The Jewish Educator

Journal

Inspirations from the 2023 Conference

Winter 2024

THANK YOU TO THE TEAM OF EDUCATORS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE JEWISH EDUCATOR JOURNAL

EACH ISSUE OF THE JEWISH EDUCATOR JOURNAL IS PRODUCED WITH INTENTION AND CARE BY AN AMAZING COMMITTEE OF DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS. THANK YOU FOR THE COUNTLESS HOURS OF READING, EDITING, PROOFING, AND REVIEWING.

Sherry Knazan, Chair
Judi Resnick, Editor
Lee Brice, Committee Member
Jessica Melhado, technical support

WE ARE ALSO GRATEFUL TO THE WONDERFULLY SKILLED PRESENTERS OF THE 2023 NEWCAJE CONFERENCE WHO SO GENEROUSLY CONTRIBUTED TO THIS ISSUE. THANK YOU FOR SHARING YOUR EXPERTISE AND BETTERING THE FIELD OF JEWISH EDUCATION!

THE JEWISH EDUCATOR

We are very pleased with this issue of *The Jewish Educator* — the Journal of NewCAJE — and we hope you will be also. This issue contains articles written by educators and based on the sessions they gave at NewCAJE 14 held in Montclair, New Jersey, this past July.

There were 120 sessions at the Conference this summer, and these articles represent just a few of them. If you are interested in seeing what else was being talked about this year, please go to our website, www.newcaje.org.

NewCAJE is a pluralistic organization of Jewish educators who work in every setting in Jewish education, from pre-school to adult ed, from formal to informal, and from part-time settings to day schools. They also hold every position from Head of School to classroom teacher. Some work in non-profit organizations supporting Jewish education and some for for-profit companies producing school/ Judaica-related materials.

This issue represents a wide range of topics. Each article in this juried publication showcases the creative and thoughtful approach that educators today are applying to their work. At NewCAJE, we learn from and teach each other what we have gleaned from our day-to-day experience in the field. It is an expertise that we value highly.

If you are doing creative, excellent work that might be used by others, please consider writing it up and sharing it with the field. Submissions may be sent to The Jewish Educator at www.newcaje.org.

Our thanks and congratulations to the fabulous Jewish educators who contributed to this issue and to Sherry Knazan, head of the editorial committee, and to Tanya Wisoker and Lee Brice, who serve on our editorial board. Thanks also to Judi Resnick, who edited the issue.

Best wishes, and we hope to see you at NewCAJE this coming July in San Diego, California.
Rabbi Cherie Koller-Fox, President New CAJE

Summaries of Fall 2023 Articles

THE VALUE IN TEACHING STRANGE TALES FROM THE *TORAH*

Sharon Frant Brooks

This curriculum was developed for pre-*B'nai Mitzvah* students to develop renewed interest and curiosity about *Torah* texts and the values they can draw from them. Most have learned the "big picture" *Torah* stories over the years while expanding the concepts and lessons these stories teach. This curriculum creates Hebrew language concepts, values and mitzvah lessons from many events and stories that, while they often seem very limited in size and are often outside of the main text of the stories being told, hold important messages we often don't get to teach. These smaller tales often are very strange and unusual, and also are among the most discussed by the Rabbis over the centuries because they have some very important lessons to teach us. The intention of this program is to create heightened curiosity, offer opportunities for unique ways to engage with the materials – including multisensory opportunities – and provide more entries into exploration of the materials.

USING STORYTELLING TO PERSONALIZE HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN THE CLASSROOM

Deborah Fripp, with Jennifer Rudick Zunikoff

Testimony-based Holocaust stories told by storytellers can be a powerful addition to a Holocaust curriculum. There are many ways to incorporate storytelling into a classroom. Entire classes can be dedicated to storytellers, either once or throughout the semester. Shorter stories can be woven into the lessons themselves. Students can be guided through the process of learning to be storytellers themselves. Educators can learn storytelling tools and bring stories to their classrooms consistently. Each method has its advantages.

TOOLS FOR CREATING ENGAGING HOLOCAUST COMMEMORATIONS FOR JEWISH AND INTERFAITH AUDIENCES

Deborah Fripp and Jennifer Rudick Zunikoff

Engaging Holocaust commemorations are crucial to the continued memory of the Holocaust. Our tradition has a perfect model for such a commemoration: the Passover *seder*. The *seder* gives us a roadmap for developing a Holocaust commemoration program. The *haggadah* includes individual voices and stories, familiar ritual actions, an honest but empowering narrative, lessons we should learn, and a call to action. An engaging Holocaust commemoration could include all of these. Holocaust commemoration ceremonies need to be different for Jewish and non-Jewish audiences, however. A Holocaust commemoration for a Jewish audience can include many references to familiar rituals like the *seder*. A Holocaust commemoration for an interfaith audience, on the other hand, needs to pull back from the familiar Jewish rituals and speak more directly to the non-Jewish audience.

ENGAGING FAMILIES OFF-THE-GRID

Nina Gelman-Gans

The author encourages educators to build off-the-grid interactive family workshops and invite participants to be in a *hineni*/here-and-now space. Positive interactions build community and interpersonal connection and help create Jewish memories.

THE FOUR WORDS OF PRAYER: STRATEGIES FOR AN INTENTIONAL JEWISH PRAYER PRACTICE

Evelyn Goldfinger

What if just four words could unlock the power of prayer? This workshop invited participants to explore the profound concepts behind these key words, giving them the tools to empower children and themselves to connect with their own spirituality through the language of the heart.

STORYTELLING FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

Evelyn Goldfinger, Leora Lazarus, and Karen Golden

This article dives into the world of stories for young learners. All you need is one story and some storytelling magic tricks.

REBUILDING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION THROUGH THE NATURAL WORLD

Paula Hoffman and Allison Charapp

We believe that the Earth was created by God and gifted to humankind. God has entrusted us to be caretakers of the planet for future generations. We have the distinct privilege of rebuilding the foundation of early childhood experiences through nature. As educators working with our youngest minds and bodies, we will explore a variety of potentials offered by our planet through the Jewish lens. Everything that we teach and learn occurs naturally outdoors. Nature is science, nature is language, nature is mathematics, nature is art, nature is social, nature grows with us. Children blossom in nature. Through conversations and sharing, we will address the diverse ways educators can introduce children to experiences, explorations, and independence in our Jewish indoor

and outdoor environments. Our day will include discovering connections to the outdoor world via walks, ephemeral art experiences, conversations, challenges, sharing of our own practices, and so much more. Our goal is to collectively create and provide concrete plans that can be implemented into your own sites.

MEANINGFUL WAYS TO ENGAGE YOUR *MADRICHIM* IN THE CLASSROOM

Erica Hruby and Melissa Pescatore

Madrichim are often a huge part of a religious school community. In addition to being alumni of the religious school program, *madrichim* are also future educators! During the *Madrichim* Engagement session at NewCAJE 14, nearly thirty professionals engaged in conversation about the benefits and drawbacks of *madrichim* in the classroom, opportunities to better utilize *madrichim* in the classroom, tools for connecting, feedback conversations, and more. The session concluded with a brief overview of NewCAJE's Next Steps: National *Madrichim* Fellowship's pilot year, as well as feedback from the participants as to what they are looking for in their *madrichim* experience.

A HIDDEN TREASURE IN PLAIN SIGHT: GRANDPARENTS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Terry Kaye

Grandparents can make any intergenerational family experience stronger. They bring wisdom, unconditional love for their grandchildren, playfulness, and the gift of time. In this article for directors of family engagement, educators, clergy, and anyone who works with families, the ways grandparents can enrich educational programs are discussed. The article explores essential roles grandparents play; the benefits of intergenerational and "skip-gen" (grandparents only, no parents) programs; and challenging family dynamics to be aware of when planning programs that include grandparents. It examines a program that weaves in telling family stories through treasured objects.

PARENTS STILL BELIEVE IN PART-TIME JEWISH EDUCATION. MAKOM COMMUNITY DOES TOO.

Beverly Socher-Lerner and Terri Soifer

Curious about how to design experiences of Jewish education that keep the whole family in mind? Read about how Makom Community honors the role parents play as interpreters of Jewish wisdom and what it takes to support teachers to be ready to honor both children and parents in how we teach and learn.

AT YOUR FINGERTIPS: MAKING TEACHING EASIER WITH THE JEWISH EDUCATOR PORTAL

Ella Metuki

The Jewish Educator Portal, an initiative of The Jewish Education Project, is a one-stop resource for thousands of quality educational materials, as well as Professional Development and community with other educators. In this article, learn how to make the most of this free resource to make work in and out of the classroom easier, while elevating the field of Jewish education as a whole.

SAYING YES, AND: WHY YOU SHOULD WELCOME IMPROVISATIONAL THEATER INTO YOUR CLASSROOM

Ella Metuki

Improvisational theater can bring tremendous learning, community-building, and social-emotional learning benefits to teachers and learners alike, and anyone can welcome it into the classroom! Learn the "why" behind the use of improv in educational settings, understand how the rules of improv can be applied in the classroom, and dive into actionable strategies to bring it to your learners. This article contains twelve improv games, complete with instructions and adaptations for different settings and content.

JEWS IN (EDUCATIONAL) SPACE

Matthew S. Nover

Halakhah is often overlooked in Supplementary School programs or is taught in ways that minimize its relevance to everyday life. This article explores the application of halakhah to futuristic or pop culture scenarios in order to make a more engaging program.

STORYING MULTIGENERATIONAL PROGRAMMING

Cherie Karo Schwartz and Batya Podos

Multigenerational programs can be enhanced and can be much more engaging with the addition of story and storytelling elements. This article will give educators many ideas for how to "story" their multigenerational programs.

GROG AND *GROGGER*S: THE ORIGIN OF *PURIM* CUSTOMS

David Schwartz

Purim may start in the Bible, but its customs have a variety of origins. This article examines the expected and unexpected origins of 10 *Purim* customs.

BASICS FOR LAY-LED LITURGY AND BIBLE CHANT

Neil Schwartz and David Schwartz

Six aspects of davening our liturgy and chanting our Bible texts are discussed: our sacred times, moods, and meanings; Hebrew textual concerns; structures of our liturgies; music modes of our liturgical chants; trope of our Biblical chants; and written/auditory resources.

JEWISH PLACEMAKING: CREATING SPACE FOR RELATIONSHIPS IN ADMINISTRATIVE WORK

Terri Soifer

In the years since Covid-19, we are all rapidly trying to rebuild our community of families. Not only are we welcoming new families, but we also are re-engaging families to show up to programming, to volunteer, and to help us lead their peers. This article answers the question, "How do we create systems that integrate transactional moments, such as enrollment, payment, and asking for volunteer time into our relational approaches?"

ANTI-SEMITISM THEN AND NOW

Paul Weinberg

This article discusses the history of Anti-semitism (as we know it) and its changes over the past two thousand years: How this ideology mutated (like a malignancy), using every facet of each age's religion, philosophy, and history to create an everlasting genie of Jew hatred that attaches itself almost seamlessly to Christendom (Western Civilization) and Islam.

TAKING MIRACLES SERIOUSLY: A JOURNEY TO EVERYDAY SPIRITUALITY

Michael Zedek

It is noteworthy that every time the *Torah* describes what we would identify as a miracle, no one seems to draw what could be the "obvious" lesson," which holds a vital piece of learning for us. Simply put, we divide experience into two categories: the ordinary and the extraordinary. This workshop explores Judaism's distinctive approach to finding a sacred, even miraculous, context for the regular and routine moments of life. This methodology may help persons find deeper meanings in *Torah* – ones that are hiding "in plain sight."

The Value in Teaching Strange Tales from the Torah

by Sharon Frant Brooks

This curriculum was developed for pre-*B'nai Mitzvah* students to develop renewed interest and curiosity about *Torah* texts and the values they can draw from them. Most have learned the "big picture" *Torah* stories over the years while expanding the concepts and lessons the stories teach. As stated in the text introduction:

> This year, we are going to learn about some of these same, and some other, value and *mitzvah* lessons, but not from the same "big picture" stories. Often, buried within these big picture stories, there are many events and stories that, while they often seem very limited in size and are often outside of the main text of the stories being told, they hold important messages we often don't get to teach. These smaller tales are often very strange and unusual, but are also among the most discussed by the Rabbis over the centuries because they have some very important lessons to teach us.

The intention of this program is to create heightened curiosity, offer opportunities for unique ways to engage in the materials – including multisensory opportunities, and provide more entries into exploration of the materials. In addition, a close concentration on the Hebrew texts is done to find clues to enhance understanding, meaning, and appreciation.

GOALS FOR EDUCATORS

1. The goal for educators is not to duplicate this curriculum, but to see which aspects of text offer exciting, interesting, relevant, and engaging material to you and to your students and enable you to teach from a different perspective.

2. Explore non-traditional sources, media, and modalities so that students are not complacent and bored, while remaining true to the texts and the values they represent.

3. Reduce reluctance to study texts frequently overlooked, bypassed, or intentionally skipped over due to the challenging subject matter.

4. With the materials, always provide sources and links to send home so families can follow along with what the students are learning and review with their child.

THE STRANGE TALES METHODS

I was initially asked to create a *Torah* curriculum for pre-*B'nai Mitzvah* students in order to utilize the successful experiences and outcomes previously seen in small groups with diverse learning needs and to duplicate these successes in a classroom of students with varied learning needs. For the curriculum to be successful, the class would need to incorporate intriguing texts, suspense or surprise elements, and media from authoritative sources that are not exclusively Jewish and have the aura of contemporary cultural or thematic excitement. As one who observed the excitement and energy surrounding the superhero and supernatural, I sought to generate the same interest in *Torah*! Impossible or improbable, you say? Enter "The Strange Tales," created with the flash, color, and curiosity-generating imagery of these exotic stories. Additionally, I created curricular pieces to incorporate this same thematic model for seasonal observances.

Sharon Frant Brooks has been a Jewish Educator for 35 years and an Occupational Therapist for 50 years. She uses aspects of both of these traditions to teach students with diverse learning needs as Coordinator of Resource Center Services at Adath Israel Congregation Religious School in Lawrenceville, NJ. She has previously taught at other congregational religious schools, including the Flemington Jewish Community Center and Beth El religious school in Franklin, NJ. She has both undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Pennsylvania, and a Masters in Jewish Education from the William Davidson School of the Jewish Theological Seminary.
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The imagery of a non-illustrated text
To generate an initial interest in closer examination of the Hebrew, we began our study of unusual tales with an examination of how the imagery of the *Torah* text, as well as the intent, can be revealed by HOW the text was written. Letter size, orientation, spacing, and context form a presentation that adds meaning and intention to the text much like the way an illustration would. However, unlike an illustration, the use of the text as the visual requires closer examination and Hebrew word and/or letter recognition and it may require reminders or recollections of *Torah* stories and characters.

Are varied learning types addressed and engaged?
The classes in which this material is used are all fully inclusive of all types of learners. There is use of print, video, manipulatives, and ritual materials. There are opportunities for movement and interaction with one another, as well as discussion. My students of all learning types have consistently indicated that this curriculum has increased their enthusiasm about *Torah* study, often reflected in their *B'nai Mitzvah* speeches.

A strange tale is one that often is obscure, not part of the canon we typically teach school-aged children, may be (but not always) shorter than the core text materials we typically teach pre-B'nai Mitzvah students, and may be considered disturbing in content.

So what constitutes a "Strange Tale?"
A strange tale is one that often is obscure, not part of the canon we typically teach school-aged children, may be (but not always) shorter than the core text materials we typically teach pre-*B'nai Mitzvah* students, and may be considered disturbing in content. I will offer a summary of a few of those tales and also end with the table of contents for the year's programming. I am very amenable to discussing any of the segmnts with anyone who chooses to follow up with me.

THE DARK SIDE

There are several events we put together to create a more complete concept of "unnatural darkness" and to reinforce that the term does not allude to general foreboding, but rather is a signal of a major transition or development in the text. I begin with the story of creation that indicates that prior to the creation of light on the first day, there was primordial darkness. It is critical to look at the text in the Hebrew, regardless of the student's proficiency. I selected the key word "*hoshekh*" – and highlighted it in all of the texts we studied to link the concept of darkness to each of them. We then reference the prayer from the *Shacharit* service that states "*Yotzer ohr u-vorekh hoshekh*"-- "Who made light and created darkness" to further reinforce this concept. We move on to the "*Brit bein ha-Betarim*" – the Covenant of the Pieces between Abram and God. The more commonly taught outcomes surrounding this first covenant are brit milah, Abram → Abraham, promise of descendants, and the land. Prior to these promises from God to Abraham, a strange darkness descends upon Abraham, causing him to fall into an unusual sleep. The final, and most obvious darkness event is the ninth plague. Once again, the text stresses the atypical nature of this darkness as more than just the absence of light. Each of these references tells us that darkness is a symbol of imminent change -- the advent of creation, the first of the covenantal agreements between God and the Jewish people, and the initiation of liberation from slavery. Therefore, darkness in the *Torah* is not a condition of evil, but a signal for positive development.

Each strange tale session ends with an activity that "brings home" the concept of the lesson. In this case, it is the recognition of darkness and the need for separation. Darkness indicates major change is about to happen! In all of these situations, darkness brings about major changes -- the start of creation itself, the covenant between God and Abraham creating the foundation of belief in the One God, and the Exodus from Egypt – creating a new nation, the People of Israel. We recognize the importance of the separation between light and darkness and these very important events every week when we recite the final blessings of the *Havdalah* service. We end the class by making *Havdalah* candles from beeswax *Hannukah* candles. We review the final blessing about separations, beginning with light and darkness. After making the candles, we review that blessing, stressing the concept of *hoshekh*. In addition, most classes include an audio-visual component to afford an alternative form (and often content) of information to help students who require that and to also offer a great time for snacks and stretching.

SNAKES ON A LEYN

This is probably the most enjoyed lesson of the year, because the students are exposed to some of the most obscure *Torah* concepts, (and also because many students love snakes!). We introduce the word "*nahash*" – snake, which becomes very

significant later. All of the students are aware of the snake in *Bereishit*, but most have pretty much disregarded it as it seems so unlikely that a snake would have the ability to do what the snake of the Garden of Eden does. After reading of the snake's punishment, we watched a scientific video revealing that snakes, in fact, started out with legs and still have the genetic code for leg development, but somehow a genetic switch to allow the legs to develop got "switched off" for reasons still not known to scientists. While this is not fully an attempt to substantiate the primordial snake's status, it does reduce the level of disbelief, creates a sense of divine wonder, and offers a little bit of information to cause consideration. We move on to the events of the rod→snake miracles of Moses and Aaron. We review the events, but now, like Hebrew detectives, look at the Hebrew. If one reads only the English text, this startling realization is not possible. Every time Moses performs this miracle, the rod becomes a *nahash*. However, when we look at the Hebrew text when Aaron throws down his rod, lo and behold, it does not become a *nahash*, but a *tanin* (a lizard!). We then watch videos of legless lizards, often mistaken for snakes, and discuss this unusual discrepancy in the text most often overlooked, even by grown-up readers! Our final snake tale is the curious tale of the *Seraphim*, flaming snakes, that attacked and killed the Israelites in the desert, and the strange remedy of the *nahash nehoshet.* This tale connecting snakes with healing does not seem as strange when we look at this common symbolism in other traditions, but the *Seraph* as protector is reflected in the use of the term used for the IDF equivalent of the Cobra military helicopter!

Our physical activity was to paint wooden articulated snakes, easily found in craft stores, to reflect one of the snake images of the lesson. In addition to being fun, it provided a catalyst for discussion with parents and siblings when arriving home.

DRUNK AND ALONE

The image of Noah as the kindly man on the ark often reflects the limited understanding of this complicated character. The students rarely have had the opportunity to learn the important lessons of Noah at the end of his life, drunk, naked, and alone. We looked at the many ways to see this imagery. Noah, who witnessed the total destruction of the world, could surely feel guilty. But why were the actions of his son, Ham, who first witnessed his condition, or his grandson Canaan, so contemptible, and his other sons' actions laudable? The concepts of *Lashon ha-Ra* (any form of speech or communication that may harm someone emotionally, financially, physically, or damage their reputation) enters here, as we note that Ham did not take corrective action, but only talked with his other brothers. We also discuss the mitzvah of honoring one's parent, given that the other brothers respectfully addressed the issue.

RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK

Despite the film's age, Indiana Jones still remains a well-known adventure hero. Before looking at the clip from the movie when the Nazis open the Ark, we read the story of Nadav and Avihu and their fiery end after improper conduct before the Ark. It is revealing to the students to recognize how Hollywood took its cue from the *Torah* on how to treat individuals who don't properly treat Holiness. On viewing the clip, or more specifically, listening, we discover that the Nazi leader (Belloq, coincidentally) is reciting the words of the *Zohar* we typically recite in front of the open ark at the start of the *Torah* service. What a great opportunity to learn how to sing that prayer showing the proper respect before our ark.

THE INVISIBLE MAN

Once again, this is a compilation of *Torah* stories that deal with the presence or absence of an "i*sh*" (man). First, we read about Jacob returning to his home country. En route to meet up with his brother Esau, Jacob has a strange encounter with someone the Torah simply refers to as "*ish*" or "man." During that encounter, Jacob receives a new name, Israel, from this being, often described as an angel. We next examine first the story of Joseph who was looking for his brothers unsuccessfully until a mysterious and unnamed "*ish*" tells him where his brothers could be found. This little detail, barely noticed, is what results in the story of Joseph in Egypt and his ability to save his family as a result. And last, we look at the story of Moses killing the Egyptian. Unlike the previous stories, Moses looks all around but "*ayn lo ish*"- there is NO man. REALLY? On an Egyptian worksite? In fact, what wasn't present was an "*ish*" who stepped up, who was, in Yiddish parlance, a *mensch*. Moses was, therefore, the only "*ish*" present who would step up.

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7. Ancient Aliens – the *Nephilim*: The Case Against Improper Mixtures; *Kashrut*
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9. Close Encounters of the God (Behind) Kind: Moses Sees God's Back; Seeing God in the World
10. What Goes Around Comes Around: What Joseph's Brothers Teach Us About Repentance
11. Super*mensch:* The Making of a Jewish Superhero; What Can You Do? Your Own Origin Tale.

FINAL POINTS

While the strange tales themselves are the focus of the curriculum, the images used, reflecting the supernatural motifs, make the lessons more impressive. Supplemental lessons for all holidays included this theme. The importance of examination of the Hebrew texts cannot be overstressed. Students are more motivated to read the texts if those texts are the source of clues to the mystery. They begin to take note of key words through repetition of the visual stimulus.

APPENDIX

Sources and videos used. Some videos were added subsequent to this compilation.

