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*The*  
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**Educator**  
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*New Ideas & Engagement*

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# THE JEWISH EDUCATOR

Welcome to the June 2018 *The Jewish Educator*, containing articles written by your colleagues. For this issue, we asked for articles on the following topics:

1. As we approach the High Holidays and new beginnings, share changes and exciting ideas you institute in your classroom, in your professional development, or in the climate of your school.
2. With today's overprogrammed students and overcommitted families, share creative ways of keeping children, with the support of their families, in school and engaged in the learning process.

We also accepted articles on Howard Garner's Multiple Intelligence Theories.

Dr. Art Shostak's article, "Making the Case for a Holocaust Education Reset," puts forth the case for a reset of Holocaust teaching with six pedagogical changes in classrooms and at home. His belief is that we need to move from the teaching method -- dating from 1945 until the present -- of what he calls the "Horror Story," focusing on the crimes perpetrated against the victims, to the "Help Story," an account of how victims tried to care for each other.

Jane Tamaren, M.D., titles her article, "Teaching Genesis in the Next Generation." She suggests teaching Torah stories to young people, using the lens provided by archeological discoveries in Egypt and the Near East. Students paint pictures that illustrate these stories by using the literary approach provided by Robert Alter.

In her article, "Looking at an Effective, Low-Cost Means of Long-Term Professional Development? Try a Community of Practice!," Miriam Rosalyn Diamond outlines the rationale behind COPs, describes how to create them, and shares practical information on motivating participants.

Hana Bor, Ph.D., and M.Paz Galupo, Ph.D., in their article, "Using Creative Leadership to Transform Jewish Education," suggest the importance of Jewish educators being encouraged and trained to develop skills in creative leadership. Their article describes the Creative Leadership Institute at Baltimore Hebrew Institute at Towson University and three areas on which Jewish educators can focus to "up the game" in their field of practice.

Ora Shulman, in her article "How Do We Creatively Engage Students and Provide a Sense of Community Through the Learning Year?," describes the #MADE@AHS program, which was inspired by the new Makerspace at Associated Hebrew School, Posluns Campus in Toronto.

Emily Aronoff Teck, Ed.D., in her article, "How Can My Jewish Institution Attract Families with Young Children?," sets out five things to do before you begin a program for families with young children to help ensure the success of the program.

Lisa Dvorin, M.Ed., in her article, "Connect, Engage and Inspire," describes her methods of connecting with and keeping families and students both in and out of the classroom in spite of their busy lives. One of these is a Jewish inspiration blog.

Cantor Wayne Krieger, in his article, "NOSH—a New Oneg Shabbat Happening," describes and reflects on a Friday night service program for families with young children.

Melissa Hoffman, in her article, "The Ark Project: A Groundbreaking Service-Learning Curriculum for Bnai Mitzvah Students," describes a newly-created (2016) service-learning curriculum, Jewish Initiative for Animals (JIFA), for Bar and Bat mitzvah students.

Mick Fine, in his article, "How Can We Integrate Hebrew Language with Social Emotional Learning?," looks at implementing an integrated curriculum of Hebrew and social-emotional learning, leaning on Howard Gardner's belief that social-emotional intelligence is one of the ways humans develop.

Cantor Daniel Eli Friedman suggests, in his article "A New Pedagogy for Teaching Torah Trope Utilizing Multiple Intelligence Theory," that teaching Torah to the very young as well as to those past Bar/Bat mitzvah age, can be successfully accomplished by using Gardner's multiple intelligences theory.

Mindy Gold, in her article, "Text, Technology, and Multiple Intelligences: A Model of Collaborative Professional Development," describes the ways that technology can help and enhance teaching and professional development through the Jewish Educator Technology Initiative (JETI), which she created. She focuses on chavruta text study with technology tools in order to reach different learners.

*Dorice Horenstein and Sherry Knazan*  
Co-Chairs, *The Jewish Educator*

# Using Creative Leadership To Transform Jewish Education

Hana Bor and M. Paz Galupo

Jewish thinkers have started to recognize the important role that creativity can play in transforming Jewish education.<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Daniel Lehmann, President of Hebrew College, wrote:

“We can and we should reorient Jewish education toward creativity... Leaders need to be creative thinkers, and we need to invest in fostering creativity as a core quality of educational leadership.”<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, Professor Michael Shire wrote:

“What would it be like if the desired result of Jewish Education was not textual literacy nor Jewish continuity nor identity development but the cultivation of a creative disposition; to act b’zelem elokim – as the Creator acts?”<sup>3</sup>

While the importance of Jewish leadership and creativity is becoming more and more apparent, there are still too few opportunities for Jewish educators to develop these skills. We describe the success of the Creative Leadership Institute at Towson University and present it as a model to develop more programs across the country geared toward helping Jewish educators become creative leaders. These programs help instill confidence in Jewish educators’ ability to teach and inspire in creative ways and to believe in their own ability to lead while adapting to changing times. Ultimately, these types of programs have the potential to meaningfully transform Jewish education.

### HOW CREATIVE LEADERSHIP CAN HELP CHANGE THE CURRENT COURSE OF JEWISH EDUCATION

Creative leadership is characterized as a way of initiating change that is flexible, relational, inventive, and open.<sup>4,5,6</sup> In recent Jewish history, rapid changes, conflicts, and controversy have rocked our communities from playground to board-room. For example, in the past, it was the norm for Jewish children to attend Hebrew School three days per week for an average of six hours weekly; more recently, many Hebrew Schools have consolidated to two-hour weekly sessions to accommodate the busy lives of its students. As the pace of life gets busier for families, children are becoming more highly-scheduled, with an emphasis on professional success and involvement in society. As a result, involvement in the Jewish community has become less of a priority. Synagogues, which once served as a center for Jewish life for generations of children, parents, and grandparents, have too often transitioned to a place where Jews go only to take part in holidays and life-cycle events. Now more than ever, Jewish educators need to identify trustworthy, courageous, and capable leaders. These leaders can use creativity to adapt, grow, and innovate. We need leaders who will transform Jewish education, and value creativity as one of today’s most important leadership skills.

In recent years, organizations — both for-profit and non-profit — have become aware of the importance of creativity and innovation to organizational success and survival. Leadership and creativity are highly related, as leaders must learn to be creative during times of change in order to be successful. Creativity and leadership are not just innate qualities inherent in some individuals, but are learned skills that can be acquired with training and practice. Creative leaders need to be comfortable with ambiguity, embrace risk-taking, and be able to influence and inspire others in new ways and directions. Developing a set of skills to move forward and succeed can help them to accomplish positive change. All individuals have the ability to grow into leadership positions and to

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develop the skills necessary to become creative leaders.

Our work addresses how we can become more creative and exercise innovative leadership.<sup>7</sup> Following two summer instructional leadership institutes for Jewish educators at Towson University, we sent surveys to 200 Jewish professionals including the 44 participants in the Creative Leadership Institute. We found that many Jewish educators felt they were lacking the tools and skills to problem-solve and adapt to change. We performed needs assessments to identify what types of workshops and training activities Jewish educators need to grow, and determined that we need to create programs to help participants think “outside of the box” and learn how to lead in creative and innovative ways. As a result, we formed a team of Jewish and non-Jewish

passion to their students leads this group of educators to be highly motivated to find creative ways to reach their students.

Using a thematic analysis,<sup>8,9</sup> we conducted an extensive review of the transcripts from the interviews and focus groups and identified three areas in which Jewish educators can embrace creative leadership in order to enhance their field of practice: Jewish history, current Jewish educational context, and Jewish values.

Participants used Jewish history as a way to describe why Jewish educators may be uniquely positioned to engage in creative leadership. In particular, they drew upon the way Jewish survival can be seen as an act of creativity. Additionally, they saw Jewish questioning as fostering

## **Creativity and leadership are not just innate qualities inherent in some individuals, but are learned skills that can be acquired with training and practice. Creative leaders need to be comfortable with ambiguity, embrace risk-taking, and be able to influence and inspire others in new ways and directions.**

professors to address these needs and developed the Creative Leadership Institute for Jewish Educators.

### **CREATIVE LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH EDUCATORS**

Beginning with the premise that you can be taught to become a creative leader, we worked with a cross-denominational group of Jewish educators with varying degrees of experience. Educators came together for a three-day seminar at Baltimore Hebrew Institute at Towson University in order to explore creative leadership and its potential applications in their own educational settings.

After defining creative leadership, and looking at problems within their own institutions through this new lens, participants returned to their educational settings, and the seminar team followed up with them five months into their academic year. We conducted eight in-depth interviews as well as a focus-group including ten teachers and administrators. During the follow-up focus groups, we found that creative leadership tools learned in the Institute were being used by teachers, administrators, and rabbis as an approach to Jewish education and as a method for change. Our interviews and focus groups taught us that many of the individuals working in this profession care deeply about Jewish education and view it as a profound responsibility and an obligation to teach the next generation. Their devotion and commitment to Jewish tradition and desire to impart this

creativity and critical thinking. Participants found that throughout Jewish history, there were many times that Jews were faced with changes that challenged them to become more creative in their religious practice. One focus group participant said:

“ . . . For over eighteen hundred years Jews got scattered out of their homes and they were committed to conserving a tradition but yet making it fit into wherever they were, so you [have] North African Jews making North African Jewish customs, you have Western European Jews making Western European customs and Spanish Jews and it goes on and on and on and that is a product of creativity. Jewish survival is a product of creativity we have inherited. . . ”

This example and many others that came as a result of the focus groups and interviews reinforce that creativity and adaptation to changing times have been part of the Jewish experience throughout history. Jewish educators can learn from history to continue to adapt and grow creatively in their practice of teaching and leading.

Participants described the unique current Jewish educational context as requiring creative leadership to solve real-world obstacles. For example, they noted that Jewish education must bridge differences across religious and secular schools

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and differences in the way Jewish families shift across communities and across time.<sup>10</sup>

“The vision is constantly changing and the goals are constantly changing, and even the population is changing. Where families are, what the families expect, and their investment in Jewish education have drastically changed. How can we, as a school, keep up with that and meet the changing needs of the families? And how can we utilize some of the teaching techniques that work well in the public schools and bring them to religious school.”

Participants also described their approaches to creative leadership within the framework of Jewish values. Jewish educators view the values they are teaching as part of their identity. Sharing these values with their students is more than just a job; it is an obligation. They view it as a responsibility to impart these values to the next generation.

“So my way as a creative leader is finding the different parts within a program and finding how we can implement Jewish values and educate the children who attend [these programs].”

It is clear that Jewish educators see creative leadership as a concept integrated with their notion of Judaism as well as Jewish education. Their responses suggest that Creative Leadership has the potential to be a successful leadership model for any Jewish educational settings.

## CREATIVE LEADERSHIP TIPS FOR EDUCATORS

Based on our research, we suggest five ideas for school administrators to enhance creative leadership in their schools.

- Create a program (e.g., staff retreat) to help teachers think “outside the box” and generate new ideas and teaching techniques in a fresh environment.
- Work with staff to develop definitions for creativity and creative leadership that are personal to your school. Staff can work together to think of other examples of creative leadership and create an action plan to apply these concepts to your school.
- Approach everyday obstacles through the lens of creative

leadership. Work with staff to come up with solutions to common challenges in Jewish education based on creative leadership.

- Hold three staff meetings throughout the year that focus on the three topics highlighted in our research (Jewish history, the current Jewish educational context, and Jewish values). For example, staff can discuss examples of creative leadership throughout Jewish history and relate them to creative leadership in Jewish education today.

- Encourage staff to attend professional development programs that focus on creative leadership.

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# Looking for an Effective, Low-Cost Means of Long-Term Professional Development? Try a Community of Practice!

Miriam Rosalyn Diamond

*Shoshana is new to the role of Educational Director in a mid-sized congregation's Religious School, having been promoted from a senior teacher position. Her predecessor has moved out of state. The Temple's Rabbi joined the congregation one year earlier. Shoshana often feels overwhelmed by the many demands of her role: reviewing and revising curriculum to make it relevant, engaging, and attainable; hiring, training, and supervising effective teachers; creating an inclusive and responsive school culture; addressing parental concerns; managing the demands of the educational board and clergy. She often feels isolated in her small city and unprepared to deal with many unexpected challenges of her job. When she hears about a monthly inter-congregational community of practice for educational directors (and their designees), she decides to try it out. There she finds colleagues facing similar concerns, experienced mentors, community resources, and opportunities to discuss educational theory and practice that apply to Jewish Religious Education. She gets support, direction, feedback, and ideas in a non-judgmental setting. She returns to her office inspired and empowered.*

**T**he roles of Jewish educators, particularly Educational Directors and Inclusion Specialists, are complex and evolving. They create and share a vision of learning for their institutions. They respond to the needs of students, families (enrolled and prospective), board and congregational members. They recruit, train, and supervise teachers as well as substitutes (often teen *madrichim* or classroom aides). They publicize activities, locate supplies, and deal with financial matters. Often, they teach classes as well. Without peers in the school, they can feel isolated as they juggle many expectations. They may report to clergy, administrators, and boards — supervisors who may not have experience performing the many tasks demanded of these professionals. Some of these educators have formal training in the field, others have content knowledge (e.g., speak Hebrew fluently) and may have worked their way up from classroom teaching. Communities of Practice can be key in supporting these individuals as they navigate the complexities of their jobs.

### WHAT ARE COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE?

Communities of Practice are “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, E., 2006, 1.) They are a low-cost, highly interactive form of peer professional development.

Communities of Practice aim to meet goals of an organization, as well as individual participants. These gatherings have a clear purpose, foster interpersonal connections, create a shared context, promote deep discussion, promote learning, solidify and disseminate knowledge and skills, cultivate collaboration, promote organized and intentional action, and foster new understanding (Cambridge, Kaplan, and Suter, 2005).

These groups have three common components; DOMAIN — or shared area of expertise and inquiry; COMMUNITY — collaborative and reciprocal relationships; and PRACTICE — the opportunity to develop and apply skills and tools (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, 2002).

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There is a range of activities that take place in Community of Practice meetings, including problem-solving, providing information, offering resources, collaborating/bridge-building, sharing updates and progress, collectively documenting knowledge and progress, and peer site visits.

What makes these collectives so effective? Participants should be intrinsically motivated to be involved. "Because communities of practice are voluntary, what makes them successful over time is their ability to generate enough excitement, relevance, and value to attract and engage members" (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, 50). It is also important that the linkages are made for the context in which these professionals function. "The value of the communities of practice lies in (their) ability to connect personal development and the professional identity of practitioners to the strategy of the organization" (Chua, A., 2002, para. 4).

## COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE IN JEWISH EDUCATION

Through Communities of Practice, Jewish educators can find support, guidance, and a peer group to which they belong. They have the opportunity to both develop and share skills as their professional identity becomes stronger.

"Gateways: Access to Jewish Education" is an organization that supports and promotes Jewish special education for, and inclusion of, children in Metropolitan Boston area religious schools, including day schools, congregational schools, and community supplemental programs. Among its goals is the provision of effective and inclusive instruction promoting learning, belonging, involvement, and the connection of learners regardless of neurological, emotional, and physical ability levels. Since 2012, Gateways has offered Communities of Practice for Educational Directors (and/or their designated representatives) of supplemental congregational and community schools across the area. Institutions that have received an annual Community Special Education Grant from this organization are strongly encouraged to become involved in this program. Some attend once or twice without returning, while about fourteen attend five or more sessions annually, and often re-join year after year.

The monthly two-hour meetings are facilitated by a professional developer and held Wednesday mornings at a centrally-located synagogue. The Communities of Practice are active during the school year, with members attending as many sessions as possible. About a dozen people are present at each gathering. Light snacks are provided.

These sessions generally follow the following format:

1. Opening participant-led d'var Torah study of the weekly parasha and themes that connect to inclusion, teaching, learning, human development, and interpersonal values.

2. Attendee check-in on recent events, challenges, and learnings at their school since the previous meeting. Confidentiality is a key feature of these sessions.

3. Presentation by a few individuals of informal cases of situations with which individuals are struggling and would like direction. These cases may revolve around particular students or whole classes, teachers, families, and/or synagogue leaders. Following the brief informal presentation of the issues, attendees are invited to question each case presenter for clarification and to inquire about options considered. They may also share similar experiences. Brainstorming often follows, from which case presenters can identify possible next steps to investigate. As a result of the discussion, readings on the subject (such as motivation, classroom management, and mentoring of teachers) are provided in follow-up emails or at subsequent meetings.

4. Introduction such as a hands-on demonstration of technology successfully in use at one school or the sharing of recommended text books or newly developed materials for learning Hebrew.

5. Finally, team decision on who will present cases and the d'var Torah at the coming meeting. Often, members linger following the program to continue discussing topics on a more informal basis.

