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**RE-ENVISIONING JEWISH FAMILY EDUCATION:  
HOW JEWISH IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH SHOULD AFFECT  
JEWISH FAMILY EDUCATION PRACTICE**

**JOANNE DOADES**

**Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
Requirements for Master of Arts in Religious Education Degree**

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**PART ONE:**

**RE-ENVISIONING JEWISH FAMILY EDUCATION**

## **I. Introduction**

A number of recently published studies shed light on the question of how Jewish family life affects Jewish identity in adulthood. These studies—such as Cohen and Eisen's "The Jew Within: Self, Community and Commitment Among the Variety of Moderately Affiliated" and "Connections and Journeys: Assessing Critical Opportunities for Enhancing Jewish Identity," A Report to the Commission on Jewish Identity & Renewal, UJA-Federation of New York —present an opportunity for us to take another look at how we define and approach our goals in the field of Jewish family education.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the implications of this research for Jewish family education practice and to suggest a different way of thinking about what is needed to sustain and nurture Jewish family life in America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We will begin by examining trends in spirituality and affiliation in the general culture today, followed by an exploration of Jewish identity among contemporary Jewish adults. We will next explore the development of Jewish family education until the present and we will consider a bold shift in our approach to Jewish family education, based upon the research we have cited. Finally, a programmatic model incorporating the new approach will be presented.

## II. Spirituality and Identity in America Today

### *The general landscape*

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century in America, a dramatic shift occurred in the relationship between the individual and the community. An earlier environment of active civic (and church/synagogue) involvement at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century evolved into a social environment characterized by isolation and alienation from institutions at the end of the century. This phenomenon has had a detrimental effect on both institutions and individuals. "In short, as the twenty-first century opens, Americans are going to church less often than we did three or four decades ago, and the churches we go to are less engaged with the wider community," notes Harvard University professor Robert Putnam. "Trends in religious life reinforce rather than counterbalance the ominous plunge in social connectedness in the secular community."<sup>1</sup>

And why is this development an "ominous plunge?" Putnam asserts that civic/religious institutional involvements strengthen connections between individuals, but these activities and involvements also strengthen the individual by helping him acquire valuable life success skills. "Religiously active men and women learn to give speeches, run meetings, manage disagreements, and bear administrative responsibility." He concludes: "...churchgoers are substantially more likely to be involved in secular organizations, to vote and participate politically in other ways, and to have deeper informal social

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000) p.79

connections.”<sup>2</sup> In place of the attachment to institutions that help individuals learn and grow within a communal framework, the trend is now toward “privatized religion”, a development that Putnam maintains, undermines our ability to work together toward desirable social outcomes. He notes that the “community-building efforts of the new denominations have been directed inward rather than outward, thus limiting their otherwise salutary effects on America’s stock of social capital.”<sup>3</sup> (The term “social capital”, which Putnam did not coin, refers to the ways in which the establishment of social connections and networks promotes trust and reciprocity and facilitates teamwork, cooperation, and enhanced decision-making.)

The social development of privatization and turning inward described by Putnam is affirmed by Princeton’s Robert Wuthnow: “Despite evidence that churches and synagogues are, on the surface, faring well, the deeper meaning of spirituality seems to be moving in a new direction in response to changes in U.S. culture. Indeed, the foundations of religious tradition seem to be less secure than in the past. Insisting that old phrases are cant, many Americans struggle to invent new languages to describe their faith. As they do, their beliefs are becoming more eclectic, and their commitments are often becoming more private.”<sup>4</sup> As individuals continue to lose faith in the ability of churches and synagogues to respond to their needs, they will continue on this path of searching for

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<sup>2</sup>Putnam, p. 66

<sup>3</sup>Putnam, p. 79

<sup>4</sup>Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950's* (Los Angeles:University of California Press, 2000) p. 1

more eclectic, private answers to their spiritual and emotional questions. (Wuthnow's recommendation that religious institutions might *facilitate* this individual search within a communal context warrants the attention of Jewish religious leaders and educators, and bears further exploration.)

