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What are we called on to be?

A teen exploration of

Jewish Ethics

“We achieve greatness by handing our values onto the next generation and empowering them to go and build the future” – Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

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Introduction

Topic

This Curriculum though written for Temple Beth-El of Great Neck can be adapted for any congregation.

The journey to adulthood, known as adolescence represents a crucial time in identity development. Creating an opportunity for teens to engage in Jewish learning will hopefully lead to their continued engagement in Jewish experiences as adults. In the House of Lords Debate on Education, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks said “Schools are about more than what we know and what we can do, they are about who we are and what we must do to help others become what they might be. The world our children will inherit tomorrow is born in the schools we build today¹.” As high school students enter the pluralism of college life, they will be challenged by peers and their own hearts regarding their morals, politics and

This capstone curriculum emerged out of a conversation with a public-school teacher and the students who were going to be in this class. After meeting with the students of the 11th grade class I would be teaching, it became apparent that the previous curriculum was no longer meeting their needs. We discussed what they were looking for out of their Hebrew High experience and they shared with me the issues that they feel passionate about. Some of the topics on the list were: gay rights, abortion, women’s rights, immigration, health care, drugs and alcohol, sexual assault and much more. After hearing their interests, I decided it was time to meet their needs, and that’s where this curriculum came into the picture.

¹ <http://rabbisacks.org/house-lords-debate-middle-east/>

This process is congruent with John Dewey's philosophy that learning must be active is a core principle of Jewish education. He believes that children come to school to support the values they are learning and living in their community and at home. Dewey believes that the teacher is present to assist the student in properly responding to the influences of their community, school and the world around them. These values are meant to guide their experiences that will later help them contribute to the larger community.

"Statements of law are almost invariably following by anecdotes illustrating how these principles have been, or can be, carried out in daily life. In a certain sense, I would argue that this is how Jewish tradition has long taught ethics. Thus, although the Torah contains a large number of laws, 613 to be precise, anyone who has read the Torah and the rest of the Bible knows that it is not a dry legal text. Rather, it is filled with hundreds of stories that serve to illustrate maybe of the laws it mandates.²"

Similar to Dewey's beliefs that the educator is meant to guide the learner and support the ideals they are practicing in their homes and communities, the Torah and Jewish text is meant to guide our Jewish journey and the choices we make in the world today.

Why these learners? (Intended Audience & Setting)

Adolescence is defined as "a stage of life in which young people are beginning to make really important decisions for themselves and create their own affiliations." In 11th

² Mcdevitt, Teresa M. Ormrod, Jeanne Ellis. *Child Development and Education; 5th Edition*. Pearson Education, Inc; 2013

grade, students are one year away from potentially moving out of the house and living on their own. They are in a place of self-discovery and are starting to defend and speak out for what they believe in. They are forming a true identity for themselves and are not afraid to express their views even if they differ from their peers. They have the ability to process more complex thoughts; these adolescents have a stronger sense of right and wrong and are able to engage in more profound conversations.

“Studies of adolescent cognitive development have shown that the teenage brain is not only able but primed to engage with challenging and significant ideas³”, according to *The Teen Years Explained*, a report from the Center for Adolescent Health at Johns Hopkins University. This curriculum will provide learners with the ability to think critically about issues that are of real concern to them and to interact with these complex ideas in a way that enhances their ability to speak logically, definitively and freely.

Newly developed thinking skills are one of the most thrilling aspects of adolescence. As their ability to think in abstract terms grows, young people begin to explore the idea of debate, challenge established ideas or values, and question authority. They begin to question notions of absolute truth and to acquire the capability to present logical arguments.

Only in early childhood are people as receptive to new information as they are in adolescence. According to *Child Development and Education*, in late adolescence

³ https://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/center-for-adolescent-health/_docs/TTYE-Guide.pdf

(ages 14-18) trends show that teens have the ability to consider multiple viewpoints about a single topic while being able to critically evaluate the concept⁴.

Rationale

Why this Learning style?

Restorative Justice is a model of learning that provides a framework for building community and for responding to challenging situations through authentic dialogue, coming to understanding, and making things right. The goal of this style of learning is to create an environment where we as educators are fostering a safe learning environment through community building and constructive conflict resolution.