Some of the CoPs also have engaged in a one-read approach, exploring ideas from a book of interest such as "The Essential Conversation" (on parent-teacher communication) by Sarah Lightfoot-Lawrence. At the beginning of the year, members complete a brief questionnaire regarding their strengths, interests, needs, and goals for participation. As the school year draws to a close, they are again surveyed regarding the usefulness of this program, what they gained, and suggestions for the future.

## IMPACT AND FEEDBACK

This program is deemed a success by many participants, some of whom travel over an hour each way to attend. Relationships have been built, lessening feelings of isolation and increasing skill levels. Practitioners have received support and learned from each others' struggles. New directors gain insights from experienced peers. Conversations begun in the sessions often continue afterward. Educators have been invited to each others' schools to consult and share ideas. Together, they have brainstormed ways to plan holiday celebrations, address concerns about staff, and integrate families whose children have special needs into the organizational community. Educators who create and share innovative programs receive recognition and validation of their efforts.

Over multiple end-of-year surveys, 89% indicated on a 1-4 scale (“Not at all Useful” to “Extremely Useful”) that they found the program “Extremely Useful,” while the remainder said it was “Useful.” All noted that the topics addressed were relevant to their work, with 70% stating that they were extremely relevant.

When asked about their professional goals upon joining the Community of Practice, most cited general learning, such as “Learn from other professionals. Exposure to successful strategies – both around inclusion, but also general school issues” and “to learn from my colleagues and to participate with them in exploring issues that confront us as Jewish educators.” The networking aspect itself was also a key attraction for many, as they stated “Tons of ideas for specific student issues and just general ideas from other teachers. Meeting regularly with people facing similar challenges lessens the isolation that can be part of the job,” “To use the community of practice for support as needed throughout the school year.” A number sought specific skills, such as “How to reach out to families with special needs, and how to best service and include our current students with special needs.”

In response to the question “How did participating in this Community of Practice inform, support, and influence your work?” it was the collaborative aspect that came up most often: “Gave me a community and network to learn from and seek advice from. Breath of fresh air in contrast to isolation of working in my office,” “Developed very strong working relationships with others and feel like I can call on these professionals even outside these specific meetings,” and “I enjoy the camaraderie and learn from other educators. I took some suggestions that helped support students, but mostly it helps to know that I’m not alone!” This was followed by skill improvement and increased confidence in addressing specific challenges. Statements included “The sharing environment has provided me with many valuable tools and techniques which I have brought back and shared with my staff,” “Contemplate before acting! Reflect back on conversations in the group!” “Focused on children’s individual needs.”

When invited to describe the ways their work was affected as a result of the discussions, responses included ideological influences such as “...The concept of ‘mattering’...was a great step to work with all kids in making our community feel more inclusive” and “I really liked the discussion on the ‘imposter syndrome.’ Adapting the approach that I don’t need to know all the answers is very refreshing for me.” Others listed particular techniques, for example “New apps, new ways of teaching, new ways of reaching out to parents, new activities/ programs,” “Specifically, I enjoyed the conversations about textbooks, scheduling, assessment/report cards/ conferences,

teacher hiring, addressing special learning issues (IEPSs).” Collaborations with other group members was cited, such as the comment that “One family ed (program) was drawn specifically from [a] reference from A.L.. Idea sharing was wonderful!”

Most participants saw this program’s strengths as providing “Help [to] strategize on specific cases and learn from the presentation by other people on challenges/concerns. We worked as a community to think critically and strategize on the issues.” A number of people expressed appreciation for engaging with peers who had a variety of expertise levels: “People bring varied perspectives and experiences, which give us all a chance to learn and grow. Since question(s)/topics are determined by the group and focus on meeting the needs of all learners, we always walk out with something.” Most participants liked the fairly open sessions that addressed issues as they arose, while a few requested more days dedicated to specific subjects such as teaching prayer, or classroom behavioral management strategies. There was some difference of opinion about structuring more interaction between meetings. Some felt too busy to take on another task and would prefer to reach out to specific peers only as needed, while a few expressed the desire for a designated buddy or hevruta-type partner.

## CREATING A CoP

How does one start a Community of Practice? The first step is to determine the program’s desired outcomes and the target participants. Research — often in the form of surveys or focus group discussions — can help determine professionals’ needs, interest levels, and schedule constraints. The next step is to plan meeting formats, including the amount of structure desired, roles of participants and facilitators, themes/topics, activities and logistics such as timing, location, and means of communication between sessions. It is important to get organizational stakeholder buy-in and determine incentives for joining. The program can be initially tested on a smaller scale before opening it up to a larger group. It is essential to create a setting where participants can speak openly and be vulnerable without fear of repercussion, so it may be best to separate supervisors from staff. A preliminary focus of the program is on community-building, developing norms of interaction, and identifying members’ needs. Active participation is key, including the encouragement of networking, cooperative learning, skill sharing, and engaging in collaborative projects among members. Over time, these communities should be flexible to accommodate the shifting needs of members (Cambridge, Kaplan, and Suter, 2005).

Once the Community of Practice is running, it is important to be flexible in allowing the format to develop organically. Balancing personal experience with scholarship, empirical findings, and data will allow for intellectual and skill



development. Interactions can include dyadic, small- and whole-group engagement. The topics at hand should be relevant to members, and the agenda can include elements of predictability and spontaneity to be able to address needs as they arise (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002).

## CONCLUSION

Communities of Practice offer effective, low-cost, on-going engaged professional development for Jewish educators who often face multiple demands in isolation from peers. These programs provide opportunities for participants to grow professionally, as well as develop and affirm expertise while building connections that support their work. As professional contacts are made, resources and ideas are shared, and skills and confidence increase. When busy professionals commit to participating in these groups, positive effects can spread to all levels of religious schools, including teachers, madrichim, students, and the larger community.

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# Connect, Engage, and Inspire

Lisa Dvorin

**A**s the kindergarten teacher for the Temple Emanuel of South Hills Torah Center, I feel honored to be in a unique position to inspire my young students to love Judaism. I also make it my mission to connect with my students' families in any way I can so that they feel welcome at our synagogue and inspired to live Jewishly themselves. I am very aware that children are over-programmed and families are over committed — I live that firsthand with my own three children. I accept this reality and work with it, not against it. My hope is that my students will be immersed in such an enjoyable and rich classroom environment that when they go back out into the world they will still be excited to think and live Jewishly.

### THE FOUNDATION

The foundation of everything I do consists of two parts: building relationships with my students and their families and being a strong example of embracing Judaism in my own life.

I prioritize connecting with my students and families. Every Sunday morning, a few minutes before class, I stand in the hallway just outside the classroom door, at the ready to welcome my guests (*hachnasat orchim*) with a friendly “*Boker Tov!*” I engage with them right away and try to reference something they may have told me during a previous class. “Leo! Your birthday is in four days!” Then I’ll generate excitement about our opening project: “We’re making special *challah* covers for *Rosh Hashanah!* I can’t wait to see what design you make!” This not only lets them know what to expect when they walk into class, it also gets them on board to start the project with a positive attitude.

When they do walk into class, our two *madrichim* (I have been very fortunate to have fantastic *madrichim* each year) are in position at the work tables, ready to greet the students and explain the project. This frees me to stay at my greeting station, and it also gives the *madrichim* some autonomy to connect with the students in their own way. Throughout the year, I remind the *madrichim* how important it is to engage with the students. We want them to learn about Judaism, but, more importantly, we want them to feel welcomed and valued in our Jewish community. This goal informs how the *madrichim* and I approach every moment with the students. Even if the students forget everything I teach them, I hope that they will still remember how they felt when they were in my class, and that consequently they will have a positive feeling about Judaism.

The second foundation I create in my classroom is being a positive example of someone who loves and lives Judaism. I focus on maintaining sincere enthusiasm (*zerizut*) about all things Jewish. This comes naturally to me because every aspect of my life is immersed in Judaism. I tell them all about how my family and I celebrate the holidays; I tell them how I incorporate Jewish values into various situations in my life; I even tell them fun stories, like the one about my dog who barks for *challah* every Friday night. And if there is a holiday around the corner, I’ll be sure to mention what I’m thinking about and what I plan on doing. “*Yom Kippur* will be here in a few days, and I’ve been thinking about some of the mistakes I’ve made this year, such as not being patient when I should have been.” On the flip side, “*Purim* is just around the corner, and I’m so excited, I can hardly stand it! I can’t wait to wear my Queen Esther costume and hear the *megillah* reading!”

Without this foundation of building relationships with my students and being an

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example of loving Judaism myself, I believe that everything else I do would fail. The other activities I do are very successful because they rest on the connections and enthusiasm I prioritize. Below are just a few of these activities.

## A HANDS-ON, FUN OPENING PROJECT

Without exception, when the students arrive, they will immediately jump into a project that reflects the topic of that day. For example, for *Purim*, one of our projects is to make *groggers* by filling clear vitamin bottles with multi-colored beads. I have a clear plastic tray for each student, along with a tiny cup; each table has two bins filled with a diverse assortment of beads — all colors and shapes imaginable. The students can scoop beads into their individual trays, inspect them, and then decide which ones will go into their *grogger* bottle. I have yet to meet a student who does not absolutely love doing this. Having them color a worksheet of a *grogger* is out of the question in my book. They need to be engaged. They need to use as many of their senses as possible. They need to love it. And while they are happily working on their project, the students chatter away with each other, and

**They need to be engaged. They need to use as many of their senses as possible. They need to love it. And while they are happily working on their project, the students chatter away with each other, and with the madrichim and me. Doing this consistently each week, we are building community; we are allowing them to connect with the topic in a fun and memorable way; and we communicate that Judaism is worth the effort and worth diving in deep.**

with the madrichim and me. Doing this consistently each week, we are building community; we are allowing them to connect with the topic in a fun and memorable way; and we communicate that Judaism is worth the effort and worth diving in deep.

## CIRCLE TIME WITH MITZVAH STORIES

After our opening project, we always have Circle Time. I welcome the students (“*Boker Tov, Yeladim!*”); we sing the *Shema*; we sing “*Yom Huledet Sameach*” if anyone has a birthday; and then I open the floor for *mitzvah* stories or anything the students wish to share. By inviting the students to share *mitzvah* stories, I am reinforcing the importance of not only doing *mitzvot*, but also noticing when others do them. The kindergarteners are on board with this and are happy to share stories of helping family members and friends (or being helped themselves). Giving them the opportunity

to share whatever they want is just as important because (1) we are valuing them by listening, and (2) there are many teachable moments during Circle Time. One week, a student shared that he had seen another student at a store, so I asked if they had said hello to each other, and they said, “yes.” This led to a discussion of the Jewish value of greeting people — especially people we know. Later that week, a mother of a different student in my class e-mailed me to say that her daughter, who is typically shy, surprised her that week by saying hello to her fifth-grade buddy at her academic school. Her mother praised her, and the girl responded that she had learned at Torah Center that you have to say “hi” if you see someone you know.

## THIS IS WHAT WE DID TODAY

Each week, I create a page entitled “This is What We Did Today at Torah Center” and give it to the parents when they pick up their kids. On this page (which is easy to read and has a consistent format), I include our topic, our opening project, the books we read, the “specials” (special activities) we went to, and what we talked about during our topic discussion. I also have a specific question the parents can ask their

children (this avoids the dreaded back and forth of “What did you do today?” “Nothing.”), as well as a simple and doable suggestion for something to try at home. Offering this sheet keeps parents informed and gives them the tools to engage with their kids about their day at Religious School and about Judaism in general. I realize that it is likely that some of the parents do not read this sheet, but even if just one parent a week does, it makes a big difference.

## SHABBAT BOX

When we learn about *Shabbat*, I read the students *The Shabbat Box* by Lesley Simpson. In this book, students take turns bringing home a special box, a *Shabbat* Box filled with a *Kiddush* cup and grape juice, a *challah* and *challah* cover, candlesticks and candles, and some *Shabbat* games and treats. Our classroom has its own *Shabbat* Box, and each student has one turn with taking it home. I updated it

recently to include the fun game “Spot It! *Shalom*” and also Jewish stickers for the kids to keep. I ask the students to be sure to take lots of photos of their *Shabbat* Box experience, and, afterwards, the parents send me the photos (which I include in their portfolio/memory books). When a student returns the *Shabbat* Box on Sunday, I always ask that student if he/she would like to share their *Shabbat* experience with the class. This way, the students can have a chance to share and be heard, and the other students can look forward to their own turn with the *Shabbat* Box. I never assume that students celebrate *Shabbat* at their homes on Friday nights — many have told me that they don’t. My hope is that the *Shabbat* Box gives all the families a meaningful experience so that they consider adding it to their family routine (or, in the case of families who already routinely have *Shabbat* dinner, enhancing their *Shabbat* celebration in some way).

## SENDING A PERSONAL NOTE

All of the teachers at my school send personal handwritten notes to their students mid-year. I look forward to this because I know how exciting it is to get mail. For each note, I write that I am thankful that the student is in my class; I give him/her a compliment, such as “You are a kind friend”; and I write that I can’t wait to spend many more Sundays with him/her and all the kindergarten friends. This is always well received, and, sometimes, I will have a student write a note back to me and bring it to class.

## PORTFOLIO/MEMORY BOOKS

I am constantly taking pictures in my classroom, and I try to take mostly candid shots in order to “catch” the students in their natural moments (and so I don’t disrupt them). I also take photos of the students when we go to “specials,” such as *Ivrit* (Hebrew), *Zimriah* (Music), *Omanut* (Art), and *Sifriyah* (Library). By the end of the year, I have a beautiful collection of photos that I put into a binder for each student. In addition to the photos, I also include portfolio pages that the students create for each topic. These pages are simple and open-ended. The *Hanukkah* page, for instance, says “This is me celebrating *Hanukkah*.” We have a class discussion about what they could draw on the page, such as playing *dreidel*, making or eating *latkes*, singing *Hanukkah* songs, etc. After the students draw their individual pictures, the *madrichim* and I go around the room and ask each student to tell us about their picture. We ask permission to write what they tell us at the bottom of their portfolio page (e.g., “I am eating donuts at my grandma’s house.”). On the last day of class, the parents join the students in the classroom, and, together, they go through their portfolio/memory books with pride and excitement. This is one of the most satisfying moments for me as a teacher. It is difficult not to cry, and sometimes I do! The students cherish these books, and my hope is that they will look at them for years to come. Parents have sent me photos of their children sleeping with their portfolios or looking at them years later. I am thrilled.

## MEETING THEM WHERE THEY ARE

Even as early as kindergarten, kids’ lives are quite busy. They do multiple activities and most of them have siblings who also do multiple activities. Because of this, Judaism’s competition is really...everything. In addition to that, many students at our synagogue have one parent who is not Jewish. Consequently, students talk freely about celebrating Christmas; I have even had students start singing Christmas songs while everyone is working on the opening project. (My response to that: “That sounds like a lovely song; let’s think of a Jewish song we can sing...”) I meet my students where they are and do my best to provide the most fantastic Jewish experience possible while they are with me. One year, on *Yom Kippur* (while the parents were in services), a student arrived quite late and said, “Sorry I’m late. I was at my soccer game.” Yes, ideally, one would not participate in a soccer game on *Yom Kippur*. But... the student still showed up. Here is what I said, and I truly meant it: “I’m so glad you’re here with us now.” Fighting against the realities of modern life will get us nowhere. Making the best of our time when our students are with us will make a positive impact, even if in some cases it’s a small one.

## MAMA SHALOM BLOG

From the very start of my teaching tenure, I had a strong desire to inspire not only my students, but also their parents and families. I do my best to accomplish this in the limited interactions I have with them, but, for many years, I have wanted to do more. Even beyond my own synagogue, I want to inspire people to live Jewishly in a way that brings out the best in themselves, their families, and their communities. This is why I created *Mama Shalom* ([www.mamashalom.com](http://www.mamashalom.com)), my Jewish inspiration blog. About three times a week, I write posts about Jewish character values, Jewish traditions, rituals, holidays, *tikkun olam*, and more. In addition, I have a Pinterest account with a vast collection of Jewish crafts and recipes on every topic and an Instagram account that captures parts of my blog, parts of my classroom, and parts of my own Jewish life. It is a joy to create all of this, and it enhances my goal of being a positive example of someone who loves Judaism. I hope that others, after reading my blog, will be inspired to create meaningful Jewish moments in their own lives.

For me, there is no separation between being a Jewish teacher and living my Jewish life. It is all connected. My passion for Judaism makes me a better teacher; all my experiences with my students and religious school community make me love Judaism even more. How can we, as Jewish educators, engage students and families as we compete with modern life? By embodying everything Judaism stands for; by being enthusiastic; by connecting with our students and valuing them; by engaging them in the most inspiring ways possible. It can be done, and it should be done. We all can do it.

# Integrating Hebrew Into Other Subjects

Mick Fine

In every school, students interact with their classmates and develop as social beings. As teachers, we plan for these interactions, we build activities, and we watch our students develop those skills necessary for navigating their social circles. Since we know how crucial the abilities to collaborate and to resolve conflicts respectfully are, a question we need to ask is how might we effectively plan for social emotional learning, and what benefit might be found by doing so in a Second Language Acquisition (SLA) context?

