

You are encouraged to share this article with colleagues. We ask only that you let people know that this article originally appeared in NewCAJE's online journal, *The Jewish Educator*. Other articles on this topic may be found on the NewCAJE website, www.newcaje.org.

SHARING OUR EARTH

by Evon J. Yakar

Hiking up one of the Flatiron Mountains in Boulder, Colorado, put most of us out of breath. Yet the journey provided a great experience ... it was a modern day ascension of that sacred mountain from our Jewish collective memory. That is where I celebrated *Shavuot* 5765 in Boulder, Colorado. Together with other rabbinical students from the three stateside campuses of HUC-JIR, we studied, we learned, we hiked, and we explored new possibilities with Rabbi Jamie Korngold of Adventure Rabbi: Synagogue w/o Walls. The experience left me with many great colleagues and new ideas. Eager to explore what was possible with this new and unique community Rabbi Korngold was creating, I was determined to follow her success.

Almost seven years later, I was invited to work with Adventure Rabbi and build upon the great success of our *B'nai Mitzvah* program, the Adventure Class, and propose new ideas for Jewish educational models that jive with the Adventure Rabbi: Synagogue w/o Walls community. This summer begins the journey and we are proud of what has been accomplished and the opportunities ahead.

Part of "trying a new model" of Jewish education is the willingness. Overseeing a "traditional" complementary Religious School with more than four hundred students, gave me a great foundation to look from the bird's eye view and see the ground too. I learned quickly, that for me, the classroom needed to be expanded. The goals must include: *Cultivating young Jews with whom we want to share the Earth*. And, the most important lesson that I am carrying into my work with Adventure Rabbi is that life-cycle moments remain at the top of the list of high impact, high value Jewish experiences for our communities. This recognition steers my work in trying a different model, a new model.

Currently, our Distance Learning reaches B'nai Mitzvah students (traditional thirteen year olds as well as adults) and facilitates ten months of Jewish exploration, action, learning and experience. This culminates in a Shabbat or weekday service offering the student the opportunity to celebrate becoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah and share the journey. Borrowing heavily from successful and well-established B'nai Mitzvah Programs, we expect prayer fluency, reading Torah, teaching Torah and a service project. However, one innovative approach to give access to our Jewish tradition is the Shabbat project. For one month blocks, students are expected to make Shabbat holy, or special, by refraining from an activity or engaging in a unique activity each Shabbat for that month. The end result is a heightened awareness, appreciation and love of Shabbat - *Vayinafash* - renewal. One of my favorites, was a student who participated on a ski team during the year each Saturday. So, one month during the winter, this individual took a picture from the same spot on the ski mountain week after week.

This continued beyond the first month and the end result was a pictorial display of the natural world - *ma'aseh beresheit* - evolving, moving through the season...Shabbat after Shabbat after Shabbat.

In addition to life-cycle moments, and creating innovative ways to engage Jews, Adventure Rabbi is working now on expanding the Religious School classroom: Moving towards a blend of outdoor Jewish education with celebrations of Judaism. From our Pesach in Moab to teen engagement programming for the Sacramento Region Jewish Federation, our programs strive for excellence in claiming that wherever Jews are is our classroom. From the trail to a coffee shop on a mind adventure, both (and everything in between) provide space for a Jewish experience. Over the next years, we will take our experiences, from life-cycle moments to Passover retreats in Moab, from Shabbat on the slopes to Adventure Rabbi training programs and use the lessons to cultivate a learning community. This community will engage Jewish learners from our young *pre-readers* to their parents and grandparents. The primary goal being to cultivate young Jews with whom we want to share the Earth. This means an awareness of the natural world and the ways Judaism can enhance our quality of life. From new and unique Shabbat observances, to exploring our freedom in the desert of Moab for Pesach all of our programs offer access to our Jewish tradition. They instill a strong sense of community and compassion for both the world around us and each other. The Adventure Class, a B'nai Mitzvah program run in Boulder, teaches our young people not only the leadership of prayer, but the personal responsibility we want all our young people to gain. It is gained through learning to change a tire while discussing different views of God. These are the ways we engage our fellow Jews and through building experiences for a growing group of interested adventurers our learning community will become reality.

Rabbi Evon J. Yakar serves the community of Temple Bat Yam in South Lake Tahoe and works with the Adventure Rabbi: Synagogue Without Walls community. He served as the assistant, then associate, Rabbi and Director of Education of Temple Chai in Phoenix, Arizona. From teaching in midrasha programs to designing Jewish outdoor adventure opportunities, Rabbi Yakar has a passion for working with Jewish youth and their families. He is passionate about building and fostering healthy relationships across generational gaps and among faith communities. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Hebrew and Biological Aspects of Conservation from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. He was ordained at Hebrew Union College, Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, where he also earned a Masters of Arts in Hebrew Letters and a Masters in Educational Administration in a joint program between HUC and Xavier University.

Rabbievon@adventurerabbi.org