Given the landscape of spirituality and institutional affiliation in America today, what does the Jewish community look like at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

### ***Jewish identity in America today***

A significant amount of data about the subject of contemporary American Jewish identity now exists, both with regard to individual identity and to institutional affiliation (particularly with the synagogue). Studies by Cohen and Eisen; Sales and Tobin; The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University; and UJA-Federation of New York among others provide a deeply nuanced picture of Jewish identity development, especially among the non-Orthodox. In *The Jew Within: Self, Community and Commitment Among the Variety of Moderately Affiliated*, Cohen and Eisen describe the sociological characteristics of this population in an age of freedom and choice. As the climate of individuality expands, the differentiation between the biographies of modern and post-modern individuals grows significantly. "One of the characteristic features of this post-modern age is the freedom and tendency to assemble new identities, drawing upon elements from once-disparate cultural systems. In this world, individuals are free to decide to emphasize or downplay aspects of their religious, ethnic, cultural, political, or sexual identities," they observe. "They are free to combine and re-combine elements in accord

with their changing needs and tastes. And, of course, this feature applies to their Jewish selves as well.”<sup>5</sup>

Cohen and Eisen found that the key obstacles to adult involvement with Jewish life, according to those in their study, were:

☛• **Parents** whose religious observance was perceived either as hypocritical (focused on certain aspects of ritual or synagogue attendance, but not on life in general); or whose observance was “true”, but whose relationships with the children were poor. “We may think of two connections: between the child and the parents, and between the parent and Judaism. If one connection is positive and the other negative, a negative relationship with Judaism is more likely to emerge later on. The converse is also true: a combination of warm relations with parents combined with their warm attitude toward things Jewish seems likely to eventuate in positive attitudes toward being Jewish in adulthood.”<sup>6</sup> (underlining mine.)

☛• Other obstacles cited were earlier **Hebrew school** experiences, generally reported to be boring and irrelevant; **rabbis and congregations** that were unwelcoming, unfriendly, dogmatic; **federations and other Jewish organizations** perceived as cliquish, elitist with a focus on money as the

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<sup>5</sup>Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen, *The Jew Within* (Boston: The Susan & David Wilstein Institute of Jewish Policy Studies, 1998), p. 38.

<sup>6</sup>Cohen and Eisen, p. 37

criterion for acceptance; and **Israel**, seen as militaristic, inflexible about peace, and intolerant of differing religious points of view and preferences.<sup>7</sup>

The researchers also identified what they called "stimuli to involvement." These included: **grandparents** far more than parents; **Jewish youth groups or intensive Jewish summer camps**, though not many are involved in these experiences; **dating and breaking up with non-Jews**, which helped adolescents and young adults clarify their thinking about their own interests and values; **the influence of spouses**; and the presence of **children** in the family. The stimuli to involvement resulted in increased rates of synagogue membership and higher levels of observance, perhaps, as Cohen and Eisen suggest, because they support the desire to raise Jewish children, or because they were received as a mandate from the Jewish school. (The researchers' boldface.)

In UJA-Federation of New York's recently published study, "Connections and Journeys: Assessing Critical Opportunities for Enhancing Jewish Identity," researchers confirmed that among Orthodox Jews, a fairly uninterrupted continuum exists between early training and strong Jewish identity and affiliation in adulthood. Among non-Orthodox Jews, however, early Jewish training had significantly less influence on Jewish identity and affiliation in adulthood. Instead, "voluntary" (we might say "choice-based") experiences today provide for non-Orthodox Jews the opportunities to strengthen/solidify Jewish identity and affiliation in adulthood. Early training seems to be the greatest factor in eventually contributing to a strong Jewish identity among non-Orthodox Jews in those

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<sup>7</sup>Cohen and Eisen p. 38

instances where internalization of Jewishness occurred by early adolescence, and this was based more upon "having come to experience Jewishness as a natural, lived experience than from formal synagogue attendance, Bar Mitzvah or years of Jewish schooling."<sup>8</sup> These "lived experiences" included steady Shabbat observance "and/or involvement in a 'total Jewish environment' like a Jewish summer camp. The route to strong Jewish engagement in adulthood for this population had to do first with early commitment and 'imprinting' and then with becoming involved in a range of voluntary experiences in adolescence and early adulthood."<sup>9</sup> Parental commitment to the importance of being Jewish was also cited as a key factor in the identity development of the child.