Integration of content areas is a staple in the Jewish educational field. Practitioners of progressive Jewish education are accustomed to thinking about innovative ways to blend the learning of subjects, such as the arts with Judaics, music with history, or geography with cultural studies.

Social emotional development isn't limited to early childhood, but rather continues throughout the early elementary years into young adulthood, and even beyond. Just as people grow physically, there is growth in terms of the ways that people understand themselves and their emotions, as well as those with whom they have meaningful relationships — their friends, family, classmates, and educators.

Taking on the challenge of developing and powerfully implementing a Hebrew language curriculum that specifically addresses some of the most frequent challenges that students face — their emerging understanding of how to navigate interpersonal relationships and express themselves — is no small task. Each subject on its own has associated methodologies, philosophies, and approaches. Why blend them? Beyond the well-researched benefits that learning a second language provides, spending time in a Hebrew class sends an implicit message — that Hebrew is important enough that we learn it with a variety of educators and in a variety of settings.

### WHY HEBREW?

Why Hebrew? Primarily because it is a language, a method of communication — the skills involved in understanding other people and expressing yourself are crucial in forming, nurturing, and strengthening relationships. Building proficiency necessitates interaction; the one is the result of the other.

At Beit Rabban Day School, we plan activities that demand of students a high volume of interactions through the use of surveys (students asking each other “What’s your favorite season?” or “Did you eat a *sufganiya* last night?”). We explicitly discuss, define, and practice respectful interactions. Students learn about each other and how to express themselves through debates, group journal-sharing, and interviewing, coupled with examination of Israeli cultural products such as videos, poems, and songs that discuss experiences of fear, sadness, loneliness, silliness, and friendship. The students learn to use the vocabulary to describe the characters’ emotions, and the social challenges that the characters experience in these materials.

In one such class, students “read” a comic by modern illustrator Yossi Abulafia that has only two words, its title: לבדי בבית — Home Alone.

The seven- and eight-year-old students, learning in relatively homogenous groups, are tasked with describing the action scene by scene, square by square. The open/closed

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nature of the prompt provides the students an opportunity to use the language they do have to tell the story of a child, his choices, and what he's thinking and feeling. Over the course of thirteen linked moments, students describe the character wanting what he doesn't have (ice cream), noticing he is alone, and playing by himself (and with his cat). The students tell the story in first person, casting themselves as the main character and sharing the thought process inherent in the choices.

In another class, a small group of heritage learners (advanced students from Hebrew-speaking homes or with particularly high aptitude) are tackling how one conducts oneself during a debate. As pairs of students face off, delivering pros and cons, they are called upon to respond thoughtfully with prepared comments, and to rebut their classmates in increasingly sophisticated ways. Given potential sentence starters such as "אני מבין אותך, אבל בכל זאת..." ("I understand you, but despite that...") or "כן, אבל מצד שני..." ("yes, but on the other hand...") the students practice acknowledging the other and responding in carefully crafted and respectful ways while working on their articulation and fluency, strengthening their

vocabulary, and developing their capacity to connect with others.

As we continue to develop the emergent curriculum, we respond to the challenges faced by the groups: an issue of cliques, normal childhood fears (spiders? the dark?), how there might be a מלכת השכונה (Queen of the Neighborhood) a בריון (Bully) or a מלך הכיתה (King of the class). Each of the aforementioned is the name of a modern Israeli cultural element: an episode in an Israeli children's series, a fun kids music album by famous Israeli musicians, or a modern Israeli poet.

Through the exposure to and discussion around the materials, we uncover and discuss the emotions, concerns, and personalities of the characters, and present to students the language with which they can describe their own emotions, concerns, desires, preferences, and experiences. Learning to use the language in these ways brings students to proficiency — a true ability to perform tasks in real settings.

# A New Pedagogy for Teaching Torah Trope Utilizing Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theories: Introduction to a Torah Trope Curriculum for Ages 2 to 92

Daniel Eli Friedman

Even today, pedagogy knows no more potent means of instilling an idea into the youthful mind than by association with music, and it is generally conceded that a text garbed in appropriate music is more readily grasped, assimilated and remembered than is the form of a plain statement.

*Sam J. Jacobson, "The Music of the Jews" (1898)*

As we have seen, there are numerous pragmatic and philosophical differences in the way trope instruction is approached. Certainly it can be argued that there is no right or wrong way, as long as the student learns trope in a reasonable length of time and has some understanding of the system. In spite of the preponderance of certain methods, it is posited that the teaching of trope defies standardization, mostly because the melodic renditions are never exactly the same. The "Polish Lithuanian" and the "Binder" trope systems may be frequently heard, but even these common systems are not always chanted precisely. Renditions common to the West Coast are often unknown on the East Coast, and vice versa.

As an example, the computer program TropeTrainer™ offers 28 trope system variations in the Ashkenazic tradition and five trope system variations in the Sephardic tradition (that's 32 different trope system variations!). More importantly, in developing this curriculum, I asked myself, "How can I engage students of trope beyond the traditional years prior to their Bar/Bat Mitzvah or as an adjunct to an adult Bar/Bat Mitzvah course? How can I bring Torah to life through the study of trope? How could I turn a subject that some consider tedious and boring into something exciting and vibrant? Most crucially, why would people care to chant Torah?"

To answer the first set of questions, I started the process of teaching Torah trope to a younger age than had ever been done before. Typically, Torah trope training starts one to two years prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah and is introduced for the sake of "getting through" the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, but not for the sake of learning as a means to its own end. This is short sighted. In addition, Torah trope training stops upon completion of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Educators should continue Torah trope training to post-Bar/Bat Mitzvah students and beyond. To this end, I became determined to familiarize myself with educational techniques, methodology, theory, and pedagogy to more fully understand how students learn. I delved briefly into Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development<sup>1</sup> and Erik Erikson's theory of psychological development.<sup>2</sup> In addition, I found Howard Gardner's writings immensely helpful, as well as those of Thomas R. Hoerr, for the application of Gardner's principles in the creation of a multiple intelligences classroom and school.<sup>3</sup> "The Ultimate Jewish Teacher's Handbook," edited by Nachama Skolnik Moskowitz, was also helpful.<sup>4</sup>

In his groundbreaking novel, "The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach," Howard Gardner identified seven distinct intelligences.<sup>5</sup> This theory of multiple-intelligence learning has emerged from recent cognitive research and

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“documents the extent to which students possess different kinds of minds and therefore learn, remember, perform, and understand in different ways.”<sup>6</sup> According to this theory, “we are all able to know the world through language, logical-mathematical analysis, spatial representation, musical thinking, use of the body to solve problems or to make things, an understanding of other individuals, and an understanding of ourselves. Where individuals differ is in the strength of these intelligences — the so-called ‘profile of intelligences’ — and in the ways in which such intelligences are invoked and combined to carry out different tasks, solve diverse problems, and progress in various domains.”<sup>7</sup>

Gardner says that these differences “challenge an educational system that assumes that everyone can learn the same materials in the same way [we have been teaching trope the

in this chapter) to inspire this type of learner. The use of chironomy (a form of conduction where the use of hand gestures directs musical performance) also touches on this learning intelligence.

**Musical:** Shows sensitivity to rhythm and sound. They love music, but they are also sensitive to sounds in their environments. They may study better with music in the background. They can be taught by turning lessons into lyrics, speaking rhythmically, or tapping out time. Tools include musical instruments, music, radio, stereo, CD-ROM, and multimedia. The use of musical notation for the trope, the accompanying CD, and “Hip Hop Torah Trope,” (including the option to use percussion instruments) all inspire this type of learner.

**... skill-focused professional development does not provide teachers with the depth of knowledge or experiences to be problem-solvers and thinkers about technology in the classroom. Instead, professional development attuned to teachers as learners, in particular that with a constructivist approach, is more effective.**

same way for years] and that a uniform, universal measure suffices to test student learning.”<sup>8</sup> He argues that “students learn in ways that are identifiably distinctive. The broad spectrum of students — and perhaps the society as a whole — would be better served if disciplines could be presented in a numbers of ways...”<sup>9</sup>

These learning styles are abridged as follows:<sup>10</sup>

**Visual-Spatial:** Thinks in terms of physical space, as do architects. They are very aware of their environments. They like to draw, do jigsaw puzzles, read maps, day-dream. They can be taught through drawings, verbal and physical imagery. Tools include models, graphics, charts, photographs, drawings, 3-D modeling, video, videoconferencing, television, multimedia, and texts with pictures/charts/graphs. Incorporate video, drawings of the trope symbols on a whiteboard or chalkboard, worksheets, and art projects in the curriculum to enhance the learning process.

**Bodily-Kinesthetic:** Uses the body effectively, like a dancer. They have a keen sense of body awareness. They like movement, making things, touching. They communicate well through body language and can be taught through physical activity, hands-on learning, acting out, and role playing. Tools include equipment and real objects. Develop art projects, coloring pages, and TROGA© (I will discuss TROGA© later

**Interpersonal:** Understanding, interacting with others. These students learn through interaction. They have many friends, empathy for others, and street smarts. They can be taught through group activities, seminars, and dialogues. Tools include the telephone, audio conferencing, time and attention from the instructor, writing, computer conferencing, and email. In the curriculum, this learner will be engaged by the peer-to-peer (chavruta) and small group interaction, as well as working on group art projects.

**Intrapersonal:** Understanding one’s own interests and goals. These learners tend to shy away from others. They’re in tune with their inner feelings; they have wisdom, intuition and motivation, as well as a strong will, confidence, and opinions. They can be taught through independent study and introspection. Tools include books, creative materials, diaries, privacy, and time. They are the most independent of the learners. The use of homework to allow these students private, “alone-time” to process and learn the material in portions of the curriculum is designed to encourage this type of learner.

**Linguistic:** Using words effectively. These learners have highly developed auditory skills and often think in words; they like reading, playing word games, and making up poetry or stories. They can be taught by encouraging them to say and



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see words, or read books together. Tools include computers, games, multimedia, books, tape recorders, and lectures. The insertion of crossword puzzles, word games, and the use of multimedia in the curriculum involve this type of learner.

**Logical–Mathematical:** Reasoning, calculating. They think conceptually, abstractly, and are able to see and explore patterns and relationships. They like to experiment and solve puzzles. They can be taught through logic games, investigations, and mysteries. They need to learn and form concepts before they can deal with details. In the curriculum I have included text study with questionnaires, in addition to articles on the history and etymology of trope to captivate this type of learner. The complexity of chironomy could also stimulate the logical-mathematical mind.

At first, it may seem impossible to teach to all learning styles. However, as one becomes mindful of the multiple intelligences of learners and we move into an era using mixed media or multimedia, it should become easier. The use of multimedia and mixed media was primary in my thinking, as well as how to include videos, smartphones, and computers, in addition to traditional text study and quizzes. By creating a curriculum that is mindful of the multiple-intelligence learning quotients that satisfy the many types of learning preferences, one can enhance the ability for every student of trope to be successful with or without being self-conscious. At the pre-school level, students really won't understand the import that they are absorbing Torah trope or any symbols for that matter<sup>11</sup>. With this in mind, I will present a teaching curriculum that reaches multiple types of learning intelligence, is appropriate for learners of all ages, and leads to the creation of a continuous, vibrant, and active Torah chanting community.

To begin, the curriculum is repetitive on purpose. It is designed to be used in its entirety, building from one age-specific grouping to the next, yet can stand alone by section or pod. For example, if you are working with two-year-old or four-year-old students, you can use the same curriculum for that of all early-childhood development students in section one. The same for section two (elementary-age students), section three (high-school-age students), and section four (adult learners). Still, each lesson plan within each section can be pulled and taught individually as well. This eliminates the teacher/tutor from having to create anything. All that is required is to follow the lesson plan. Furthermore, the teacher/tutor does not have to be well-versed in trope because a CD is included with a system of vocalization that can be used. Of course, prior knowledge and mastery of trope certainly would be advantageous, but they are not necessary, as all the materials will be provided for the teacher/tutor.

Section one of the curriculum is devoted to early-childhood-age learners (ages 2 – 6) and primarily utilizes kinesthetic educational techniques.<sup>12</sup> Kinesthetic learning is an outcrop of “active learning,” wherein the students are active participants rather than passive recipients of information. The focus of the learning situation is the classroom, not the teacher. In an active classroom the teacher is a creator and facilitator of the activity.<sup>13</sup> Noise level should be high; student behavior is supervised, but not rigidly controlled. Each lesson plan in the curriculum has some sort of “active learning” component.

Section two of the curriculum is for elementary-age learners (ages 7 – 12). At this level, I introduce lessons that take advantage of the “cooperative” or “collaborative” learning.<sup>14</sup> The students work together in groups and teach one another, remain responsible for creating projects together, and have moments to reflect back to the class what they have learned. The students take the lead in the trope projects. TROGA© can still be used at this level.

Section three of the curriculum is for high-school-age learners (ages 13 – 17). At this level, I introduce chironomy and text study. Building on the previous sections, teachers can include aspects of the previous lesson plans if they so choose. In addition, more advanced games are available and I present Trope Troupe as a learning outcome; torahreaders.net™ is also introduced. Through Trope Troupe and torahreaders.net™, students apply the trope as a practical skill by signing up to read from the Torah during an actual service. As it is chanted every month, the four Torah readings for Rosh Chodesh (from Pinchas in the book of Numbers: first aliyah 28: 1 – 3, second aliyah 28:3 – 5 [no, this is not a mistake, we do read verse 3 twice!], third Aliyah 28:6 – 10, fourth Aliyah 28:11 – 15) are given special attention.

Section four is dedicated to the adult learner (ages 18 – 92). Building on the previous sections, the teacher has an array of materials to engage the student. Chironomy, text study, games, puzzles, multi-media, video, music, TROGA©, Trope Troupe and torahreaders.net™ are available. As with section three, the readings for Rosh Chodesh are taught.

As you can see from above, there are three innovations that need to be highlighted. The first is TROGA©, the second is Trope Troupe, and the third is torahreaders.net™.

TROGA© is the utilization of yoga-inspired poses to intimate trope symbols. There is no age limit for TROGA© participants. One should simply be mindful of one's own physical limitations. As you can see from the DVD accompanying the curriculum, students learn through kinesthetically moving their bodies. The sounds of the trope names are

used continuously throughout the poses, and the symbols are posted on a whiteboard or chalkboard for the students to visually comprehend. Practitioners learn the sound and shapes of the trope symbols and get some exercise as well.

Trope Troupe<sup>15</sup> is a group dedicated to the continuous study of Torah trope and the practice of the art and craft of chanting from the Torah. It is my hope that through the curriculum, trope troupes can be created at any synagogue, school, or Jewish institution where the ritual chanting of Torah is practiced. These troupes could eventually meet on a monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly basis to support advanced Torah trope study and chanting from the Torah. Additionally, the

**The Torah service is the re-creation of revelation of the law to the Jewish people at Mt. Sinai. It is the central part of the Shabbat morning service. Every part of the davening ... leads to the presentation of the Torah, like a warm-up act building to the featured performer, and winds us down ... thereafter.**

troupes can become a Torah chanting resource for institutions in need of people to chant Torah. Supervision by a “master of the Torah troupe” (the rabbi, cantor, or tutor) is optimal. In addition, these troupes do not have to be proprietary to the institution at which they meet, meaning, depending on proximity, they can include members from neighboring Jewish institutions coming together for the love of Torah trope, regardless of affiliation.

Torahreaders.net™ is a fully integrated scheduling, teaching, and communication web application site for the chanting of Torah. It is designed to help manage and grow Torah reading programs at any synagogue or Jewish organization with fully or partially lay-led Torah reading for weekday, Shabbat, and Chaggim. It simplifies everything associated with a professional or non-professional Torah reading program. Upon completing the curriculum, students are encouraged to utilize newly acquired skills and sign up to chant from the Torah through Torahreaders.net™. With drop-down options like “trope,” students can refresh trope skills through worksheets and audio guides. In addition, there is a “community bulletin board” room, wherein members can discuss issues relating to Torah trope and scheduling, etc. More information on Torahreaders.net™ can be found in section four of the curriculum.

Now to answer the last question I posed earlier: Why is this curriculum important; of what value is it? Why would people care? Ve-zot ha-Torah asher sam Moshe lifnei b’nai Yisrael, al pi Adonai b’yad Moshe.<sup>16</sup> “This is the Torah that Moses put

before the people Israel, from the lips of God in the hand of Moses.” I hope people will care because the Torah is our link to hundreds of generations of Jewish people. It is our soul. The teaching of Torah trope is much more than memorizing symbols and their sounds. It must lead to the application of the trope to the chanting of the Torah. The Torah service is the re-creation of revelation of the law to the Jewish people at Mt. Sinai.<sup>17</sup> It is the central part of the Shabbat morning service. Every part of the davening (P’sukei D’zimrah and Shacharit service) leads to the presentation of the Torah, like a warm-up act building to the featured performer, and winds us down (Musaf and closing prayers) thereafter.