Source Materials for these lessons:

For all lessons:
Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary
Sim Shalom siddur
Hebrew *Torah* texts and translations: Sefaria.org

The Dark Side
- "Darkness Deciphered," Shira Smiles, commentary on *Parshat Bo,* Orthodox Union
- The Gift of God's First Creation, *Dvar Torah* on *Bereishit*, Ellen Umansky, ReformJudaism.org
- Video of the Covenant between the pieces: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRoSL0e0VsU

Snakes on a Leyn
- Wikipedia: Snakes in the Bible
- Video: https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/10/20/498575639/how-snakes-lost-their-legs
- Legless lizards - Tanin https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TjDpvC9Xh0Y
- Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSfcQrsbLAc (Indiana Jones and snakes)

Raiders of the (Lost?) Ark
- Jewniverse: Strange Dispatches from Jewish Culture, "Why Indiana Jones Nazi Loving Enemy Said a Torah Prayer," Michael Bohnen
- Video: segment from *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark* https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=m83JcNoNQ-4

Bridegroom of Blood
- Moshe Reiss. "Zipporah and the *Brit Milah*" in *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal* Fall 2012, Volume 9, Number 2
- GodCast video, *Brit Milah*: Jewish Traditions for Welcoming a Baby Boy https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0fkpHV4TxM
- Video, http://www.aish.com/j/jt/Jtube-Saturday-Night-Live-A-Bris-in-the-Royal-Deluxe-II.html

The Mouth of the Beast
- Video, Partners in Torah, Donkey Talk: *Parshat Balak* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIfkvZTMGD8
- Video: GodCast, Donkeys, Angels, and Prophecy in the *Torah* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uu3-Pi4olZs

Drunk and Alone
- Massachusetts Bible Society, Exploring the Bible, "What's Wrong with Noah's Sons Seeing Him Naked?"
- Video: Bible Babble https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ejGCVaBEOgo
- Video: TorahClass.com, Ham's Seed Should Terrify Us All https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIZSceBBdbc

Ancient Aliens -Nephilim
- Video: Judaism and Extraterrestrials https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcAO4sHexn4 (3:08-14:19)
- Rabbinic Assembly, Magen Tzedek – Justice, Food Justice and Hunger
- Video:https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcAO4sHexn4 (Magen Tzedek video presentation)

What Goes Around Comes Around
- Greenspan, Mark. "Joseph's Brothers: Guilt, Repentence, Remorse," Rabbinical Assembly
- "Healing and Transformation", Rabbi Suzanne Singer, Commentary on *Parshat Miketz*, My Jewish Learning
- Beck-Berman, Dennis. "The Story of Joseph, A Partial Paradigm of Conflict Resolution"in *Journal for Scriptural Reasoning,* 2006

Close Encounters of the Divine (Behind) Kind
- "The Backside of God – Exodus 33:19- 34:9", Excerpt: *Exodus Birth of a Nation*, Bible.org
- "God's Butt," Boticelli's Mars, January 22, 2013
- Video: https://www.facebook.com/RabbiDavidAaron/videos/1490347424346833/
- http://www.museivaticani.va/content/museivaticani/en/collezioni/musei/cappella-sistina/tour-virtuale.html

Supermensch

- Lewis, Ethan. "Mensch of Steel, Superman's Jewish Roots." Denofgeek.com
- "Superman – Moses, the Survivor," Aish.com
- Feiler, Brice. "It's a Bird, It's a Plane, It's Moses."
- Video: Torahcafe.com, "Every Saga has a Beginning: Moses, Shmot" https://www.torahcafe.com/immanuel-shalev/shmot-every-saga-has-a-beginning-meeting-moses-video_54249a78f.html
- Video: Origins of Superman, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uySYIw3Ofc

Using Storytelling to Personalize Holocaust Education in the Classroom

by Deborah Fripp

> "Before Dr. Fripp's visit, the Holocaust felt like a terrible historical event that we were researching in class. I didn't really understand it on a more personal level. After Dr. Fripp's visit, I had a better understanding of how the people felt."

This quote comes from one of forty students in a 9th grade Humanities class I had visited the previous week. I introduced the students to three people: Holocaust survivor Margot Jeremias, Holocaust survivor Dr. Vera Goodkin, and Holocaust victim Yitzhok Rudashevsky. All of these people were teens at the time of the Holocaust, around the same age as the students in the class. None of them were actually in the room, of course. Instead, I was telling their stories.

Storytelling based on historical testimony can be a powerful addition to a classroom curriculum. "The value of storytelling was incalculable," the Humanities teachers told me. There are a variety of ways to incorporate storytelling into a classroom. Each has its advantages.

SINGLE CLASS WITH MULTIPLE STORIES

When I visited the Humanities class, I shared three stories in one 90-minute class. The stories were chosen to fit with the Holocaust unit they were currently working on in class. Each story lasted 10 to 15 minutes long. I provided background and answered questions after I finished each story. As part of the Q&A, we discussed how the story connected to the learning objectives of their current unit.

For these classes, the story of Margot Jeremias was told not by me but by my daughter Esther. Esther was one of the students in this particular 9th grade class. A teen teller like Esther can be especially illuminating for students. Whether or not she is their classmate, she is a peer. She also is telling the story of someone who is close to her own age. When we hear Margot tell her story in her video testimony, we are hearing the story of a 12-year-old told by an old woman. When we hear Esther tell Margot's story, we are hearing the story of a 12-year-old told by a 15-year-old. Students may find a peer's telling more accessible.

One of the advantages of this method is that the entire process is completed in one class period. A single class can be easier to set aside than several classes. In addition, students have the opportunity to interact with the storyteller(s), giving them an important method of engaging with and processing the stories.

Sharing stories with a group of 40 or fewer students provides an intimate setting that allows significant interaction interacting with the storyteller. In a large auditorium, students may not feel as personal a connection to the story and the teller. If you have many classes, we recommend you tell the stories to each class separately.

STORY-INFUSED LESSON

Another option is to share several shorter stories (five-to-seven minutes each) interwoven with an historical lesson. Both stories can be shared by a single educator or a visiting storyteller can tell the stories within the teacher's lesson.

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The advantage of this method is that it provides a stronger historical focus to the stories. Educators can choose the stories that best suit their particular curriculum and objectives. Students again have the chance to interact with the storyteller directly.

STORIES THROUGHOUT THE SEMESTER

If time permits, bringing storytellers to class on multiple occasions can add significant depth to a unit. In this scenario, some classes are dedicated to learning the history of the Holocaust, and others are dedicated to learning from visiting storytellers. Each "story" class has a single storyteller, potentially allowing for longer stories. Teachers can select storytellers whose stories are an ideal match for the unit they are covering or the unit they have just completed.

With a single storyteller, students listen, appreciate, and ask questions of the storyteller. Teachers have the option of guiding students to try Holocaust storytelling by retelling pieces of this story in partners. Students who told pieces of storytellers' stories tell us that us that the process of retelling (and listening to their peers retell) deepens their understanding of the story.

STUDENTS AS HOLOCAUST STORYTELLERS: SINGLE- OR MULTI-DAY STORYTELLING WORKSHOPS

Students can learn storytelling skills beyond retelling a story they have heard. Full-class workshops offer students a chance to interact with primary sources and experiment with developing their own story. Multi-class workshops allow students to actually develop a story based on a primary source.

Workshops begin with a demonstration of the process of moving from testimony to story by inviting learners to describe an image from the testimony. Students then develop that image into a scene. In a single-day workshop, students have the opportunity of use a testimony to build an image and a scene. In a multi-day workshop, students create multiple scenes from a testimony or other primary source and link these scenes to form a story.

Students work in partners or small groups through this step-by-step story development process. Story development occurs through appreciation – positive feedback – rather than suggestion and critique. This allows students freedom to weave their own stories. We have had remarkable success building stories primarily through appreciation rather than critique.

The stories students tell always should be true stories. Learning to be a "Holocaust storyteller" does not mean learning to make up stories about the Holocaust. Learning to be a Holocaust storyteller means learning to take a primary source such as testimony, memoir, or diary, and to retell the story told in that testimony in a compelling way. The best storytellers tell the story of someone's Holocaust experience from inside the story itself, rather than from a distance, shifting from the "10,000-foot" view to a two-foot view.

"Learning to be a Holocaust storyteller means learning to take a primary source such as testimony, memoir, or diary, and to retell the story told in that testimony in a compelling way."

For a single-class workshop, learners use small sections of primary-source testimony. Teen diaries can be a good source. Educators should select testimonies that students will understand, based on their current knowledge of the Holocaust.

For multi-class workshops, students will need to pick a story that speaks to them. Some students might want to share a family member's story. Others may choose a book that was meaningful to them. Some will need help choosing a primary source. No matter whose story the student learns to tell, it will create a deep connection to that individual. This Holocaust story becomes part of their own story. By helping students learn to tell these stories, we also help the students learn to tell their own stories.

TEACHERS AS HOLOCAUST STORYTELLERS

Although it can be advantageous to bring in an outside storyteller, there are advantages to classroom teachers serving as the storytellers. When educators receive training in storytelling and in developing new stories, they can bring stories into every part of their curriculum. Stories can be included in every lesson, with each story's length geared to fit the needs of that lesson. When the educator is a storyteller, every lesson can be a story-infused lesson.

Tools for Creating Engaging Holocaust Commemorations for Jewish and Interfaith Audiences

by Deborah Fripp and Jennifer Rudick Zunikoff

We have been broken. Part of us will always be broken. We gather each precious shard and piece them together to create a new vessel that will hold our love and our pain.

"We find that we are somehow whole and broken at the same time. We discover glimmers of holiness in the cracks, for it is through these jagged windows that we see the paths to building a better world.

There is more to a broken vessel than the hammer that shattered it."

So begins *Light from the Darkness*,[1] a new ritual designed to help us commemorate the Holocaust. These words are followed by candle lighting, as is traditional for most Jewish rituals. In this case, however, the candles are lit on mismatched candlesticks. The mismatch reminds us that in difficult times, our ancestors made do with what they had and never gave up on their Judaism.

Over the next 90 minutes of this ritual, we tell the story of the Holocaust. We talk not only of the horrific hatred and violence that we endured, but also of the strength of our ancestors and those who helped them. We hear their voices. We tell their stories. We mourn our losses and celebrate our survival. We sing. We read and talk together. We engage with each other and call upon each other to learn the lessons of this atrocity and to act.

Engaging Holocaust commemorations like this one are crucial to the continued memory of the Holocaust. We can no longer rely on strong in-person interactions with survivors to carry the memory to new audiences. Without survivors, new forms of commemoration are needed to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive and relevant to the next generation. With knowledge of the Holocaust dwindling and Antisemitism rising, our responsibility to keep the story of the Holocaust alive and relevant has come into stark relief.

BUILDING A TEXT

If the description of *Light from the Darkness* feels familiar, there is good reason. The ceremony is loosely based on the Passover *seder*. The *seder* is the perfect model for developing a Holocaust commemoration. At the *seder*, we tell the story of our survival from a great tragedy – 400 years of slavery. We mourn the bitterness of the Egyptian slavery while celebrating our passage to freedom. In a Holocaust commemoration, we want to tell the story of our survival from another great tragedy. We must mourn the losses of the Holocaust while celebrating our survival as a people.

The seder gives us a roadmap for developing a Holocaust commemoration program. The *haggadah* includes individual voices and stories, familiar ritual actions, an honest but empowering narrative, lessons we should learn, and a call to action. An engaging Holocaust commemoration could include all of these.

• *Individual voices and stories:* We have an advantage over the rabbis who assembled the

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original *haggadah* – we have first-person stories to draw on. A Holocaust commemoration can include direct quotes or actual individual stories from people who experienced the Holocaust – both survivors (from testimony and memoirs) and victims (from their diaries).

- *Familiar and novel ritual actions:* For a Holocaust program, we can use a combination of familiar and novel actions, modified to be appropriate for the context. The candle lighting in *Light from the Darkness* described above is one such example. Another modified ritual we can use is dipping potato skins in salt water. This action reminds us of the starvation and the tears of the dark times, while simultaneously calling to mind a familiar ritual from our tradition.

The *seder* is the perfect model for developing a Holocaust commemoration. At the *seder*, we tell the story of our survival from a great tragedy ….. We mourn the bitterness of the Egyptian slavery while celebrating our passage to freedom. In a Holocaust commemoration ….. (we) mourn the losses of the Holocaust while celebrating our survival as a people.

- *An honest but empowering narrative:* How we tell a story matters. The Passover *haggadah* reminds us of the horrors of slavery, but does not dwell exclusively on those. We also remember the strength of our ancestors and of those, like the Egyptian midwives, who helped them.

We can use the same thought process in crafting a narrative for a Holocaust commemoration. We must remember the horrific hatred and violence, but we also should remember the strength of our ancestors and of those who helped them, those whom we call the Righteous Among the Nations.

In addition, the *haggadah* does not begin with the Jews in slavery – it begins with our ancestors coming to the land of Egypt. In a Holocaust commemoration, we similarly want to talk about how life was before and what happened after. As we do in the *haggadah*, we can end our narrative in an empowered position – a terrible thing was done to us, but we survived, and that is worth celebrating.

- *Lessons*: The haggadah doesn't just tell the story, it tells us what we should learn from the story. We must remember that we were slaves in Egypt, we are told, not so we can take our vengeance, but so we learn to treat others better. We must remember what happened to us in the Holocaust not so we can take our revenge, but so we can make sure no people ever suffer such a fate again.

It is not enough, however, to say "never again." We must understand what that means. In *Light from the Darkness*, we list specific actions we will avoid. We say, "Never again shall we stay silent at the preaching of malice." "Never again shall we allow groups of people to be separated and made unequal." In total, we have nine specific statements that help us understand what "never again" means.

- *A call to action:* The *haggadah* ends with "Next year in Jerusalem." As familiar, and almost cliché, as that feels, it is a call to action. It is a call to rebuild peace so that Jerusalem can be a city of peace where we can all celebrate Passover together.

A call to action for a Holocaust commemoration might be more direct. *Light from the Darkness* ends with "Justice, justice we shall pursue." This is a deliberate rephrasing of the biblical quote ("Justice, justice you shall pursue[2]), putting ourselves, together as a community, in the driver's seat of building a more just world.

ADDED RICHNESS

A strong text like *Light from the Darkness* can stand on its own. The text should include group readings and ritual actions in which everyone can participate. In addition, a variety of elements can be added to enrich the experience and complement the text.

- *Food*: A meal in the middle of the program, as would happen during a *seder*, is not recommended. An early version *Light from the Darkness* included a meal in the middle and participants felt it interfered with the flow of the ceremony. However, snacks before or a meal following the ceremony can provide useful additional time for contemplation and discussion.

Recipes from Holocaust cookbooks such as *In Memory's Kitchen*[3] can anchor your commemoration in the lives and memories of those you are remembering. Be aware, however,

that cookbooks written in the camps and ghettos relied on the uncertain memories of starving people. Many of the recipes therefore cannot be used directly and need modification.

- *Storytelling:* In a text like *Light from the Darkness*, we can, and do, hear the voices of survivors and victims. In the text, however, we get short quotes, not entire stories. A more complete, if brief, story to hear from a particular person's voice and experience can be a beautiful complement to these shorter quotes. Live storytellers, be they family members of survivors or unrelated adults or teens, can add considerable depth and meaning to your ceremony.

- *Music*: Music that is meaningful to you and your audience adds connection and opportunities for audience participation.

- *Other forms of art*: Other forms of art, such as poetry, dance, or visual arts, can add nuance and color to your ceremony. Dance that involves participants has the added advantage of getting the participants moving, which increases engagement.

- *Audience participation questions:* A good way to draw the participants into the program is to actually pause and ask them to consider something. Questions designed to get them to think about themselves can help them see the relevance of the story of the Holocaust to their own lives.

Good audience participation questions for this context fall into two categories.

1. How do you relate? These questions draw recollections of participants' own lives and help them to see connections between their own story and the story of the Holocaust.
2. What can you learn? These draw participants to consider what they can do in their own lives to learn from and act on the lessons of the Holocaust.

DEVELOPING A PROGRAM FOR AN INTERFAITH AUDIENCE

The ceremony we have been describing is a Jewish ritual, drawing on familiar traditions and understandings of a Jewish audience. Participation in Jewish ritual by non-Jews is a wonderful thing. However, if the only time non-Jews encounter Holocaust commemorations is through Jewish ritual, the Holocaust will become a "Jewish" story – i.e., one that they have to consider only in a Jewish context.

The Holocaust is a Jewish story, but it is much more than that. The Holocaust is also a human story. We all, Jews and non-Jews, have a responsibility to learn from the Holocaust and keep its memory alive. An interfaith Holocaust commemoration therefore needs to speak to a non-Jewish audience directly.

Audience participation questions are a great way to draw in a non-Jewish audience. These questions allow non-Jews to see how their experiences, and the experiences of their communities, are reflected in the story of the Holocaust. These connections help them learn the lessons of the Holocaust and relate those lessons to their own lives.

In addition, there are several modifications that we can make to inspire a non-Jewish audience to see the story of the Holocaust as important and relevant to their lives.

- *Broaden the "we":* In the Passover *haggadah*, the word "we" is used repeatedly to refer to the Jewish community. In *Light from the Darkness,* "we" is used in the same way, to refer to the Jewish community. A non-Jew listening to this will sympathize, but may not see themselves as part of this community and therefore part of this story.

In an interfaith context, the "we" needs to be more inclusive. The interfaith version of *Light from the Darkness*, tentatively entitled *Moments of Witness*, is currently in preproduction. In the first section of *Moments of Witness*, we make the inclusive nature of the "we" explicit:

> "We are all the descendants of the Holocaust. We are the descendants of the victims and of the perpetrators, of those who stood by and of those who stood up, of those who were uninvolved and of those who were unaware. No matter who our individual ancestors were, we all have a place in this story."

- *Substitute more general quotes for many of the* brachot *and the Hebrew*: A Jewish ritual is full of Hebrew blessings. These have a strong connection to a Jewish audience but may, in fact, increase the non-Jews' feeling of not being part of the story. Substituting quotes from other traditions can broaden the appeal. There are many traditions to draw from – Christian, Muslim, Baha'i, Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist, to name a few. Quotes from secular sources are wonderful as well.

We do want to be careful not to erase the Jewish aspect of this story, however. References to Jewish ritual, and a few Hebrew blessings, can help even non-Jewish participants remember that at its heart, this is still a Jewish story.

VENUES

Holocaust commemorations come in all shapes and sizes. Depending on the circumstances, a commemoration like the ones described here could look very different.

- *In-person in a small group:* In a small group setting, a Holocaust commemoration can become intimate, feeling

like a home *seder*. Everyone can participate not only in the ritual actions, group readings, and singing, but also in the reading of the text itself. Audience participation questions can lead to wonderful discussion, especially during a meal that follows the ceremony.

- *In-person in a large group at tables:* As with a community *seder*, a community commemoration can have a small group feel by seating people at multiple tables. Everyone can still participate in the ritual actions, group readings, and singing. Although a larger group requires a stronger leader, reading the text also can be shared among participants. With tables of 8 to 10 people, audience participation questions can still lead to good discussions, especially during a meal following the program.

- *In-person in an auditorium in lecture-style seating:* A commemoration like *Light from the Darkness* can be done in an auditorium or sanctuary with a leader on the stage or *bima*. It is easy for a commemoration of this nature to become a performance, however, so it is important to give thought to how to engage the audience.

Audience participation in an auditorium is more difficult, but is still possible. If the entire text is available, handing this out to everyone will make them feel more included. If not, group readings and song sheets can be handed out to encourage participation. Some ritual actions will be accessible to those sitting in the pews, but not all. Those that cannot be done from the seats can be done either solely by the leader or replaced with storytellers or music. Audience participation questions are still useful, with participants responding either individually on paper or in small groups.

- *Online*: A commemoration like this works quite well online. An online program has the advantage of being able to draw both presenters, such as musicians and storytellers, and participants from a wide range of locations. Simultaneously, however, an online program can easily become a performance. It is important to give thought to audience engagement.

To ensure the best engagement, a list of items needed for the ritual actions should be sent to participants at least several days beforehand. Presenting slides with the text allows the audience to follow along. However, group readings and singing, core aspects of audience participation for in-person ceremonies, lose their power online where only one voice can be heard. Audience participation questions are therefore critical. In a small group, a discussion can ensue from these questions. In most cases, however, answers written in the chat and read by one of the leaders are a better option.

Endnotes:

1. Fripp, Deborah and Violet Neff-Helms. *Light from the Darkness: A Ritual for Holocaust Remembrance.* Millburn, NJ: Behrman House, 2020.
2. *Deuteronomy*, 16:20
3. De Silva, Cara. *In Memory's Kitchen : A Legacy from the Women of Terezin.* Latham, MD: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1996.

Engaging Families Off-the-Grid

by Nina Gelman-Gans

Oh, the distractions … Social media! Screens! Streaks! For our parent constituents, there is a lot to navigate around children embedded in a social-media age, while also juggling extra-curricular activities, household management, and carving out moments for self-care. As tuned-in educators, how can we partner with our families to support their endeavors and help foster Jewish memories?

Wanting to connect more with local families, I launched "*Yallah* Families!" workshops. These outdoor interactive experiences are based on a particular theme and structured to draw families together, both in community and within their nuclear make-up. Meeting in an outdoor setting shakes up the routine of drop-offs and pick-ups, time constraints, and age groups separating into stratified learning communities.

Nature has a magical quality. Relinquishing to the time and space of now allows for detachment from the usual distractions to fully connect with each other. As educators, we can invite participants to slow down, name, and notice "*Adonai* moments," while tuning into wonder-filled minutiae of the Divine surrounding us.

Our workshop session commenced with a guided meditation to visualize a supportive setting, imagining the play of all five senses. Personally, this often lands me near water, in a forest, or enjoying an amazing sunset. You might ask popcorn-style where people "went." That is, invite people to "pop" their ideas into the room. The main goal is to ground participants in the moment and open them to *hineni*, I - am – here - now.

When my kids were young, it seemed unlikely anyone would enjoy sitting through a talk-based *seder*. Inviting other friend-families, I took the *seder* out into the yard and together we embodied the Passover story through sight, sound, and action. Once my children were grown, I took the programming to our religious school community. Most recently, I expanded the experience to families with 2-to-5-year-olds and and K-to-grade-3 children with their adults. The chldren were quite ready to explore, imagine, and play. Adults were eager to pick up *seder* tricks and engage with their youngsters.

I allowed 15 minutes for arrivals, 75 to 90 minutes for guided interactions, and 15 minutes for lingering questions, feedback, and inter-family follow-up.

Stops along the "journey" are below. Allowing time for play and imagination, it is unlikely your participants will get to all the stops. This leaves room for next year.