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<sup>8</sup>Bethamie Horowitz, *Connections and Journeys: Assessing Critical Opportunities for Enhancing Jewish Identity - A Report to the Commission on Jewish Identity & Renewal* (New York: UJA-Federation of New York, 2000), p. 123.

<sup>9</sup>Horowitz, p. 128.

### **III. Jewish Family Education in Perspective**

This chapter will explore why Jewish family education has become an important part of the synagogue-based educational process in this country, and will assess the capability of currently conceived approaches to family education practices to address the Jewish identity issues presented in the research we have examined.

#### ***Background***

For most of our history, Jewish education has been an inside-out proposition. Being born into a Jewish family conferred upon the individual an identity that was nurtured and sustained until that individual was ready to become an adult member of the Jewish community. Judaism was the essence of one's being, and as strong as the internal Jewish communal boundaries were at maintaining the individual's sense of self as a Jew, so too, by and large, were the external societal boundaries that reinforced the separateness and apartness of the Jewish community.

In this environment, the role of Jewish education was essentially to teach the individual how to live appropriately as a Jew at every stage of life. At its basic, everyday level, this was not an intellectual proposition, but rather a survival strategy that provided the skills training and information necessary for the individual to function within the community.

The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century intellectual, philosophical, and social revolution known as the Enlightenment disassembled the boundaries that had excluded Jews from Western European society and the normalized encounter with the non-Jewish world had a profound

affect on Jewish consciousness, according to historians Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehudah Reinharz: "Parallel to the Enlightenment there was a shift in the attitudes of Jews toward their own religious tradition and the outside world. One may refer to this shift as a secularization of consciousness, or a disengagement of the consciousness of the individual from the authority of religious tradition."<sup>10</sup> This secularization proceeded at rapid pace when Jews found their way to America, a land with no history of anti-Semitism and built upon a vision of religious freedom and plurality.<sup>11</sup> In this environment, where being American became, for most, more important than being Jewish, Jewish identity came to be seen as a private, individual matter and Jewish education became supplementary, rather than primary. Observed Jewish educator Samson Benderly at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, "What we want in this country is not Jews who can successfully keep up their Jewishness in a few large ghettos, but men and women who have grown up in freedom and can assert themselves wherever they are. A parochial system of education among the Jews would be fatal to such hopes."<sup>12</sup> For many Jewish families, the desire to integrate fully into American life and culture led to unqualified support for the public school system and the creation of a supplementary system for the Jewish education of children.

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<sup>10</sup>Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehudah Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.54.

<sup>11</sup>Howard M. Sachar, *The Course of Modern Jewish History*, rev. ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 200.

<sup>12</sup>Nathan H. Winter, *Jewish Education in a Pluralist Society* (New York: New York University Press, 1966), p. 48.

### *A Need and a Response*

The perception of the success of the supplementary system, however, has been marginal at best. In a comprehensive assessment of synagogue-based after-school Hebrew school programs in the greater New York area, the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York reported, "Overall, the Jewish supplementary school has an homogenizing effect upon student achievement. Pupils show very little increase in Jewish knowledge from grade to grade."<sup>13</sup>

Within the past 25 years, farsighted Jewish educators identified and began to address a major problem that was contributing to the difficulties encountered by teachers in the supplementary schools. Where Jewish identity had long been an inside-out proposition, with the school reinforcing and extending the early childhood training in Jewish thought, practices, and belief received in the home and the community, the great majority of non-Orthodox Jewish children were now coming from homes where Judaism was not a lived experience, and where the parents had little Jewish educational training themselves, and/or had very ambivalent feelings about their own Jewish identity. Jewish family education programs were developed to provide parents with the basics necessary to observe Jewish holidays and communicate Jewish values, enabling them, in effect, to once again be "teachers to their children." Dr. Jan Katzew of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations describes the situation this way: "During the last generation, due in part to the shortcomings of their own Jewish education as children, parents have begun to learn

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<sup>13</sup>Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York. "Jewish Supplementary Schooling: An Educational System in Need of Change - Executive Summary" (New York: Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York: 1987), p.9.

with and even from their children in family education settings.”<sup>14</sup>

How successfully Jewish family education initiatives have succeeded in educating parents and changing their Jewish behaviors is a question that has not been well studied. While the recently published results of the Community Foundation for Jewish Education of Metropolitan Chicago’s Family Education Survey are impressive, they represent the opinions and perceptions of parents at a single point in time and do not indicate trends or changes in behavior over time that can be correlated to participation in family education programs. To date, the only longitudinal community-wide Jewish family education plan and follow-up research has been done by Boston’s Commission on Jewish Continuity. A summary of those findings follows.