During this ritual of the Torah service, multiple intelligences are stimulated: the visual (the ark is majestically opened to reveal the Torah), auditory (we antiphonally proclaim the oneness of God – Shema Yisrael – as if standing at the base of Mt. Sinai), tactile (we touch the Torah as it is sent out among the congregation representing the Israelites), and kinesthetic (the Torah is carried and moves about, as do the congregants who reach out to engage with it). The Torah service adds pageantry, a procession, a complex choreography, and broad communal participation to the service. By linking to these elements as an active participant in the chanting of the Torah, I wonder if it is possible to elevate one’s spiritual connection to God as well? Obviously, the chanting of the Torah is a public affirmation of the core values of Judaism (mitzvot and narrative). Could it be possible, regardless of the theological lens, that the act of chanting the words of Torah bring together powerful forces for the contemporary Jew?

The Torah is our lifeblood. By being trained in Torah trope and the chanting of the Torah, we engage with the never-ending life-force of the Jewish people. Rabbi Jeffrey A. Summit, in his book “Singing God’s Words,” suggests that engaging in the chanting of Torah allows one to “re-authenticate yourself as a Jew.”<sup>18</sup> It is a “way to perform one’s historical connection to the Jewish people”<sup>19</sup> regardless of one’s denominational or non-denominational affiliation (Conservative, Reform, Orthodox, Reconstructionist, Renewal, Humanistic, other) or faith belief system (agnostic, humanist, atheist).

Further along these lines, Cantor Dr. Jonathan Friedmann,

in his book "Social Functions of Synagogue Song," offers a Durkheimian<sup>20</sup> perspective to the purpose of Torah chant. Through the listening and participating in the cantillation of the Torah, we obtain a personal awareness of being part of a "moral community – a group united by common values, goals, and beliefs."<sup>21</sup> Even a liberal Jew, or one who challenges the traditional interpretations of Torah, can agree that the Jewish people are bound together through the transmission of, and association to, our biblical and cultural heritage and the mitzvot.

In his article, "The New Religious Consciousness and the Crisis of Modernity," Robert Bellah describes how the "primacy experience" is one of the most important and significant features of contemporary religious expression.<sup>22</sup> More than faith and more than belief, congregants value ritual that brings meaning to the celebration of life passages. Think of how a rabbi or cantor is always sought for a brit millah ceremony, or baby naming, or wedding, or death, or any life-cycle event, for that matter. These ritual observances nurture us in difficult as well as joyous times. The Torah service is the moment when we express these life-cycle opportunities as a community (think of the mi-shebeirach in its many forms). By learning Torah trope and chanting from the Torah, we can connect, on a primal level, to ourselves, to our community, and to the entire Jewish people.

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2. Erik Erikson posited that the social environment in which a person exists is important to his/her development. Context is imperative and can change over time. Thus, chavruta-style learning is very effective for the Jewish student. *Ibid.*, 93.
3. Howard Gardner, Ph.D, is the John H. and Elisabeth A. Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He is a MacArthur Fellow, has written more than twenty books, and holds twenty-seven honorary degrees. Thomas R. Hoerr, Ph.D, is the head of school at the New City School in St. Louis, Missouri.
4. Moskowitz, ed., "The Ultimate Jewish Teacher's Handbook." (Denver, CO: A.R.E, 2003).
5. Howard Gardner, "The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach, 20th Ann. Ed." (New York: Basic, 2011), p. 12.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
10. Subsequent to the publication of *The Unschooled Mind*, Gardner added two more classifications of intelligence as follows. Naturalistic – the ability to identify and classify animals and plants. Existential – Sensitivity to cosmic questions about human existence, neither of which will be utilized in the curriculum.
11. According to Gardner, "The Unschooled Mind," p. 59, we have been "trafficking in a swarm of symbols for nearly all our lives." At ages 2-6, children are inundated with pragmatic semiotic representations as they learn to distinguish language and communication through syntax, the categorization of objects and events, play, and imagination, *ibid.*, 59-90. By introducing the symbols (trope) and sounds relevant to the "grammar" of Torah chant, the preschooler absorbs without "knowing" (in terms of the application of the symbolic system to the chanting of Torah, much like realizing the letters of the English alphabet in application to reading a book) what he/she is actually learning. This sets a firm foundation for the teaching of Torah trope well before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah training.
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# Text, Technology, and Multiple Intelligences: A Model of Collaborative Professional Development

Mindy Gold

Everything can be taught in more than one way. And anything that's understood can be shown in more than one way." So says Howard Gardner in an interview with Edutopia (2010) on the topic of technology and multiple intelligences. The eight intelligences outlined in Gardner's multiple intelligences (MI) theory (Gardner, 2008) provide a framework for differentiating how content is provided and how learners can share what they have learned.

I'd like to take Gardner's statement one step further. The diverse teaching and learning that Gardner describes is best done in a relational learning community, a space where teachers are valued as learners working collaboratively to gain knowledge about content and their craft (Raider-Roth, 2017). In the professional development model I have created, the Jewish Educator Technology Initiative (JETI), teachers engage in discourse during havruta (partner-based) text study facilitated by technology tools. They are simultaneously learning Jewish-content knowledge, integrating technology tools to stimulate critical thinking, and are building professional relationships to support the application of the content and pedagogies they are experiencing to their respective classrooms. In reflecting on this interdisciplinary model, I'm seeing how the havruta text study afforded unique opportunities to engage the intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences, while the technology tools provided pathways of access to think about textual themes through a variety of the other intelligences.

### HAVRUTA TEXT STUDY AND TECHNOLOGY: A PARTNERSHIP IN LEARNING

In Jewish education, high-quality professional development is not only about pedagogy. It must simultaneously be grounded in Jewish-content learning (Dorph, 2011). The design of JETI sessions was greatly influenced by my own participation in such a model, the Mandel Teacher Educator Institute (MTEI) (<http://www.mtei-learning.org/>). In particular, I embraced MTEI's emphasis on havruta text study as a content-rich, collaborative, essential experience for Jewish teacher-learners (Mandel Teacher Educator Institute, 2016).

Havruta text study is "a learning format in which two **partners** collaborate in establishing a text's meanings and engage in an open dialogue with the ideas of both the text and each other" (Holzer & Kent, 2013, p. 37, emphasis added). The partnership is key in this process, as each individual is responsible for his/her own ideas as well as supporting and challenging the ideas of his/her partner throughout the discourse (Holzer & Kent, 2013). Research has shown that learning with a partner is also a key component of teachers' professional learning (Phelps & Graham, 2013; Robbins, 2015; Vislocky, 2013). As they learn new pedagogies, technology integration in particular, teachers benefit from the support, knowledge, and encouragement of their peers (Phelps and Graham, 2013).

In pairing Jewish texts with technology tools, I was acutely aware of "the insufficiency of throwing digital tools into classrooms without further support and expecting valid changes in teaching" (ISTE, 2016, p. 2). In secular as well as Jewish education, skill-focused professional development does not provide teachers with the depth of knowledge or experiences to be problem-solvers and thinkers about technology in the classroom (Amkraut, 2011; ISTE, 2016). Instead, professional development attuned to teachers as learners, in particular that with a constructivist approach, is more effective (Dorph, 2011). Thus, the construction of each JETI session includes

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- 1) Havruta text study to set context and introduce a theme related to teaching and learning.
- 2) Technology tools introduced, not through didactic instruction, but rather through experimentation and “play.”
- 3) Opportunities to use technology tools for collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity (the 4 C’s).

Each of the 4 C’s (P21, Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2016) is an example of ways in which we want learners, including teacher-learners, to be interacting with content. Technology’s potential to foster the 4 C’s around Jewish content is an important reason for its inclusion in Jewish educator professional development.

**... skill-focused professional development does not provide teachers with the depth of knowledge or experiences to be problem-solvers and thinkers about technology in the classroom. Instead, professional development attuned to teachers as learners, in particular that with a constructivist approach, is more effective.**

## **ADDING A MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES LENS TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Gardner’s multiple intelligences theory provides a framework for how learners interact with and think about content. By being acutely aware of the multiple ways teacher-learners might approach and think about Jewish ideas, we can create the authentic, experiential, varied learning experiences that define high-quality professional development. In havruta text study, we find a unique application of both the intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences. As the partners interact with the text, each individual has the opportunity to consider personal feelings, ideas, and interpretations of the text: thinking about the text and textual theme from a personal perspective. This is an intrapersonal approach to the content. An interpersonal approach arises when, together, each partner must take in the other’s individual learning on the text and co-create discourse on the convergences and/or divergences of individual thinking to sustain the core work of the partnership.

Professional development that maximizes the potential of technology tools to address multiple intelligences facilitates multi-modal, relevant, and thoughtful experiences for teacher-learners (McKenzie, 2009). Knowing that different learners approach and think about content in different ways, we can use technology to help them do so more effectively. In JETI, the same theme related to teaching and learning that appears in a Jewish text also can be elicited

through video, artistic representations, and music. We can use the technology to organize different kinds of thinking about a theme as well. We can categorize ideas, analyze, consider word patterns, and organize our ideas visually in multiple dimensions. The technology tools are the conduit for activating the multiple intelligences in relation to Jewish educational content. This potential distinguishes multiple intelligences theory from learning styles. As Silver, Strong, and Perini (1997) distinguish between the two: “learning styles are concerned with differences in the process of learning, whereas multiple intelligences center on the content and products of learning.”

The following examples describe how havruta text study paired with digital tools provided opportunities to engage educators’ multiple intelligences in both knowledge-gathering and knowledge-sharing phases of professional development. Note that while many of the intelligences may have been triggered, I have chosen a few to highlight for each example. As Gardner reminds us:

“Inasmuch as nearly every cultural role requires several intelligences, it becomes important to consider individuals as a collection of aptitudes rather than as having a singular problem-solving faculty” (2008, p. 29).

### **Example 1: Interacting with Text**

Presenting a text for study often begins with words on a page, catering to those with a strong linguistic intelligence. Here, however, technology can significantly increase access to the text and its themes, activating several of the intelligences important for engaging all learners.

In a JETI session that introduced the concept of havruta text study, it was important to identify key components of that relationship. Teachers were given multiple print-based texts (Jewish and secular), referencing supportive peer/partner-based relationships. Together, partners created a digital mind-map of the qualities of a successful partnership based on the themes and details of the texts using Popplet (<http://www.popplet.com>). Then, participants used the color-coding

feature of the software to categorize these qualities as relating to collaboration, supported risk-taking or reflection, all important components of successful partner-based text study and professional relationships.

Creating a visual representation of the ideas in the text with Popplet engages the spatial intelligence. Ideas can be conceived of outside of a linear fashion, moved around, and expanded upon in a two-dimensional space. This visualization of the text, including the opportunity to illustrate and incorporate representational images to the digital mind map space, also draws on the spatial intelligence.

Categorizing and distinguishing between potentially similar qualities of the partner relationship engages the naturalist intelligence. Erroneously, many think the naturalist intelligence relates strictly to nature. However, the categorizing and classifying that often occur in naturalist environments can be applied to many areas of study (Gardner, 2008; McKenzie, 2009). Here, we see the naturalist intelligence in the capacity to distinguish subtle differences between ideas or items when classifying and categorizing information (McKenzie, 2009). Organizing characteristics of partnerships into categories mirrors the kinds of distinctions made in naturalist environments. The themes of the text are more likely to be brought out and multiple learners more likely to be engaged with the ideas from the text through a technology tool that activates these multiple kinds of thinking approaches to the content.

### **Example 2: Using Multimedia to Support Textual Themes**

In this second example, the theme of the JETI session was again the nature of partnerships. The focus this time was on how individual partners can support each other and the partnership through their actions and words during text study and technology integration planning. The text study included a Jewish text about how partners “sharpen” each other (Proverbs 27:17), paired with a video about how Tango partners work together. The goal was to present the theme of collaboration and partnership through a variety of media. The video effectively represented the “dance” that partners do when one partner puts forth an idea or interpretation of a text, the other partner responds, the first partner counters or assents, etc. In the video, as in text study, partners are responding to each other’s “moves” and working towards a common goal of co-creation, the former in a performance and the latter in understanding thematic content.

Through a multiple intelligences lens, having a print-based text to work with activated the linguistic intelligence. The thematic content was accessible through words, spoken and written. The Tango video presented the same thematic content from spatial and bodily-kinesthetic perspectives. This is the core of Gardner’s theory: presenting content

in different ways makes it more accessible to our diverse population of learners. In our text-video pairing, the naturalist intelligence approach to learning appears again in distinguishing the qualities and characteristics that each partner brought to the partnership in both the video and the text. Nuances of what different partners can bring to a partnership could be heightened here. Through the havruta format of text and video study, with two partners thinking critically both as individuals and collaboratively, we continue to see opportunities to interact with the themed content via intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences. The interpersonal intelligence is clearly present as partners moved through discourse on both the text and the video, taking in each other’s’ reactions and ideas, considering how they align or digress from their own. In addition, as educators communicate how they see themselves in a partnership, how they view their respective roles, what they can bring and what they need, in a successful partnership, they are each building an awareness of their individual approaches to partner-based learning. This thinking finds its roots in the intrapersonal intelligence.

The discourse during this session was particularly vibrant. It’s reasonable to conjecture that with many of the intelligences activated, more learners had more options for accessing the themes in the content and thus were more actively involved in the learning.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Jewish Educator Technology Initiative (JETI) is a research-based professional development model incorporating components of high quality professional development for Jewish educators. Teachers experiment with technology tools and integration strategies as new methods for analyzing Jewish texts. Reflecting on JETI sessions reveals that the layers of instructional practice that make the model successful in sharing Jewish content and technology integration strategies also afford opportunities to activate multiple intelligences when thinking about and interacting with the Jewish and technology content. In fact, this varied interaction is itself facilitated by the capacity of the technology tools themselves. As JETI continues to evolve, a multiple intelligences lens will add increased diversity to my instructional practice. Recognizing our teachers as learners and valuing their diverse approaches to thinking about content will continue to be key components of the JETI model.

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# The Ark Project

Melissa Hoffman

*The Ark Project: A ground-breaking service-learning curriculum for Bar/Bat Mitzvah students*

If you're a Jewish parent, educator, or clergy person who's shepherded more than one 11- or 12-year-old through the Bar/Bat mitzvah preparation process, you've likely heard this answer when asking them what they'd like to focus on for their community service or mitzvah project: Animals.

Many people, from robust Jewish backgrounds or not, can name some fundamental Jewish principles that help dictate our moral behavior in modern society: respect for parents and elders, visiting the sick, providing for the poor. These values form the basis for many of our current major Jewish projects. Parshat Ki Tetzei, which holds the record for "most mitzvot included in any weekly Torah portion," names several legal imperatives that get folded into a term coined in the Talmud: *tza'ar ba'alei chayim*. Literally "the suffering of animals," this set of laws promotes discussion around how much and why animals matter in different situations — and how far we, as Jews, must go to prevent unnecessary suffering to these sentient members of our community. The only problem is we tend to have outdated or under-explained examples in the Torah for the types of animals and situations we encounter on a daily basis — how many of us still use oxen and donkeys to plow our own fields? How should laws like these inform how we treat animals today?

This is where The Ark Project comes in. Jewish Initiative for Animals (JIFA), launched in 2016, developed the first-of-its kind comprehensive service-learning curriculum for Bar and Bat Mitzvah students. Young people everywhere likely have performed a compassionate or humane act without recognizing its Jewish significance — choosing not to eat certain animal products, cleaning up trash on the beach so it doesn't end up around the neck or in the gullet of unsuspecting wildlife, or adopting a shelter animal with their family. The Ark Project takes this natural affinity for animals and allows students to see it through the lens of their Jewish identity and their development into responsible Jewish adults.

Early on, JIFA recognized the demand for an animal-related curriculum, in particular from parents and tutors looking for resources on animal welfare, a topic near to their students' hearts. During a formal research project in 2014, which included interviews with 21 spiritual leaders and educators from Jewish communities across the US and across all major Jewish denominations, our goal was to gauge current Jewish community leaders' understanding of and interest in animals and their welfare in a contemporary Jewish context. The responses suggested that relationships with animals in general are both fundamentally important to many people and raise serious issues that often lack a developed contemporary dialogue. All but two of the leaders said that animals are of interest as a topic of Jewish learning. Sixty percent of the interview responses showed that animal ethics is understood as introducing the foundations of Jewish ethics, especially for younger students, and all participants were able to point to at least rudimentary lessons that can be learned from animals in a Jewish moral context. At the same time, the vast majority of leaders did not feel their knowledge about different kinds of animals and animal welfare issues was sufficient to teach in their communities.