Learning is done in a group allowing stakeholders to contribute to the conflict resolution process. Creating a safe atmosphere where learners are actively engaged in debate and disagreement with their peers will allow them to feel accepted for their diverse opinions while also accepting the opinions of others.

“Teenagers, do not readily share what is deeply important with anyone, certainly not with most adults called ‘teachers.’ To earn their trust, I had to learn ways to work together to create an environment that was safe and full of respect and compassion so that they would speak with authenticity. The more they felt

⁴ Mcdevitt, Teresa M. Ormrod, Jeanne Ellis. *Child Development and Education*; 5th Edition. Pearson Education, Inc; 2013

their voices honored by their peers and teacher, the more they were willing to speak.⁵

By creating a safe environment, following the guidelines of a restorative practice, students feel comfortable sharing their opinions and deep thoughts and reflecting on their feelings and emotions. The act of reflecting ensures the absorption of educational material and experiences.⁶ Reflection is an important aspect of the educational process, but to succeed, it must occur in a safe community.

In 1992, the Josephson Institute of Ethics hosted a gathering of experts in ethics and character education. The goal of this gathering was to find ways to work together, primarily by developing a common language of core ethical values that transcend religious, political and socioeconomic differences. They identified 6 pillars of character⁷:

1. Trustworthiness
2. Respect
3. Responsibility
4. Fairness
5. Caring
6. Citizenship

These pillars not only will guide the way in which the class is structured but guide the choices we make. The morals we abide by come from the essentials of ethics, and

⁵ Kessler, Rachael, *The Soul of Education: Helping Students Find Connection, Compassion, and Character at School*, Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2000, page 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁷ https://web.engr.uky.edu/~jrchee0/CE%20401/Josephson%20EDM/Making_Ethical_Decisions.pdf

therefore are the basis of decision-making. The Six Pillars can dramatically improve the ethical quality of our decisions, and thus our character and lives⁸.

Why Text Study?

The goal of this curriculum is not only to provide students with textual knowledge but also with the tools and skills they need to hopefully one day live an active and ethical Jewish life of their own. Providing students with the textual knowledge is in service of character development and allows them to make their own choices. Our sacred texts should be the basis to guide one's life. Rooting our studies in Jewish text allows us to connect to our collective past while obtaining the necessary wisdom to guide one's actions into the future.

"Two Talmudic sages, Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akiva, struggled to determine which is more important- the study of Torah or living according to its laws, God's mitzvot. Rabbi Tarfon was convinced that it is more important to follow the laws of Torah. Rabbi Akiva argued that the only way to know what the laws are is to study Torah. In the end, the sages determined that the study of Torah is greater than all other mitzvot because it leads to them all (Talmud, Kiddushin 40b)⁹.

Michael Rosenak states¹⁰, "by providing students the access to traditional Jewish, texts that are studied in Hebrew, we can empower them with the skills, information and language that will hopefully inform their Jewish identity". He also states that a

⁸ https://web.engr.uky.edu/~jrchee0/CE%20401/Josephson%20EDM/Making_Ethical_Decisions.pdf

⁹ Gevirtz, Gila. *Count me In: Jewish Wisdom in Action*. Behrman House Publishers; 2005.

¹⁰ Rosenack, Michael. *Educated Jews: Common Elements*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press: 2003.

communal approach to the study of sacred texts and articulation of common vocabulary around Jewish life is critical to the success of a community. This does not necessarily refer to Hebrew words but rather a shared vocabulary and articulation of values that shape Jewish life.

Cultural literacy of Judaism is essential for children to construct a meaningful Jewish Identity. Combining this with transforming routine activities into inspiring and groundbreaking experiences we can provide our students with memorable opportunities outside the classroom. Michael Meyer explains that *Torah* is the primary vehicle and source of education, but the goal of Jewish education is not *Torah Lishmah*; it's fostering personal growth and morality. Rooting this curriculum in text study will encourage the learners to ask "how our past authorities would have decided the matter, in addition to their wisdom, if they had our knowledge of history and science?"¹¹

In researching other curricula that are rooted in Jewish texts there are a few questions that stood out:

1. Torah and Talmud: What light can they shed on the ethical dilemmas we face today?¹²
2. What action will one take to represent themselves Jewishly?
3. What affect do concepts such as closeness and holiness have on one's sense of moral responsibility?¹³

¹¹ Gittlesohn, Roland B. *How do I Decide? A contemporary Jewish Approach to What's right and What's wrong?* West Orange, NY: Behrman House, Inc., Publishers: 1989.

