it look and feel? Where might you hold the festivities?
- What will you need to pay special attention to?
- What concerns would you have about planning and executing the celebration?
- What additional information or questions do you need to research to be able to plan?

*Debrief: 15 minutes*

Discuss the group's ideas as a way to allow each group to build on the other group's answers. Make certain that the planning includes an attempt to include Beta Yisrael either physically or through consultation and make sure the discussion explicitly explores why representation is needed when beginning to celebrate something that did not originate from your own culture and practices. Provide an in-depth explanation of the importance of representation.

What came up for the groups around their thinking and decision-making regarding the questions?

*Close*

There is tension in recognizing that Sigd is a Jewish holiday and celebrating it widely and authentically to ensure that celebrations do not cross the line into cultural appropriation or folklore. By being intentional about planning, there is greater opportunity for authenticity.

I hope that you might consider taking this learning to your synagogue and larger Jewish community.

## RESOURCES

Sigd: What's it all About? Josh Traulsen

<https://www.moishehouse.org/resources/sigd-whats-it-all-about/>

Have you ever heard of the Sigd holiday? Government Press Office

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gCYia7Pegaw>

The Festival of Sigd, UJS and UK

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MofKd9YjQgs>

Learn about Ethiopian Jewish Holiday Sigd with the Flavors of Ethiopia  
Faith Kramer, The Jewish News of Northern California.

<https://jweekly.com/2020/11/12/learn-about-ethiopian-jewish-holiday-sigd-with-the-flavors-of-ethiopia/>

### *Context and history*

Why Ethiopian Jews are building a movement against Racism, Vice News

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ki-6IK5NCdQ>

### *Definition of Cultural Appropriation*

Theft of cultural elements—including symbols, art, language, customs, etc.—for one's own use, commodification, or profit, often without understanding, acknowledgment, or respect for its value in the original culture. Results from the assumption of a dominant (i.e. white) culture's right to take other cultural elements.

Source: Colours of Resistance Archive, "Cultural Appropriation" (accessed June 2013). As found in Racial Equity Tools Glossary.