- Chalk drawing opening activity allowing for introductions, name tags, and a *maggid* story overview (s*ee photos 1 and 2 on following page*).

- Blessings for food from the earth, *borei pri ha-adamah*. A popular *seder* question is "is it time to eat yet?" This urgency can be slowed down by capitalizing on the opening blessing over fruits of the ground.[1] Prepare a snacking plate with an assortment of earth munchies, then invite participants to say the blessing together and enjoy their snack. This is an opportunity to expand palates with choices like jicama, radish, and papaya.

- *Chametz* scavenger hunt using play *matzot* and *challot*. (I knew there was a reason I held onto these toddler play items!) Children LOVED hiding the *chametz* while playing hot/cold

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photos 1 and 2: A chalking opportunity invites children with a focused activity while participants meet each other and the leader reviews basics of the Passover holiday.

photo 3. Children engage in bibliodrama to insert their midrash/interpretations into the Passover narrative.

photo 4. Baby dolls or stuffies wrapped in blankets engage children in the surprise and delight of finding a hidden baby.

with their adults in a boisterous scavenger hunt. It was great to see the adults being playful, too.

- The Four Children: Using chalk outlines, discuss and depict how the different characteristics (wise/wicked/simple/can't ask) show up for family members. If there is time, have them ask how they might grow with that trait in the future.

- Interactive repeat-after-me singing the Four Questions. This is especially important for adults who, for whatever reason, are not familiar with the Hebrew.

- *Maggid* with costumes! Use bibliodrama techniques to interact with story characters, allowing participants to insert their own *midrash*/interpretation and expression of the narrative (*see photo 3 above*).

- Plagues/insects: Use imagination and action to experience the plagues and explore how they show up in our lives today. This must be curated to be age-appropriate.
    - Insects: I hid plastic wiggly creatures along the garden path and sent children to find them. Questions followed, inviting children to add their own emotions and experiences of the pesty plague.
    - Hail: At the end of our walking *seder*, children were invited onto the trampoline where they were surprised with flying ping pong ball plagues. Joyous jumping was accompanied by an invitation to keep the balls from hitting the ground. Yes, it was memorable.

- Miriam and Moses at the River Nile. The children became Miriam as they searched for hidden babies in baskets

floating down the Nile. They comforted the sweet baby and interacted according to the *maggid*/story , inserting their own story and meaning (*see photo 4 on the previous page*).

- Red Sea parting and releasing into freedom: Taking the journey out of Egypt. Pass through a narrow space using sheets, rope or long ribbons. In the parting, invite imaginative sightings, "What natural wonders do you see?" Answers may be surprising.

Depending on the energy of the group, each experience delved into different aspects and whatever got covered, it . was . all . good. Children were enthralled, parents gathered new ideas for engaging their youngsters, and participants enjoyed their time together.

At our NewCAJE session, educators shared their own outdoor interactive programming and ideas. These included a blessing walk, *Shofar* over the Hudson, a program called *Shofari*, coffee filters for recording dissolving sins/missing the mark,[2] a *Simchat Torah* Journey, an apple charoset bar, an *Omer* game with giant fuzzy dice, *Yom ha-Atzmaut* at the beach, *Shavuot* rock climbing, and a ropes course built on a specific theme.

> "A blessing walk gives children (and adults) the opportunity to appreciate the world around them. First, teach the children the Hebrew word *baruch*, which means blessing or praise. Associate it with a blessing they know, perhaps a *Shabbat* blessing. Then go outside, and upon seeing something that they feel is a blessing, say *baruch*. Leaving it open-ended allows children (and adults) to determine what is a blessing to them."[3]
>
> *Ronni Ticker,*
> *A NewCAJE 14 participant*

Following the sharing, NewCAJE Conference participants divided themselves into breakout groups to brainstorm programming based on their target population.

- Multigenerational: The younger generation has prepared questions for visiting seniors/ask seniors to play a character/ hold a scavenger hunt.
- Upper elementary: Trivia contest/Jewpardy/obstacle course
- ECE (early childhood educators): Indoor stations for Passover/adult volunteers in character/tasting station/ movement/food

And now, I invite you to create powerful off-the-grid experiences and gift your families with positive focused time creating Jewish memories. It's a win-win for all.

Have questions? Want a short brainstorm? Feel free to view www.pitome.com or contact nina@pitome.com.

Thank you to Beth Liberman who generously shared her session notes and deep appreciation to Shiraz Biggie and all participants for adapting to unanticipated challenges.

Endnotes:

1. This educator tip from Ron Wolfson, offered at a professional development conference many years ago has averted many hangry meltdowns.
2. Using coffee filters and washable markers to record when individuals committed sin or "missed the mark." This is followed by dipping the filters into water and letting the sins dissolve for the New Year.
3. Inspired by Rabbi Robert Freedman at a National Chavurah Committee Summer Institute.

The Four Words of Prayer: Strategies for an Intentional Jewish Prayer Practice

by Evelyn Goldfinger

During the The Four Words of Prayer: Strategies for an Intentional Jewish Prayer Practice workshop at NewCAJE 14, participants were invited to connect with spirituality and Jewish prayer in an experiential way.

The room was set as an engaging working space, surrounded by words and also materials to write on. The first goal: to spark one's curiosity and playfulness.

Participants were asked, "Can you describe Jewish prayer in one word?" — and thus the exploration begun. They reflected and shared their words. Then, they were invited to exchange their word for another one that brought a different meaning or for a word they wished to explore.

But why are spirituality and prayer even relevant? We turned to ancient texts, stories, and current science-based research to aid in that quest.

Next, we dove into my approach to spirituality and prayer, found in my book *Words From My Heart,*[1] which proposes four key words through which to explore Jewish prayer: *Todah* (thank you/ gratefulness or gratitude), *Bivakashah* (please/asking for help), *Selichah* (saying sorry/ learning and repairing our mistakes), and *Halleluyah* (wow/exclaiming praise and awe).

Participants were guided through each of these words. How did the participants feel? When do we experience these concepts? We started by following a hands-on activity that would connect us to that spiritual concept, here and now — one that provided an opportunity to explore our own spirituality at an adult level. We then turned to Jewish tradition to reflect on how that particular concept relates to our heritage throughout millennia. Where can we find this concept in Jewish text, values, or tradition? What are the Jewish prayers that express this concept?

After all that, we then put on our educators' hats to discuss the concept in relation to

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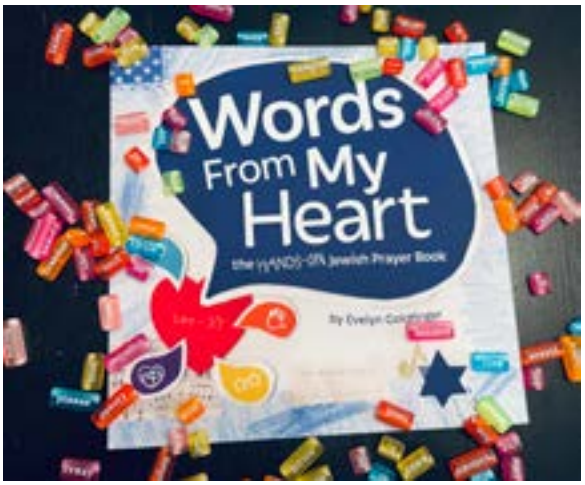

children and their development. Moving to incorporating practices that can introduce this concept into a classroom or a prayer moment, we followed prompts and activities suggested in my book. We thought of possible ways in which to create a space where students and educators can experience a meaningful connection to the Divine, using their own words and tapping into the timeless wisdom of Jewish prayer.

Conversations were honest and deep. Participants really went all in. They listened and they shared. And while doing that, we incorporated new tools with which to empower children and adults to connect with their own spirituality through the language of their hearts.

For more info visit
www.shalomeve.com
www.youtube.com/torahtron on Youtube
Instagram @torahtron

Endnotes:
1. Goldfinger, Evelyn. *Words From My Heart: The Hands-on Jewish Prayerbook*. Self-published, Goldfinger, 2022.

Storytelling for Young Learners

by Evelyn Goldfinger, Leora Lazarus, and Karen Golden

RISE co-director Karen Golden telling her version of the story of the two brothers

Stories help us make sense of our world. Storytelling is one of the most ancient forms of communication and community-building. This is the case in Judaism as well. Ever since we were children, stories do much more than help us sleep. They assist us in making sense of the world, shape our identity, excite our imagination, and connect us to our people and to each other.

During a session at NewCAJE 14, educators explored different techniques to incorporate into their storytelling. Leora Lazarus, a.k.a. Morah Leora; Evelyn Goldfinger, a.k.a. Ms. Eve; and Karen Golden, are all professional storytellers and the new directors of NewCAJE's RISE, Re-Jew-venation Initiative for Storytelling Education. Each modeled a story for the session participants.

SHAPING THE STORY

The catch? Each of their stories was based on the same story! Participants were invited to notice the different approaches each storyteller used and how each unique personality shaped the retelling. Was the story lineal? How were the characters represented? How were Jewish values or Hebrew incorporated? Were there voices, sound effects? What was audience participation like? The educators also heard a retelling of the story by Susan Newton, one of the proud graduates of the first RISE Young Learners (YL) cohort.

RISE co-director Evelyn "Ms. Eve" Goldfinger modeling how to incorporate puppets into a story

We shared techniques for creating interactive and engaging storytelling experiences for young learners. Where do we begin? How can we find the stories? How can we make them our own? How can we incorporate

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Karen Golden has been an international touring storyteller/ musician for more than 33 years, as well as an author, and a recording artist. She is the founding/director of the Creative Learning Place, a home-school learning center in Los Angeles. Karen brings her blend of stories, music, and interactive joy to audiences of all ages at synagogues, schools, and museums, and to the virtual world.
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Storytellers meet live at NewCAJE for the first time: Cherie Karo Schwartz, RISE creator (bottom right) , with Batya Podos, RISE first co-director (bottom left), alongside two of three RISE new directors: Leora Lazarus (top right) and Evelyn "Ms. Eve" Goldfinger (top left).

Leora Lazarus and Evelyn "Ms. Eve" Goldfinger rehearsing with stand-in finger puppets for the NewCAJE concert.

these techniques into lesson plans for both Judaic and secular curriculums? We explored finding, shaping, and the sharing of stories, as well as ways to apply storytelling in the classroom.

At the end of the workshop, participants put together their own version of the folktale we had been working on together, choosing from the techniques they observed and explored during the session.

It takes one story to RISE to a world of possibilities.

RISE YOUNG LEARNERS

RISE is excited to launch the RISE YL's second cohort, beginning September 2023. It's a virtual year-long program of storytelling techniques, resources, repertoire, and skills you can use tomorrow in your classroom, and an easily accessible virtual platform for sharing ideas among colleagues. For more information, please visit www.newcaje.org/storytelling or contact torahtron@gmail.com.

RISE is the Re-Jew-vination Initiative for Storytelling Education. The RISE program is made possible through a donation from Cherie Karo Schwartz, in honor of Peninnah Schram and in memory of Rabbi Janie Grackin *z"l* and Phyllis Binik Thomas *z"l*, all wondrous storytellers and educators. They all have been instrumental in preserving and perpetuating the legacy of Jewish storytelling.

Rebuilding Early Childhood Education Through the Natural World

by Paula Hoffman and Allison Charapp

Paula Hoffman, M.JEd, is an experienced early childhood educator, having worked as a kindergarten teacher, EC Director, and educational consultant for 30 years. Paula is committed to providing educators with current knowledge based upon best practices for adult and children's learning. Her current focus is on designing Jewish outdoor classroom environments with attention to gardening and "loose parts." Paula is the administrator of the 4000+ members Facebook group "Early Childhood Jewish Educators." 18paula18@gmail.com

Allison I Charapp, M.Ed. has been teaching for more than 30 years and is the Director of Education at Kol Shalom in Annapolis, MD. In 2015, Allison opened Tree of Life Preschool – a nature preschool – to teach Jewish traditions and their connection to nature. Having completed their eighth year, the program is now flourishing and has become a model for other communities, solidifying her expertise in the field of nature education. She also holds a BA in Theatre and training in AMI Montessori, Orton-Gillingham, and Reggio Emilia. Allison currently is working with the Advisory Committee to implement Maryland's HB525, creating a Pilot Program for Nature Preschools under the Dept. of Education – the second of its kind in the country. eitdesigns.ac@gmail.com

A mandala on the sidewalk

Experience is not the best teacher; it is the only teacher" and "If it hasn't been in the hand and the body, then it can't be in the brain." These two quotes from the amazing early childhood educator Bev Bos,[1] of blessed memory, remind us of the importance of experiential and hands-on learning for young children. Curiosity and trial and error are cornerstones of problem-solving.

Our Sunday morning intensive session at NewCAJE 14 began with reading *The Listening Walk* by Paul Showers, followed by a silent nature walk just outside to search for open-ended natural materials, also known as "loose parts." Our group of educators then gathered to sort the discovered materials – leaves, sticks, stones, flower petals, a few metal pieces – and wondered if children would sort them in the same way. We then worked together to create a mandala on the sidewalk. The importance of what we did was to recognize that the Earth was created by God; we have been entrusted to care for and respect this planet. Nature is God's canvas; our mandala, though, was ephemeral art – there was no expectation that it would last forever.

HOW TO DO A NATURE WALK WITH CHILDREN

First recognize that learning to walk and observe in nature is a process. It begins with learning about WHAT a nature walk is. (Maybe reading a book? Maybe having a conversation about hikes with their parents?) For the teacher, it is practice and repetition that will allow so many special moments to evolve stemming from the growing familiarity with where they are walking. You want to build a friendship with the area with which you will be connecting.

• Gather the children and consider reading *The Listening Walk* to set the tone.

- Discuss walking quietly, listening to sounds around us. Try keeping talking to a minimum and motioning towards points of interest. Make sure that you find things to look at that are low and high: you want the children to look EVERYWHERE. You want to teach about watching where your feet land so as not to disturb the homes of insects or other creatures.
- Over time, you will teach them "rules of the road" such as it's okay to move a log as long as you roll it TOWARDS you so that if there is something underneath, the log serves as a barrier. These are extensions of "basic manners" that ensure nature is both protected and respected.
- Look at the variety of colors, look for what is living or non-living, look for plants and animals.

Being outside – in nature – naturally compliments and supports a vast array of learning styles ..... We need to follow (children's) passions and introduce the children to learning through exploring what captures their attention.

- As an educator, you can use this time to share the potential of what can be seen, observed, and found in nature.

A nature walk is packed with teachable moments. It is an endless opportunity to build vocabulary. Vocabulary is the gateway into so many important and inspiring conversations. Curiosity flourishes when a child has the words to ask questions. Your job as an educator and guide is simple – just name what is seen…the trees, the birds, insects. There are two helpful Apps to download on your phone – SEEK or PICTURE THIS – that can answer "what's that?"

Of course, a nature walk can be spontaneous and without a single prop or you can prepare with items that will expand the experience. Some materials to take along on a nature walk include bags or baskets for gathering found materials, measuring tape, magnifying glasses, clay for impressions, crayons and paper for tree rubbings, and pencils/paper/clipboards for sketching. Truly, the list is limited only by your imagination.

ALLOWING CHILDREN'S CURIOSITY AND INTERESTS TO BE THE GUIDE

Our morning at NewCAJE continued with verbally sharing what the outdoor spaces offer in each school setting for nature exploration. We discussed letting go of lesson plans to allow for the natural curiosity of the children to lead and guide the teachers. The weekly plan needs to be left behind; children don't learn on a timetable. They should be allowed to learn about anything to the point of their satisfaction. It's so necessary when outdoors for educators to listen and observe how children are interacting with materials in their environment in order to recognize the needs of the children as opposed to the needs of the teachers. It is so important to allow the curiosity and interest of the children to guide the adults; to help them become reflective practitioners; to build upon what the children know and the questions they are asking; to not rush to provide them with "correct" answers, but instead to develop their own ideas and theories.

The outdoor classroom offers an introduction to the scientific method of learning. Children ask many questions. They can conduct their own research, guess (hypothesize) outcomes, create experiments, gather information, reach conclusions, and then share their findings. Teachers constantly are being asked about the "academics" of early childhood education; learning in this way encompasses language development, reading, math, executive functioning skills, and so much more. Being outside – in nature – naturally complements and supports a vast array of learning styles. Young children who are not able to self-regulate or focus on demand can find peace and acceptance when outside. This success directly influences their self-image as a student. We know that a curious student is what keeps us going.

The outdoor classroom, as well as any other nature space that each school's campus has to offer, is a year-round experience, as are nature walks. It follows the changing of the seasons and is connected to the Jewish calendar. As each holiday purposefully highlights different characteristics of the season or particular moments in the natural cycle, we also can note what has to be done in each season to prepare for the next. For example, we plant potatoes in the late summer so they are ready to harvest right around *Chanukah*. As educators, we need to be available to be inspired by the children's passions. We need to follow those passions and introduce the children to learning through exploring what captures their attention.

As we ended our time together in the NewCAJE intensive, the conversation shifted to recognizing that we are a quarter of the way into the 21st century. It is long past the time of letting go of old lesson plans, particularly the "standards" that have been with us for 50 years! We must reimagine our path; because our roots were born of love and hope, our purpose has grown and matured into a powerful movement. But that movement needs to let go of past practices that limit us and instead embrace what we have learned. Children learn

through play. They need time to process the world around them. We need to step up as guides and open doors for our children to discover this gift bestowed upon us.

Early Childhood Education must be allowed to evolve. It must grow and shift with the newest knowledge we have in the sciences, in our social practices, in child development, in learning styles, and age-appropriate experiences. We do not have to do everything. Hopefully, our children will have a lifetime of Jewish learning (it is not a sprint – it is a lifetime marathon). What can they REALLY walk away with KNOWING/OWNING, and not just focusing on for a week?

Our challenge is having the courage to go back to our schools to have this important conversation, being open to the opportunities, recognizing that everyone is on their own journey of discovery, and gently helping to bring along those who might be stuck.

Our job and our CRAFT require that we continue to evolve and improve our methods. We know that a small change has a ripple effect. Let's work towards that – just add more time outside, add more vocabulary, add more conversations… allow yourself to be a child, too, and feel the excitement of new discoveries.

Endnotes:

1. Bev Bos (1936-2016) was an American teacher, author, and singer. She was an advocate of child-centered, developmentally appropriate play-based programs for young children.

Meaningful Ways to Engage Your *Madrichim* in the Classroom

by Erica Hruby and Melissa Pescatore

Madrichim are often a huge part of a religious school community. In addition to being alumni of the religious school program, madrichim are also future educators. During the *Madrichim* Engagement session at NewCAJE14, nearly thirty professionals engaged in conversation with each other about the benefits and drawbacks of *madrichim* in the classroom; opportunities to better utilize *madrichim* in the classroom; and some tools for connecting, feedback conversations, and more. The session concluded with a brief overview of the pilot year of NewCAJE's Next Steps: National *Madrichim* Fellowship,[1] as well as feedback from the participants as to what they are looking for in their *madrichim* experience.

We started the session with community building and small group discussions about the benefits and challenges of *madrichim* in the classroom. The benefits identified fell into two categories. Some were a direct benefit to the school/teacher, and others were a direct benefit to the students/*madrichim* themselves. Examples of direct benefits to the school/teacher included the *madrichim* being tech savvy, good for one-on-one or small group work, family retention post-*Bnai Mitzvah*, and great support for teachers.

Examples of direct benefits to the students/*madrichim* themselves included building near-peer relationships, earning community service hours, serving as role models, and keeping teens involved in the synagogue community. Additionally, there was a mention of *madrichim* programs being a pathway towards building a declining Jewish educator pipeline.

THE CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF *MADRICHIM*

The small groups then discussed challenges of having *madrichim* in religious schools. Some of the challenges shared were irresponsibility of the *madrichim*, their lack of reliability, the significant time need to train a *madrich/a*, their disinterest in the role, and their being on phones too much. Sharing the group brainstorms aloud enabled participants to feel seen by those dealing with similar challenges and sparked new understandings for those who perhaps looked at their program through a different lens.

Next, we discussed two interesting ways that *madrichim* programs can positively impact the mental health of teens involved. *Madrichim* programs can serve as social-emotional protective factors in two ways. Firstly, *madrichim* programs provide opportunities for teens to connect with a (Jewish) peer community outside of their day-to-day academics, extracurriculars, work, etc. And, secondly, having a positive adult role model in the lives of teens increases their chance of developing into healthy, well-adjusted adults. These factors were important to name because the *madrichim* role has real-life implications outside the classroom as well.

We then explored five reasons that teens may want to be involved as a *madrich/a* and why the role is valuable for them.

- *Madrichim* programs provide a pathway to keep teens connected to their synagogue and Jewish communities.
- Teens have a desire to give back and participate (and earning community service hours or having a paying job doesn't hurt either).
- Teens want to share their positive religious school experience or improve on what they might have struggled with in religious school.

Erica Hruby is a Jewish educator with more than 28 years of teaching, curriculum writing, and professional development experience in Jewish community, academic, and residential environments. Erica serves as the Senior Manager of National Teen Education and Engagement at The Jewish Education Project, formerly the Executive Director of JTEEN - Jewish Teen Education & Engagement Network. She is also the founder of Anchored Parenting, LLC, where she serves as an educator and coach for tw/eens, parents, and grandparents. Erica has an M.A. from Georgia School of Professional Psychology in Clinical Psychology, with a focus on children and adolescents.
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Melissa Pescatore is the Director of Religious Education at Temple Shaari Emeth in Manalapan, NJ. Serving as principal in the congregation where she grew up, she is passionate about instilling a love of learning and building a strong, positive Jewish identity in her students. She is also a proud graduate of the LEEP Fellowship at NewCAJE and is the co-leader of NewCAJE's National Madrichim Fellowship.
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- Teens provide a near-peer relationship for students and often enjoy serving as a role model to younger students.
- *Madrichim* are future educators. The role they play provides on-the-job training for a meaningful future career.

CREATING A BIGGER IMPACT WITH *MADRICHIM*

And lastly, participants learned ways to put *madrichim* engagement into practice. We looked at five areas where classroom teachers can create a bigger impact with their *madrichim*, and we provided tools that teachers can use as well.[2]

1. It is important for teachers to build rapport with their *madrich/a* in order to identify their passions, interests, and abilities, as well as to learn where they struggle. Participants in the session were provided with a rapport building activity to connect on a personal level and begin the important job of relationship-building. They also received a teacher/*madrichim* agreement highlighting the roles and responsibilities in the classroom, in addition to discussing what the *madrich/a* may want to learn (or learn more about) in terms of their role.