¹² Gittlesohn, Roland B. *How do I Decide? A contemporary Jewish Approach to What's right and What's wrong?* West Orange, NY: Behrman House, Inc., Publishers: 1989.

¹³ Gittlesohn, Roland B. *How do I Decide? A contemporary Jewish Approach to What's right and What's wrong?* West Orange, NY: Behrman House, Inc., Publishers: 1989.

Desired Results and Acceptable Evidence for Learning

Enduring Understanding

1. Learning through a restorative practice model will empower the decision-making process.
2. Social activism has played a role in Jewish life since the time of Moses.
3. As members of the Jewish people, we are each stakeholders and partners in inspiring others to lead an ethical Jewish life.
4. Jewish tradition presents us with a critical toolset for building our character and becoming the people we wish to be in the world.

Essential Questions

1. What connects teens to Jewish learning about ethics?
2. How do we provide a platform for teens to find meaning and value in Jewish learning?
3. How do our Jewish values play a role in who we are and the ethical decisions we face?

Letter to Educators

Dear Educator,

I am thrilled that you are exploring this curriculum! While the rationale will provide the thinking that motivated this curriculum, I want to address a few pieces of the implementation.

This curriculum was designed to offer teens to see how Judaism provides a framework for the ethical dilemmas they face on a regular basis or in the world at large. I chose this pedagogy to create an environment that will support learning that empowers student's decision-making abilities. As 11th graders, our students are on the brink of moving out of the house and living on their own. In college, they will be surrounded by others who will challenge them to stand up for what they believe in and defend their viewpoints/values.

There is room for additional lessons with topics of your choosing to be added to the curriculum to meet the interests of your students. I encourage you to spend some time learning about the issues that your students feel passionate about and to design additional lessons to meet the interest of your specific classrooms.

One of the primary tasks as the teacher is to educate, reinforce, and adhere to the guidelines you will set for your classroom.

Here are some suggested standards from the restorative practice model that I found to be useful¹⁴:

1. Be sure to keep parents in the loop about the difficult topics you will be discussing.
2. Create a class brit- and refer to it at the start of every class. It should hang in a visible spot so it can always be seen.
3. Students should always sit in a circle so that everyone in the group can see each other.
4. Open every session with a check-in. (A low-risk, relevant question)
5. All opinions are welcomed.
6. Avoid solving the problem for the students. Allow them to define the issues and develop their own action plan.
7. Maintain constant communication and be open to all feedback.
8. Provide Snacks: it helps create a more relaxed environment. ☺

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¹⁴ <http://restorativeschoolsproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Social-Emotional-Learning.pdf>

Session Overview

<u>Session Topic</u>	<u>Core Concept</u>	<u>Text</u>
Why Me?	Exploring the roots of Social Action through an exploration of Jewish text will allow students to define the role they play in the world.	Leviticus 19:16 Sefer Chasidim 674 Amos 9:7-8 Kitty Genovese Case
Let's Talk about Sex	Through a Jewish lens students will engage in the deeper values around the conversation about physical intimacy.	Exodus 20:13 Exodus 21:10 Numbers 15:39 Song of Songs 8:6 Mishnah, Ketubot
Homosexuality	Guided by the belief that all human beings are created <i>b'tselem Elohim</i> , students will explore the ideas behind creating open and inclusive environments.	Genesis 1:27 Genesis 19:1-13 Leviticus 18:22
Homelessness	Students will gain a deeper understanding of the causes of Homelessness and explore the roots of Social Action through an exploration of Jewish text.	Kizzur Shulchan Arukh 34:1 Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Gifts to the Poor 7:13 Deuteronomy 15:11 Exodus Rabbah 31:12 Jonathan Sacks, To Heal a Fractured World p. 5.
Drugs and Alcohol	Through the study of Biblical stories and Jewish text students will gain a deeper understanding of how drugs and alcohol affect our body and mind.	Genesis 9:18-27 Esther 1:5-2:1 Mishan Torah, Hilchot De'ot 4:1

Social Media	Judaism, while ancient, can inform the choices we make surrounding technology and social media.	Proverbs 11:13 Pirkei Avot 1:1 Midrash Psalms 102:4
Ethical Treatment of Workers	Torah and Talmud can inform us about the dignity and rights of those who produce our food in addition to the kashrut.	Leviticus 19:13 Deuteronomy 24:14-15 Newsweek Article

**All resources and supporting materials for lessons are attached.

Lesson 1: Why Me?