When we open the door for young teens to lead the way in this much-needed dialogue,

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everyone benefits. Dr. Megan Kiely-Mueller, professor at Tufts University's Center for Animals and Public Policy, studies the intersection of positive youth development and human-animal interactions — her doctoral work centered around the everyday relationships between young adults and their companions (pets), and showed that “young adults who cared for animals reported engaging in more ‘contribution’ activities, such as providing service to their community, helping friends or family, and demonstrating leadership, than those who did not...The study also found that high levels of attachment to an animal in late adolescence and young adulthood were positively associated with feeling connected with other people, having empathy, and feeling confident.”

**“young adults who cared for animals reported engaging in more ‘contribution’ activities, such as providing service to their community, helping friends or family and demonstrating leadership, than those who did not...”**

Engagement with animal welfare issues, which likely attracts similarly minded adolescents, doesn't just benefit animals directly, but builds positive character traits in young people that end up strengthening their attachment and contribution to the larger community.

As a curriculum, The Ark Project demonstrates excellence in the following ways:

1. The Ark Project utilizes a service-learning model, which encourages students to address a real community need. While a volunteer or community service project dedicates limited time to a cause, a student is not necessarily looking at deep, systemic issues. In service-learning, students combine learning, service, and reflection activities in order to synthesize their experience and address the broader problems facing animals.
2. The Ark Project is available both to individuals and to groups of students. JIFA has created an individual student workbook as well as a facilitator guide for Jewish adults who want to facilitate a cohort project.
3. Using the curriculum as a framework, students can design an animal-related project around any number of welfare topics. From factory farming to animal testing, there's no limit to what topic a student can address in his/her project. The Ark Project curriculum includes a large list of sample topics and subtopics.
4. The curriculum pulls together a wealth of Jewish sources

from a variety of texts and traditions. From biblical to Talmudic texts to medieval sources to contemporary poets, The Ark Project provides a variety of Jewish teachings to give legal, philosophical, and theological context to the contemporary issues students will explore. Bonus: Every text in the book is displayed in both original Hebrew and English translation.

5. Resources included in the curriculum can guide students and adults in finding an appropriate animal organization with which to partner. It can be difficult to find an organization to work with that really puts animal welfare first. The Ark Project gives students and mentors the tools to locate and learn about an organization that will have existing projects

or guidance for a novel project that truly supports animals' well-being.

6. The approach of this curriculum draws upon the fundamental concepts in humane education. Comprehensive humane education encourages students to see injustices to animals, humans, and the environment as interconnected, so that actions to solve systemic problems really do benefit us all.

7. The Ark Project allows Jewish students to put the lessons of their service into action. Having made connections between their service-learning and their day-to-day life, students will go on to consider how they can live their values beyond their Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation. Perhaps it's with more plant-based food options at their Bar/Bat Mitzvah parties. Perhaps it's by helping their synagogue or school institute more humane and sustainable policies.

Ark Project students are also educating their adult family members and leaders. The first cohort project, started by Ekar Farm in Denver, Colorado, aims to improve the bee colonies on the farm, thanks to The Ark Project's activities and structure. During each service-learning session, the group engages in Torah study, avodah (service work), and reflection. Margot Sands, the cohort facilitator, observed that “the Torah learning allows our group to explore the Jewish approach to animal welfare. This targeted learning strengthens the connections Bar/Bat Mitzvah students can make between their service project and the transition to an active, involved

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Jewish adulthood. At our last session, a sixth grader named Jake made such a connection organically during our text study about shiluach haken, the mitzvah of sending away a mother bird from a nest of eggs in order to preserve future generations of birds: ‘This reminds me of what I was writing for my d’var Torah: The downfall of others is the downfall of ourselves. I think that is what this mitzvah is about.’”

The mitzvah of shiluach haken is also found in Ki Teitzei. And perhaps Jake’s insight allows us to understand why animal welfare projects are so relevant today, when our lives are so intertwined with and contingent upon the welfare of the planet and all who inhabit it. With these opportunities to engage with Jewish teaching and real life problems about topics that matter to them—homeless animals, animals used

in entertainment, farmed animal welfare, conservation of wildlife, and so much more—there are endless ways to apply the mitzvah of tza’ar ba’alei chayim. Ark Project students will expand their roles as dedicated Jewish community members and build their potential to repair the world as active and effective adult advocates.

*Jewish Initiative for Animals (JIFA) is a project of Farm Forward, and is funded by Emanuel J. Friedman Philanthropies, the Leichtag Foundation, the Foer Foundation, the Rose Community Foundation, and Dr. Bronner’s All-One. JIFA’s partners include Hazon and The Humane Society of the United States. To learn more about The Ark Project, contact Melissa Hoffman, JIFA’s Humane Education and Program Specialist, at [melissah@farmforward.com](mailto:melissah@farmforward.com).*

# NOSH – New Oneg Shabbat Happening

Wayne Krieger

*NOSH is a wonderful monthly Shabbat evening program created especially for young families. It begins with music, stories, and dance followed by a family-friendly dinner.*

**W**hen I first launched NOSH in 1989 at Temple Beth Sholom in Manchester, CT, young families were hesitant to attend shul because of decorum issues, and many parents were intimidated by a service that was completely foreign to them. NOSH was created to transform the synagogue setting into a welcoming environment where children and families could meet new friends, form new social networks, and enrich their Jewish identity.

As the program evolved, we occasionally boosted our audience by having the Junior Choir, Hebrew School, and Hebrew High School classes participate. They would lead the singing or present a brief drama or comedy piece. Special evenings also have included highlighting birthday children of the month, grandparents/special friends night, and holiday themes. I continued to run NOSH at Temple Torah in Boynton Beach, FL, and have implemented it at my current synagogue, Marlboro Jewish Center in Marlboro, NJ.



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**MUSICAL ACTIVITIES AND SONGS:** Our sing-along builds on a repertoire of traditional favorites, and a new song is introduced each month. I incorporate sign language to facilitate learning Hebrew vocabulary and as an important movement component for our attendees.

**STORYTELLING:** I present a different Jewish folktale each month, choosing stories that portray important Jewish values. I always use special props to enhance each story and I encourage lots of audience participation.

**DANCE:** The NOSH Israeli dance repertoire has included Zemer Atik, Mayim, Hora Hadera, Mechol Ovadiah (To the Right and To the Left), Tscherkessia, Yesh Lanu Tayish, Tzaddik Katamar, Hiney Ma Tov, V'David Yefeh Aynayim, Patsch Dance, and the Hora.

A festive **ONEG SHABBAT** concludes the fun until next time!

### REFLECTIONS ON NOSH

I have been a storyteller and collector of Jewish folktales for the last forty years. Because of my extensive background, I would find stories that were very funny and that explored middot (Jewish values).

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I used special props, different voices and accents, and always encouraged audience participation. In some communities in which I've worked, I would even take a few minutes to discuss the folktale.

The musical component of NOSH was a way to build a repertoire of traditional, contemporary, and holiday melodies, as well as nigunim by introducing a new song every month. By the end of the year, the children and their parents could sing about 15 songs. For many of the songs, I used sign language and movement to make it more fun.

For the dances, I taught and called out the steps of such basic Israeli dances as Zemer Atik, Mayim, Hora Hadera and Mechol Ovadiah, introducing a new dance every month. By the end of the season, the families knew about five or six dances.

At the end of the program, we would sing the blessings for the candles, wine, and challah and then have a snack. Parents would gather, meet new friends, and socialize.

Everyone was welcome to stay for the Shabbat dinner that followed!

# MAKING THE CASE FOR A HOLOCAUST EDUCATION RESET: TIME TO ADD THE “HELP STORY”

Art Shostack

Educators – both as classroom teachers and as parents – know few subjects are as challenging to share with youngsters as is the Holocaust. For as explained by Professor Gerald K. Markle, “to struggle with the Holocaust is to wrestle with the meaning of our lives and times.” (p. xi) Fortunately, a creative pedagogical reset is underway in Israel, and it could take hold in America if supported soon by NewCAJE members who conclude its adaptation here is attainable, worthy, and vital. At stake is the quality of Holocaust memorialization for many decades to come.

From 1945 to date, Holocaust memorialization in Israel and America has been dominated by the “Horror Story,” a terrifying account of unforgettable and unforgivable crimes perpetrators committed against victims. Regrettably, little or no attention has gone to the “Help Story,” an inspiring account of daring, secret, and fiercely forbidden efforts by victims to try to care for one another.

Overdue inclusion of this neglected matter in our K-12 Holocaust curriculum AND home-based “instruction” can improve the accuracy of the transmitted narrative, earn the pride of American Jewish youngsters in the nobility of certain European Jewish victims, and bolster our life-shaping appreciation of what cognitive psychologist Steven Pinker calls the “the better angels of our nature.”

In Israeli classes about the Holocaust, a growing number of pro-reset teachers now focus more on humanistic lessons than on evil license. More on ennobling achievements of Jewish and Gentile Upstanders than on the evil aberrations of Nazi perpetrators and their collaborators. More on retention by victims of religious faith than on lapses in it. And far more on reasons that can be found in the Holocaust for hope in humanity’s future than on its undeniably ominous aspects.

This reset requires six pedagogical changes in our classrooms and living rooms:

1. Upgrading the role of young learners.
2. Reducing the traumatic impact on them of the “Horror Story.”
3. Re- directing attention to the humanity of victims.
4. Saluting the role of Upstander as one worthy of emulation.
5. Emphasizing inspiring takeaway lessons and helping to improve the Reset itself (see <https://www.facinghistory.org/>).

### 1. STUDENTS AS CO-LEARNERS

Reset teachers in America would encourage students to develop, discuss, critically examine, and prioritize their own Holocaust-related questions, e.g., “How has it impacted American bigotry and racism?” “What might life be like here had Germany won the war?” Guided by the teacher, a class would prioritize its questions and have small teams develop tentative answers. Engaging presentations would ensue, while the entire class also tackles teacher-posed questions (see [www.rightquestion.org](http://www.rightquestion.org)).

This inquiry-led process can promote critical thinking, fresh discovery, and student engagement. A teacher will be able to learn what hasn’t yet been grasped; what

*Arthur Shostack, as a sociology professor from 1961 to 2003, aided the AFT, NEA, and school superintendents nationwide improve K-12 reforms. In retirement, he has seen the publication in 2017 of his 34th book, “Stealth Altruism: Forbidden Care as Jewish Resistance in the Holocaust;” posted a related website, [www.stealthaltruism.com](http://www.stealthaltruism.com); and given invited talks to teachers and others in Australia, Israel, New Zealand, and throughout the U.S. He is presently writing a follow-up book entitled “Stealth Help: The OTHER Holocaust Story”. His 33 other books include “Anticipate the School You Want: Futurizing K-12 Education” (2008) and “Creating the School You Want: Learning @ Tomorrow” (2010).  
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especially intrigues the students about the Holocaust; and what merits clarification, correction, debate, or emphasis. Similarly, students are likely to achieve some “deep” learning and age-appropriate gains in self-esteem (see [info@echoesandreflections.org](mailto:info@echoesandreflections.org)).

Outstanding as a resource for classroom and home-based learning are over 80 colorful booklets in an inexpensive series entitled “A Book by Me.” The authors are teenagers, as are the illustrators. Series creator and director Deb Bowen invites youngsters under 18 all over the world to use their talents to share extraordinary stories about Holocaust survivors, Righteous Gentiles (non-Jews who aided Jews), prison camp liberators, and others ... important stories about human rights and/or WWII heroes. Each booklet also provides a “Learning Station” (vocabulary and key terms, thinking strategies, discussion questions, extended activities, coping strategies,

(See in this connection, [www.stealthaltruism.com](http://www.stealthaltruism.com).)

Invaluable here is a 67-page booklet, “Teaching the Holocaust from a Position of Strength,” written by Dr. Deborah Fripp after attending a 10-day annual teachers seminar offered by Yad Vashem’s International School of Holocaust Studies (see [www.yadvashem.museum.ac.il/is/en](http://www.yadvashem.museum.ac.il/is/en)). Her inexpensive booklet features “a story of people who held onto their humanity and their Judaism in the face of chaos and terror ... We see and acknowledge the horror [they] endured, but recognize the strength with which [they] met that horror (see <https://share.1MLQ4g>; “This Synagogue Embraced a New Narrative for Teaching the Holocaust”).

Dr. Fripp’s booklet explains that Reset Teachers can convey a traumatic story without traumatizing young learners. She urges us to “rescue the individuals from out of the pile of

## **While age-appropriate attention must be paid, the conventional classroom approach can and often does result in a defensive turnoff or some other undesirable emotional response .... The reset approach buffers against this by explicitly emphasizing not one, but TWO stories – “Horror” and “Help.”**

comprehension questions, etc.), which aids in spotlighting the “Help Story” (see [www.abookbyme.com](http://www.abookbyme.com)).

### **2. DEFANG THE HORROR STORY**

Haim Ginott, speaking for many other survivors, will never forget having seen “what no man should witness: Gas chambers built by learned engineers. Children poisoned by educated physicians. Infants killed by trained nurses. Women and children shot and burned by high school and college graduates.” (p. xx)

While age-appropriate attention must be paid, the conventional classroom approach can and often does result in a defensive turnoff or some other undesirable emotional response from aggrieved parents, school administrators, and local media pundits. The reset approach buffers against this by explicitly emphasizing not one, but TWO stories – “Horror” and “Help.”

History is represented as a Both/And matter, rather than Either/Or. In the case of the Holocaust (and other mass murders and genocides), classroom attention goes both to perpetrator atrocities and to victim care-sharing. In this way, the reset recognizes that Holocaust retelling in school or home, as defined by Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis, is “a sacred act that elicits a double standard -- to expose the depth of evil and to raise goodness from the dust of amnesia” (p. 318).

bodies. We need to focus on their humanity and on our empathy with them ... through literature, music, art, and religion.” She discusses lesson plans, offers specific insights, and provides curriculum suggestions divided by Early Elementary, Late Elementary, Middle School, High School, and Adult Education. Ideas are offered regarding “Safety Nets,” classic texts, survivor testimony, field trips to Holocaust Museums, and sample handouts for parents to use when discussing the Holocaust with their children (see [www.TeachTheShoah.org](http://www.TeachTheShoah.org)).

### **3. HUMANIZE LEARNING GOALS**

In the past, learning goals might have included awareness of certain dark historic dates, geographic sites, and numbing percentages – as in “what year did the Holocaust begin?” “What countries did the Third Reich eventually subjugate?” and “what percent of all European Jewish youngsters did the Nazis murder before the war’s end?” Reasonable doubts persist today about whether any of this was long remembered or had lasting salience in the lives of American youngsters.

Reset Teachers and parents will reframe such material so as to accent the positive – as in highlighting the dates of militant resistance in ghettos, camps, and also in forests that contained partisan guerilla groups. Student attention would be directed to Bulgaria, Denmark, Portugal, Russia (before 1939), and Sweden, where Jewish and gentile Upstanders

enabled many Jewish victims to find refuge. And note would be taken of the large number of hidden Jewish victims aided by Gentile Upstanders in eluding capture by the Gestapo or SS in Italy, France, Germany, and the Netherlands (see “Jewish Resistance Against the Nazis,” edited by Patrick Henry; “Jewish Responses to Nazi Persecution,” by Isaiah Trunk; <http://jewishcurrents.org/escaping-from-the-vilna-ghetto-an-authentic-memoir/>).

As for the conventional school bus visit to a local Holocaust Museum, Dr. Fripp warns us that all too many of these places “often emphasize different aspects of the story than this [reset] program is designed to emphasize” (p. 54). Be sure to have activities ready that fit the new Reset narrative. Employing “scavenger hunt,” questions could have students search for “Help Story” material, and later recommend some to a museum found to have a short supply (see [info@echoesandreflections.org](mailto:info@echoesandreflections.org) – “Teaching the Holocaust. Inspiring the Classroom”).

#### 4. SALUTE UPSTANDERS

Certain Jewish and Gentile victims let their conscience, ethicality, and/or religiosity lead them to try to alleviate suffering, even at risk of life. Manya Frydman Perel, a survivor of six years in eight concentration camps, recalls, “We resisted in every way we could. Our weapons were our bare hands, our minds, our courage, and our faith. I resisted by stealing bread and potatoes to share with my friends. I resisted by risking my life time and again. The Nazis could not crush our spirit, our faith, or our love for life and humanity” (p. xvii).

Such behavior was fanatically opposed and fiercely punished by the Nazis. Their anti-Semitic ideology insisted Jews as *Untermenschen* (sub-humans) were incapable of Higher Morality ... this a “sacred” falsehood that could brook no behavioral refutation (see “Saving Children: Diary of a Buchenwald Survivor and Rescuer,” by Jack Weber with William B. Helmreich; and [i.witness.usc.edu/SFI/Activity](http://i.witness.usc.edu/SFI/Activity)).