#### ***Assessing Results: the Boston Community’s Jewish Family Education Initiative***

In 1993, the Boston Jewish community’s Commission on Jewish Continuity launched *Sh’arim: Building Gateways to Jewish Life and Community*, a major initiative in Jewish family education. With 11 participating Conservative and Reform movement synagogues, the project was intended to “strengthen Jewish family life at home, in synagogues, in other Jewish organizations and in the community.”<sup>15</sup> In order to accomplish this, the following objectives were defined:

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<sup>14</sup>Jan Katzew, “The Jewish Educational State of the Union, 2000/5760” (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations website: 2000).

<sup>15</sup>Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, *Sh’arim: Building Gateways to Jewish Life and Community - A Report on Boston’s Jewish Family Educator Initiative* (Boston: Commission on Jewish Continuity, Bureau of Jewish Education, Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies: 2000), p.4

1. Involve family members in their children's Jewish education so that the whole family can support and enhance the children's learning.
2. Establish contexts for Jewish learning that will help family members find Judaism accessible and Jewish organizations and synagogues comfortable places to be.
3. Establish programs for joint family involvement in Jewish learning, thereby providing families with "quality time" together in Jewish pursuits and creating shared Jewish memories.
4. Build community among families in order to strengthen their connection to each other and to their Jewish institution (synagogue, community center or school).
5. Adapt Jewish learning to the home by empowering family members to become Jewish models and teachers for their children.

With support, training, and consultation from *Sh'arim's* sponsoring agencies (the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, the Boston Bureau of Jewish Education, and the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University), Jewish family educators were retained by the 11 synagogues to develop and implement the programs that would achieve the project's goals and objectives. Longitudinal research on outcomes indicate significant accomplishments. For example, almost half of the parents in the study reported increased attachment to Judaism over the course of the study (1995-98), especially in the areas of study and synagogue attendance.

But although parents reported that family education gave them the understanding they need to support Jewish practices in the home, there was almost no change in key aspects of Jewish family life, according to the study findings. If the premise of Jewish family education has been that educating parents will enable them to achieve increased levels of Jewish home observance thereby multiplying the "lived Jewish experiences" to support their children's learning, then how can we understand their failure to effect that change?

Some Jewish family educational professionals have suggested that the Boston research does not really tell us what we need to know, since included in the study were families who may have participated in family education programs as few as three times in a given year. Real changes in home religious practices and attitudes toward observance can only result, these educators argue, from involvement in longer-term Jewish family education programs, such as PACE, which works with families over a period of several years.

In addition, experts in the field have begun to suggest that, until recently, Jewish family education has largely been conducted on a learning level that may be suitable for children, but not for their adult parents. "As the field of Jewish family education matures by defining and refining itself, family educators have looked to related disciplines for insight into practice and expansion of theory. One such field is adult development," according to Betsy Dolgin Katz, the North American director of the Florence Melton Mini-School. Katz further suggests that linking family education to children may send

parents the message that when their children's education is complete, theirs is too.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, as some Jewish educators have tried to point out, the quality of Jewish family life is as much about *family life* as it is about *Jewish*. In other words, the successful transmission of Jewish values, practices, and culture is related to the nature of the family relationship itself. In 1992, noted Jewish educator Vicky Kelman observed: "We have learned from the field of family therapy that the most efficient way to help a child is to work with the entire family of which the child is part. We must develop programs and contexts within which the family is treated as a system and is the client, in addition to schools where the child is the client."<sup>17</sup>

This need to understand how family dynamics impact Jewish identity and practice is further reflected in the conclusion of the "Connections and Journeys" report: "The emotional quality of family relationships during upbringing plays an important mediating role in whether or not the child will emulate the family's Jewish (and general) commitments. Traumatic or difficult emotional relationships push people away, whereas happier relationships attract the child to adopt the parent's values and behaviors."<sup>18</sup> In searching for ways in which to help families achieve peace and healing in their stressful lives, Jew educators might identify the "high stress" moments in family life and develop

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<sup>16</sup>Betsy Dolgin Katz, "Adult Education and Jewish Family Education," in *First Fruit: An Anthology of Jewish Family Education*, ed. Adrienne Bank and Ron Wolfson (Los Angeles: The Shirley and Arthur Whizin Institute for Jewish Family Life, 1998), p.537.