Core Concept:

Exploring the roots of Social Action through an exploration of Jewish text will allow students to define the role they play in the world.

Essential Questions:

1. How does our Judaism define the role we play in the world?
2. Who are we obligated to and at what expense?

Schedule

00:00-00:15

Welcome and Check In

00:15-00:45

Kitty Genovese Case Study

00:45-00:55

- Questions, comments, discussion.
- What is your universe of obligation?

Universe of Obligation

In **Circle 1**, write your name.

In **Circle 2**, write the name of people to whom you feel the greatest obligation for example, people for whom you'd be willing to take a great risk or put yourself in peril for (you don't have to write actual names.)

In **Circle 3**, who are the people on the next level? That is people to whom you have some obligation, but not as great as in circle 2.

In **Circle 4**, who are the people on the next level? People to whom you have some obligation, but not as great as in circle 3.

00:55-01:15

Text Study

- 1) What message do you think Amos holds for those who believe one race is superior to another? For those who think they have God "on their side"?
- 2) What is the basic message of the passage from Kiddushin?
- 3) How does it answer the question "why me?"

01:15-01:30

Hebrew High Wrap Up and bed time Shema!

Lesson 2: Homelessness and Working Poor

Core Concept:

1. Students will gain a deeper understanding of the causes of Homelessness and explore the roots of Social Action through an exploration of Jewish text.
2. Students will gain a deeper understanding of the causes of Homelessness through hearing from a man who has been homeless himself and learning about homeless in the Jewish community.

EQ:

1. How do we balance helping those in need regardless of background while still helping our fellow Jews?
2. How does our desire to help those less fortunate find meaning within our Jewish tradition?

Schedule

00:00-00:15

Welcome and Check In

00:15-00:45

An exploration of Jewish Homelessness

00:45-01:00

Causes of Homeless sheet and follow up questions

Questions:

- 1) What surprised you?
- 2) In thinking about those in need, do you prioritize giving time and money to Jews?
- 3) What are you still thinking about?

01:00-01:20

Mock Scenarios

Use these profiles to do some improve activities that allow students to practice interacting with people they may meet on the streets. We are out in NYC distributing food and goods to the homeless and working poor. You meet one of the following people. How do you interact with them?

- **Challenge**

- **Reflective Question**

Imagine a family member that is close to you appearing at one of the stops on a Midnight Run. How would you treat them differently than you do the men and women we meet? What could you do to inspire that reaction at stops?

01:20-01:30

Hebrew High Wrap Up and bed time Shema!

Lesson 3: Let's Talk about Sex!

Core Concept:

1. Social dynamics can lead to pressure in physical relationships. Through a Jewish lens, students will engage in the deeper values around the conversation about physical intimacy.

EQ: How does Judaism help shape one's decision to be physical with someone?

KDDB

Knowing: Participants will know how Jewish values shape the causes they believe in.

Do: Participants will participate in conversations around physical intimacy.

Believe: Participants will believe in themselves to speak out for what they believe in.

Belong: Participants will belong to a community of learners that they feel safe in to express their opinions freely.

Schedule

00:00-00:15

Welcome and Check In

00:15-00:35

An exploration of Jewish attitudes towards sex.

00:35-00:55

Scenario Debates

00:55-01:20

A look at sexual harassment and takeaways.

After having a conversation about physical intimacy, it is important for students to also understand the definition of sexual harassment. Discuss the definition below and take a look at the questions that follow.

Sex-u-al Ha-rass-ment

NOUN

1. Harassment (typically of woman) in a workplace, or other professional or social situation, involving the making of unwanted sexual advances or obscene remarks

1. What cases do you know of?
2. Why do you think some women have been silent?

3. Have you ever been made to feel uncomfortable by the way someone looked at you or what they said?
4. Has something ever seemed ok in the moment and then felt bad later?
5. How did you deal with those feelings?
6. Do you feel that pressure to go further physically than someone might want is a part of the dynamics in High School?
7. If so, what role do girls play? What role do boys play?