Reset Teachers and parents will help youngsters learn about Gentile Upstanders at Yad Vashem’s “Righteous Among the Nations” website. Over 26,000 Europeans are honored (more are saluted annually; see <http://www.yadvashem.org/righteous.html>). Young learners report aloud at least one such story (see <https://edsitement.neh.gov/websites/coming-age-holocaust-coming-age-now>, a free, interactive curriculum for middle and high school students and their educators that features individual testimonies of thirteen people who were adolescents during the Holocaust).

Similarly, many vignettes of Jewish Upstanders are available in my 2017 “Stealth Altruism” book, and also in the survivor memoirs of teen-age victims, e.g., “If You Save one Life,” by Eva Brown; “A Lucky Child: A Memoir of Surviving Auschwitz

as a Young Boy,” by Thomas Buergenthal; “Roses in a Forbidden Garden: A Holocaust Love Story,” by Elise Garibaldi; “Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered,” by Ruth Kluger; and “Eva’s Story: A Survivor’s Tale by the Stepsister of Anne Frank,” by Eva Schloss with Evelyn Julia Kent (see also <http://mandelproject.us/younglove.htm>; <http://www.ushmm.org>).

The Reset approach could have High School students debate whether or not the law – as guided by ethical concerns – should require complacent Bystanders to intervene in situations of imminent harm as “instant” Upstanders. Severe penalties might ensue if a Bystander remained indifferent (see “The Crime of Complicity: The Bystander in the Holocaust,” by Amos N. Guiora).

#### 5. ACCENT TAKEAWAY LESSONS

Since youngsters give special credence to informal accounts of the real-life applicability of Holocaust-based lessons, personal anecdotes offered in class or in a living room by an adult are often highly valued. Likewise, Holocaust survivors are greatly appreciated in classrooms as guest speakers.

Wide-eyed youngsters find it fascinating to hear directly from a (sometimes arm-tattooed) senior citizen who had survived as a slave laborer or a Jewish resistance fighter, had been hazardingly hidden in a farmhouse or monastery, had been sent on the Kindertransport to England, or had perilously escaped to distant China or an unoccupied European country. (See, for example, <http://www.jewishpartisans.org>, the Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation.)

Our Holocaust Reset would have us meet a classroom guest beforehand in person or by phone to encourage use of examples of the “Help Story,” along with age-appropriate aspects of the “Horror Story.” Likewise, discussion of life-enriching lessons would be sensitively recommended (see [www.ushmm.org/educators](http://www.ushmm.org/educators), and [info@echoesandreflections.org](mailto:info@echoesandreflections.org)).

The US Holocaust Memorial Museum hopes youngsters will learn that their personal actions – as in refuting hate-mongers and helping new refugees – do matter, as we are responsible for helping others create a better future. Similarly, youngsters ought to be aware of the link between yesteryear’s Nazism and today’s neo-Nazi and white supremacist campaigns: both share powerful code words, ideologies, and symbols of hate, which can be partially blunted if their sordid WWII antecedents are exposed and defamed (see <https://www.ushmm.org/endhate>).

Our Holocaust Reset would also seek awareness of new global legal deterrents against war crimes, such as the actions of the permanent International Criminal Court. These tools have

their origins in worldwide revulsion against Nazi war crimes. Although horrific new mass murders (as in Bosnia, Cambodia, Darfur, Rwanda, and the Sudan) have lamentably followed the WWII Holocaust, students ought to learn humanity persists in trying to prevent them, force their rapid end, blunt their material and human costs, and punish their perpetrators (see <http://memoria.auschwitz.org>).

## 6. HELP IMPROVE OUR RESET

Please send advice, ideas, and field reports to [www.TeachTheShoah.org](http://www.TeachTheShoah.org) (as maintained by Dr. Deborah Fripp) and to me at [arthurshostak@gmail.com](mailto:arthurshostak@gmail.com), for sharing with many other educators and parents. Especially welcome are inputs about strengths and weaknesses of the Reset approach from youngsters.

Citations of relevant DVDs would be especially welcome (e.g., "God on Trial;" "When I Was 14: A Survivor Remembers."), as would clips from feature films (e.g., "Help Story" episodes in "Defiance," "Fateless," and "Son of Saul" – see "The Holocaust as Seen Through Film," by Rabbi Dr. Bernhard H. Rosenberg). Also sought are the names of Holocaust Museums with a reset "Horror"/"Help" focus, this a welcome endorsement of related classroom and living room work.

## SUMMARY

A redemptive "Horror"/"Help" pedagogy will not dodge classroom attention to the "Horror Story." Our Reset insists, however, that TWO stories be sensitively told: that of altruism along with that of anguish; high-risk care-sharing along with cruelty, and valor along with victimization. These opposites are inseparable in an honest account of history, and that is the only narrative we want to share with young learners.

As survivor Pierre Sauvage would have us never forget, "If we remember solely the horror of the Holocaust, we will pass on no perspective from which meaningfully to confront and learn from that horror ... If the hard and fast evidence of the possibility of good on Earth is allowed to slip through our fingers and turn to dust, then future generations will have only dust to build on." (p. xviii)

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## Acknowledgements

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# A Year of Making

Ora Shulman

**T**his year at Associated Hebrew Schools, Posluns Campus, we have been innovating in creative and exciting ways under the umbrella of our #MADE@AHS program. #MADE@AHS has been our overarching theme for the 2017-2018 year, with each month taking as its theme a different phrase using the word “make.” #MADE@AHS is partially inspired by our new Makerspace — but, in many ways, the entire school is a Makerspace.

Our overall goal at Posluns is to make space to appreciate the wonders of learning and connection. This includes making space for learning and practicing reading in English, Hebrew, and French; manipulating numbers and making calculations in math; experimenting with science and technology; and studying Torah and learning about the wonders of creation. We also create space for students to make their own paths.

From preschool through Grade 5, we appreciate what our students make of their time with us. We focus especially on three areas of student life. First, we ask if he or she made a new friend, because forming relationships is critical. Second, we see if he or she made a mistake, because real learning happens when we stumble, driving motivation and building problem-solving skills. Lastly, we ask if he or she made a difference, because individuals striving to improve the world is the goal of tikkun olam, and students must learn from a young age that they have an active role to play. Here at Posluns, we are committed to growth in all of these areas. We run year-long student leadership programs such as Ha Parliament, Mashkinei Shalom, and Supportsmanship. These initiatives allow students to have control of their lives and the ability to make things happen. Our goal is to instill responsibility and confidence that ultimately help children solve problems creatively, work as a team, and work collaboratively with other individuals.

**Our overall goal at Posluns is to make space to appreciate the wonders of learning and connection .... We also create space for students to make their own paths.**

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We are ready to develop new lessons and foster learning. We can't wait to see the students make new friends, make discoveries, and make a difference at school and at home.

There is a story about a Roman general summoning Rabbi Akiva to challenge his faith in the face of great hardship. If babies are meant to be circumcised, asks the Roman general, why didn't God make babies born that way? Why do boys require a brit milah rather than accepting that humans are born perfect — why make a change eight days after birth? Rabbi Akiva's response is that we understand that we are never to remain static, there is no perfection, only progress through curiosity, learning, and action.

We are following that model of constant growth, hard work, learning, and action. We are raising children who understand whence they came, where they are heading, and before Whom they stand. We are raising children who are as comfortable participating in an

## THE JEWISH EDUCATOR

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Hour of Code or instructing the robots Dot and Dash as they are saying birchot ha-shachar and singing birkat ha-mazon. Our job is not to prepare students for something. Our job is to help students prepare themselves for anything. We want to give our students the knowledge and skills to pursue their passions, their interests, and their futures. This year, as we focus on MADE@AHS, we have spent the fall term integrating our learning of different subjects in our

Makerspace around the theme of Creation and Creating, and, in the second term, we focused on the value of curiosity and questions. We know that by the end of the year, and in the years to come, our students will all have the chance to MAKE us proud here at Associated Posluns.

# Teaching Genesis to the Next Generation

Janet Tamaren

In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.” This is the beginning of the *Torah*. It is the linchpin for understanding the Jewish – and the Western – conception of our world, created by a God who is imposing order on chaos. It is a powerfully written story that should be read, understood, and appreciated by anyone who is literate. Especially anyone who is Jewish.

I started teaching Genesis to 6th graders some decades ago. I was concerned because, having watched my own children grow up in a Reform temple, these stories were not a significant part of the curriculum.

In my years as a religious school teacher, I’ve focused on 18 classic stories from Genesis. These included the early stories that are of mythic origin – Creation, the Tower of Babel, and the Great Flood. These stories are examined through the lens of archaeological discoveries from Egypt and Mesopotamia within the last 150 years. They are a fascinating reflection of the cultures through which the early Hebrews traveled – over 4000 years ago! We find many of these contextual connections in Plaut’s *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*. We also examine these stories through the literary lens provided by *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, a seminal book by Robert Alter. Finally, we discuss how these stories inform our lives today as Jews through the values being conveyed and the customs we follow. We use these same approaches (cultural context, literary approaches, personal) in the remaining stories from *Genesis: the Akedah, the Jacob Cycle, and Joseph*. The children also discuss the personalities of the matriarchs and patriarchs, and how they were portrayed as real people.

To engage the students, I ask questions and have them write brief essays in response. Then I give them key Hebrew phrases from the stories and ask them to illustrate these phrases with paint and paper. This can be rather messy, but the kids deeply enjoy their artistic exploration. As an added bonus, we decorate the classroom walls with their biblical art. I provide an illustrated timeline of ancient history, and then they do further research on the Internet. Lastly, they look at the original Hebrew in order to parse its poetry and artistry.

This is a fun and layered way to teach these texts. Generally, students from grade 6 and up have the cognitive skills and creative abilities for this approach.

At the end of the year, I collate their essays and art into a notebook that they take home. The parents enjoy seeing the work of their little geniuses.

In the last few years, I have organized these classic stories into a compendium. Each story is carefully and faithfully translated from the Hebrew, and an artist in the family provides color illustrations. This compilation is available as a 124-page book – *Genesis and Exodus: 36 Stories / An Illustrated Study Guide*.

You are welcome to a complimentary copy of the study guide, plus 38 pages of teacher materials for your review. Contact me at [jndavid\\_40502@yahoo.com](mailto:jndavid_40502@yahoo.com), and I will ship it to you. The book is also available at Amazon.com. I hope you enjoy the book and are able to use it in your classroom!

Janet Tamaren is a physician who has taught Religious School at Temple Adath Israel for 30 years. She went to the Cleveland Hebrew Schools in the 1960s and has always had a fondness for Hebrew and for Torah. She went to Brandeis in the late 1960s and acquired an appreciation for Near Eastern Studies. She has written a curriculum for teaching Genesis and Exodus to young people, “Genesis and Exodus: 36 Stories / An Illustrated Study Guide.”  
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# The Impact and Influence of “Tot Shabbat” Participation

Emily Aronoff Teck

Shabbat programs for young children and their families have become increasingly common in American synagogues over the past few decades. This article is a summary of the 2018 Research Project “Exploring Tot Shabbat: A Study on Tot Shabbat Programs and Their Effect on the Engagement in Jewish Life of Families with Young Children.” The project sought to

- a) explore, identify, and describe Tot Shabbat programs
- b) explore the impact that participation in Tot Shabbat programs can have on the engagement in Jewish life of families with young children.

Data was collected via survey from 113 adult participants and 146 leaders of “Tot Shabbat” programs that met the following criteria: designed for children under age six attending the services with their families,<sup>1</sup> typically are led by the same person or persons at a non-Orthodox Jewish institution<sup>2</sup> with a history of at least three years of facilitating these services and an average attendance of 10 or more children for the past year, occurs at least 8 times per year, and does not require temple “membership” or other cost for participation. Twenty-one follow-up interviews were conducted to gather additional insight.

The data confirmed the hypothesis that Tot Shabbat programs encourage families with young children to engage in Jewish life. Additionally, it verified that they provide an environment for young children and families to celebrate Shabbat while engaging in social and educational opportunities that allow them to explore music, ritual, and prayer in the context of Jewish community. The data revealed trends and provided a much more specific description of not only what Tot Shabbat programs typically include, but also a richer depiction of what Tot Shabbat programs look and feel like; their impact and influence; their challenges and highlights; the reasons that participants attend; and the goals and motivations of the communities and facilitators who host them.

The respondents almost unanimously agreed that Tot Shabbat is an experience during which music, prayer, and Jewish ritual play a significant role as young children and their families gather to learn about and celebrate Jewish life and community. Tot Shabbat is a gateway into Jewish life and an opportunity to build community and foster relationships with members of that community. The vast majority of participants (more than 90%) agreed or strongly agreed that Tot Shabbat “provides a positive Jewish experience for my family, helps connect my family to Jewish community, encourages my family to participate in Jewish life, provides opportunities to create and nurture relationships with members of the synagogue community, and helps connect my family to Jewish ritual.” Most participants (more than 75%) also agreed or strongly agreed that Tot Shabbat “teaches my family about Shabbat, makes me think about my family’s Jewish practice, helps connect my family to Jewish prayer, influences the way my family engages with Judaism, and teaches my family about Jewish concepts and beliefs.”

### AN EXPERIENCE RICH WITH OPPORTUNITIES

Tot Shabbat is an experience rich with opportunities. All Tot Shabbat programs can provide connections with other Jewish families, relationships with Jewish professionals, and knowledge about Judaism and how it might be relevant to the stage of life that families with young children are experiencing. The specific nature of the opportunities

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varies by community and depends upon the community's goals, facility, and culture; they might offer early childhood learning options, recruit for adult learning options, or facilitate chavura groups that create support networks — the list of possible offerings could be endless. Like worship experiences for any population, the services likely share a skeleton, but the actual experience is conducted by leaders in a unique physical environment for a community of individuals, so each community offers its own special variances while providing a familiar overall experience to participants. The participants bring their own backgrounds, expectations, and personal preferences to the experience, which also frames their perceptions.

Eighty-nine percent of participants indicated that participation in Tot Shabbat programs encourages their participation in at least one of the Jewish life engagement examples provided, and 96% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "Tot Shabbat encourages my family to engage in Jewish life." The vast majority (93% or more) of participants either agree or strongly agree that Tot Shabbat helps connect their family to the Jewish community, encourages their family

The information the Tot Shabbat participants provided and the examples that were the most popular closely align with the UJA findings. Analogously, Tot Shabbat Influence (see chart at end of article), which conveys the participants' opinions regarding the influence of Tot Shabbat participation on their family's choices and behaviors, shows that the most popular of the engagement examples provided was also directly related to the creation of community through relationships.

Ninety-seven percent of participants report that they have social interactions with other families with Jewish children, and 68% believe that Tot Shabbat participation encourages this type of Jewish engagement, making it the most commonly-cited influence of Tot Shabbat attendance. This is a particularly powerful example of Jewish engagement that is likely the first step in encouraging many different positive and Jewishly-oriented outcomes. Repeatedly, the research highlights that the facilitation of the establishment of friendships is one of, if not the most, powerful things that Jewish communities can do in order not only to encourage families to raise Jewish children, but to support young

### **Repeatedly, the research highlights that the facilitation of the establishment of friendships is one of, if not the most, powerful things that Jewish communities can do in order not only to encourage families to raise Jewish children, but to support young children's development across domains.**

to participate in Jewish life, and provides opportunities to create and nurture relationships with members of the synagogue community. These three points upon which participants agreed are mutually inclusive, and each one reinforces the other. At the conclusion of the Early Childhood Parent Research project, after considering the stated priorities of Jewish mothers with young children collected through focus groups, the report suggested that:

If we shift our desired outcomes away from only Jewish rituals and affiliation as evidence of Jewish engagement, and more towards relationships among Jewish parents, we can help create and support a vibrant Jewish network made up of meaningful and purposeful relationships...Let us commit the time and effort to building relationships between and among families as an investment in the future, a time when they could be more able and willing to engage in new types of learning and living" (Rosen et al. p. 12).

children's development across domains. Dr. John Bartkowski, who led the research team that studied the impact of religion on the development of young children, found that the relationships constructed through young families' religious attendance builds a community network that promotes social, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive development:

Consistent with the adage that "it takes a village to raise a child," it is likely that the network closure provided by congregations (that is, interaction and instruction provided to youngsters by non-parental adults who reinforce parental values) is a vital part of promoting pro-social outcomes in children (Bartkowski et al. p. 18).