2. Prior to a teacher inviting a *madrich/a* into their classroom, teachers should think about areas where they could use the most help in the classroom. A great discussion can come from reviewing their list together with the *madrich/a* , and also asking the *madrich/a* if there are any other roles that they might want to add to the list. During this portion of the session, we asked participants to create a list of roles that *madrichim* can play in the classroom. Below are some of the roles that were brainstormed:

a. Station leader (supporting differentiated learning)
b. Second set of eyes
c. Library assistant
d. Tech support
e. Bathroom helper
f. Line leader or caboose
g. Reading a story
h. Helping with Hebrew
i. Door greeter
j. Class photographer, paparazzi
k. Leading ice-breakers and transitional activities
l.. Snack helper
m. *Tefillah* leader
n. Preparing crafts
o. Attendance taker

3. Teachers can create a growth-minded relationship through open, positive, and regular communication with their *madrich/a*. Establishing a consistent check-in meeting schedule creates a dedicated and appropriate space for conversations about the flow of the class, challenging situations in the classroom, new or changing roles of the *madrich/a*, providing feedback, and the like. Participants were provided with a sample check-in meeting template, as well as a document highlighting best practices in giving feedback to their *madrichim*.

4. Part of the role (maybe unexpressed) of the teacher is helping the *madrich/a* perform their role successfully. Teachers can do this through establishing a practice environment. Participants were provided with a framework through which teachers can move their *madrich/a* from knowing a role exists to learning the role to managing the role successfully on their own.

A *madrich/a*'s success in this role provides a positive ripple effect to the students, classroom, teacher, school, community…and ultimately to the teen himself/herself.

5. Whether it is through an in-house *madrichim* professional development program or the Next Steps: National *Madrichim* Fellowship, it is important for *madrichim* to be provided with tangible skills that they can use in the classroom. Some religious school directors or *madrichim* coordinators meet regularly with their *madrichim* to discuss ways to be most effective in the classroom. The Next Steps Fellowship provides professional development on a national scale to *madrichim* who have proven their commitment to the role, have a desire to grow their skills, and want to have a larger impact in the classroom and on their students. With the acquisition of valuable classroom skills, participants in the 2022-2023 Next Steps Fellowship felt that their contributions to the classroom were appreciated and that those contributions enhanced the experience for their students. Participants also expressed their desire to take on more significant roles in the classroom, including teaching lessons. The Next Steps Fellowship offers sessions on child development, differentiated learning, communication, and more.

In summary, if we are to offer teens the opportunity to serve as *madrichim* in our classrooms, we first must understand their developmental stage and their motives for wanting to serve in the role. Then, we must look seriously at a variety of ways that our teachers and education directors can provide their *madrichim* with an enhanced road to success. A *madrich/a*'s success in this role provides a positive ripple effect to the students, classroom, teacher, school, community…and ultimately to the teens themselves.

Endnotes:

1. http://www.newcaje.org/teens/madrichim-program/
2. The tools referred to can be provided on request by contacting Erica and/or Melissa at the email provided at the end of their biographical information.

A Hidden Treasure in Plain Sight: Grandparents in Your Community

by Terry Kaye

Grandparents can make any intergenerational family program stronger. Grandparents bring wisdom, unconditional love for their grandchildren, and the gift of time.

Let's start by playing a game.

Take our Grandparent Quiz (toward the end of this article). How did you do?

The Jewish Grandparents Network believes grandparents are essential partners in enriching Jewish life. We envision a Jewish world that embraces grandparents as vital to our families, our communities, and our future.

Think about this for a moment: What, in your experience, are some of the roles grandparents play in a family?
Grandparents are caregivers and babysitters, historians and tellers of family stories, mediators and peacekeepers amidst diverse family dynamics, entertainers and playmates, family financial supporters, and the hub for Jewish traditions and holiday celebrations. "Grandparents are American Jewry's great untapped resource," wrote Jack Wertheimer.[1]

What is unique about the grandparent-grandchild relationship?
Grandparents provide unconditional love and acceptance, the gift of time and of deep listening, shared exploration, and joy and playfulness. Grandparents are often "the fun one" — the not-disciplinarians.

What would you add?

How do you decide when to include grandparents in your educational programs?
First, let's clarify two terms:
"Multi-generational" is the number of generations alive at one time or that you can invite to a program at one time. "Intergenerational" is the interaction among the generations in a family, an intentional act, a mindset in an age-segregated society (from Rabbi Hayim Herring).[2]

You'll need to make some decisions about how to structure a program with or for grandparents. Consider the following four models with the characteristics of each:

1. *Grandparent-grandchild (Skip-gen)*
   - Celebrates and highlights the grandparent's role (the key players are grandparent and grandchild).
   - Builds and nurtures the grandparent-grandchild unique relationship.
   - The mood is more playful and relaxed than when parents are there — and often the child takes the lead.

2. *Intergenerational*
   - The parent is the primary adult figure; grandparents play a secondary role.
   - The parent may monitor — even unwittingly — grandparent-grandchild interactions (comments and interpretations: "What Grandma means is..."; corrective actions: "We don't do/say/behave....").
   - Children may defer to the parent.

Terry Kaye is Associate Director and Director of Creative Partnerships at the Jewish Grandparents Network, a national organization that educates, connects, and supports grandparents as essential partners in enriching Jewish life. Terry has worked in Jewish education for 35+ years, mostly at Behrman House Publishers, where she was Director of Educational Services. Visit https://jewishgrandparentsnetwork.org/ to learn more about the Jewish Grandparents Network. terry@jewishgrandparentsnetwork.org

- Parents may want and expect that you will include them in the program.
- It can be enriching for the child to have their closest people around them sharing in a Jewish experience.

3. Grandparents and adult children

- Ideal to discuss family dynamics (what adult children want and don't want from grandparents, multifaith dynamics), legacy and transmitting family stories, preparing for the grandchild's *B-Mitzvah* together.

4. Just grandparents

- Ideal to support grandparents who want to learn from one another, especially about family dynamics and personal matters (retirement, grandchildren who live at a distance, grandchildren with special needs, multifaith families).
- Grandchildren might be occupied in a separate group, then the groups reconvene for shared learning.
- Could be part of or evolve into a Grandparents' Group.
- Might encourage grandparent participation in the synagogue or organization, including donations.

What grandparent realities do you need to consider in addition to your regular decisions about program logistics?
This is a matter of great sensitivity in any family program and is the reason some organizations actively shy away from grandparent programs. Below, we propose solutions to each reality.

- **Grandparents may live far away.**
  Possible solutions: Offer a full opportunity for grandparents to participate virtually, e.g., on FaceTime, Zoom, or live streaming. Make sure to include grandparents at a distance throughout the program. Send out advance preparation, for example, questions for the grandchild and grandparent to ask one another or something they create together in advance of the program.
- **Families may not have grandparents or may not be in touch with them.**
  Possible solutions: Open the invitation to aunts and uncles, or other cherished family members or even neighbors. Invite elders from partner organizations to play a (surrogate) grandparental role. Consider making it an intergenerational community event rather than an intergenerational family event.
- **Grandparents may have physical challenges.**
  Possible solutions: See the first item above for ways to include grandparents who are physically unable to attend. Find out from families in advance who will attend, then accommodate grandparents who are in a wheelchair, use a walker, or are physically challenged in other ways.

What is an example of an intergenerational family program?
We invite you to take a look at all JGN's Program Guides.

In particular, see Stories from Our Closets, an intergenerational program in which families with children ages 10-13 explore the value of telling family stories inspired by a personally meaningful and treasured object found in their own closets — that they bring along to the program.

There is a progression to any program. The following are steps to consider as you plan a family heirlooms program.

- What kinds of objects might you encourage people to bring? (*candlesticks; cherished old toys; scarf from great-grandma; an old doorknob to represent "may your door always be open"; a chicken soup recipe*)
- How will you model sharing these stories? (*Bring along your own object and tell a very short story about it; ask for a volunteer to model.*)
- What will a) grandparents b) parents c) children do that makes the experience meaningful for them? (*For example, grandchildren might record their grandparent telling the story of the object.*)
- How will you engage family members at a distance? (*Families use FaceTime; families engage grandparents or cherished elders in advance; for example, the elder shares an object on Zoom in advance, tells the story, and the grandchild reports back/shares photos or video at the event.*)
- What other resources, tools, or texts might you weave in? (*Research on telling family stories; quotes or short pieces of* Torah *text*)
- What other modalities or senses will you employ? (*Ways to tell the stories through movement, art, smell, such as bringing in a* challah *or old piece of clothing*)
- What else will you consider to help bring the event to life?

Can you share other examples of intergenerational synagogue programs?
With thanks to Ronni Ticker, Director of Family Engagement, Jewish Federation of Palm Beach County

- "Cooking with *Bubbie/Zaydie*": Other intergenerational cooking (elders come in to teach recipes to religious school students).
- Grandparent *Shabbat* in conjunction with Consecration. Cantor/clergy presents a grandparent blessing, related to priestly blessing.
- Intergenerational programs with teens and local senior community.
- Confirmation: 10th graders interview seniors in the community, then present the elders' stories. And vice versa: seniors interview teens.
- "*Bubbies* and Babies": If families do not have grandparents

in the community, they "adopt" grandparents. This builds connections in the community.
- *Li-Dor va-Dor* Intergenerational *Shabbat* Service held monthly, and High Holiday *Li-Dor va-Dor* services.
- Grandparents are invited to the annual family engagement learning session for each grade.
- Grandparents are invited to all-school presentations, such as the *Shabbat* Museum, Living History Museum, *Torah* Festival, and sessions when students share what they learn in their *chugim* (electives).
- Intergenerational Passover program including sessions for each grade on aspects of the *Haggadah*.
- Senior-child choral group.
- When people register for events, ask who they would like to add to synagogue or organizational mailings. (It's almost always grandparents.) Grandparents love to see what the students are doing in the classroom. Send separate emails to grandparents sharing classroom events, i.e., not addressed to parents.
- Good Deeds Day; *Tzedakah* Fair; *Mitzvah* Mall; day of service; taking then, giving the goods to first responders on Christmas Day.
- Public Space Judaism (off-the-grid programs): library readings; Hanukkah lighting in a candy shop; PJ Library programs; *Hanukkah* celebration at commuter train station; Summer Sweets series (ice cream stores); summer film series; come blow bubbles in the park.

We'd love to learn about your grandparent programs. Would you share them with us? Write to Terry Kaye, terry@jewishgrandparentsnetwork.org**.**

ENDNOTES:

1. Wertheimer, Jack. "American Jewry's Great Untapped Resource: Grandparents" in Mosaic, January 28. 2016. https://mosaicmagazine.com/observation/religion-holidays/2016/01/american-jewrys-great-untapped-resource-grandparents/
2. Herring, Hayim. "A 'Big Jewish Idea' is hiding in the *Pesach seder* " on the *Times of Israel* blog, April 20, 2022. https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/a-big-jewish-idea-is-hiding-in-the-pesach-seder/

Jewish Grandparents Network

GRANDPARENTING QUIZ (TRUE OR FALSE)

Many of the following items are based on the Jewish Grandparents Network's National Study of Grandparents (2019).

1. The total number of grandparents in the US exceeds 70 million.
2. Grandparents spend over $60 billion every year on their grandkids. A little over half of that supports grandchild education. (AARP)
3. Studies have found that a strong grandparent-grandchild relationship has a positive impact on the mental health of both.
4. The most popular secular activity for grandparents and grandchildren is going on trips together.
5. The Jewish holiday most celebrated by grandparents and grandchildren together is Passover.
6. In a survey of 160 parents (adult children), the vast majority said they value their parents' (the grandparents') opinions about how to raise the grandchildren.
7. In the same survey of 160 parents (adult children), the overwhelming expressed need was for the grandparents to spend time with their grandchildren.
8. Almost three-quarters of Jewish grandparents say it is important to them to transmit Jewish values to their grandchild.
9. Almost three-quarters of Jewish grandparents say it is important to them that their grandchild marries a Jewish partner.
10. Twenty percent of grandparents have challenges with family relationships and may not see their grandchildren as much as they want.

Answers:
1. True
2. True
3. True
4. False (celebrating family birthdays)
5. False (Hanukkah, 54% vs 43%)
6. False (most said they want the grandparents to trust them, "we got this")
7. True
8. True
9. False (38%)
10. True

Parents Still Believe in Part-time Jewish Education. Makom Community Does Too.

by Beverly Socher-Lerner and Terri Soifer

The release of *From Census to Possibilities: Designing Pathways for Jewish Learners* was a much-needed voice in the public square of part-time Jewish education. Part-time Jewish education is an area of Jewish life that often is overlooked as extra or irreparable and a local problem. At Makom Community, we are seeing the profound effects of intentional professional development that teaches communities how to design part-time Jewish education to honor each unique child and family.

In founding Makom Community, I had the immense privilege of hearing stories from some 150 people about when they had connected or failed to connect with the Jewish community throughout their lives. In having those conversations, I learned two significant things about this generation of parents:

1. Parents are overwhelmingly disconnected from institutional Jewish life and have real bumps and bruises around how that happened. They are not willing to have their children contend with a Jewish education experience that will be a negative one for them. They are willing to choose no Jewish education over a negative one.
2. Parents are working and need childcare between the end of the school day and the end of the work day. And they are zealously protective of their weekend family time; they do not want to sacrifice that time for Jewish ducation.

As a family-centered community that sees Jewish text as the heart of Jewish education, we are particularly grounded in the idea of *kibud av v'em* (honoring parents). Practically, that means that we create experiences where all parents are held up as interpreters of Jewish wisdom, regardless of the way they came to be a part of the Jewish community. Yes, I am saying that ALL our parents, whether they are Jewish or not, are a part of our Jewish community. And that is equally true whether a parent had a Jewish education they loved or hated, or whether they didn't grow up with a Jewish education at all.

JEWISH PLACEMAKING

Makom Community was designed with these parent-centered ideas in mind, looking at the parents in our community as whole people, and asking, "What can we add to these families' lives?" From our inception, Makom Community has been intentional about how we build community. Our unique pedagogy, Jewish placemaking, invites children and their families to engage with and challenge Jewish text while building the community we need. As a pedagogy, it shapes our HOW we teach and learn and constantly connects us to our WHY, including shaping our curriculum content.

Jewish placemaking invites us to experiment with how we apply Jewish wisdom in connecting to our past and in growing into the humans we want to be in our world.

For example, children studying the narrative of Yaakov and Eisav discussed that if the brothers had a place where they could go to calm down and then problem-solve, things might have gone differently. And then they realized they needed that for their classroom, too. They wanted to have a place where they could re-regulate or meet with a friend to

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handle a conflict. Since this is their space, they raised that need for their class in Texploration, Makom's time for daily text study and then collaborated with their parents and teachers to make it happen.

By taking this approach to a child's Jewish education, we are adding value to a family's life. We are recognizing the journey these children and parents are on — beauty, challenges, and all. While we journey together, we get to affirm the diverse people and families in our community. We are on a shared adventure to prioritize empathy and connection in a durable way and bring Jewish learning to our lives.

MAKOM MAKING

In order to make this kind of connection possible and increase our reach, Makom Community is researching and testing techniques to bring Jewish placemaking to a variety of spaces where Jewish education happens. So far, we have created tools to support educators in crafting multimodal learning experiences, building intentional relationships with children and parents, reading behavior as communication and an indicator of engagement, and learning and teaching Jewish text for empathy and agency. Because Jewish placemaking is a pedagogy, a way to teach and learn, it easily can be brought to other communities and curricula to deepen learning and reflect their unique mission/vision/values, too. Supporting educational leadership and classroom teachers through professional development strengthens all our communities and the field of Jewish education as a whole.

Teachers deserve to be seen for how important their role is. Honoring this profession means funding the same type of professional development opportunities for them as for our senior leaders. By supporting teachers, we bring families into community in a long-term way that honors their journeys and is designed for their needs. We are so grateful that The Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia and other local foundations have been supportive of this vision for deepening Jewish learning and communal connection with the tools of Jewish placemaking. Educators who have learned with us emerge with a greater connection to the field of Jewish education. Synagogues have seen increased teacher retention and increased student attendance, enrollment, and engagement. One congregation we worked with grew their enrollment by 50%. Another congregation went from 50% attendance to 95% attendance, with consistent learner engagement.

We see the hard work, dedication, and passion it takes to be a Jewish educator. And we see a significant role for our professional development in growing that dedication and passion with an array of new strategies. This year, we have impacted more than 1,000 children and their families with Makom Community's professional development work, called Makom Making. We have a true solution that empowers and enhances our local communities to do this holy work well and deeply across the country. If you're ready to bring your community into deeper engagement with Jewish wisdom through Jewish placemaking pedagogy, consider connecting with us about individualized ways Makom Making can support your community building and strengthen Jewish education in your home community. We create customized plans for professional development and offer coaching to support each community in applying Jewish placemaking to their unique values and vision.

At Your Fingertips: Making Teaching Easier with the Jewish Educator Portal

by Ella Metuki

What does "resource" mean to you? This was the question I asked workshop participants at NewCAJE14: day school and part-time educators, education directors, and clergy. The answers varied: money, a person, a lesson plan, a curriculum, a worksheet, an article, a website, sometimes a Facebook reel or TikTok video.

We agreed that a resource is anything that helps us learn, evolve, or further our teaching goals. For all, a resource is something that helps us be better educators, something that makes our job easier, an activity or lesson we can implement with our learners, share with staff, or offer to our parent community.

With so many materials out there, it can be daunting to find the resources you need quickly and easily. In the earliest days of the COVID pandemic, educators were scrambling to figure out not only how to teach, but also what to teach. I was also a part-time educator at that time. I needed easy access to quality resources, online professional development, and, most importantly, a community struggling with the same questions.

In response, The Jewish Educator Portal was born. An initiative from The Jewish Education Project in Manhattan, it is a virtual gathering place where educators around the globe can connect with one another, find and share resources, network around best practices, and discover opportunities for professional growth. Now entering its fourth year, the Portal averages 8000 global visitors a month. Visitors represent Jewish educators from across the denominational and professional spectrum: synagogue and day school teachers, principals and education directors, teen professionals, camp professionals, independent educators, early childhood educators, and professionals from Jewish Federations and other Jewish education organizations.

Visitors come to the Portal for three main things:

1. **Professional Development** from The Jewish Education Project, including webinars, in-person events, and on-demand eCourses. Hundreds of professionals participate in these professional development opportunities each year.
2. **Over 40 Educator Networks**, supporting the work of over 400 professionals. Networks may be focused on a particular topic, serve educators nationally or in a specific geographic region, or support educators in a shared professional role.
3. **Over 1800 free resources**, many provided through a collaboration with over thirty Resource Partners. Others come from organizations world-wide as well as individual educators.

Resources on the Portal include lesson plans, curricula, podcasts, videos, articles, source sheets, and more, all provided free of charge without registration.

When I got to this point in the session at NewCAJE, I heard a question I hear a lot: *"Can't I just find all of these resources on Google?"*

While most resources are also available elsewhere, the Portal is the only place to find them

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all alongside each other. The Portal also offers several unique features, adding to its value:

1. **Vetted by educators:** All materials on the Portal are vetted by The Jewish Education Project's digital team – Jewish educators with experience in multiple settings, who can ensure that resources are both valuable and representative of the diversity of the Jewish community.
2. **An intuitive filtering system:** Visitors can filter based on grade, topic, professional setting, resource type or organization. The filtering system allows you not only to search, but also to zero in on the resources most relevant to you.

> **Resources on the Portal include lesson plans, curricula, podcasts, videos, articles, source sheets, and more, all provided free of charge without registration ..... (T)he Portal will continue to develop its curated resource collections while also expanding its features that encourage connection and collaboration between educators.**

3. **A recommendation index:** The Portal's recommendation index will suggest additional resources based on your search, helping you to discover additional materials that fit your needs.
4. **Curated resource collections:** In addition to the robust search engine, resources on the Portal are arranged into curated collections based on topics such as holidays, Jewish ritual or relevant current events. Collections provide multiple vantage points from which to explore each topic.

HOW CAN YOU MAKE THE MOST OUT OF THE PORTAL?

First, register for a free user account and fill out a **complete profile**. Adding information to your profile such as your work setting, role, and interests lets other educators know a little bit about you and connect with you through a secure email system. Plus, you will receive personalized resource recommendations sent directly to your inbox based on your profile.

Then start searching and filtering. Whether you're a newer teacher looking for an entire lesson or you have a tried-and-true curriculum that you want to shake up a bit, searching and filtering allows you to quickly get relevant results. Each of the participants in the NewCAJE session was able to find at least one useful resource in a quick, five-minute search of the Portal.

Once you have found the resource or resources that are right for you, the Portal lets you save them in a **personal library** and arrange them in your own collections. Imagine going to the Portal before each holiday to find the collection you created for yourself the previous year. You also can create a collection of your favorite resources to easily share with others.

The Portal also enables you to be part of a community of educators elevating the field together. Any registered user can **share their own resources** on the Portal, whether it's a lesson plan they created, a handout, a video, or even an idea for an activity they tried and reflections on how it went. Sharing your resources allows you to connect with other like-minded educators and contributes to a growing body of resources that represent what educators like you are working on, struggling with, and thinking about.

What struck me in the NewCAJE session, and continuously strikes me when I speak to educators about the Portal, is that while the challenges we experienced during those early days of the Portal have changed, the Portal's value has not diminished. Educators are still asking questions, looking for ways to engage learners, and struggling with new challenges in a post-pandemic world.

The Portal continues to evolve to meet these needs. In the year ahead, the Portal will continue to develop its curated resource collections while also expanding its features that encourage connection and collaboration among educators. We will continue to work to make it easier to find the resources and professional development you need so you can focus on your learners.

To do this, we need you, educators in any capacity, to join us on this journey. Reach out to us, let us know what you're struggling with and what you need. Help us make The Jewish Educator Portal the best resource for you.

To find the Portal, search for "The Jewish Educator Portal" or click here.

Saying Yes, And: Why You Should Welcome Improvisational Theater into your Classroom

by Ella Metuki

It's the beginning of the year. A group of students who may or may not have met before is gathered in a room with you, their teacher. You play a name game. Maybe a getting-to-know-you game. The following week, you play another. You might play a few warm-up games every now and again at the start of class. Then, you get down to the "real" learning.

Sound familiar?

What if theater games and improv games could be part of your classroom all the time? What if you could reap the benefits for you and your learners throughout the year?

This year at NewCAJE, I had the pleasure of sharing space with 13 educators from across the country as we explored the powerful tool of improv in the classroom.

WHY IMPROV?

Over the last decades, a growing body of research has demonstrated that improvisational theater has benefits far beyond just fun or playfulness. Engaging in improv can improve creativity, writing, social anxiety, and uncertainty tolerance.[1] To bring all these to your learners, you don't have to be an SNL-level performer or spend your entire time improvising -- you can simply introduce improv and theater games as one of your teaching modalities.