Toolkit

Every student can get an index card that has your number (if you're comfortable) or a local hotline phone number. Let them write on the index card what they want in their emotional toolkit to know they are ready to be intimate.

- What is a question that you still have about physical intimacy or sex?
- What do you need in your emotional toolkit to be ready to be intimate?
 - Tool Kit:
 - Know beforehand what you want
 - Don't think you **can't** change your mind
 - A sign that you're in the wrong relationship would be someone....
 - If you were harassed, coerced or assaulted, who would you go to for support?
 - How might Judaism play a role?

01:20-01:30

Hebrew High Wrap Up and bed time Shema!

RESOURCES

Weekly Check-In

Enraged	Furious	Frustrated	Shocked	M	Surprised	Upbeat	Motivated	Ecstatic
Livid	Frightened	Nervous	Restless	O	Hyper	Cheerful	Inspired	Elated
Fuming	Apprehensive	Worried	Annoyed	O	Energized	Lively	Optimistic	Thrilled
Repulsed	Troubled	Uneasy	Peeved	D	Pleasant	Joyful	Proud	Blissful
M	O	O	D	M	E	T	E	R
Disgusted	Disappointed	Glum	Ashamed	E	Blessed	At Ease	Content	Fulfilled
Mortified	Alienated	Mopey	Apathetic	T	Humble	Secure	Chill	Grateful
Embarrassed	Excluded	Timid	Drained	E	Calm	Satisfied	Relaxed	Carefree
Alone	Down	Bored	Tired	R	Relieved	Restful	Tranquil	Serene

Use the Mood-O-Meter each week to check in:

- Find a box that best represents how you are feeling now
- Where would you like to be by the end of the week

WHY ME?

Leviticus 19:16

לֹא תַעֲמֹד עַל־דַּם רֵעֶךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה:

Do not profit by the blood of your fellow: I am the LORD.

Amos 9:7-8

7: הֲלוֹא כִבְנֵי כְשִׁיִּים אַתֶּם לִי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נְאֻם־יְהוָה הֲלוֹא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל הֶעֱלִיתִי מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וּפְלִשְׁתִּיִּים מִכַּפְתּוֹר וְאַרְמֵי מִקִּיר:

To Me, O Israelites, you are Just like the Ethiopians —declares the LORD. True, I brought Israel up From the land of Egypt, But also the Philistines from Caphtor And the Arameans from Kir.

8: הִנֵּה עֵינַי | אֲדַגֵּי יְהוָה בַּמַּמְלָכָה הַחַטָּאָה וְהַשְׂמֵדָתִי אֶתָּה מַעַל בְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה אֶפְסֹ כִּי לֹא הַשְׂמִיד אֲשַׁמִּיד אֶת־בֵּית יַעֲקֹב נְאֻם־יְהוָה:

Behold, the Lord GOD has His eye Upon the sinful kingdom: I will wipe it off The face of the earth! But, I will not wholly wipe out The House of Jacob —declares the LORD.

A non-swimmer need not attempt life-saving because he would sacrifice his life in vain.

(Sefer Chasidim 674)

Kiddushin 40b

a person should view himself as though he were exactly half-liable and half-meritorious. In other words, he should act as though the plates of his scale are balanced, so that if he performs one mitzvah he is fortunate, as he tilts his balance to the scale of merit. If he transgresses one prohibition, woe to him, as he tilts his balance to the scale of liability, as it is stated: “But one sin destroys much good” ([Ecclesiastes 9:18](#)), which means that due to one sin that a person transgresses he squanders much good. Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon, says: Since the world is judged by its majority, i.e., depending on whether people have performed a majority of mitzvot or a majority of sins, and an individual is likewise judged by his majority, each person must consider that if he performs one mitzvah he is praiseworthy, as he tilts the balance of himself and the entire world to the scale of merit. Conversely, if he transgresses one prohibition, woe to him, as he tilts the balance for himself and the entire world to the scale of liability, as it is stated: “But one sin destroys much good,” i.e., due to one sin that this individual commits, he squanders much goodness from himself and from the entire world.