The same study also concluded that "the effects of parents' religious attendance are stronger and more persistent than those related to the family's religious environment, thereby underscoring the importance of parental integration (and, likely, children's integration) in religious networks for steering youngsters toward positive developmental outcomes"

(Bartkowski et al. 18). Several Tot Shabbat leaders shared that their ability to impact the Jewish identity and practice of a child and his/her family was limited by the constraint of time, because a child would be most shaped by the way the family practices and discusses Judaism at home. This conclusion that each individual family's religious environment is less consequential than the parents' religious attendance actually underscores the finding that Tot Shabbat participation is a particularly powerful influence, and the scope of the impact reaches beyond the time that the Tot Shabbat program meets. This is particularly significant for this study, as the Tot Shabbat participants come from many different types of family religious environments: 100% of the respondents indicated that they light Chanukah candles, read Jewish books for children, and either attend or host a Passover seder, and 97% indicated that they use Jewish ritual objects in the home. In addition, 73% recite blessings not related to Shabbat at home, and 53% report that they incorporate Jewish elements into their bedtime routine. Beyond their personal observances, however, Bartkowski's assertion suggests that the impact of Tot Shabbat is not determined by each family's Jewish environment at home, because they are nurtured through the network in which they participate, which yields greater effects.

In relation to this specific population, "Jewish Early Engagement in New York," a project commissioned by the Jewish Federation of New York, argues the following:

Whatever the reasons underlying the parent's institutional choices, when a family becomes involved with secular institutions instead of with Jewish institutions, the outcomes are predictable. Parents will be less likely to establish friendships with other parents who are involved in Jewish life and will be less likely to encounter Jewish role models. Since Jewish friends and role models have a strong influence on whether parents make Jewish choices for their children, these parents will tend to be uninvolved with Jewish tradition during their child's early formative years (Rosen et al. p. 3).

Both participants and leaders described experiences that led them to agree with this assertion, that development of relationships is a crucial foundation for Jewish living and that the period of time directly adjacent to becoming parents is critical. This very sensitive period of growth that occurs for young children and their families is well documented in both secular and Jewish research. In the seminal book, "From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development," the data highlights the critical opportunity for development that each child in an early learning environment experiences:

From the time of conception to the first day of kindergarten, development proceeds at a pace exceeding that of any

subsequent stage of life. What happens during the first months and years of life matters a lot, not because this period of development provides an indelible blueprint for adult well-being, but because it sets either a sturdy or fragile stage for what follows (Shonkoff pp. 26-7).

## AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP JEWISH IDENTITY

Similarly, the early childhood years represent a crucial opportunity for children to begin to develop their Jewish identities with their families and form connections that foster future Jewish communal engagement. The article "If Not Now, When?" in "What We Now Know About Jewish Education," argued that early childhood Jewish education offers a potent opportunity to strengthen "the future viability of the North American Jewish community" because it "instills a Jewish identity in children...strengthens the Jewish identity and practice of families, provides an important venue for adults to connect with other Jewish adults, and serves as a pivotal gateway into further involvement and commitment (Vogelstein 383). This opinion is further affirmed by the fact that the parents of young children are, themselves, undergoing a period of rapid identity development that synagogues can support:

New parents — who had been so confident in their careers — find themselves in uncharted waters when they start preparing to welcome their first child. Rather than focusing on what parents and their young children can contribute to the synagogue, synagogues need to see themselves as having something to offer these parents as they start their parenting journey. Synagogues must be intentional in their efforts to meet the needs of today's parents, beginning with knowing those needs (Rolland et al. p. 10).

All of these data illustrate that Tot Shabbat programs are an especially valuable opportunity for synagogues to connect to and impact the lives of families with young children. Not only is this a critical time of development for the children who attend, but the nature of the programs in this study, designed for children aged 0-6 to attend with their families, also further primes the participants for impact: "Programs that combine child-focused educational activities with explicit attention to parent-child interaction patterns and relationship-building appear to have the greatest impacts" (Shonkoff p. 11). This assertion, that programs that wish to maximize impact must attend simultaneously to the children's learning and the parent's learning as it relates to familial participation, was additionally described in the 2005 study "Linking the Silos: How to Accelerate the Momentum in Jewish Education Today." This study sought to compile a description of "The Current Moment in Jewish Education Today," which called attention to the following 21st century reality:

Today, Jewish families and educational programs do not operate in two separate spheres, but rather mutually

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reinforce one another. Clearly, family engagement with Jewish education ranges across a spectrum from more to less intense participation, but it is no longer helpful to look at families as divorced from the Jewish educational process, any more than it is useful to imagine schools and informal education as operating independently of families (Wertheimer p. 11).

Many findings of the project aligned with the trends discovered by that project. One example is that 90% of families indicate that they participate in other events at the synagogue where they attend Tot Shabbat, and 41% of the families credit Tot Shabbat participation for encouraging this behavior. "Linking the Silos" also found that "A number of parents report that their child's participation in religious school has led them to become more involved in the synagogue" (Wertheimer 16). This was additionally affirmed by the descriptions and objectives both leaders and participants provided: Tot Shabbat was repeatedly called an "entry point" or a "gateway" to synagogue life.

Tot Shabbat programs, as defined for the purposes of this study as services children attend with their families, are uniquely at the intersection of critically important dynamics: Family engagement opportunities that jointly invite the parents and the young children to interact with one another, learn about Judaism, and build relationships not only with like-minded families in a similar development state, but also with experts (leaders who are teachers, rabbis, etc.), in a brief and vulnerable time period. These ideas, that Tot Shabbat timing is critical and that the relationships established in this window deeply matter, were also intuitively understood by leaders and parents. One example was provided by a parent who described her child's birth as a welcome "excuse" that allowed her to find her place in the community, a place she was acutely aware that she was actively missing. When asked, "Why do you bring your family to these experiences?" she described her belief that participation could offer a significant opportunity for her:

I've never really lived anywhere where I didn't actually feel like I belonged to the Jewish community...but living here, I really felt like an outsider, for a really long time. Having "kiddo" was really sort of my excuse to find my inroads in creating a community — and I work for the Jewish community, it's also a really weird thing to say — but I didn't feel connected. Even though I work for the community. It's really an intentional way for us, for me in particular, because "husband" comes sometimes and he doesn't know...Really intentional for me to start to make more personal connections and get to know people and to start to feel like less of an outsider. If this is where we're going to be long-term, then this needs to feel like home, and I

need to do things to make that the case.

She went on to describe connections and friendships that she has started to meet the goal she set for herself. From a different perspective with a similar outlook, a rabbi, when asked, "Why do you host these services for young children and their families?" answered:

It is a great welcoming tool...I think a recognition that (and I don't want this to come across as seeming sneaky) [there is] a sense of vulnerability of that time of life for families that they are looking for 'Jewish' and they are looking for connection...this is exactly what a synagogue is built for.

This rabbi went on to describe what she hopes children and families will gain from their Tot Shabbat participation:

To me, actually the number one thing that I hope that they gain is connections with other families. Nothing makes me happier than seeing families who met through Tot Shabbat making plans to go to the playground. Even just right after Tot Shabbat, even through sort of [an] organic connection. I hope they make connections with the clergy and the community, and I hope that they have sweet and positive Jewish experiences that make them feel like, 'Oh, this could have meaning in our lives going forward.'

In almost every Tot Shabbat leader interview, the leader responded affirmatively when asked if /she believes that Tot Shabbat encourages families who participate to engage in Jewish life. Several specified that they know not every family is impacted, but each was able to identify examples that provide evidence for this phenomenon. This section will present the Tot Shabbat leaders' perspectives and observations on this topic.

One cantor's perspective offers a limitation on the data that remains true for all of the responses collected: there is simply insufficient research to definitively determine the specific origin of the impact. When asked, "Do you think participation in your program encourages the families to engage in Jewish life outside of this specific experience that you're providing?" the cantor replied:

I don't know that I can definitively say that. I don't know if it's a chicken or an egg...It's [the suburban community in which the families live] pretty well engaged, there are lots of opportunities to be Jewish in this town without having to belong anywhere. So I don't know that I can definitively say, yes, it's because of our program that people get involved in things.

Further research would be required to determine true causal

relationships, but this study is able to describe the correlation effects of the data that the populations provided and is the richest collection of anecdotal evidence to date. Several Tot Shabbat leaders shared stories of the parents of the children who attend Tot Shabbat experiencing enormous shifts in their own relationships with Judaism. This is one element of a theme that emerged through all of the data collection: Tot Shabbat programs are presented for young children, but the adult participants are experiencing mature, meaningful learning and make profound connections that deeply affect their lives. Tot Shabbat leaders remarked repeatedly that Tot Shabbat is a time of life when the adults are also at a life stage that is particularly ripe for influence.

A cantor who leads Tot Shabbat describes a phenomenon with which he is very familiar:

When people graduate from high school, graduate from college, it is typical to drift away from Judaism — heck, after Bar/Bat Mitzvah, they drift away from Judaism! I'm talking about this [Tot Shabbat] as an entryway into Jewish life, it makes it a non-judgmental way to reinforce the lessons of Judaism with these adults, and I've seen it a number of times when people start to engage with their curiosity, and it may ignite a real passion for Jewish texts to

There was a moment that I witnessed, just because I was sitting maybe in the right place at the right time, where we had a little bit more order...I remember seeing grandparents who were crying because they just had this opportunity to have a ritually-created moment to bless their grandchildren. And we [the Tot Shabbat leadership team] were the conduit through which they were given this gift. I want to call it a gift. We don't take time out, you know. I don't know what many families do at Shabbat dinner at home. The kids are running around and they're going crazy, and we sit down and maybe we'll have ten minutes of order where we can sit and talk and then the kids are crazy again...to be able to facilitate those moments of holiness, those sacred moments for families to have a time to bless their children, it is just the same as a Bar/Bat [Mitzvah] family, you know. They'll get up on our bimah, and after their child reads the Torah and gives a d'var Torah,<sup>3</sup> they will have a moment to really share what they think and really share what they believe in a way that is...you really can't do that in your home as well...or during a Ketubah<sup>4</sup> signing. I invite the cameras to leave and say, 'all right, everybody, it's time. We're going to go

**(The rabbi) said that one of the reasons that his synagogue hosts Tot Shabbat programs is “for them to establish a relationship with one of the rabbis of the congregation at that level of connection that makes it more welcoming for them to participate in other elements of the congregation.”**

Jewish music and study and community.

He goes on to give an example that he says isn't atypical:

There's one couple in particular who kind of stepped forward, they stepped up to the plate, and said, 'Wow, we'd love to know more about the community, and we'd love to reengage with Jewish life.' They ended up enrolling their child in our early childhood center. They became active in the community. The dad is now one of the co-chairs for my men's retreat, so it's significant that [Tot Shabbat] is a way that we're able to provide an opportunity for couples to come in with their young children, and they are able to take a step into the Jewish life.

This leader went on to compare the depth and meaning of other life cycle events to describe the significance of the experiences he is able to facilitate at Tot Shabbat:

around and we're going to say: What do you really wish for this couple?' So, the ability for a family to do that is a significant gift.

His testimony highlights the deeply intimate and emotionally-connective part of the Tot Shabbat program that he clearly treasures. His approach towards Tot Shabbat as one small piece of the journey the families are embarking upon was shared by other people leading Tot Shabbat programs.

One rabbi spoke about the relationship he was able to build with the individual participants of the Tot Shabbat he facilitates as the path to encouraging engagement far beyond the time the children could identify as “tots.” He said that one of the reasons that his synagogue hosts Tot Shabbat programs is “for them to establish a relationship with one of the rabbis of the congregation at that level of connection that makes it



more welcoming for them to participate in other elements of the congregation.” In his experience, the relationship established early in the child’s life can determine the choices the family makes regarding future life cycle events: “I feel comfortable saying that when the time comes for their children’s Bar or Bat Mitzvah or lifecycle events, there could be a likelihood that I’m going to be the one that’s officiating, because they have a relationship with one of their rabbis in a very intimate and personal way.” The connections between the children and the clergy, as well as the parents and the clergy, can individually and collectively yield immense impact.

## STRENGTHENING PARENTS’ CONNECTIONS TO JUDAISM

An early childhood director who facilitates Tot Shabbat testified that this phenomenon, that the opportunity that Tot Shabbat presents to parents to shift their relationship with Judaism, can also occur to non-Jewish parents:

I have an interfaith family right now...the dad was really not interested in Judaism but has chosen this program for his kids. But little by little, we’ve been talking about things and inviting him to come. Finally, he came to a Tot Shabbat; now they come every single month. He asks me if we can have them more, and he’s gotten involved in the Dad’s Club. (The dads got together, and they did a little fundraiser last year that’s now becoming an annual thing. They did a cornhole tournament that was sort of their own idea.) They are coming to the annual event and talking about joining the temple. Now, they come to our Friday morning school Shabbat, and the mom who is not Jewish is really loving it and super involved — when Dad was out of town and she posted a video of herself lighting the Chanukah candles with the kids...that’s just one example, but there are so many more. I definitely think Tot Shabbat is helping the families to create traditions around Judaism.

Another early childhood director who leads Tot Shabbat with a rabbi and song leader tells the story of the enormous impact one toddler’s brief experience can have on a family and their relationship to a synagogue community:

A little boy who was two at the time came to Tot Shabbat — the family comes every month. After Tot Shabbat, there is an oneg for the kids and families. As it is in process, the regular adults service is starting in the same sanctuary where Tot Shabbat was held. The boy asked to go into the sanctuary again, and since the service hadn’t started yet, the parents said OK. He went up to the bimah. He wanted to talk to one of the song leaders he loves — the boy loves the guitar and wanted to go and talk to her. After the child and the song leader chatted for a few moments, the rabbi and the song

leader were ready to start the service. His parents called him: “Come on down, they’re ready to start.” But the rabbi and song leader said: “No, no, no, he can stay. He can stay and help lead.”

So here’s this adult service with 200 people and this little tiny two-year-old standing up on the bimah — and he actually put in his request for his favorite songs, so the rabbi and song leader kind of re-did their plan so they could do the songs that he wanted to lead. After that, they said: “Now you can go find your parents.”

The next day we got an email from a parent, from the mom in particular, saying: “I wasn’t raised as part of a synagogue. I knew I was Jewish but Jewish meant family and food, and it never really meant going to a synagogue, and my son has had such a different experience. He feels so at home here at the synagogue. The rabbi could’ve easily said to him, “The service’s starting. Go, get off the bimah,” but instead you allowed him to lead this service. It’s like the highlight of his life. It made him so happy. And because of that, I feel so much more connected to you and to this congregation. I’ll have this connection forever, just because of the way that our family has been valued here.”

This moment, while Tot Shabbat-adjacent, did not happen during the program — it was a spontaneous occurrence that most likely happened as a result of several elements unique to this community: the personality and attitude of the leadership, a flexible community climate that could allow a toddler to take over the bimah, and a scheduling approach that created opportunities for different populations to be visible to one another. While the details of the experience are specific to this community, the theme that the parent’s understanding and identification with Judaism and Jewish rituals can shift as a result of the family’s participation was shared by both leaders and participants, again and again.

One song leader described the way that the Tot Shabbat leaders welcomed a family that impacted not only the members of that family, but also each of the community’s members. She shared that the person who is currently their synagogue’s education director and youth group advisor told her that:

It was through Tot Shabbat that her non-Jewish husband felt that this was a community that really embraced him and really embraced his kids and made him feel comfortable enough to start doing other things at the synagogue as a family. Kids got involved, they got involved, and now she’s the head

of a religious school and youth group.

This is yet another example of the enormous changes that can all start at Tot Shabbat, in this case, not only for this family, but also for the synagogue community and all of the families they serve.

Another Tot Shabbat leader, the synagogue's director of education, describes one of her favorite rituals and the evidence that a parent offered to her about the way that Tot Shabbat encourages participation in Jewish life:

We will have 'Shehechyanu' moments in which I will ask, before we say the prayer, the families to share what happened to them between the last time and last service and this service. For example, if somebody lost a tooth or got potty-trained, the parents traveled somewhere, or the grandparents came to visit...

She goes on to describe a parent in a family that participates in this ritual at her program: "They went on a hike and they climbed all the way up, and the kid (about four years old) said, 'Mommy, this is...this is the perfect Shehechyanu moment!'" She explained that this is why she believes she is able to encourage families to engage in Jewish life through their participation in Tot Shabbat: "You know this is the 'ah-ha' moment, when what I'm doing here, connected to a family's experience, was really meaningful for me. And that sort of stayed with me. So that's one of those experiences when we're able to create meaningful enough interactions that stay with the family afterwards." This leader was able to impart a lesson to this four-year-old in a meaningful enough way for the child to independently make a connection to a moment outside of the context of Tot Shabbat, that an exciting achievement merited the recognition of being a shehechyanu moment. This is one example of the ways that interviewees offered to make evident that Tot Shabbat attendance encourages families to engage in Jewish life.

This director also knows that this anecdote is not reflective of every family's experience. When asked, "Do you believe that participation in these programs encourages the families who participate in Tot Shabbat to engage in Jewish life in other ways?" she further explains:

I know that for some people this will be the only experience they choose to participate in, and some people [are] not knowledgeable enough and comfortable enough to facilitate Shabbat at home. So while, of course, internally that would be my goal, that the atmosphere and the experiences that we create affect the Jewish choices of the parents outside the synagogue because we have only this much time with them and then they have the rest of the week and the year with the children. But I see

different people who practice differently and for some this might be it. And that's why I'm also trying to make it a little bit larger than just the service because I realized that for some families this will be the ultimate Jewish experience they are going to have with their children.