Improv works so well in the classroom because it has some universal rules that translate seamlessly to the work of learning and engaging with others.

Yes, and: This is the cardinal rule of improv, which states that when an actor establishes an idea, their partners must say yes, accepting the established reality, and add on to it so the scene can continue to evolve. For example, if an actor knocks on a door and says "Well, Ms. Smith, I have your test results and it's not looking good," the other actor must assume the role of Ms. Smith, a patient receiving grim results, and then add on, "Oh, my goodness, Doctor. Is it the mosquito bite or the tiger bite?" This connects to another principle -- no mistakes. Anything that is said or done on stage can and should be incorporated into the world of the scene, no matter how far-fetched or surprising.

In the classroom, yes, and it can serve us, as well as our learners. Cultivating this mindset can help us to be more flexible and expansive in our thinking, which can help with group work, creative projects, deep text-study, and even social connections. Learning not to negate each other's ideas, but rather elevate them and look for a way to integrate them into our own thinking can help create a thriving learning community.

Share the air: When only one actor is speaking, a scene falls flat. When only one learner is speaking, a discussion falls flat. Through exploration of this rule, more extroverted learners can experience what it feels like to let others speak, make decisions, and shine, and learners who are more hesitant can get a chance to express themselves. Improv games create a safe practice environment for this without shaming or pushing learners.

Actively Listen: On stage, this means more than "be quiet when others are speaking." Since actors are constantly offering up new ideas and adding new information, an actor who is not actively listening to scene partners will not pick up their cues, and the scene will fail. Learning

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to truly listen, intently and deeply, is not only a classroom skill, but also a critical life skill for our learners. As teachers too, so often we anticipate how our learners might respond to a question or a prompt. Learning to listen as if we have no idea what is going to come out of the other person's mouth can help us find novelty in our classroom discussions, even when we are teaching a subject we know by heart.

You and your students are probably not putting on an improv show. But when we practice these rules through theater games and improv exercises woven into our class, the real magic happens: a better class community, creative thinking, improved language skills, social-emotional learning, and, yes, fun. A whole lot of fun.

In the Jewish classroom, improv can be a uniquely useful tool. Whether we are teaching Hebrew, stories, prayer or practice, our mission is, in large part, connection. We want our learners to feel that what they are learning connects to who they are as individuals and as a community. Improv is a great way of making learning personal, alive, and tangible.

At NewCAJE this year, I had the privilege of watching the magic happen live in our session. I introduced the subject, and we experienced a few simple improv games. I had planned to offer the group some ideas about using the games we played for specific content areas, but before I could, ideas were flowing in the room. "I could use this to teach *Simanim* (symbols, but in this case symbolic foods eaten on *Rosh Hashanah)*"; "I could use this to introduce *nikkud* (vowel marks) in Hebrew"; "I could explore the weekly *parasha* (a section of the *Torah* assigned for weekly reading in the synagogue) through this game!" The improvisational mindset had set in, and creative thinking quickly followed.

> **Learning to listen as if we have no idea what is going to come out of the other person's mouth can help us find novelty in our classroom discussions, even when we are teaching a subject we know by heart.**

SO WHERE DO WE START?

Like any tool you bring into your class, implementation might take some trial and error. Here are some basic principles to guide you:

1. **Start Small:** Name games, warm-up exercises. As you and your class get comfortable with some of these games, you can go deeper -- whether in exploring our shared stories, or in exploring values and how they are expressed in your classroom and larger community.
2. **Find the why:** As with any learning activity, know your goals. All activities listed in this article contain a possible purpose and use, but make sure you know why you chose a particular game for a particular class.
3. **Practice makes better:** This holds as true for the learners as it does for teachers. There may be a learning curve in introducing and facilitating these activities. As you get comfortable with this tool, I suggest trying out your instructions to learners on a peer/ friend/ co-teacher. Often, when we explain a game out loud for the first time, we find that some instructions are not quite clear and we can improve them before presenting them to the class.

4. Resistance is part of the journey: Although younger studnts often are much more inclined to this type of dramatic play than adults, getting silly and vulnerable can feel tricky for some learners. Allow space for learners to observe, make suggestions, and participate to the extent they are able while they build comfort.

GAMES AND EXERCISES

Below are some suggested activities that can be adapted for grades K-8, along with some big ideas to help you develop your own games. The activities are broken down by larger purpose, but many can be used in more than one context. Note that many of these can also be played with adults in staff meetings or trainings or community sessions.

1. WARMING UP

Warm-up games are a chance for students to warm up to being in the space with each other, so while a specific topic (such as a holiday) can be part of the warm-up, the primary purpose should be connection. More than one game can be played.

A. My name is...

Standing in a circle, each group member introduces themselves by name, stating "my name is _____, and I like to _____ ." The activity is accompanied by a gesture. Example: My name is Ella, and I like to read (with the gesture of reading a book). All group members repeat: "That's Ella, and she likes to read" and also repeat her gesture.

The game allows us to know each other's names and begin to make connections by discovering people's interests.

B. The Big Wind Blows
Everyone sits in a circle, with one chair fewer than the number of players (like musical chairs). One person (the facilitator) stands in the middle and says, "The big wind blows for anyone who _____." Anyone to whom the statement applies, gets up and switches seats. The person left without a seat makes the next statement.

The Big Wind Blows can be played at any age, and at any group stage and level, but it requires adaptation of the statements. For a group of teenagers who don't know each other, start slowly: "The Big Wind Blows for anyone who is tired today" and work up to more personal or mood-driven statements such as "The Big Wind Blows for anyone who felt out of place this week.".This game can teach us where the group is at and how people are feeling, while also allowing people to start getting to know each other as they find common ground.

C. Check-in Machine
Players stand in a line. The first player begins with a motion and sound that connect to how they're feeling in the moment. The next person adds theirs, and so on. Once everyone is moving, the facilitator invites players to listen to each other and see how they can make their machine work more harmoniously-. Can you match someone else's tempo? Sound? Cadence? Moves?

This game allows us to check in with our students and allows them to check in with themselves. At the same time, it allows students to find a common energy and rhythm, opening the door for focus and collaboration.

2. FOCUSING UP
Focus games are used to bring the group in and prepare for learning. These are often an extension of the warm-up section, and most games in this category can be used as warm-ups for a more experienced group.

A. And Then
All members sit in a circle and tell a story together. The first person begins with "Once upon a time" and sets up the story. The next person says "and then" (or, to infuse Hebrew, "*Ve-az*"), and continues the story with another sentence, and so on.

This can be made easier or harder depending on age. Younger kids may need more facilitation for stories to flow. This is a great way to learn about story structure, bring up new themes in class or incorporate Hebrew vocabulary.

B. Zip, Zap, Zop
Sitting in a circle, players send energy to one another by clapping in the direction of someone in the circle and saying "zip," then "zap," then "zop," and back again. If a player gets the order wrong, the game starts over.

This requires a high level of concentration, noticing where the "zip" is and paying attention to what was said last. For more advanced students, start a second cycle mid-way through the game or increase the speed. When participants are familiar with the basic game, this can be a good place to introduce Jewish vocabulary or practice verb conjugations. Some suggestions from NewCAJE participants include the order of prayers, *Seder Simanim*, or books of the *Torah*.

C. What Are You Doing?
Players stand in a line. One player begins miming an activity, and the next in line asks, "What are you doing?" While still performing the activity, the first player must name another activity for the next player in line to perform. Example: (while pretending to brush teeth) "What are you doing?" "I'm picking strawberries!" Next player picks strawberries. (For younger learners, have activities ready, charades-style).

This game invites players to focus on their own actions while listening attentively to their friends. It creates a focus challenge while adding silliness and levity.

D. Pass the Energy
In a circle, one person makes a gesture and a sound toward the person next to them, which is repeated and augmented by each person in turn, until it is morphed into something else. The energy must be kept high. This is especially good for transitioning lower-energy groups into independent work in small groups.

3. PALATE CLEANERS
Palate cleaners are good games to play in transitions or in cases of tension in the group or intense discussion.

A. Imaginair
Players walk around the room, the facilitator changes the environment, and everyone reacts physically. Example: We are walking around, and, all of a sudden, it's freezing cold! It's snowing! We can't see! After a few moments, we return to "normal" walking around, and change to a new environment.

It is best for the facilitator to participate and model this behavior. For more advanced players, the "environment" can be swapped for a scenario. Example: We are walking around, and all of a sudden, we see someone we really don't like.

B. Number walking
1 is the slowest walking pace. 5 (or 7 or 10) is the fastest. The facilitator shouts out numbers and everyone must walk accordingly. This can also be done in Hebrew.

This game helps get bodies moving, but also helps the group find a shared rhythm.

D. DRIVING CREATIVITY AND COLLABORTION
These games generally take longer and encourage creative thinking, storytelling, and collaboration.

A. Freeze
Two players begin a scene and establish a "who," a "what," and a "where" (or we assign a "who-what-where" for our younger learners). Any player in the audience can yell "freeze," assume the exact physical position of one of the actors, and begin a new scene based on it.

We can use this to jump start creative thinking or to act out Biblical stories, and also to work out classroom behaviors/ issues.

B. Translator
Three players sit in chairs. One speaks only gibberish, one only English, and one is a translator. The three must communicate through the translator, who must understand the gibberish using gestures and body language.

This game can be used when we have trouble understanding each other or around exploration in Hebrew.

C. The Herald
The facilitator (or a volunteer) tells a story, while all other participants are on the "stage." Participants are welcome at any time to begin acting out pieces of the story as they see fit. This can be a great way to explore text-study, Bible stories or Jewish practice.

This is a more advanced game, as it requires high levels of collaboration and listening. It is recommended to try this with a group that has played some theater games together already.

Endnotes:
1. Clay Drinko, Ph.D, "7 Research-Backed Benefits of Improv Comedy" in Psychology Today, March 7, 2023. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/play-your-way-sane/202303/7-research-backed-benefits-of-improv-comedy

Jews in (Educational) Space

by Matthew S. Nover

When thinking about teaching Jewish law, the image that might come to mind is a classroom of yeshiva students or rabbinical students or advanced students at a Jewish day school. Yet, *halakhah* (Jewish law) is such an integral part of Judaism, its study should be open to all Jews, regardless of previous knowledge. When its study is limited to only those who have chosen to pursue advanced Jewish education, it lessens all of the Jewish people. Just as *halakhah* deals not only with the ritual and the ethical, but also the mundane and regular, its study is the heritage of all Jews and can address the needs of the secular, religious, traditionally observant, and spiritual. *Halakhah* intertwines Jews, rituals, ethics, and peoplehood in ways that give Jews opportunities to be more aware and intentional. While the study of classical sources may be spiritually meaningful, the topics themselves as discussed in classical codes and responsa literature can be quite tedious. How interesting can the definition of time be? Who cares that an hour is the twelfth part of daytime or nighttime?

MAKING IT RELEVANT

The challenge for contemporary Jewish educators, especially in supplementary school (also known as Hebrew School or Religious School) contexts, becomes how to help students care about these extremely detailed conversations. Brooks and Brooks[1] explains that Constructivist education demands that teachers provide students with a way to find relevance in the text. For students in supplementary programs, some of whom are not traditionally observant, pages upon pages of purely hypothetical detail can act as a barrier to interest and engagement. Common cases, which are relevant and practical, are often too detail oriented in Talmud and the codes to be engaging. How, then, can educators engage students? Perhaps, by looking back at the educational model of the Babylonian *Talmud*.

Kirsch[2] explains

> In American law, one sometimes hears the maxim "hard cases make bad law": The more unusual and complex the case, the less suitable it is to serve as a precedent. The rabbis believe just the opposite: The law is never more fascinating to them than when it is difficult.

The Talmudic approach to case law has profound educational implications. In the United States, bills and laws are not written while thinking of extreme cases, unless reacting to an extreme that just happened. Rather, laws are written based on the simple and common case, and perhaps the simple and common exceptions. To use a Talmudic turn of phrase, It might have "arisen in your mind" to say that the same process would hold true in Jewish law. And while it does in later codes and responsa, it does not hold true for the Babylonian Talmud.

The Babylonian Talmud abounds in complexities and nuance, forcing the reader to explore thought experiments that turn out to be fruitless. Studying Talmud can be an exercise in frustration, if one assumes the point of the Babylonian Talmud is to make laws based on common circumstances. But, as noted earlier, this does not seem to be the function of Talmud. Rather, its goal is to explore all the possible nuances, look at the different opinions, and explore the possible implications of the law when reality is stretched to its limit. Above all, the Talmud feels comfortable with uncertainty and often refuses to give conclusions.

What if that were the approach taken to halakhah in education, especially in supplementary

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school contexts? For example, the spontaneous generation of meat from nothing may seem absurd on its face. Yet that exact example is given in the Talmud (*BT Sanhedrin* 65b):

רב חנינא ורב אושעיא הוו יתבי כל מעלי שבתא ועסקי בספר יצירה ומיברו להו עיגלא תילתא ואכלי ליה

Rav Hanina and Rav Ushaya would sit all of *Erev Shabbat,* occupied with a Book of Creation, and create for themselves a third-grown calf, and they would eat it.

Perhaps this tale is simply an exaggeration or legend. But the fact that it is preserved in the Talmud provides educators an interesting opportunity to explore. For example, is meat that is generated from nothing, kosher? In pop culture, a classic example of meat from nothing is the Star Trek technology called the replicator, a device that creates materials, including food, from energy. Building a connection between classical sources and futuristic thinking is a natural outcome of the Talmudic pedagogic approach. But even further, this discussion can then be applied to actual food science. Nevins[3] explores the *kashrut* of lab grown, or cultured, meat. This meat seems to be generated from almost nothing, just a single cell. He cites Rav Hanina and Rab Ushaya's creation of meat from nothing to explore whether this kind of meat is kosher, and whether it could be considered meat or something else.

> **If the rabbis did not stick to common, everyday situations when discussing Jewish law, why should Jewish educators?**

EXPLORING WHEN TIME IS TAKEN TO THE EXTREME

If the rabbis did not stick to common, everyday situations when discussing Jewish law, why should Jewish educators? Thus was born the idea of "Jews in Space." The entire point of this unit is to explore what happens when time is taken to extremes. Exploring the definition of "time" stays mundane. But when exploring time in space and space travel, new applications of *halakhah* are required. In particular, this topic can be divided into four units. Each one has its own essential questions:

1. Jews in Orbital Space - How is time of day determined? In this case, when location is changing.
   A. Golinkin[4] explores this topic in great detail. His source is derived from the *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 468:4, which deals with a person who travels from an area he knows to a different area, and that area has a different understanding or application of Jewish law. Even so, the person may continue to act within their original understanding and custom. In the case of traveling in orbit, since there is no fixed sunrise or sunset, one may rely on the custom of the place, either the last port of call, or perhaps the time and day of the week as set on their spacecraft/space station.[5]

2. Jews in Interplanetary Space - How is daytime determined? In this case, when it is impossible to determine day and night.
   A. Building on Rabbi Golinkin's *teshuvah*, this becomes a case in which a person can no longer rely on knowing the exact day and time. In this scenario, the best solution may be to rely on the model of one who is lost in the desert. One simply counts the week from the last day they knew (the day of departure) and counts until they know it should be *Shabbat*. They then continue in that pattern. See *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 344.

3. Jews at Relativistic Speeds - How is a day determined? In this case, when the measurement of a day is no longer universal.
   A. This case seems to be an even more extreme version of the previous case. In general scientific terms, the faster one travels, the slower they experience time. This does not matter for most mundane situations, but in space travel, when one approaches light speed, or a significant fraction of it, the calendar is no longer in sync with the rest of the universe The equation for time dilation is t'=t1-v2c2. This means that for a person traveling at high speed (v), they experience less time than a person standing still. It's meaningless to maintain a clock in sync with the rest of the universe. So the same case applies, and the calendar should be the one the people on the ship experience, rather than that of the outside universe.

4. Jews on Other Planets - How is a calendar determined? In this case, days, years, and hours are not universal.
   A. A year is commonly defined not as a specific number of days, but as the time it takes for a planet to orbit its star. A day is commonly defined not as a specific number of hours, but as the time it takes for a planet to complete one rotation on its axis. These are not universal lengths, but rather a convenient way to order time. Therefore, a Jewish calendar year may not be in sync with the year of whatever planet Jews travel to. How then, should the calendar be defined? *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 117:2 is relevant here. The question raised is whether to say the prayer for rain at the time appropriate for the Land of Israel, or the time appropriate for an individual's locale. The text argues that it is all based around the Land of Israel.

B. Similarly, when deciding the day of the holidays, Maimonides, in his code the *Mishneh Torah (Hilchot Kiddush HaChodesh* 5:4), explains that, in ancient times, there was doubt about when to celebrate the holidays due to distance from the Land of Israel. Therefore, holidays were celebrated for two days.
C. The presence of these two texts shows that there is already a solution. Each planet should maintain the original Jewish calendar, which should be calculated just as it is today. Each planetary community should celebrate two days, as there is always a doubt, and it seems that a day should be a local planetary day, unless such a measurement is not meaningful (a day that lasts hundreds of hours).

Each of these is certainly a question grappled with in the Talmud and in *halakhah*, but the content is now potentially more engaging for students. It no longer appears to deal with what seems to be mundane issues, but rather with concepts they understand from science fiction novels. Yet, the students still study the same topics, thought processes, and sources, proof that the *halakhi*c system is still relevant today.

Even further, there is not a single tried and true right answer. These questions have not been fully explored, and there is no place where one can go to simply cite, "here is the answer." Rather, these exercises require the full use of the process of *halakhah*, and require students to use reason and logic to construct arguments to prove their answers. It forces the student to do *p'sak* (make a Jewish legal decision.) *Halakhah*, through this methodology, is no longer a set of books, but rather rules, precedents, and logic that can be applied to any situation.

There is another subtext to a *halakhah* class. The image many people may have of a *Talmud* or *halakhah* class is a group of older, male rabbis, talking about sources written by males. The challenge for the modern educator is "Does it pass the Kranjec test as explained in Hoffman et al.[6]?" For those not familiar with the reference, here is the quote: "The Kranjec Test posits that a sourcesheet with more than two sources must include at least one non-male-identified voice." It's easy for educators to use only traditional sources. If there is a desire to have more non-male scholars of *halakhah*, then there must be a push to lift those voices, to show they are there if only scholars make the effort to look for them. By bringing a broader range of voices to the table, more participants can be represented in these discussions and these texts.

This model of education can be effective in many different contexts. It simply remains to be seen how the reader and educator will apply this model to their classroom. Perhaps they might begin with challenging themselves to answer something that, on its face, seems to be an outlandish hypothetical question, such as "Are aliens kosher?" The answer is for the reader to decide.

Endnotes:

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STORYING MULTIGENERATIONAL PROGRAMMING

by Cherie Karo Schwartz and Batya Podos

Every synagogue and religious school, as well as many day schools, offers intergenerational programming sessions. Jewish educators are constantly seeking new ways to bring together generations in community, with fresh ideas and programs. Storytelling and story skills will enhance any and every program. See what happens when your community experiences the profound enhancement that using story and storytelling can have on your family programming events and sessions.

Cherie Karo Schwartz and Batya Podos individually have created and presented a multitude of multigenerational programs across the U.S. and abroad for decades. They present story-filled experiences for synagogues, religious schools, JCCs and camps. Infusing storytelling into the programs provides enriched and enhanced education and entertainment.

Batya and Cherie offer a plethora of ideas and foundational techniques and tools, story resources, and inspiration, drawing from their long careers in Jewish education. Adding Jewish story and storytelling to your intergenerational programs brings meaningful engagement where everyone will learn from and teach each other. Every theme, subject, holiday, and occasion can be 'storied'' to great success.

Following are many of their workshop ideas, which can be used in your classrooms and other venues for teaching purposes. May these be a springboard for your own further creative work.

Cherie Karo Schwartz is a Jewish storyteller, author and educator for over 5 decades, and has attended 41 CAJE/NewCAJE conferences. She shares spirit-filled tales of wishes, wit, and wisdom for audiences around the country and abroad, including tales from sacred, Rabbinic, Hassidic, personal, original, and especially worldwide Jewish folktales. Cherie created *Omanim b'Yachad*, was on the faculty for the Jewish Spiritual Education *Maggid* training program, and created and directed the RISE (Renewing Initiative for Storytelling in Education) certification program. She is the author of *My Lucky Dreidel* and *Circle Spinning* and is co-author (with Barbara Rush) of *The Kids' Catalog of Passover*.
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STORYING MULTIGENERATIONAL PROGRAMMING

Workshop by Cherie Karo Schwartz ©2023

Multigenerational programming can be some of the most rewarding and exciting parts of your congregational life. Storying the programs offers enjoyment for everyone, deepening connections to each other and the community and stepping outside of usual roles. And all of it directly enhances the participants' love of Judaism, the ultimate goal! Each generation learns from the others in a relaxed state of being in the magic of interweaving Jewish stories.

Here are a few brief explanations of some intergenerational story programs that can enhance your offerings in your communities.

For each "exercise," create small groups (by family, or have them find a group with random people from different generations).

FIVE PART STORIES

- Ask for people to call out answers to several prompts:
    - a Jewish object
    - a Jewish holiday
    - a Jewish food
    - a Jewish name of someone
    - a place in the world
- Then, have each group come up with a story using all five things in new and different ways.
- Each group presents its story. If some group forgets one of the five, then someone in the

"audience" can help out with an idea to weave into the story.

RUBE GOLDBERG INVENTIONS

- Talk with group about how the Jews have been great inventors, thinkers, and problem solvers.
- Talk about Rube Goldberg toys (i.e., Mousetrap[1]).
- Each group comes up with a great new Jewish invention (*challah* maker, *matzah* maker, etc.) or something that will really help the world.
- Each group works together to figure out a worthy project, using body parts and noises to show the invention.
- Each group shares its invention and why it is so important for the Jewish People.

FAMILY TREASURES

• Each family grouping, small or large, brings something from their home that they would consider a family treasure.
• This can be something very old, brand new, given from others, homemade, Pre-K clay candlesticks, first thing bought as a newly Jewish person, passed down….
-• The eldest can tell the others the story, and then they figure out a way to tell the whole group (narrator and mimes), consecutively, acted out in improv, personal point of view, as the object itself….

***MISCHPACHA* MUSEUM**

- Using the idea of the Family Treasures project, families choose one Jewish object that has a wonderful story to share in the Museum.
- Have the Museum set up (on many levels, with boxes underneath tablecloths, etc.) by theme, by holiday or by usage.
- The elders and youngsters, all generations, can work together to create a standing page of the story of the object.
- One of the younger generation, the eldest person, or someone of any generation can share the story while standing at the table by the object. The narrator can share the story in first person, e.g., "I am a 4th generation Kiddush cup and this is my story. I was made in ____ , around this time ___. I have belonged to ____, and when the youngest becomes *Bar/Bat Mitzvah,* then that person will receive it, and, eventually, in late life, pass me on to the 5th generation."