The Kitty Genovese Case

At about 3:00 AM on March 13, 1964, in the residential neighborhood of Kew Gardens in New York City, a 28-year-old woman name Kitty Genovese was attacked by a man with a knife. Subsequent investigation revealed that during the next thirty minutes, at least 37 people who heard her screams and witnessed the fatal assault failed to come to her rescue- or even call the police. Not until 3:50 AM, did the police receive the first report from an eyewitness. By that time, Kitty Genovese had bled to death.

When interviewed by the police and by newspaper reporters, those who heard Kitty’s scream’s but did nothing gave the following reasons:

- I was afraid the assailant might attack me.
- I thought it was only a prank or innocent scuffle.
- I didn’t want to become involved.

- I didn't want to bother having to appear as a witness in court.
 - I feared that if I testified against the assailant, friends of his might harm me, too.
- 4) What would you have done?
 - 5) How can we balance our obligation to help with possible risk to ourselves?

Homelessness

Top 10 Causes of Homelessness

by Jason Cox - Sep 2, 2013 – www.povertyliving.com

The top ten causes of homelessness seem easy to identify; however, one may find a few surprises.

1. Poverty remains the top cause of homelessness. In actuality that seems obvious, but most people don't know that a quarter of the homeless citizens have jobs but do not receive a high enough paycheck to pay rent or mortgage. Thus, they live on the streets or in a shelter struggling to survive on a low paying nine to five.
2. Homelessness can stem from financial crisis. Overwhelming debt, termination from work, and medical emergencies can provide expenses that place an individual or family on the streets. Oftentimes, these circumstances bring insurmountable debt, expenditures, or needs that do not comply with the current income of the individual, forcing him/her to leave his/her home.
3. Divorce plays a huge part in homelessness. Usually, one individual receives the home while the other has no place to go. On top of that, if one individual happened to work and the other was unemployed, the unemployed may face difficulties obtaining a job or paying child support.
4. Mental illness presents another battle to many homeless individuals. In addition to the expense, proper medication and treatment can evade an individual. On top of that, many individuals grow wary of mental help due to bad experiences, preconceived notions, or simply irrational fears provided by the illness itself. Amongst the mentally ill homeless two paths remain common: they receive expensive treatment and medication but can no longer afford housing or they refuse to receive treatment and can no longer keep a job due to the symptoms of their illness thus stopping income and pushing them to the streets.
5. Drug addiction can destroy an individual's finances. Costly drug habits can lead to the loss of a job, arrest, debt, illness, or death. In regard to an addict individual, the individual may face homelessness due to lack of money for housing. But a family with an addict parent may face homelessness because of the loss of finances provided by the individual.

6. Many veterans face homelessness due to wounds or mental illness. Their disabilities keep them from employment and provide different expenses. How sad that serving our country remains one of the top ten causes of homelessness.
7. Domestic violence leaves many on the streets as well. Fleeing victims often have no place to turn and no financial means. Even if the victim has employment, they often have children who have numerous needs. Though some safe havens open their doors to these victims, they may face years of poverty before they fully recover financially.
8. Children make up a large portion of the homeless in our country. Many employed individuals receive a paycheck classified as adult-sufficient. This means that an individual with a certain level of income can provide reasonably well for her/himself and possibly a partner. However, once children enter the picture, the expenses outweigh the income leading to poverty and even homelessness. Many homeless individuals are runaways and cannot receive employment due to their age. In addition, runaways rarely attend school or receive a diploma and cannot receive a high paying job once they become adults.
9. Tragedy puts many families on the streets. Some may have lost their financially providing parent while others may simply succumb to a deep depression keeping them from maintaining their job. Unfortunately, the suddenness of such tragedies can leave relatives and dependents lost and confused, simply unable to provide for themselves.
10. Finally, natural disasters like floods, fires, tornadoes, or hurricanes can leave many homeless in the path of their destruction. Stripped of everything, these families struggle toward the lives they once had.

HOMELESSNESS: Text Study

Read through the texts below. Of the six, which do you connect with most?

- 1) "We are here to make a difference, to mend the fractures of the world, a day at a time, an act at a time, for as long as it takes to make it a place of justice and compassion where the lonely are not alone, the poor not without help; where the cry of the vulnerable is heeded and those who are wronged are heard. 'someone else's physical needs are my spiritual obligation,' a Jewish mystic taught."
-Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World* (New York: Random House, 2007), p. 5.