This limitation is likely true about all of the communities that attend Tot Shabbat – the level of impact that each family experiences will fall on a spectrum. However, the data gathered clearly state that a majority of families are positively influenced to make more Jewish choices. Other examples of Tot Shabbat rituals that made their way into the everyday lives of the participating children include children's spontaneous singing of "Yom Huledet Sameach"<sup>5</sup> when a family member celebrates a birthday, a child who takes small Israeli flags and marches around her house and calls this ritual "playing Shabbat" (which is a ritual at her Tot Shabbat celebration), the baking of challah at home, and the purchase of wooden Shabbat sets.<sup>6</sup>

While the vast majority of parents credit their Tot Shabbat participation as meaningful to their family, not all parents immediately identify their experience as meaningful for themselves. For example, when asked, "Is participation in Tot Shabbat meaningful for you?" one parent responded, "Hmm. Separate from the children as prayer experience? I don't feel like it is a spiritual or eye-opening kind of thing in that regard. As a community building thing, yes, absolutely. And it gives me a chance to connect with other families in the preschool community who we've grown close with over the years ..." This answer also illustrates how the word "meaningful" can be understood in many ways.

Ninety-seven percent of participants strongly agree or agree that Tot Shabbat provides a positive Jewish experience for their family. The participants generously offered their observations that their children make connections, express joy, and demonstrate increased understanding as a result of their Tot Shabbat participation. One way that these data were collected was through a survey question that asked the participants to finish the line "My favorite part of Tot Shabbat is when..." which was almost entirely made of examples of a participant watching his/her own child engage, express happiness, or show familiarity with Tot Shabbat (46%) or, more specifically, watching his/her child sing (31%).

In her interview, one mom described her favorite part of Tot Shabbat as what occurred outside of the specific experience. She is a Jew by choice, married to a man whom she described as being raised in a "Christianized" way by Jewish parents in a small town in Georgia because they would "say Christian prayers before bed...his family exchanged Christmas presents,

which seems really weird to us.” She indicated that they were able to continue singing songs or practicing rituals they shared during the program: “Between the two of us growing up kind of atypical, the Tot Shabbat has really helped us to get a grasp on how we can introduce our child to Judaism in a way that feels natural and is fun.” When asked, “How was participation in these programs encouraged your family to engage in Jewish life in any other way?” she described the impact she has witnessed in her three-year-old daughter:

She’s become a much more active part of the candle lighting, Shabbat evening...she’ll sing lots of songs from services...it’s just become second nature for her, which is good because otherwise she isn’t really exposed to much Jewish stuff. Her daycare is Christian-run. We started going to Tot Shabbat when she started singing “Jesus Loves Me,” so we thought OK, we’re going to have to come to this [Tot Shabbat]. And so now she brings her Torah to day-care instead.

The mother expressed entire satisfaction with her Tot Shabbat experience. When asked if she had advice or suggestions she would offer to her Tot Shabbat leadership, she had none: “This is working the way it is, and it’s really beautiful.” This family’s background was unique, but the fact that Tot Shabbat can help families better navigate the observance and celebration of Jewish life with toddlers proved to be a crucially important part of what parents with very strong Jewish backgrounds appreciate, as well.

Another mom, who is a Jewish professional with rabbinic ordination married to a congregational rabbi, described her toddler’s experience at Tot Shabbat (which one of his parents leads) as a reason that her child loves being in the Temple:

When we go on a regular Friday night, not for Tot Shabbat, we are in there for a little bit, but we review beforehand... ‘we sit quietly in services and you sit next to Ima, we’re not running around. If you need to run around, we’re going to go outside, and you can run around in the hallway.’ We’re not there for that long...it is a little harder. I think he participates a lot more in Tot Shabbat than he does in other services.

When asked to clarify how Tot Shabbat has influenced her family’s established practice of Judaism, she described the experience as helping her recognize her child’s relationship with Judaism in a new way:

“Kiddo” has expectations and excitement about Shabbat and knows that it’s coming. He has no sense of time, but whenever anything is exciting, I’ll say “Kiddo, do you know what’s happening tonight?” and he assumes that the right answer is Shabbat,

which is adorable (but it’s not always Shabbat, sometimes it’s, like, grandma and grandpa are coming). I think in that sense, it really pushed me to not dial it in so much on Friday nights, which is really easy to do. I think in some ways as a rabbinic family, it’s harder to ‘do Jewish’ because my husband is not home. We don’t eat Shabbat dinner together as a family by any means...but his excitement about Shabbat has pushed me to think, how do I, how do we, mark Shabbat as special no matter what, even if it’s not all of us together?

She continued about the ways that Tot Shabbat participation has impacted the Shabbat observance she shares with her child, even on the weeks that it doesn’t occur:

It is this reminder that Jewish life is now about us and not just about me, and [this] reminded me to be intentional — how are we going to do this, we’re going to go to Tot Shabbat next week, but there’s no Tot Shabbat this week, so what are we going to do to mark Shabbat? Because my kid is expecting it... and it has made Shabbat candle lighting, in particular, all the more meaningful to me because we do it together. It used to be this very quick thing that I would do, and it was pretty inconsequential, but now we normally do it at home, “kiddo” loves it.

In these two interviews with mothers of Jewish toddlers, each cited Tot Shabbat participation for increasing the meaning, joy, and participation shared in their home candle lighting ritual. In the first family, neither parent has formal training in Jewish learning, and both lack personal experience to share with their child; they are working intentionally to make Jewish choices as their child’s day-care teaches her to sing about “Jesus’ love.” In the latter, both parents are ordained rabbis with rich Jewish backgrounds.

Interestingly, these testimonies are very clear examples of the conclusions that Spagnola and Fiese identified when they studied young children’s development in the context of a family’s routines and rituals. Families and children each benefit from predictable patterns of meaningful rituals, especially when emotional connections are an element of that ritual. The lighting of Shabbat candles is an example of what they call a “transactional” model of ritual observance that “emphasizes the mutual effects between parent and child, embedded and regulated by cultural codes. In this model, child outcome is neither predictable by the state of the child alone nor the environment in which he or she is being raised. Rather, it is a result of a series of transactions that evolve, with the child responding to and altering the environment” (Spagnola and Fiese p. 291).

The same study argues that the most vulnerable time when parents seek ritual is when infants become toddlers. In the first few months of a child's life, the parents are consumed with caregiving, but parents will seek meaningful rituals as those babies mature into toddlers. As children mature, their "family routines and rituals provide a structure for the socialization of culturally acceptable behavior" that allows them to practice emerging skills that offer "opportunities to foster skill development that encourages autonomy as well as connection with others" (Spagnola and Fiese pp. 287-8). An intentional approach to this process will yield best results: "for families with young children, the emotional investment in routines starts with an awareness that these settings are opportunities for learning as well as for building relationships" (p. 289). This shift in attitude and readiness to create meaningful rituals was echoed in several interviews. One mom described the shift in her own approach towards Judaism that parenthood inspired:

**The same study argues that the most vulnerable time when parents seek ritual is when infants become toddlers. In the first few months of a child's life, the parents are consumed with caregiving, but parents will seek meaningful rituals as those babies mature into toddlers.**

You can have the Jewish ceremony, you can get married under the chuppah<sup>7</sup> and you could break the glass, and you could do all the Jewish customs walking around your husband seven times, and yeah, that's all great. But then as a couple after you're married, what do you do? And there's nothing, it's not really that important. And you go to High Holiday services...I think I went a couple times to maybe my parents' Temple activities, as a couple, just to kind of support my dad, but I would say nothing really helped us as a couple with the Judaism aspect.

She describes her husband's initial attitude towards Jewish life as being that he "wants nothing to do with it, going to services, nothing do with the Temple" because he "grew up going to an Orthodox temple and Yeshiva<sup>8</sup> and he felt like it was being shoved down his throat and he did not enjoy it." She credits Tot Shabbat with helping her family connect. She says that his attitude has shifted as a result of the positive experiences the family shares attending Tot Shabbat at several different congregations and said that her husband is now more willing and able to appreciate services, in general:

For instance, we went to the High Holiday services at 'Synagogue,' and he really enjoyed it for the first time. He actually walked away with something,

and I don't know if he would have done that had we not done Tot Shabbat for so many years and just had that comfort level, going to that 'synagogue' for Tot Shabbat and being comfortable and knowing the 'Rabbi,' and getting to know him. I don't know if he would have the same feelings.

When asked about how the Tot Shabbat experience is meaningful to her, she answered, "I would say the Tot Shabbat kind of brings us together as adults...being together as a couple and seeing our children enjoying Shabbat and seeing my husband enjoying Shabbat, whereas before he never used to enjoy it." This sentiment, that Tot Shabbat offered a platform for parents with divergent attitudes to reconsider and perhaps even start to reconcile their approaches to Jewish parenthood, is of rising importance in an increasingly diverse Jewish community.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Host communities and leaders need to recognize and accommodate to the fact that the most consequential opportunity their Tot Shabbat can offer is the facilitation of relationships.

The data highlight the significant impact and potential of synagogue programs that invite families with young children to celebrate Shabbat. The testimonies of the participants and documentation offered by the literature reinforce the uniquely powerful combination of traits that synagogue programs for families with young children typically maintain as they:

- Facilitate opportunities for families to create and maintain peer relationships the participants actively seek that can grow into an influential network.
- Welcome family members who are candidates for membership to learn about the synagogue community without commitment while beginning relationships with synagogue leaders and staff and (sometimes) sharing information about other opportunities to participate.
- Invite families to engage at a vulnerable and critical developmental stage in the lives of both the adults (constructing their identity as parents) and the children.

As such, the leaders and the communities that host Tot

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Shabbat programs should craft their programs with careful attention to these three elements to maximize the benefits of the experience for not only the individual families but the community as a whole.

The communities that host Tot Shabbat must consider practical environmental and safety issues.

Tot Shabbat programs are encouraging families to engage in Jewish life and the participants are generally happy with their experiences. However, the data collected from the survey questions regarding challenges and the leaders' perspectives highlight areas of opportunity. The families are most challenged by logistical, practical concerns (see chart at end of article). Synagogues that wish to maximize participation in their programs need to communicate with their program's potential participants and address their concerns: Can small children reach the sink in the bathroom? How can a family with multiple children of diverse ages participate? Are programs scheduled with regard to the bedtimes of the children? Are the candles and matches out of the toddlers' reach? Are the electrical outlets covered? Are choking hazards entirely removed from the environment (hard candies, balloons, etc.)?

Lines of communication must be open, and participants invited to share their specific concerns and feedback. Similarly, some of the adult participants shared serious concerns (sensory issues, children with anaphylactic allergies, special needs diagnoses, etc.) through the survey and interviews. Parents also shared that they had never thought to share their challenges with the host synagogue's leadership, even when they perceived those leaders to be people who would be open to feedback. The communities that host Tot Shabbat programs and their leadership could greatly improve their participant experiences by establishing a process that invites them to provide feedback regarding such concerns.

The communal norms and behavioral expectations of both the children and the adults who participate in Tot Shabbat programs need to be articulated and communicated.

Both data populations shared concerns about the participants' behavior (both children and adults) and the ways that they engage in the program, but relatively few research participants referred to any communication about or understanding of the community's expectations of behavior. The research participants who did make reference to the sharing of these norms remarked on a two-step process (one, leadership decided what was acceptable and, two, communicated those guidelines) and noticed an immediate and marked improvement. The communities that host Tot

Shabbat programs and the leaders who facilitate them should decide and articulate the behavioral guidelines for all participants (not only children) to address this challenge.

The leadership teams who plan and facilitate Tot Shabbat programs would benefit from additional training and/or support to better understand the developmental needs of the program participants.

In academic settings, the critical importance of developmentally appropriate practice is well established. However, the leaders, participants and experts all agree that Tot Shabbat leaders and their approach often reflect an insufficient understanding of the developmental capabilities of young children and often reflect that the developmental needs of the adult participants have not been sufficiently considered.

Tot Shabbat leaders can be better equipped to plan and lead their programs by utilizing resources and referencing literature on a variety of relevant topics.

While a body of resources and research on "Tot Shabbat" or specifically about programs that seek to jointly engage young children and their families in Shabbat worship experience is still lacking, there is an immense body of literature and resources available that can help leaders understand and improve their roles, their leadership styles, and their programs. Leaders volunteered that what they found to be the most useful information or relevant skill set that informed their leadership came from an enormous diversity of experiences, some with more obvious connections to Tot Shabbat leadership than others: nursing, counseling, songleading, teaching, performing, parenting, and crafting, to name only a few. Similarly, best practices of program facilitation and educational pursuits, like collaborative planning, goal setting, and assessment, should be utilized by communities hoping to improve their Tot Shabbat programs. Each leader's individual academic and personal background as well as his or her particular interests should inform the topics that can be pursued to develop their Tot Shabbat leadership ability.

Leaders of Tot Shabbat programs and Jewish community leadership need to recognize Tot Shabbat programs for what they are and what they can be.

When asked to define Tot Shabbat, none of the research participants described the opportunities to meaningfully impact the practice of families with young children or the significant adult education component of Tot Shabbat programs. An expanded understanding of Tot Shabbat programs and a recognition of their potential is a first step

that communities can take in improving the ways that they invite families with young children to participate in their community. The consideration of the data presented in this report in conjunction with the literature highlighted will prove beneficial to those who choose to take intentional steps towards improvement.

## CONCLUSION

The research project explored Tot Shabbat programs and the ways that they might encourage families with young children to engage in Jewish life. Participation in these programs does, in fact, influence the families to engage in Jewish life and encourage behaviors (namely, social interactions with other Jewish families and the forming of new relationships). This is consistent with relevant research and extensive literature that argue that these are the most potent ways to increase Jewish identity. A slightly less anticipated finding of this project is the fact that, while Tot Shabbat participation facilitates what is designed to be a developmentally-appropriate learning experience for the children, the adults that participate in Tot Shabbat can be affected in meaningful, mature, and identity-altering ways.

Tot Shabbat programs are “for” the children in the same way that a child’s first pediatrician’s appointments are “for” the children. While it is certainly imperative that a child’s physical wellness is monitored, the majority of the appointment is spent in dialogue between the doctor and the child’s caregiver(s). A relationship is established or nurtured so that the parents understand the scope of the doctor’s expertise and various services the office provides. The parents ask questions that help the doctor not only address their concerns, but better understand the background and perspectives this family is bringing to their parenting. Since 2010, the American Academy of Pediatrics has recommended that mothers be screened for post-partum depression during an infant’s well-child visits because, while the pediatrician certainly can’t treat this condition, a pediatrician is in a unique role to be able to identify it, as that mother’s wellness cannot be detached from the wellness of the child. Often, the Tot Shabbat leader is an expert and the synagogue is like the doctor’s office, with the benefit of a built-in referral network.

Throughout the interviews, the Tot Shabbat leaders gave testimony to the opportunities that Tot Shabbat presented for relationships to be established or nurtured in a way that truly changed lives. Clearly, the care that is given to a baby in the first stage of its development sets the foundation for its health. The dynamics of the relationship between that child, its caregiver(s), and the doctor will influence not only the wellbeing of the child but the wellness of the family.

The data made clear that the potential that Tot Shabbat

programming presents is substantial. It can support not only the children’s religious and spiritual development but invites families with young children to form relationships that can yield positive impacts for each participant’s educational, social, emotional, and religious needs. This participation also nurtures each individual participant’s Jewish identity. This study affirms that Tot Shabbat participation encourages families with young children to engage in Jewish life in their home and community.

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## Explanatory Notes

1. Families define themselves; the members may include adults or siblings of any faith or background. This study is not investigating the impact of the presence or effect on siblings who participate, nor the effect on non-Jewish adults that participate, although those areas may both be worthy of further investigation.

2. The researcher included data from leaders of Tot Shabbat programs in non-denominational or multi-denominational synagogues, as well as communities that don’t specifically identify as “synagogues” but serve and support the Jewish educational, communal, and prayer needs of families with young children, though they weren’t specifically described in the original data population plan.

3. Prepared remarks shared with the community regarding a person’s perspective on a particular passage of Torah.

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4. A marriage contract that requires a ceremonial signing by two witnesses that typically takes place in a private ceremony before the more public ritual during which the couple is formally married.

5. A popular Hebrew translation of the “Happy Birthday” song.

6. A commercially available toy set that includes the items typically utilized in a Shabbat celebration: wine (Kiddush) cup; two candles and candlesticks; and a platter and cover for challah.

7. A canopy under which Jewish couples stand during their wedding ceremony.

8. A Jewish educational institution that focuses students’ attention on religious texts.

*The entire project is available for download at [www.MissEmilyCelebrates.com](http://www.MissEmilyCelebrates.com).*