<sup>17</sup>Vicky Kelman, "Zones and Scaffolds: Toward a Theory for Jewish Family Education," in *Jewish Family Retreats*, (Los Angeles: Melton/Whizin, 1992), p.10.

<sup>18</sup>Horowitz, p. 190

programmatic approaches for helping families address them.

If the last decade of activity in the field of Jewish family education has focused on successful programming "events" centered around the needs of Jewish children, now seems to be a good time to take a closer look at the needs of today's American Jewish parents.

#### IV. Keeping Jewish Parents Connected

For non-Orthodox Jews, being Jewish in America today is what Jonathan Woocher calls a "constructivist project"; that is, people put it together as they go along, and according to their own needs.<sup>19</sup> Wuthnow has described this process as the piecing together of faith like a patchwork quilt.<sup>20</sup> As needs change over time, so too does the individual's receptivity to Jewish identification, and certain moments present opportunities for Jewish institutions to intensify engagement and to provide the environment in which personal meaning can be found in the context of communal affiliation.

If there is one institution that represents "affiliation" for Jews, it is the synagogue. And while the role of the synagogue in American Jewish life may be experiencing a period of change, there does seem to be consensus among leading Jewish educators regarding the importance of the synagogue as the educating institution for American Jews. Woocher notes: "There can be little doubt that for American Jews, the synagogue is *the* preeminent 'educating institution.' As it has developed over the past half-century, most aspects of American Jewish education...and the education of Jewish youth and adults have become synagogue-centered."<sup>21</sup> Seymour Rossel and Sara Lee advise: "If we are serious about bringing Jewish learning to the Jews of North America, we must look to the one institution in which the vast majority of Jews take part, which is the congregation. It is estimated that at one time or another in their lives

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<sup>19</sup>Cohen and Eisen, p.60.

<sup>20</sup>Wuthnow, p.2.

<sup>21</sup>Foreward by Jonathan Woocher in Joseph Reimer's *Succeeding at Jewish Education: How One Synagogue Made it Work* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1997), p. xiv.

fully 75% or 80% of Jews are affiliated with a congregation."<sup>22</sup>

Until now, however, synagogue-based Jewish family education programs have largely been designed at the level of child, rather than adult, learning. "JFE programs typically do not begin with the experiences of grown-ups; rather, they start with the age or developmental stage of the child," according to Diane Tickton Schuster.<sup>23</sup> In addition, such programs often focus on holiday and life cycle learning, rather than on the personal search for meaning described in the Jewish identity and affiliation research. "For the past 15 years," notes the UJA-Federation of New York "Connections and Journeys" report, "the idea of 'family education' has been developed as a way of working with families to intensify their Jewishness. Often it has simply meant learning how to celebrate Jewish holidays at home as a family."<sup>24</sup>

### ***What Jewish parents really need***

Given what we know, then, about the search of today's Jewish adult for meaning, what is it that parents really need from Jewish family education programs, beyond the "how-to's" of holiday and life cycle observances? We can conclude from the research presented in this thesis that Jewish parents have four primary needs:

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<sup>22</sup>Introduction by Seymour Rossel and Sara Lee in *A Congregation of Learners: Transforming the Synagogue into a Learning Community* ed. by Isa Aron, Sara Lee, and Seymour Rossel (New York: UAHC Press, 1995), p. 7

<sup>23</sup>Diane Tickton Schuster, "Adult Development and Jewish Family Education," in *First Fruit: A Whizin Anthology of Jewish Family Education*, ed. by Adrienne Bank and Ron Wolfson (Los Angeles: Shirley and Arthur Whizin Institute for Jewish Family Education, 1998) p.522.