2) Kizzur Shulchan Arukh 34:1 (law codes derived from the Talmud)

A person should always keep in mind the depth of his desire when he pleads before the Holy One Blessed be God. With the same intensity that she wishes that the Holy One Blessed be God will heed her cry, she should heed the call of the poor. [AJWS translation]

3) Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Gifts to the Poor 7:13

A poor relative takes precedence over all men; the poor of his household before the poor of his city; the poor of his town before the poor of another town; as it says: 'to your brother, to your poor, and to your needy in your land; (Deuteronomy 15:11)

4) Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Gifts to the Poor 7:3

You are commanded to provide the needy with whatever they lack. If they lack clothing, you must clothe them. If they lack household goods, you must provide them...You are commanded to fulfill all of their needs, though not required to make them wealthy. [AJWS translation]

5) Likutey Aharon (Rabbi Yeshua Lalum) #17

And so, the Torah commands us," Do not harden your heart and do not close your hand"; to the needy. If your heart hardens, your hand will close and you will see that your fingers are of equal length and then you will say to him (the poor person)-Go out and work like me! But do the opposite, open your hand and then you will see that your fingers are short and tall and this is how God created people, big and small, and this lives from that. [Translation by AVODAH]

6) Exodus Rabbah 31:12 (Midrash on the book of Exodus)

There is nothing in the world more grievous than poverty; it is the most terrible of all sufferings. Our sages have said: If all troubles were assembled on one side and poverty on the other, [poverty would outweigh them all]. When a man is rich and has a poor relative, he does not acknowledge him; for when he sees his poor relation, he hides himself from him, being ashamed to speak to him, because he is poor. [AJWS translation]

Mock Interaction Profiles

Guest: Sam Walton

Gender: Male

Race: African American

Mood: Upbeat, really happy to meet the teens and accept a much-needed meal and clothing donations.

Backstory: 53-year-old man from Virginia. He moved to New York about 15 years ago after his parents passed away and has been looking for work ever since. He stays in and out of shelters and has little to no assistance from his family. He has no college education but has held jobs for long periods of time. His biggest challenge is saving enough money to find a reliable, safe, and affordable place to live.



Guest: Benny Jimenez

Gender: Male

Race: Puerto Rican

Mood: Stressed, friendly, happy but embarrassed. Hungry and looking for a break. He wants newer clothing only and several pairs on underwear, socks, and t-shirts.

Backstory: 23 years old from the Bronx. Benny is well dressed in a Yankees jacket and matching hat, nice work boots, and dark jeans. He had gotten into some trouble as a teenager and hung out with the wrong crowd. His mom kicked him out of the house and after he exhausted all favors with friends he had nowhere else to stay. He sleeps in Port Authority or Subway cars and keeps only a small backpack of belongings. He needs a job desperately.



Guest: Joseph DeMarco

Gender: Male

Race: White

Mood: Pushy, cold, tired, bothered by waiting and impatient. Demanding. He wants more sandwiches and two or three additional blankets. He is battling a rough winter cold and has no tissues.

Backstory: 63 years old and living on the streets for over 20 years. He sleeps on church steps, in doorways and doesn't trust shelters because he was once robbed in one. He had an alcohol problem and doesn't speak with his family.



Guest: Renee Sylvester

Gender: Female

Race: White

Mood: Friendly and fidgety. She is rummaging through your women's and men's clothing and wants bags full. She seems persistent and in a rush.

Backstory: Renee is a drug addict that can't kick her addict. She is going to take all the clothing she gets tonight and sell it on the streets so she can feed her addiction. She appears to have not showered in a long time and has very little clothing on considering the frigid temperatures.



Guest: James Mannix

Gender: Male

Race: African American

Mood: Tired, appreciative, cold, and hungry.

Backstory: 35 years old. James works two jobs as a hospital janitor and bellman at a NYC hotel. He has just gotten off of work and made a conscious effort to be at this Midnight Run stop. He supports his ill grandmother in their studio (single room) apartment on the little he makes. He often chooses not to eat dinner so his grandmother can have the sustenance she needs. Though he has a place to live and a job his access to food is limited and there is no discretionary income to purchase items such as gloves, dress clothing, socks etc.