This can easily be a religious school project, with the students sharing the stories while standing by their own family treasure. The entire congregation or whole community can view the Museum, which can be up for a day or longer.

Endnotes:

1. A Rube Goldberg machine performs simple task through unnecessarily complex operations.

MULTIGENERATIONAL PROJECTS

By BATYA PODOS

Cherie has shared so many wonderful ideas that I want to offer just one: the family/multigenerational *Shabbaton,* which is a great way bring a community together. I've facilitated these on-site and on retreats. Although the Friday night and Saturday services have a leader (that would usually be me), everyone has a part and the service is communal. The younger children might help light candles and say simple *brachot*, the elders might read *Torah*, and everyone tells the *Torah* story through interactive *Torah* play and exploration using storytelling, speaking as the characters of our ancestors, movement, and other creative dramatics techniques. This *Torah* study begins in small multigenerational groups and then moves into the group as a whole.

There is often a hands-on project associated with the themes of the *parashah*. We have built peace poles,[1] painted murals, made quilts out of a variety of materials — all of which end up being displayed in the synagogue. We have created puppet shows, made masks, written and illustrated books, and also created social action projects.

Havdalah takes on a special meaning, because it indicates that we are coming to an end of our time together. If we are on retreat, we often have a closing activity on the Sunday morning before everyone packs up and leaves involving giving and receiving blessings.

Families and extended families of all generations really are transformed through this experience, and if you can organize it and get them to come, it is well worth the effort.

Endnotes:

1. We erected a wooden pole; square for more surface to decorate. We painted it and decorated it with words of peace in many languages and handprints of participants.

Grog and Groggers: The Origin of *Purim* Customs

by David Schwartz

There are many components to celebrating *Purim*, but where do they come from? In this article, we will examine the expected and unexpected origin of 10 *Purim* customs.

MISHLOACH MANOT

Esther 9:22
22: the same days on which the Jews enjoyed relief from their foes and the same month that had been transformed for them from one of grief and mourning to one of festive joy. They were to observe them as days of feasting and merrymaking, **and as an occasion for sending gifts to one another** and presents to the poor.

אסתר ט':ב"ב
כב: כַּיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר־נָחוּ בָהֶם הַיְהוּדִים מֵאֹיְבֵיהֶם
וְהַחֹדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר נֶהְפַּךְ לָהֶם מִיָּגוֹן לְשִׂמְחָה וּמֵאֵבֶל
לְיוֹם טוֹב לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתָם יְמֵי מִשְׁתֶּה וְשִׂמְחָה
וּמִשְׁלֹחַ מָנוֹת אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ וּמַתָּנוֹת לָאֶבְיוֹנִים:

Context: This is from the Biblical Book of Esther. *After the Jews are delivered from their enemies, this is how Esther and Mordechai want the Jews to celebrate henceforth.*

Esther 9:22 is the origin of the concept of *Mishloach Manot*, sending portions (of food) to friends (in Yiddish this, is known as *shlach-manos*). *Mishloach Manot* is noted in the *Talmud* (*Megillah 7a:20*), *Mishneh Torah* (*Scroll of Esther* and *Hanukkah 2:15*), and *Shulchan Aruch* (*O.C. 695:4*). These texts recognize that the word "portions" is plural, and so they rule that there should be two types of food sent to one person, at least. It doesn't need to be two different blessings, as is commonly thought, though.

There are two explanations of the primary benefit of this *mitzvah* (commandment):
1. Providing food for the feasting
2. Enhancing interpersonal connections and unity (since Haman claimed that the Jews were scattered and dispersed - *Esther 3:8*)

> **They were to observe them as days of feasting and merrymaking, and as an occasion for sending gifts to one another and presents to the poor.**

Today, common things to put in *Mishloach Manot* are *hamantaschen* (made or bought), nut-free candy or clementines or boxes of raisins or tea bags, all of which are easily bought in bulk at local grocery stores. In communities where handing out *Mishloach Manot* is the norm, people will come to the *Megillah* reading with two large bags — one for outgoing *Mishloach Manot* and one for incoming *Mishloach Manot*.

The classical sources are clear that while the minimum is to give *Mishloach Manot* to one

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person, it is better to give to lots of people. HOWEVER, the sources also are clear that if you have extra funds, then you should not give fancier *Mishloach Manot,* but rather give more for *Matanot la-Evyonim*.

MATANOT LA-EVYONIM

Esther 9:22
22: the same days on which the Jews enjoyed relief from their foes and the same month that had been transformed for them from one of grief and mourning to one of festive joy. They were to observe them as days of feasting and merrymaking,
and as an occasion for sending gifts to one another and **presents to the poor.**

אסתר ט׳:ב״ב
כב: כַּיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר־נָֽחוּ־בָהֶם
הַיְהוּדִים מֵאֹיְבֵיהֶם וְהַחֹדֶשׁ
אֲשֶׁר נֶהְפַּךְ לָהֶם מִיָּגוֹן
לְשִׂמְחָה וּמֵאֵבֶל לְיוֹם טוֹב
לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתָם יְמֵי מִשְׁתֶּה
וְשִׂמְחָה וּמִשְׁלֹחַ מָנוֹת אִישׁ
לְרֵעֵהוּ וּמַתָּנוֹת לָאֶבְיוֹנִים:

Context: This is the same verse as before.

Matanot la-Evyonim literally means "gifts to the poor." Because both words are plural, it requires giving to at least two people. This can be done through giving food or money to two individuals who ask for help or giving enough money (or canned food) to an organization so that at least two people can have food. Because this is meant to ensure that everybody can have a festive meal on *Purim*, these organizations should be food-insecurity related, such as Mazon, Leket Israel, or a local Jewish food pantry.

While this commandment is the most overlooked, it is arguably the most important. Maimonides writes that any holiday celebration that does not also look after the needs of the poor is not a celebration of the holiday, but rather a celebration of the stomach (*Mishneh Torah*, *Rest on a Holiday, 6:18*). On *Purim*, we are not to question the true need of people asking for money nor question what they are going to do with the money.

HEARING THE *MEGILLAH*

Esther 9:28
28: Consequently, these days are recalled and observed in every generation: by every family, every province, and every city. And these days of *Purim* shall never cease among the Jews, and the memory of them shall never perish among their descendants.

אסתר ט׳:ב״ח
כח: וְהַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה נִזְכָּרִים
וְנַעֲשִׂים בְּכָל־דּוֹר וָדוֹר
מִשְׁפָּחָה וּמִשְׁפָּחָה מְדִינָה
וּמְדִינָה וְעִיר וָעִיר וִימֵי הַפּוּרִים
הָאֵלֶּה לֹא יַעַבְרוּ מִתּוֹךְ
הַיְהוּדִים וְזִכְרָם לֹא־יָסוּף
{מִזַּרְעָם:

Context: This is from the same chapter of the Book of Esther*, a few verses later.*

Megillat Esther is the Biblical book the *Scroll of Esther.* It is thought to have been written in the 4th century B.C.E. Reading *Megillat Esther* on *Purim* dates back to the *Mishnah* (*Mishnah Megillah 1:1-4, 2:1-5, 4:1, Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 3:7*).

Megillat Esther is usually referred to as "The *Megillah*," even though *Song of Songs/Shir HaShirim, Ruth/Rut, Lamentations/ Eicha,* and *Ecclesiastes/Kohelet* are also *megillot*/scrolls. *Esther* is the only scroll commonly still chanted from an actual scroll these days.

Megillat Esther is read in the evening at the start of *Purim*, after the *Amidah*, and again in the morning after the *Torah* reading. Some people also do additional readings throughout the day to make sure that everybody has a chance to hear the story.

Because [*Matanot la-Evyonim*] is meant to ensure that everybody can have a festive meal on *Purim*, these organizations should be food-insecurity related, such as Mazon, Leket Israel or a local Jewish food pantry.

Megillat Esther is handwritten in the same fashion as a *Torah*, though it is rolled up from only one direction. People used to have their own family's handwritten copy of the *Megillah*. It doesn't take as long to write (the book is only 10 chapters), so it's not as expensive as a *Torah*. These scrolls would be housed in elaborate wooden or silver cases. During the Renaissance, while the scroll for the public chanting was plain, the scrolls that people followed with were often highly illustrated. This was one of the outlets of Jewish art during this period. Since the invention of the printing press in the

1400s, the custom of family handwritten scrolls has been on the decline.

In the 2010s and beyond, many people have been accessing the *Megillah* using Sefaria on their phones, since electronics can be used on *Purim*. Therefore, if somebody is staring at their phone during the *Megillah*, they might be not paying attention, but the Jewish thing to do is give people the benefit of the doubt that they are actually following the reading (*Pirkei Avot 1:6)*.

People make noise when Haman's name is read in order to blot out his name. Often a *grogger* is used. There is a custom to read the name of Haman's 10 sons in one breath (*Chapter 9)*. *Megillat Esther* is chanted using a special, unique *trope* (though a few verses are chanted in the *Eicha trope: 1:7a, 2:6, 3:15b, 4:1, 4:3, 4:16b, 7:3b, 7:4a, 8:6*). There are a few "verses of redemption" where the congregation chants first and then the reader repeats: *2:5, 8:15, 8:16, 10:3*. If there is more than one reader, the first reader starts the reading with three blessings and the last reader concludes with one, both in the evening and in the morning.

HAVING A *PURIM SEUDAH*

Esther 9:22
22: the same days on which the Jews enjoyed relief from their foes and the same month that had been transformed for them from one of grief and mourning to one of festive joy. They were to observe them as days of feasting and merry-making, and as an occasion for sending gifts to one another and presents to the poor.

אסתר ט':ב"ב
כב: כַּיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר־נָחוּ בָהֶם
הַיְהוּדִים מֵאֹיְבֵיהֶם וְהַחֹדֶשׁ
אֲשֶׁר נֶהְפַּךְ לָהֶם מִיָּגוֹן
לְשִׂמְחָה וּמֵאֵבֶל לְיוֹם טוֹב
לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתָם יְמֵי מִשְׁתֶּה
וְשִׂמְחָה וּמִשְׁלֹחַ מָנוֹת אִישׁ
לְרֵעֵהוּ וּמַתָּנוֹת לָאֶבְיוֹנִים:

Context: This is the first verse again. Many customs come from this verse.

The *Purim* feast, known as a *seudah*, happens during the day because Mordechai/*Megillat Esther* said that the Jews should observe *Purim* as "days" of feasting and merrymaking. People often have Persian food, because the story happens in Persia, or sometimes Indian and/or Ethiopian food, because the Persian Empire was said to stretch from India to Ethiopia (or at least Kush/Nubia, which is next to Ethiopia) (*Esther 1:1*).

It is better to eat your *Purim* meals with others, because being with others increases joy (*Mishnah Berurah 695:9*)

The Meiri says that if you drink too much, then you cannot have a properly thankful attitude for the miracles God wrought for the Jews of Shushan.

Zoom is excellent for increasing the number of people one can eat with. The "*Al ha-Nissim*" paragraph is added to *Birkat ha-Mazon* after eating on *Purim* (it's also added to the *Amidah*).

DRINKING ON *PURIM*

Megillah 7b:7-8
Rava said: A person is obligated to become intoxicated with wine **on *Purim* until he** is so intoxicated **that he does not know** how to distinguish **between cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordecai.**

The *Gemara* relates **that Rabba and Rabbi Zeira prepared a *Purim* feast with each other,** and **they became intoxicated** to the point that **Rabba arose and slaughtered Rabbi Zeira. The next day,** when he became sober and realized what he had done, Rabba **asked God for mercy, and revived him. The next year,** Rabba **said to** Rabbi Zeira: **Let the Master come and let us prepare the *Purim* feast with each other. He said to him: Miracles do not happen each and every hour,** and I do not want to undergo that experience again.

מגילה ז' ב:ז'-ח'
אָמַר רָבָא: מְיַחֲיֵב אִינִישׁ
לְבַסּוֹמֵי בְּפוּרָיָא עַד דְּלָא יָדַע
בֵּין אָרוּר הָמָן לְבָרוּךְ מָרְדֳּכַי.

רַבָּה וְרַבִּי זֵירָא עֲבַדוּ סְעוּדַת
פּוּרִים בַּהֲדֵי הֲדָדֵי. אִיבַּסּוּם.
קָם רַבָּה שַׁחְטֵיהּ לְרַבִּי זֵירָא.
לְמָחָר, בָּעֵי רַחֲמֵי וְאַחֲיֵיהּ.
לְשָׁנָה, אֲמַר לֵיהּ: נֵיתֵי מָר
וְנַעֲבֵיד סְעוּדַת פּוּרִים בַּהֲדֵי
הֲדָדֵי. אֲמַר לֵיהּ: לָא בְּכֹל
שַׁעְתָּא וְשַׁעְתָּא מִתְרְחִישׁ
נִיסָּא.

Context: This is from the Babylonian Talmud, Masechet *(Tractate)* Megillah*, which is about* Purim *(logically enough).*

The *Megillah* says that *Purim* should be a day of feasting. The *Gemara* assumes this includes drinking and has a line that one should drink until one can't tell the difference between "blessed in Mordechai" and "cursed is Haman." Immediately afterwards is a story about how getting drunk on *Purim* can lead to murder. One can surmise that this is an implicit warning to not overdo things.

Many rabbinic authorities have weighed in on this over the last 1,000 years. Rabbeinu Efraim (North Africa, 1000s) says that the just-mentioned story cancels out the previous statement. Rambam (Egypt, 1100s) says that one should drink until you fall asleep, because when you're asleep you can't distinguish between Mordechai and Haman (*Mishneh Torah, Scroll of Esther* and *Chanukah 2:15*). The Meiri (Provence/France, 1200s) says that if you drink too much, then you cannot have a properly thankful attitude for the miracles God wrought for the Jews of Shushan. Rabbi Alexander Zusslin HaKohen (Germany, 1300s) points out that the *Gematria* (alphanumeric value) of "blessed is Mordechai" and "cursed is Haman" both come out to 502, but it doesn't take very much alcohol to not be able to figure that out. Rabbi Aaron of Lunel (Provence/France, 1300s) says that one should drink so one is generous-minded and helps the poor to enjoy *Purim*, too. Rabbi Yosef Haviva (Spain, 1400s) says that one should say funny things on *Purim* so people think you have trouble distinguishing between things. Rabbi Netanel Weil (Germany, 1700s) says that you should drink until, but only up to and not including, you can't distinguish right from wrong. The *Mishnah Berurah* (Poland, 1800s) says that if you drink too much, then you won't be able to have the proper intention for washing your hands before the *Purim seudah*.

Finally, the *Talmud* (Babylonia, 500s) says that you shouldn't drink alcohol at all when it's a matter of health, such as if you are driving home, pregnant, taking medicine, or an alcoholic. (Note that if you are drinking more than one drink per hour, your liver can not process it fast enough, and you are endangering your health or the health of others if you drive.) For an in-depth examination of this topic, see https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/293689?lang=bi.

WEARING COSTUMES

Esther 2:10

10: Esther did not reveal her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had told her not to reveal it.

אסתר ב':י'

י: לֹא־הִגִּידָה אֶסְתֵּר אֶת־עַמָּהּ וְאֶת־מֽוֹלַדְתָּהּ כִּי מָרְדֳּכַי צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תַגִּיד׃

Context: This is from the Book of Esther*, after Esther is taken to the palace.*

The first mention of wearing costumes on *Purim* is from the Italian rabbi Yehudah Mintz/Mahari Minz (late 1400s-1508) (Responsa #17), where he says that it's fine to dress up in costume on *Purim*.

Moritz Steinschneider (1816-1907) notes that this is the same time of year as Carnival season and Mardi Gras, which come around February (prior to Lent, which is before Passover), and involves public celebration with costumes. It is possible that the Jews of Italy noticed that dressing in costumes is similar to the fact that Esther hides her identity from the king (and the name "Esther" is linguistically connected to the word "hidden"). Moreover, Mordechai is dressed in royal garments when Haman parades him through the streets. Additionally, God is not mentioned in the *Megillah*, and so it is thought that God might be in disguise as well.

Another theory is based on Rashi's comment about the Canaanites attacking the Israelites from the area inhabited by Amalek (*Numbers 21:1*). Rashi thought that the Amalekites disguised themselves as Canaanites so that the Israelites would pray for deliverance from the Canaanites and not get Divine help since the Canaanites weren't actually attacking them. This episode was inserted into a *piyut* (liturgical poem) for *Shabbat Zachor,* which is right before *Purim*. The theory goes that some French and/or German Jews thought that the Jews were disguising themselves, so they put on costumes on *Purim*. The main advantage of this theory is that it removes non-Jewish influence from this custom.

From Italy in the 1400s the custom of costumes spread across Europe. It arrived in the Middle East in the 1800s. An advantage of dressing in costume on *Purim* is that when giving *Matanot la-Evyonim*, the giver and receiver are less likely to recognize each other, thus preserving the dignity of the recipient. In the 1800s in the United States, masquerade *Purim* balls were the big social events, and *Purim* was the big holiday. This lasted until the rise of the popularity of *Chanukah* in the 1920s.

GROGGERS

Deuteronomy 25:17-19

17: Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt— 18: how, undeterred by fear of God, he surprised you on the march, when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear. 19: Therefore, when your God יהוה grants

דברים כ"ה:י"ז-י"ט

יז: זָכֹ֗ור אֵ֚ת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂ֣ה לְךָ֣ עֲמָלֵ֔ק בַּדֶּ֖רֶךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶ֥ם מִמִּצְרָֽיִם׃ יח: אֲשֶׁ֤ר קָרְךָ֙ בַּדֶּ֔רֶךְ וַיְזַנֵּ֖ב בְּךָ֣ כָּל־הַנֶּחֱשָׁלִ֑ים אַחֲרֶ֗יךָ וְאַתָּ֤ה עָיֵף֙ וְיָגֵ֔עַ וְלֹ֥א יָרֵ֖א אֱלֹהִֽים׃ יט: וְהָיָ֗ה בְּהָנִ֤יחַ יְהוָה֙ אֱלֹהֶ֣יךָ ׀ לְךָ֔

מִכָּל־אֹיְבֶיךָ מִסָּבִיב בָּאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר
יְהוָה־אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לְךָ נַחֲלָה
לְרִשְׁתָּהּ **תִּמְחֶה אֶת־זֵכֶר עֲמָלֵק**
מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם לֹא תִּשְׁכָּח:

safety from all your enemies around you, in the land that your God יהוה is giving you as a hereditary portion, **you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!**

Context: This is from the Biblical Book of Deuteronomy*, amongst a set of rules for when the Israelites enter the Land of Israel.*

*Grogger*s are used to blot out Haman's name each of the 54 times it appears in the *Megillah* (*grogger* is Yiddish; in Hebrew, it's called a *ra'ashan*). The *Torah* commands us to blot out Amalek (*Deutronomy 25:19*). Agag was the king of Amalek (*1 Samuel 15:8*). Haman is described as an Agagite (*Esther 3:1*). Using a syllogism (if A=B and B=C. then A=C), Haman is descended from the tribe of Amalek.

The story of *grogger*s involves two separate streams — the making of noise vs. the actual rattle — which don't come together until about 300 years ago. The noise-making custom dates to the 1200s in Europe, from the French Tosafists. They interpreted blotting out Amalek to mean "even from wood and stones." According to Rabbi Abraham ben Nathan, in the 1200s, children in France and Provence used to write Haman's name on smooth stones taken from streams and then bang them together to blot out his name when Haman's name was read from the *Megillah*. Another custom was to write Haman's name in chalk on the bottom of shoes, and then to stomp when his name was read, thus both blotting out the writing as well as the sound of his name.

From there, the custom of making noise to blot out Haman's name spread throughout Europe. Rabbi David Abudraham referenced that in the 1300s: Jews would break clay pots and bang on tables with their hands or sticks during the *Megillah* reading. In the 1500s, Rabbi Moses Isserles talks about children banging pieces of wood or stone against each other to blot out Haman's name on *Purim*, both when it was and wasn't the *Megillah* reading (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 690:17*). In the 1600s, when gunpowder became available, children in what is now modern-day Germany started using firecrackers in synagogue. This custom spread to Poland, Lithuania, Romania, and Russia, and elsewhere. This practice was still observed in Tel Aviv in the 1930s.

The modern *grogger* has its roots in ancient Greece and was adopted by the Romans for their ceremonies. Medieval Christians thought that *grogger*s could exorcize demons, and they were used during weddings and storms. Since the 800s, in the three days prior to Easter (the Triduum), church bells weren't used to announce the times for prayer (to respect the mournful period), so *grogger*s were used to summon worshipers (today it's called a "crotalus," meaning "rattle," the same meaning as *grogger*).

In 1638, Boston organized its first police force, the "Rattle Watch," which stood guard at night. *Grogger*s were issued to sound alarms because they were small and made a loud noise. New York City followed in 1658. *Grogger*s were used until (pea) whistles were invented in 1883. *Grogger*s then went on to be used by the U.S. military in World War I and World War II to warn of poison gas attacks once one was already wearing a gas mask.

*Grogger*s also made their way into classical music. For instance, there's one in the beginning of "Pines of Rome" by Respighi (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IvgyfqzLC0A - 0:30-0:40) and also in "Pictures at an Exhibition" by Mussorgsky (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2T_aY52jMMY&t=145s). Even Haydn (or Mozart) got into it with "Toy Symphony" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1miohLVZobE). *Grogger*s were also used for violent musical purposes, such as the sound of cannon fire in Beethoven's "Wellington's Victory" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7kYHsHFRFxQ 3:25-6:00). A *grogger* is called a "ratchet" when it's an instrument.

On the evening of Easter, there were annual "Burning of Judas" ceremonies where an effigy of Judas Iscariot would be hung and then burned. From medieval Germany to 19th century Malta, there would next be a ceremony of "The Grinding of Judas' Bones," where Christian children would whirl *grogger*s. The whole process was often very anti-Semitic. This was the inspiration for Jews borrowing *grogger*s for Haman (and flipping the anti-Semitic ceremonies on their head in the process). They had already been burning Haman in effigy since the 400s, something the Roman Empire tried

to clamp down on, and this was another way of committing violence against Haman while also drowning out his name.

The first known evidence of *groggers* being used on *Purim* is from the 1700s, both in Europe (Holland and Italy) and in New York. The word *grogger* is Yiddish, but it has translations in other languages. In Hebrew it is a *ra'ashan* (from *ra'ash*, meaning "noise"); in Polish, it is a *terkotka*; in French, it's a *crecelle*; and in Hungarian, it's a *kereplo*. Spanish and Portuguese Jews consider *groggers* a breach of decorum and don't use them in their synagogues.