<sup>24</sup>Horowitz, p.190.

- Experiences that challenge and satisfy them intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually;
- Experiences that connect them to a Judaism they can understand as historically meaningful, yet relevant for today;
- Experiences that address their real life needs and concerns;
- Experiences that facilitate their search for meaning within a caring community.

If new approaches to Jewish family education are to be successful in responding to these needs, they must therefore be attentive to three fundamental issues: the nature of parenting today; how adults best learn; and the use of Jewish sources.

*The nature of parenting today.* Changes in the social/cultural environment, according to Demo and Acock, have dramatically affected parenting concerns. They specifically note that "the erosion of family and social support networks has led to greater isolation of parents from one another and to fewer friends and relatives who can be sought as sources of support and information on parenting."<sup>25</sup> In addition, they suggest, the greater number of potentially dangerous activities, substances, and influences to which contemporary children, and particularly adolescents, are exposed has contributed to a great deal of uncertainty for parents in their role as protectors and teachers. The lengthening of the period of adolescence means that parents are responsible for their children longer, with very little assistance and guidance in

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<sup>25</sup>Demo and Acock, "Family Structure and Adolescent Living," *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 6:4, (1996), p.455.

how to raise adolescents.<sup>26</sup>

How adults best learn. The field of adult learning presents a picture of a dynamic, non-linear process. Cognitive flexibility—taking risks, considering alternatives, confronting challenges—is a key aspect of adult learning and is a direct result of the intellectual challenge with which the learner is confronted, according to Diane Tickton Schuster. And relevance is essential: “Adult learners respond especially well to learning situations that empower them to take what they are learning and make it useful in everyday life.”<sup>27</sup> Further, suggests Jack Mezirow, for “transformative” learning to take place (learning that changes the way adults think, rather than simply transfers information), an environment must be created in which learners can reflect upon their own beliefs and meaning schemes “through a critical examination of the history, context and consequences of their assumptions and premises.”<sup>28</sup> Brookfield describes the adult learning process this way: “One cannot specify in advance which changes one wishes to make when it is a question of redefining the self, reinterpreting past behaviors, or attempting to grant meaning to current or past experiences. This is one reason why the idea of continuous negotiation and renegotiation is stressed so strongly...Only if this renegotiation is possible can one abandon previously formulated goals as these become

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<sup>26</sup>Demo and Acock, p. 458

<sup>27</sup>Diane Tickton Schuster, “New Lessons for Educators of Jewish Adult Learners,” in *Agenda: Jewish Education* #12 (New York: Jewish Educational Service of North America, Summer, 2000), p. 16

<sup>28</sup>Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, p. 225.

demonstrably irrelevant."<sup>29</sup>

Rabbi Elyse Goldstein's description of the adult study of Jewish texts provides another view of the dynamic adult learning process: "It [the teaching] depends much less on frontal, lecture methodology because the role of the teacher is not to pour information into waiting students, but to help students extract ...meaning for themselves. It uses the *chevruta* (partner) and small group model more, giving students the opportunity to inquire of each other."<sup>30</sup>

In terms of parent education, the sharing of experiences and mutually directed learning has a positive effect on parenting. "It is from others who are going through similar experiences that parents can best learn new strategies for communicating and dealing with their children, compare notes on how different or similar their own parenting experiences are, and learn about community standards regarding adolescent behaviors and expectations."<sup>31</sup> (At a group I led in December, for example, the subject of forcing teens to attend synagogue on a weekly basis was discussed. For one family, where one parent is a social worker and the other is a rabbi, this was a particularly painful and complex issue. The group ultimately suggested a compromise solution for this family that others in the group had already achieved: "Once a month, no protests!" I later learned that this was the

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<sup>29</sup>Stephen D. Brookfield, *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning: A Comprehensive Analysis of Principles and Effective Practices* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1986), p. 214.

<sup>30</sup>Elyse Goldstein, "The Study of Text as a Religious Exercise," in *Agenda: Jewish Education* #12 ed. by Arthur Vernon (New York: Jewish Educational Service of North America, Summer, 1999 ), p.23.

<sup>31</sup>Demo and Acock, p.459

agreement the family in question in fact adopted.).