Let's Talk About Sex
Jewish Attitudes Towards Sex
Source Sheet by Rachel Barnehama

Exodus 20:13

(13) You shall not commit adultery.

שמות כ':י"ג

(יג) לֹא תִנָּאֵף:

Exodus 21:10

(10) If he marries another, he must not withhold from this one her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights.

שמות כ"א:י'

(י) אִם-אֶחָדָה יִקַּח-לָו שְׂאֵרָה כְּסוּתָהּ וְעֹנֶתָהּ לֹא יִגְרַע:

Numbers 15:39

(39) That shall be your fringe; look at it and recall all the commandments of the LORD and observe them, so that you do not follow your heart and eyes in your lustful urge.

במדבר ט"ו:ל"ט

(לט) וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְצִיצִית וּרְאִיתֶם אֹתוֹ וּזְכַרְתֶּם אֶת-כָּל-מִצְוֹת יְהוָה וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם וְלֹא-תִתְּלוּ אֲחֵרֵי לִבְבְּכֶם וְאֲחֵרֵי עֵינֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר-אֲתֶם זִנִּים אֲחֵרֵיהֶם:

Song of Songs 8:6

(6) Let me be a seal upon your heart, Like the seal upon your hand. For love is fierce as death, Passion is mighty as Sheol; Its darts are darts of fire, A blazing flame.

שיר השירים ח':ו'

(ו) שִׁימְנֵי בְּחֹמֹתַי עַל-לֵבָבִי בְּחוֹתָם עַל-זֶרְעוֹךָ כִּי-עֲזָה כְּמָוֶת אֲהַבָּה קָשָׁה כְּשֹׂאֵל קִנְיָה רִשְׁפֵּיהָ רִשְׁפֵּי אֵשׁ שְׁלֵהֲבָתֶיהָ:

The marital duty set forth in the Torah is: for men who have no occupation, everyday: for laborers, twice a week, for donkey-drivers (who travel during the week), once a week, for camel drivers (who travel for long periods), once every thirty days, for sailors (who travel for many months) once in six months. *Mishnah, Ketubot*

Questions:

1. What do you think the text is saying?
2. What is the range of attitude towards sex in these texts?
3. When you think about the social pressures of High School, especially with regards to physical relationships, what text most relates to you and why?
4. What role might sexuality and physical relationships play in our spiritual lives?

Scenarios for debate:

1. You are at your Girlfriend's house, no one is home and things start progressing physically. You are fooling around on her bed and her mom walks in. Immediately, your girlfriend blames you and makes it seem like you pressured her. Her mom calls your parents and you get grounded.
2. You've been dating someone for only a few weeks. Prom is quickly approaching and all of your friends are discussing getting hotel rooms with their dates.

Annotated Bibliography

1. Josephson Institute of Ethics, Making Ethical Decisions
https://web.engr.uky.edu/~jrchee0/CE%20401/Josephson%20EDM/Making_Ethical_Decisions.pdf

This style of learning served as the basis of this capstone. These resources helped inform the choices I made around the style of lessons I wanted to create.

Involving the students in their learning and creating an environment where they were bought into the choices they were making was critical to the success of this curriculum.

2. Kent, Orit. *Interactive Text Study: A Case of Hevruta Learning*. Journal of Jewish Education; 2006.

Through this close examination of text study, students are able to relate to the Jewish text in a way that allows them to connect with it on a deeper level. It allows adolescents to challenge both their own and each other's ideas while wrestling with Jewish text.

3. Rosenack, Michael. *Educated Jews: Common Elements*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press; 2003.

Providing our students with the textual knowledge to make their own choices is a key component to this curriculum. Creating a foundation of text study as a core element of each lesson exposes the students to Jewish text that will provide them with the tools to make their own choices around the way they want to ethically live their lives. Michael Rosenack states, the study of text and learning of language is in service of character development through action. Our sacred texts should be the basis to guide one's life.

4. Mcdevitt, Teresa M. Ormrod, Jeanne Ellis. *Child Development and Education*; 5th Edition. Pearson Education, Inc; 2013

Child Development and Education teaches those working with children and adolescents how to apply the knowledge and theory into everyday practice. This research not only informed my knowledge on adolescents but provided the tools to assist in creating a curriculum that meets the needs of the audience.

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