HAMANTASCHEN

Esther 3:9	**אסתר ג':ט'**
9: If it please Your Majesty, let an edict be drawn for their destruction, and **I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the stewards for deposit in the royal treasury.**	ט: אִם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב יִכָּתֵב לְאַבְּדָם **וַעֲשָׂרֶת אֲלָפִּים כִּכַּר־כֶּסֶף אֶשְׁקוֹל עַל־יְדֵי עֹשֵׂי הַמְּלָאכָה לְהָבִיא אֶל־גִּנְזֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ:**

Context: This is from the Book of Esther again, when Haman is trying to get the king to agree to the death of the Jews.

The first reference to *hamantaschen* comes in the 1500s. In the oldest surviving Hebrew play, Leone de'Sommi Portaleone (Jewish-Italian, 1525-1590) wrote "A Comedy of Betrothal" in Mantua, Italy, for a *Purim* carnival. It was a play making fun of rabbis trying to base new customs in the *Torah*. One of the characters says that the reason we eat "*oznei Haman*" ("Haman ears") is because God commanded the Israelites to eat the *manna*, and in Hebrew "the *manna*" sounds the same as "Haman" (both are "*hah-mahn*"). The reason for this new tradition is that in medieval Europe it was customary to cut off the ears of someone about to be hung, and so this was read back into the story of the punishment of Haman. Thus, eating these "Haman ears" became a way to remember the punishment of Haman. Note that *oznayim* was just a term for pastries in general.

Soon thereafter, the *oznei Haman* of Italy reached 1500s Central Europe, where Germany is today. In the winter, people snacked on the seeds of the poppy plant, known as "*mohn*" in Yiddish. On special occasions, these seeds would be turned into jam and enclosed in pastry. These were known as "poppy pockets," or "*mohn-taschen*" in Yiddish. When the "*oznei Haman*" met the "*mohn-taschen*," the "*hamantaschen*" was born (note that in Yiddish the singular of *hamantaschen* is *hamantasch*, but that has dropped in English).

With the connection of Haman to the "*haman-taschen*," a new explanation was needed. It was suggested that if Haman offered a bribe to the king to kill the Jews, then certainly he was not above filling his own pockets (*taschen*, in Yiddish) with bribes. The poppy seeds would then represent the individual coins.

Hamantaschen may have been what the *Shulchan Aruch* had in mind in 1563, because it says that one should eat seeds on *Purim* in accordance with the vegetarian food that the Talmud says Esther ate in the palace (*Orach Chayim 695:2*). Others say that Esther specifically ate only poppy seeds while preparing to go before the king.

While *hamantaschen* are probably triangular because that's a good way to enclose a filling, other post-de facto explanations connect it with the pyramid-shaped die unearthed from ancient Persia, as well as the claim of the *Midrash* (well before *hamantaschen* were invented) that when Haman recognized the three Patriarchs, his strength weakened (which plays into the fact that "*tash*" is Hebrew for "weaken").

It is possible that the triangle-shaped cookies filled with black dots of poppy seeds may have connections to fertility, particularly given that they were eaten prior to the onset of spring. If this direction intrigues you, here are three links to further investigate:

1. https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/299414.4?lang=bi
2. https://www.heyalma.com/yes-theres-a-reason-hamantaschen-look-like-vaginas/
3. https://lilith.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/v23i01_Spring_1998-08.pdf

Prune *hamantaschen* came into being in 1731 in Bavaria. That year, David Brandeis sold some plum jam to the daughter of a Christian bookbinder. The bookbinder died shortly thereafter of tuberculosis, and the daughter accused

The reason for this new tradition (of eating *hamentaschen*) is that in medieval Europe it was customary to cut off the ears of someone about to be hung, and so this was rolled back into the story of the punishment of Haman.

Brandeis of poisoning her father. Brandeis and his family were imprisoned; the Court of Appeals investigated and found that he was innocent. Brandeis and his family were released shortly before *Purim*, and the Jews of his town celebrated by making prune *hamantaschen*. These spread throughout Central Europe, and when the Jews moved east, they brought this second flavor of *hamantaschen* with them.

In the late 1700s in England and America, the tricornes, or "three-cornered hat," became fashionable, and political leaders such as George Washington wore them. The *hamantaschen* also having three corners, it then was assumed that Haman wore such a hat when he became the king's advisor (though that is a historical impossibility). This interpretation spread to the Spanish-speaking world where *hamantaschen* are sometimes called "sombreros de Aman".

In the 1900s, Rabbi Ya'akov Kamenetsky suggested that the reason that we eat Haman's ears/hat is because eating is a way of destroying something, and we are destroying the embodiment of evil.

Hamantaschen evolved from a pastry to more of a cookie when baking powder became widely available in the first half of the 20th century, replacing yeast in most *hamantaschen* recipes.

Purim has other traditional foods that cover some of the same themes as *hamantaschen*. Just as *hamantaschen* are connected to eating Haman in some way, Sephardic Jews eat deep-fried strips of dough called "orejas de Haman" (Haman's ears), and some Scandinavian and Western European Jews eat decorated gingerbread cookies that represent Haman.

Just as *hamantaschen* have a hidden filling, representing Esther hiding her identity as a Jew (among other things being hidden in this story), Ashkenazic Jews sometimes eat *kreplach* (a meat or potato-filled dumpling), pierogi, stuffed cabbage, or *knish*es. Ravioli or wonton would probably also fit this category, even if they are less traditional. Italian Jews often eat spinach-filled pasta on Purim or *burriche*, which are meat or vegetables inside of puff pastry. Persian and Iraqi Jews often eat *sambusak*, which are savory turnovers containing ground lamb or cheese or chickpeas or chicken or spinach. *Samosa*s would probably also fit into this category and would go with the "ruling from India to Ethiopia" theme.

According to the *Talmud*, Esther ate a strictly vegetarian diet in the palace, so nuts and seeds are part of Purim foods around the world. Jews in Iraq eat *Hadgi badah*, which are sugar cookies that have cardamom and almonds. Jews in Lebanon and Syria eat *mamoul*, which are semolina cookies containing nuts or dates.

There are other *Purim* foods that don't fit into any of those categories. Hungarian and Romanian Jews eat *arany galuska*, a dessert of fried dough balls and vanilla custard. On *Purim*, medieval Jews ate *nilish,* which was a type of waffle. Moroccan Jews bake *ojos de Haman*, which is bread-shaped like a head from which the "eyes" (made out of eggs) are then plucked out. Polish Jews bake *koilitch*, a raisin *challah* that's braided to look like a the rope from which Haman swung and decorated with candies to show the colorful nature of the holiday. Sephardi Jews also eat *folares*, pastry dough wrapped around decorated hard-boiled eggs to create animals or Purim characters that are displayed and then eaten.

PURIM SHPIEL

[For an example of a *Purim Shpiel*, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Qozz7aIE64. It replaces "The Book of Mormon" with "The Book of Purim."]

Shpiel is a Yiddish word that means "play" (both the noun and the verb, as in *shpiel balalaika*). The first public reenactment of the *Purim* story goes back to around 400 C.E., when the Theodosian Code of the Roman Empire prohibited Jews from hanging Haman in effigy (Emperor Theodosius II issued this law on May 29, 408 C.E.).

In the 1400s, Ashkenazi Jews would entertain audiences by reciting silly monologues on *Purim*, either rhymed paraphrases of *Megillat Esther* or parodies of holy texts. This was probably a Jewish version of the Christian and secular performances happening around this time. In the 1500s, yeshiva students would wear costumes and masks and perform during the *Purim* meal in people's homes. Presumably, they would then be invited to have some food afterwards.

In the 1600s, amateur and professional performers (including acrobats) would go on tour to people's homes to perform during the *Purim* meal. The format of the *shpiel* became more defined, with a narrator to introduce, conduct, and conclude the *shpiel*. Prologues and epilogues were more defined as well — prologues would bless the audience, explain what was going to happen, and introduce the actors, while epilogues would give parting blessings and ask for money. Sometimes there would be cantorial contests built into the *shpiel*. A common line for roving *shpielers* was "Today is *Purim*, tomorrow it's gone, give us a coin, and throw us out!" It rhymes in *Yiddish - Haint is Purim* (today is *Purim*), *morgen is oys* (tomorrow it's finished), *gib mir a penny* (give me a penny), *und vorf mir arroys* (and throw me out). Groups of excited children would follow the shpielers from house to house and watch through the windows.

By the 1700s in Eastern Europe, the *Purim Shpiel* became

song and dance routines that were primarily social satire and only loosely connected to the story of *Purim*. In the 1700s in Central Europe, some *shpiel* scripts were Biblically connected, though only "the Achashveirosh *Shpiel*" was related to the *Book of Esther*. Other Biblical *shpiel* scripts were based on Joseph, David and Goliath, the Binding of Isaac, Hannah and Penina, and the wisdom of Solomon. Nonetheless, these scripts also incorporated elements of current life. *Shpiel*s were now much bigger affairs with musical accompaniment, long scripts, and large casts. Therefore, they moved from private homes to public places with admission prices. They were not considered appropriate to be performed inside synagogues. *Shpiel*s in the 1700s derived much of their humor from eroticism, profanity, and obscenity. In 1728, *Purim shpiel*s were banned in Hamburg, Germany, and anybody caught performing one would be fined. Also in the 1700s, an "Achashveirosh *Shpiel*" script was burned in Frankfurt, Germany, because of its lewdness.

In the 1800s, European Jews who followed the ideas of the *Haskalah* (Enlightenment) would include the *Hasidim* as characters in their *Purim shpiel*s. By 1876, Yiddish theatre took off as a separate item after 400 years of *Purim shpiel*s. Just as Hamlet has been set in all sorts of settings, such as Nazi Germany, the *Purim shpiel* has given the opportunity to set the *Megillah* in many settings. For example, in 1965 Dov Seltzer turned Itzik Manger's "Poems of the *Megillah*" into a Yiddish musical, setting the story in early 20th century Eastern Europe. This was the first Yiddish play performed in Israel.

Today, *Purim shpiel*s come in three flavors. The first is any dramatic performance of the *Purim* story. The second is a parody of something else that already exists (such as "The Book of *Purim*" instead of "The Book of Mormon"). The third lovingly makes fun of one's community. Regardless of which type of *Purim shpiel* it is, scripts (and lyrics) are usually written so that children think it's funny, but adults think it's hilarious. Arguably, *Purim* parody songs are a 21st century version of the *Purim Shpiel*. For example: https://youtu.be/MjmLkEcaUAA (The Maccabeats "An Encanto *Purim*"and https://youtu.be/aR7IV1dRlSM ("We don't talk about Haman," a parody of the movie "Encanto"). Another example is https://youtu.be/eC4yh5oYlpA ("The Fandom of the *Amidah,*" a parody of "The Phantom of the Opera").

> **"Just as Hamlet has been set in all sorts of settings, such as Nazi Germany, the *Purim shpiel* has given the opportunity to set the *Megillah* in many settings."**

THE SONG "*CHAG PURIM*"

[For an example, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSYEiHkMDUA. Note: The transliteration in this video is from the Ladino style, so the "j" represents the "ch" sound.]

The song "*Chag Purim*" was written by Russian-Israeli poet and children's author Levin Kipnis (1894-1990), who also composed "*Sivivon, Sov Sov Sov,*" "*Ner Li*," and "*Ani Purim*." The tune was originally used by the Cherynobl or Belz *Chasidim* for the seventh *Hakafa* on *Simchat Torah*.

Here are the lyrics for the first verse:
Chag Purim, chag Purim, chag gadol la-Yehudim
Masechot, ra'ashanim, shirim ve-rikudim.
Hava narishah - rash, rash, rash,
Hava narishah - rash, rash, rash,
Hava narishah - rash, rash, rash,
Ba-ra'ashanim.

There's also a lesser-known second verse:
Chag Purim, chag Purim, zeh el zeh sholchim manot,
Machmadim, mamtakim, tunifim migdanot.
Hava narishah - rash, rash, rash,
Hava narishah - rash, rash, rash,
Hava narishah - rash, rash, rash,
Ba-ra'ashanim.

Other variations of the lyrics in the first verse go "*Chag gadol la-yeladim*", which means "a great holiday for the children." Because *Purim* is a great holiday for Jews of all ages, many people use "*chag gadol la-Yehudim.*" Another variation is to replace "*shirim*" with "*zmirot,*" both of which mean "songs." Both of these variations came later.

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APPENDIX:
THE INTERNATIONAL VERSION OF THE PURIM STORY

The story of *Purim* is an international tale.

King Ahashverosh was Finnish with his disobedient wife Vashti. "You Congo now!" he ordered her. After she had Ghana way, the king's messengers went Roman the land to find a new queen. And India end, the beautiful Esther won the crown.

Meanwhile, Mordecai sat outside the palace, where the Chile Haman would Czech up on him daily. "I Haiti you because you refuse to bow to me!" Haman scolded Mordecai. "USA very stubborn man. You Jews are such Bahamas! If you keep this up, Denmark my words! I will have all your people killed! Just Kuwait and see."

Mordecai went into mourning and tore his clothes — a custom known as Korea. He urged Esther to plead with the king. The Jews fasted for three days and grew very Hungary.

Esther approached the king and asked, "Kenya Belize come to a banquet I've prepared for you and Haman?" At the feast, she invited her guests to a second banquet to eat Samoa.

The king asked, "Esther, why Jamaica big meal like this? Just tell me what you want. Unto half my United Kingdom will I give you."

Esther replied, "Spain full for me to say this, but Haman is Russian to kill my people."

Haman's loud Wales could be heard as he carried Honduran this scene.

"Oman!" Haman cried bitterly. "Iraq my brains in an effort to destroy the Jews. But that sneaky Mordecai — Egypt me!" Haman and his 10 sons were hanged and went immediately to the Netherlands. And to Sweden the deal, the Jews were allowed to Polish off the rest of their foes as well.

"You lost your enemies and Uganda friend," the king smiled.

And that is why the *Purim* story Israeli a miracle. God decided to China light on God's chosen people.

So now, let's celebrate! Forget all your Syria's business and just be happy! Serb up some wine and Taiwan on!

https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/purim-international/

Basics for Lay-Led Liturgy and Bible Chant

by Neil Schwartz and David Schwartz

This article is an overview of general basic areas that may be of interest for someone functioning as a lay leader of Ashkenazi Jewish liturgy or for someone who has the opportunity to chant a Biblical passage.

The subject matter is divided into six general areas, three of which are relevant both for liturgical chant and for Biblical chant. The general Introduction posits the notion that both nusach *modes and Biblical* trope *identify Jewish sacred times, and they also both indicate the moods that accompany those sacred times.*

David's grandmother was the principal of the Sunday School in the small synagogue Agudath Achim in Hibbing, Minnesota. Yes, among her students was Robert Zimmerman, whom many of us know by a stage name.[1] She had a way of letting us students know how important it is to chant the traditional *nusach* (exact text of a prayer service) or *trope* (cantillation or musical melody) for a given religious time.

The context is the 1960s, when people were speculating about flying saucers visiting Earth. She would say, "If a visiting Martian knew synagogue chants, he\she\it could step into any synagogue, listen for a while, and know exactly what day of the week and time of year it is here, just from our Jewish sacred music."

It took specialized education from the Cantorial School of the Jewish Theological Seminary to fill in those details for a *chazzan* (cantor), but she was correct. Our Jewish liturgical chants are low-key and perfunctory for weekday services; relaxed and energetic on *Shabbat*; and differ significantly on the High Holy Days (*Yamim Nora'im)*, three Pilgrimage Festivals (*Shalosh Regalim)*, and special occasions such as *Purim* and *Tisha b'Av*.

MUSICAL MOTIFS REFLECT HOW MOODS CHANGE FOR DIFFERENT SERVICES AND OCCASIONS

The specific musical motifs that together comprise the *nusach* mode for a given occasion also indicate how the moods change within any given religious service on any specific occasion. Except for a special time such as *Erev Yom Kippur*, the preliminary service is chanted in a fairly simple manner. The *Shema* section gets more elaborate, and when the *Amidah* is repeated, that is usually more musically elaborate. When there is a *Musaf* (Additional) service, that can be musically special.

The *trope* for Biblical books also reflect the moods of these occasions.

Many Jewish people have had the opportunity to learn *trope* to chant a *Haftarah* and sometimes also their *Torah* portion when they became a *Bat* or *Bar Mitzvah* (currently called a "*B-Mitzvah*" in many communities).

From careful study of *trope* patterns, two aspects become fairly clear. *Trope* obviously serves as a Masoretic system of identifying the phrases within a Biblical text, and often the placement of a *trope* mark reflects the accent of a particular Hebrew word. Changing the placement of a *trope,* and this the word-accent, also may change the meaning of a passage, such as from past tense to future.

What is less well-known is the concept that the musical motifs within a given *nusach ha-tefillah* system also can reflect punctuation and word accents, and thus either reinforce or

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alter the meaning of prayer texts. Just like *trope*, each system of *nusach ha-tefillah* has opening motifs, "carrying" motifs, elaborations, penultimate motifs, and closing motifs. These were indicated graphically by this author in a computer program that unfortunately is no longer available and was developed for weekday, *Shabbat*, and High Holy Days liturgy based on traditional chant motifs.

SUBTLE DETAILS IN THE ANCIENT HEBREW LANGUAGE

The second general area of "basics" that is shared by both liturgical chant and Biblical chant is the Hebrew language. It is safe to say that anyone who accepts the responsibility of leading part of a service, or chanting from *Torah* or any other Biblical book, should know the basics of Hebrew pronunciation, accentuation, and phrasing. However, there are many subtle details in the ancient Hebrew language that can affect the meaning of some words and thus the meaning of texts.

Among these details are the use of "*sh'va na*" (moving or sounded *sh'va*) versus "*sh'va nach*" (standing or quiet *sh'va*). For instance, when a single-syllable consonant has a *dagesh* (a diacritic used in the Hebrew alphabet that takes the form of a dot placed inside a Hebrew letter and has the effect of modifying the sound in one of two ways) in it and also a *sh'va* underneath, that *sh'va* becomes a "*sh'va na,*" moving or sounded. Similarly, a *dagesh* in a consonant that is not a "*BeGeD KeFeT*" letter (ב ג ד כ פ ת) can affect the syllable division, through "doubling" a consonant. A third detail is the use of the vertical line "*meteg*" (a punctuation mark used in Biblical Hebrew for stress marking, a vertical bar placed under the affected syllable) under a letter to indicate a penultimate accent, which can change a word's meaning.

Another aspect of Hebrew grammar that liturgy and Bible texts share is the tendency towards "Verb-Subject-Object" word-order, which can be important for identifying logical phrases. *Trope* shows phrases in the Hebrew Bible, but one needs some grammar knowledge to find logical phrases within our liturgical texts. The fact that adjectives often follow nouns and adverbs often follow verbs in ancient Hebrew can confuse a prayer leader who is less familiar with these differences from English.

Perhaps the easiest aspect of liturgy to teach is the basic underlying structure: "preliminary section," "Evening and Morning "*Shema* section," "*Amidah*," on some occasions a "*Torah* service," and sometimes "*Musaf.*" Within each of these sections, there are sub-structures, but the chants in a given section are often in one particular musical mode or *nusach*.

ADDITIONS TO THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF THE LITURGY

The High Holy Days and the Three Pilgrimage Festivals (*Shalosh Regalim)* have the most additions to this basic structure of our liturgy. Religious poems called "*piyyutim*" are added on such occasions, often with an ancient melody associated with each specific text. "*Hallel*" Psalms are added on the Pilgrimage Festivals (*Shalosh Regalim)*, on *Rosh Chodesh* (the first day[s] of the New Month), and most of their melodies tend to be congregational in nature.

The specific musical motifs that together comprise the *nusach* mode for a given occasion also indicate how the moods change within any given religious service on any specific occasion.

The distinctive sounds of the liturgical chants (*nusach*), together with specific *trope* of the Biblical passages chanted on all these occasions, give our Jewish holidays a "sacred soundscape" that is unique to each time of year.

CANTILLATION REFLECTS BOTH THE MOOD AND THE SUBJECT MATTER OF EACH OCCASION

In a written article, it is hard to communicate very many details about the *nusach/*musical motifs of our various liturgies, or about the *trope/*cantillation motifs of our various Biblical books. However, one might approximate both of these tasks with some descriptive language for both the liturgical and Biblical chants through a full Jewish year.

Except for *Torah* and *Haftarah* chant, each of which are the same on weekdays, *Shabbat*, *Rosh Chodesh,* and most Festivals, Biblical cantillation reflects both the mood and the subject matter of each occasion, and the Biblical book that is being chanted at that time. For instance, the *trope* of *Megilat Esther* seems both jolly and sarcastic, in keeping with the storyline of *Purim*. The *trope* of *Eichah* and the chanting of the triple acrostic in Chapter 3 are both mournful, fitting well with the mood of *Tisha b'Av*. On the *Shalosh Regalim* when we chant *Shir ha-Shirim* (*The Song of Songs* on *Pesach*), *Ruth* (*Shavuot*) or *Ecclesiastes* (*Kohelet* on *Sukkot*), the lyrical sounds of the *trope* for these three Books are a good fit for these ancient pastoral occasions. Similarly, the *nusach* motifs in *nusach l'-Shalosh Regalim* (Pilgrmage Festivals) have a more lyrical sound than the more majestic *nusach* associated with the High Holy Days (*Yamim Nora'im)*.

APPENDICES AND RESOURCES

This article has briefly addressed several "basics" for lay leaders to use when leading liturgy or chanting Biblical texts. There are a few Appendix documents with this article, including a "Grammar Issues" chart, a comparison of "*Nusach* Modal Scales," the "*Trope* Families," and a three-page set of "Questions and Answers" Since these all will be published in a textbook that is gradually being written, please give credit to Cantor Neil if you use any of these materials. When the textbook is finally published on this subject, there will be dozens of other charts in all areas such as "General Overview," "Hebrew, "Structure of Liturgy," "*Nusach* Modes," "Biblical *Trope;*" a bibliography of books and music for reference; and about 500 audio files for auditory learning.

Meanwhile, there are sources of auditory resources available already. The Cantors Assembly,[2] Transcontinental Music,[3] Rabbi Miles Cohen,[4] Linda Sue Sohn,[5] online version of *Trope* Trainer,[6] Joey Weisenberg of Hadar's Rising Song Institute,[7] and individual cantors are all making available their auditory resources for purchase.

When listening to and learning from any auditory resources, please keep in mind two things. Biblical *trope* has a long history along with grammar functions, and that *trope* portrays the meanings of various Bible texts. Similarly, the many musical motifs of liturgical chant have a long history and phrasing functions, while reflecting each occasion for prayer and using *nusach* motifs to portray the meanings of our prayer texts, each relative to its own time-of-day and time-of-year.

Endnotes:

1. On August 2, 1962, Robert Allen Zimmerman decided to change his name to Bob Dylan.
2. The Cantors Assembly: https://www.cantors.org
3. Transcontinental Music: www.transcontinentalmusic.com
4. Rabbi Miles Cohen: www.milesbcohen.com
5. Linda Sue Sohn: www.cantoreducator.com
6. Online version of *Trope* Trainer: www.cantors.org/tropetrainer
7. Joey Weisenberg of Hadar's Rising Song Institute: www.risingsong.org

Jewish Placemaking: Creating Space for Relationships in Administrative Work

by Terri Soifer

In February 2013, Dr. Ron Wolfson's book, *Relational Judaism: Using the Power of Relationships to Transform the Jewish Community*,[1] took the Jewish professional world by storm. In the 10 years since it was published, Jewish professionals have embraced the tenets of relational Judaism and have listened to Jewish and life journeys over SO MANY cups of coffee.

Now that we are beyond the emergency measures of Covid-19, which also required Jewish leaders to be emergency contingency planners on a scale we never imagined possible, we now are returning to building community, not just sustaining it. Many of us know how to be relational, warm, and welcoming. We understand the importance of getting to know each family. And in the busy nature of our day-to-day, it is integral that we create systems that maintain this welcoming approach, while also helping our families perform the transactional activities they need to do in order to safely and fiscally sustain our communities.

At Makom Community, where I am privileged to be in the role of Director of Strategy, we have been implementing and finetuning the strategies below for a number of years. Jewish

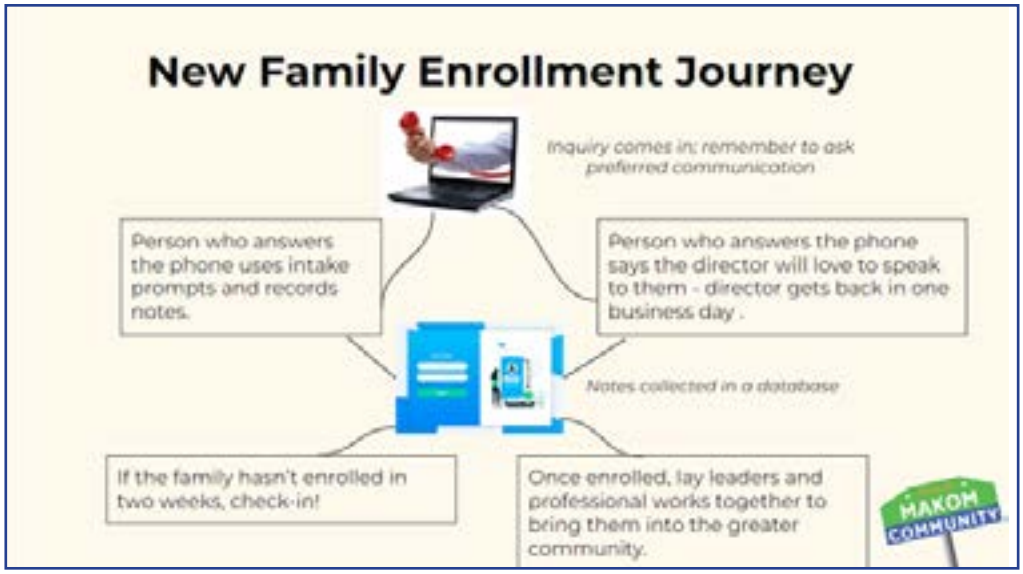
> **Jewish Placemaking ..... shapes how we teach and learn and constantly connects us to why we do this work ..... It also is the space between each of us where we build community and connections.**

Placemaking is our unique pedagogy that transforms Jewish education by creating and modeling experiential and intentional learning environments in collaboration with educators, children, and their families. Jewish Placemaking sees each individual's journey and invites Jewish wisdom to shape how each family and child interacts with the world around them. As a pedagogy, it shapes how we teach and learn and constantly connects us to why we do this work, including shaping our learning content. Jewish Placemaking is more than the physical space we are in. It also is the space between each of us where we build community and connections. The systems discussed below help us foster the relational space to grow our communities.

We live in a world where we want to be seen individually (think of the recent ad that targeted you so well for those shoes you want), and we want to complete buying items quickly. That is the mindset of our society, being seen individually in the promotion and completing the purchase of the item quickly.

I am not asking your institution to compete with a juggernaut like Amazon, but you can use the principle of seeing people as individuals, a.k.a. relational Judaism, to take a realistic turn to ensure that your community's process does not feel too dissident from the society around us. How do you accomplish this?

Terri Soifer is a passionate and strategic relationship builder who works in the intersection of Jewish education and fundraising. Terri has spent her career strengthening the Jewish community in Philadelphia. Her background is in Jewish education, and she completed her Masters in Jewish Education from the Davidson School of Jewish Education at the Jewish Theological Seminary, with a concentration in Israel Education.
Terri@makomcommunity.org



CREATING A DECISION TREE

Above is an example of a decision tree showing how to enroll a new family who calls. The beauty of a decision tree is that it clearly lays out what steps need to be taken and the turn around when it needs to happen. Going on vacation? Look at your team and figure out how to fill the gaps. Attending a conference and still need to follow up with families? Schedule those emails beforehand. A decision tree can be used when asking for volunteers, hiring teachers or ensuring that you connect with all returning families.

An important part of a decision tree also is predicting where decisions get backed up. A few common areas are:

- When people are on vacation
- Scholarships or financial assistance
- Conversations around conversion
- Families who need immediate *B'nai Mitzvah* administrative support

  This can mean receiving a *B'nai Mitzvah* date or starting tutoring. Typically this urgency is around families whose children are in 5th or 6th grade.

One variable that is similar in all of these instances is that it involves other decision-makers besides yourself. Think about which decisions you can be the point person for, such as requests for financial support. Much of the time it is a cumbersome process that involves connecting prospective families with many people they don't know, and "asks" for financial support are hard enough for people. The more that potential families get "tossed around" (i.e., you copy another person on an email chain), the more complicated your community seems. These families are reaching out and likely feel a bit scared or vulnerable. The more you can be their main point person, the more likely they will enroll and join your community!

CREATING TEMPLATES, SCRIPTS, AND CHECKLISTS

Yes, every phone call and story you hear is unique. You also have a good idea of whom you will hear from. Let's continue with the scenario of summer enrollment. You most likely will hear from the following:

- Families who are entering Kindergarten
- Families who just moved to town
- Families who are switching communities
- Families who suddenly want a Jewish education for their child because *B'nai Mitzvah* is approaching

With a list like this in mind, you can create systems that help all of them. Whether you are responding to an email or answering a phone call, create a checklist of the INITIAL information you want to capture. Remember, this is the beginning of your journey with this family; you have time to continue to get to know them. You want to gather the information that will help move this forward.

- The names of everyone in the family
- Why they are interested in your community
- The best way to contact them

From there, using a template email helps the turnaround time for follow up. Leave blanks for where you can personalize it, but include the first day of school, any summer meet ups, a way to get in touch with you and meet, and the enrollment

form or link. Then set a reminder for yourself to follow up in two weeks. All of a sudden, you are not putting off writing an email if you are tired or distracted, and the family is seen and heard.

You can create scripts for teacher emails, committee outreach, and any other initiatives throughout the year. The first time you do this, it can feel cumbersome, but, by the second year, these documents just need some tweaks, and your system is in place.

STEWARDSHIP FOLLOWING THE TRANSACTION

A family enrolls, or they donate, or join a committee — your work does not stop there. What comes next is the hardest area to think about. The follow up after a transaction is integral for deeper engagement. Think of a family who just enrolled. What are they hearing from you in the first few weeks of school? From their teacher? From the greater community, specifically around fall holidays? By making this part of your decision tree, you are able to ensure these important moments happen!

As Jewish educators, our work requires so many skills. I hope these systems and suggestions make the holy work of connecting with families and with each other a bit more straightforward and not as daunting.

Author's Note: I am grateful for Makom Community, for being an intentional living laboratory. In the past two years, I have had the privilege to work with a number of communities to help them finetune these principles. I have so appreciated learning with them. Interested in bringing Makom Community to your community for this training? Contact me at terri@makomcommunity.org.

Endnotes:

1. Wolfson, Ron. Relational Judaism: Using the Power of Relationships to Transform the Jewish Community. Woodstock, VT, Jewish Lights, 2013.

ANTI-SEMITISM THEN AND NOW

by Paul Weinberg

Up until the 1960s, the conventional wisdom in America was that anti-Semitism was on the wane, with the general population becoming more educated; with the gains of the civil rights movement; with the meteoric success of Jews in fields that formerly were denied to them in business (much of corporate America) and academia (up until 1960, the only Jewish head of a college or university not associated with the Jewish community was Rutgers University, headed by Edward Bloustein); and with expansion of where they were permitted to live (though restrictive covenants were still in effect in major metropolitan areas such as Darien, CT; Kenilworth, IL, *et al*.) as well as where they could vacation (many resorts and hotels still had restrictive covenants).

The old shibboleths of anti-Semitism – the Far Right, Neo-Nazis, and White Nationalists – were becoming a small minority, and even genteel anti-Semitism was no longer respectable.

However, the genie of Jew-hatred never disappeared; it merely was looking for a new home. With help from seemingly liberal organizations such as The National Council of Churches and many mainstream Protestant churches (the Quakers, the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church USA, and others), Jew-hatred shifted its attention to Israel as a temporary substitute for Jews and Judaism. Anti-Semitism put on a new face, one of "human rights," that featured Yasser Arafat, with gun in hand, being celebrated in 1974 at the United Nations (UN). The UN, a Congress of Nations set up in the closing days of a World War that resulted in the almost total destruction of European Jewry, declared that "Zionism Is Racism."

The shift to a focus on academia was accomplished over a period of almost 20 years, with departments of Middle Eastern Studies (ironically having been founded by Jews, among them Bernard Lewis and Michael Curtis) becoming *Judenrein* (free of Jews) and where Israel was declared to be not even part of the Middle East.

Later, the mainstream media joined in, with the *New York Times* attacking Israel almost daily in its news reports and editorials. The NBC network criticized Israel for defending itself against PLO terrorists, while John Chancellor called Israelis "war criminals."

Academia was perhaps the most diabolical in its characterization of Israel as a rogue state. The charge of apartheid in reference to Israel was first used by Jimmy Carter in his book, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, published by Simon & Schuster in November 2006. In 2014,

> **The charge of apartheid in reference to Israel was first used by Jimmy Carter in his book, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* .....**

Secretary of State John Kerry said the Jewish state could become an "apartheid state" if it didn't reach a peace deal with the Palestinians (several days later, he said he chose the wrong word in describing Israel's potential future). There also were verbal attacks on Jews who supported Zionism, especially if they were religious, and later attacks on the whole corpus of Jewish history (e.g., The Copenhagen School, headed by the American Thomas Thompson, whose anti-Semitic writings fueled the lie that the Jews were never in Israel, or Palestine as they call it).

Paul Weinberg has owned Alden Films, a distributor of media of Israel and Judaica for 39 years. He has presented workshops and films about Anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, and other Jewish subjects at NewCAJE, Limmud NY, JCCs, synagogues, Holocaust centers, colleges, and fraternal group meetings.
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In the Humanities, Jew-hatred infected subjects such as English, Sociology, and Political Science, with courses at prestigious schools using Jewish terms such as “Diaspora” to highlight the plight of the “Palestinians.”

Later, Jew-hatred moved into politics itself, with the burning of the Israeli flag at the Democratic Convention in Philadelphia in 2016 and later openly anti-Semitic members of Congress, including Ilhan Omar (ironically, a refugee from Somalia who was assisted by the Jewish organization HIAS to emigrate to the U.S.), Jamal Bowman, Rashida Tlaib, and others.

Today, even the discussion of anti-Semitism has been compromised by Jewish self-defense organizations (ADL and others) by focusing only on the old Jew-hatred of groups such as White Supremacists, while ignoring anti-Semitism concentrated in the media, academia, and politics.

There also has been an almost complete suppression of news of anti-Semitic attacks in major American cities, including New York, Los Angeles, and other cities.

Though the White House recently has set up a task force to fight anti-Semitism, anti-Semitic groups such as the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), which actively defends Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran, are part of this committee. In my opinion, this is like having the Nazi Party advising on the prosecution of war criminals at Nuremberg. Again, in my opinion, sadly, there has been no shortage of Jews (Deborah Lipstadt and others) willing to go along with travesty.

The purpose of my NewCAJE talk, “Anti-Semitism Then and Now,” was to present a broad view of where and how Jew-hatred arose , how it mutated, and why it is so ubiquitous. The discussion was not a rehash of either the Holocaust or what is happening today, but rather an abbreviated but comprehensive look at the first two thousand years of the history of Anti-Semitism, beginning with the birth of Christianity and, later, the birth of Islam. Ironically, this cosmic hatred that continues to this day has its roots in the foundation of the two great daughter religions of Judaism. In Europe, which is the home of Christendom, religion has been on the wane for many years, but the bedrock of European civilization is Jew-hatred with or without the Church today. It is expressed in her history, current politics, and even culture. Islam is a religion that borrows from Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and paganism, but always has had contempt for the Jew. The return of Jews to their land is an affront to the beliefs of Muslims.

Finally, there is a need for people, both Jews and non-Jews, to study the subject of anti-Semitism as a truly academic discipline in order to explain our ill-fated history and give us insight into our present situation.

Taking Miracles Seriously: A Journey to Everyday Spirituality

by Michael Zedek

While it is beyond my ability to reproduce with precision the content of the 90-minute interactive presentation at NewCAJE14, I provide below a "two-minute summary" and then add a few of the anecdotes and illustrations that accompanied the discussion. Should one be interested in further exploration, including the applicability of this content in a classroom setting, I am available for consultation (no charge), and one may find additional, and I hope valuable, material in my recently-published book which bears the same title as this article.[1]

As to the summary, it goes like this:
Intriguingly, every time the Hebrew Bible presents what we would call a miracle, no one draws what should be the obvious conclusion. And that must be an essential lesson for us. Just consider, after a series of signs and wonders, the people arrive at Mount Sinai; Moses goes up the mountain; and they build a Golden Calf.

Either these are the dumbest people ever to walk the face of the earth (how could they experience so many miracles and not be assured God is with them?) or there is something more going on. And Jewish tradition insists there is a great deal more. For instance, these stories demonstrate it is easier to get the slaves out of Egypt than to get Egypt out of the slaves. That is always true, whether it is a movement for a people's or individual's embrace of freedom. But the workshop's focus offered a different insight. Namely, people are free to disbelieve the evidence of their own experience. I know that's true about me, and I'll make the leap to presume others share that same blind spot. "Days pass. Years vanish. And [yes] we walk sightless among miracles."[2]

ORDINARY AND EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCES

Part of the challenge is that we divide experience into ordinary and extraordinary. Regarding the extraordinary, we have no choice but to pay attention. Metaphorically, it slaps us across the face and says, "Wake up." What we do with the ordinary is equally clear. We take it for granted. If we were to take the ordinary for granted less, our lives would be more filled with life. And that happens to be Judaism's special expertise. Self-evidently, the "aha" moments are incredible, but everyone knows that. Our value-added is that the "ho-hum" moments also are always an "aha"! The workshop and the book on which it was based are efforts to cultivate a sensitivity to and an action plan for finding more and more of the regular and remarkable Burning Bush moments in and through every day. The rest is commentary.

Among the items that the workshop discussed is a reflection attributed to Albert Einstein. While everyone is aware of his incredible prowess in science, he was no slouch when it comes to religious or philosophical ideas. Consider: "There are two ways to live. The first is as though nothing is a miracle. The second is as though everything is a miracle."[3] It is my conviction that we can get closer to that second prospect. And Jewish tradition provides a path to get there, or at least closer.

With such in mind, I shared a portion of a poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning.[4]

> Earth's crammed with heaven.
> And every common bush is afire with God.
> But only he who sees takes off his shoes.
> The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.

Rabbi Michael Zedek is the Rabbi Emeritus of two great congregations: The Temple, Congregation Bnai Jehudah in greater Kansas City and Congregation Emanuel, Chicago, Illinois. He currently serves as Rabbi-in-Residence at Saint Paul School of Theology and is the author of a book that bears the same title as this workshop.
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The point, of course, is that Burning Bushes are scattered randomly through every day, and we regularly miss or ignore them.

That same challenge Is implicit in what many seminary students referred to as the "Plumber's prayer."[5]

As this translation offers: "Praised are You, Eternal our God, Ruler of the Universe, Who has fashioned us in wondrous manner with openings and closings. If that which were to be opened were closed up and that which is closed up were opened, we could not stand before You." The prayer urges us to acknowledge that obviously essential activities — urination and defecation — most commonly described in profane terms and at times with profanity, are filled with the miraculous, with holiness. In fact, the conclusion of the prayer invents a verb form for one of the words, which is often imprecisely translated as miracle. The Hebrew root is *Peleh*, meaning a wonder or something awesome. The verb form used is *Maphlee*, which may be interpreted as one who causes or brings wonder. So, as the Psalmist reminds us, we are "awesomely made."[6] But to recognize that urination and defecation may be understood as spiritual moments clearly intends for us to expand our awareness of what defines the sacred. More commonly, our attention focuses on our bodies only at times of dysfunction, rather than in the remarkable rhythm of consistency that we likely take for granted. We tend to our health most often only when we don't have it. The truth is we are wondrously fashioned and, as a sage advises, "Woe to the person who stands on earth and does not see what he sees."[7]

But truth be told, prayer-filled attentiveness is reminiscent of a suggestion by the author Henry James. "Be among those upon whom nothing is lost."[8] That reflection, however stimulating on first hearing or reading, is part of our challenge, one that may keep us stuck in the ceaseless pursuit of instant gratification. Jim Morrison, of the rock group The Doors, put it well. "We want the world, and we want it now."[9] But Carrie Fisher got even closer to contemporary and paradoxical reality: "Instant gratification isn't quick enough."[10]

Part of the challenge, then, is to cultivate a particular sensitivity or, what many spiritual traditions call — in a cliché for our time — mindfulness. Consider this illustration: You are likely aware that one of the hermeneutic principles for our Sages is that there are no unnecessary words. If some word or phrase seems redundant, it may reveal a deep insight. For instance, in *Exodus* 24:12, Moses is told, "Go up to the top of the mountain and be there." As the Hasidic teaching points out, why does Moses have to be instructed to be there? Where else would he be? And while none of us is a Moses, we all have the experience of being in a location or in the midst of an experience and not fully being there. We endlessly worry about what happened yesterday, or how to get to the next appointment on time, etc.

Comes then the question of why bother, especially as we fall short of James's insistence for total awareness. After all, no one can live at the top of the mountain all the time. There are appointments to be made, traffic delays to endure, and dirty diapers to change, to name only a few of the endless distractions that may throw us off course.

Part of the challenge, then, is to cultivate a particular sensitivity or, what many spiritual traditions call — in a cliché for our time — mindfulness ..... we all have the experience of being in a location or with an experience and not being there.

Part of my response as to why bother at all is suggested in a phrase lifted from the Ten Commandments. "So that your days will be long upon the land."[11] Notice that the commandment doesn't suggest that living with a certain devotion to our *mitzvah* system guarantees a long life. Rather, whatever portion of days/years may be ours will be filled with greater clarity and intensity if we can find a way to be among those upon less is lost. I have no doubt that is not only possible, but is also key to the value-added that Jewish tradition brings to the "business" of making a life.

TWO SUGGESTIONS

With that in mind, I offer two suggestions. The first has a Jewish context in that the person who offered the teaching to me is part of our community. The second has a more specifically Jewish *ta'am* (flavor).

First item: my friend and her mother were incarcerated in a Japanese prisoner of war camp in Indonesia during World War II. Some 80% of their fellow prisoners did not survive the camp. Up to her death in her mid-90s, the daughter continued to marvel at her mother's enthusiasm for the gift and blessing of life. After all, we likely know persons who instead embraced cynicism after far less trying experiences. The daughter inquired of her mother as to the secret of her joy. Her mother's response: "Every day of my imprisonment and every day thereafter I would insist on asking myself three

questions. Did I see, hear, and say something beautiful? Admittedly, the rabbi in me added a fourth category. Namely, did I do something beautiful?"

Ever since hearing her story and before retiring for bed, I ask myself those four questions. Did I see, hear, say, and do something beautiful? If the answer to any one of them is "no," then I have to get up because my real work, my soul work, for the day isn't finished. The magic, of course, is the more one engages in that *cheshbon ha-nefesh* (an inventory of spirit or soul), the more one discovers the endless number of Burning Bush moments scattered throughout every day.

Second item: During my first year out of rabbinical school, I would study *Midrash* weekly with a retired rabbi who happened to be blind. Often, after we would complete our study, then the real learning would begin. So it was on one particular occasion that he asked me when one recites the *Shecheyanu* prayer. Having just graduated from seminary, I knew the answer cold. So I told him that it is said when you are doing something for the first time or the first time in season. The rabbi's immediate response, "Wrong." Fortunately, he elaborated with a *Talmud*ic phrase. "Let your ears hear what your mouth has spoken." What he said next literally changed my life. "Michael, it's when are you not doing something for the first time."

Ever since, there's a voice right behind my right ear, one that is constantly reciting that prayer. And here's the remarkable part, I can't get through one prayerbefore it's time for the next and the next. Admittedly, there are times when it's only background noise, but then moments of awareness enter and, yes, I am alert to the certainty that the ground upon which I walk is holy.

Praised are You Eternal our God, Ruler of the universe, who has kept us in life, sustained us, and brought us to this precious moment, this precious moment and more…

Endnotes:

1. Zedek, Michael. *Taking Miracles Seriously: A Journey to Everyday Spirituality.* Toronto, Sutherland House Books, 2023.
2. *Gates of Prayer - Shaarei Tefila: The New Union Prayerbook for Weekdays, Sabbaths, and Festivals.* New York City: CCAR Press, 1975.
3. Albert Einstein, as quoted in *Journal of France and Germany (1942-1944)* by Gilbert Fowler White, in excerpt published in Hinshaw, Robert E. "Living with Nature's Extremes: The Life of Gilbert Fowler White." Denver, Co: Johnson Books, 2006.
4. Browning, Elizabeth Barrett. quote from *Aurora Lee*.
5. *Asher Yatsar,* prayer after using the bathroom
6. *Psalms* 139:14
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8. James, Henry. *The Art of Fiction*, in *Longman's Magazine,* September 4, 1884.
9. Quote in The Doors, "When the Music's Over," track 10 on *Strange Days.*
10. Fisher, Carrie. *Postcards From the Edge*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010.
11. Fifth Commandment: Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God gives you.