It would seem, then, that adults who elect to participate in a learning experience derive the greatest benefit from that experience when: the subject matter has applicability to their lives; the material is presented on an appropriately challenging level, and a group interaction process is present for re-examination and revision.

*The use of Jewish sources.* The American Jewish adult's journey for self-discovery, reflective of the spirituality search in the larger culture, can be informed by the use of Jewish texts in all learning situations. Experts in adult learning (see above) tell us that adults are interested in transformation, not training—they are not seeking an exchange of information so much as a methodology for growth. This process is what Torah/text study is all about. "Adult learners who stay [involved]," notes Goldstein, "are hungry for transformation, and they sense that traditional texts and traditional text study may lead to it. They sense that a text is not merely a text, not only a written document of historical and sociological significance, but reflecting deep philosophical and spiritual value as well."<sup>32</sup> Therefore, using Jewish texts as conversation "triggers" and as values communicating vehicles is an important aspect of Jewish adult education.

We have seen that, in order to truly affect the Jewish identities of adult parents, Jewish family education programs must focus on addressing their search for spirituality and meaning, as well as on their needs as Jewish parents and Jewish learners. We will

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<sup>32</sup>Elyse Goldstein, p. 22

now turn our attention to a programmatic model—"Parenting Your Jewish Teen"—that has been designed to reflect these considerations and to reach the currently unserved population of parents of Jewish teenagers in the synagogue setting.

**PART TWO:**

**A NEW JEWISH FAMILY EDUCATION PROGRAM MODEL**

## **V. Extending Jewish Family Education - "Parenting Your Jewish Teen"**

The remainder of this thesis is devoted to the presentation of a program model that demonstrates how we can provide a meaningful, deeply engaging learning opportunity for adults within the framework of Jewish family education. The program model was developed in response to these research findings:

- Jewish family education programs teach parents how to incorporate Jewish practice and observance in their home, but there is no longitudinal data confirming that parents actually do so.
- Jewish family education has focused on the learning needs of children, rather than on their parents.
- Given appropriate Jewish education and life experiences, the likelihood of children adopting the values and teachings of their parents is directly related to the emotional quality of the home: the more peaceful the family life, the higher the probability; the less peaceful the family life, the lower the probability.
- Jewish identity in today's adults is a "constructivist" proposition, characterized by a search for meaning and an openness to Jewish engagement at moments when the individual's personal/intellectual/spiritual needs are addressed.

The program model we will be considering, "Parenting Your Jewish Teen," seeks to reach a currently unserved population within the synagogue—parents of post b'nai mitzvah children. This population has been selected as a focus of attention because a)

Jewish family education programs typically end at bar/bat mitzvah, though Jewish parenting issues are often most challenging during the teenage years, and b) many families leave the synagogue after their children have been bar/bat mitzvah, believing that they no longer need to affiliate when, as they understand it, their children's Jewish education has been completed. (Since the children themselves will not be present for the program, there may be objection to placing the program within the rubric of "family education." I strongly believe, however, that the definition of family education should be extended to include programs such as these, which are *about* family, whether or not all members of the family are present.)

The "Parenting Your Jewish Teen" program is intended to achieve the following outcomes:

- Create a much-needed safe, supportive place, a **סוכת שלום**, in which Jewish parents can explore and share both their challenges and their success strategies in parenting Jewish teens.
- Enable parents of Jewish teens to use the framework and the insights of Jewish texts and sources at an adult level to address their current issues and to experience Judaism as a source of insight and guidance in dealing with the real-world challenges of everyday life.
- Promote **שלום בית**, peace in the home, by educating parents about the reality of the general teen experience (as well as the special issues of Jewish teens) and by developing perspectives and strategies for best managing the family situation during these sometimes difficult years.

- Provide a "bridge" *from* the active involvement in pre-bar mitzvah Jewish family education focused on children in the home *to* meaningful Jewish affiliation and engagement as adults without children in the home ("empty-nesters").

With regard to the last point, it is unrealistic to expect that the presence of Jewish parents attending a program in synagogue space could, in itself, promote affiliation. In addition, then, to the warm, relaxed, and helpful quality of the "Parenting Your Jewish Teen" program, specific opportunities for enhancing the synagogue connection should be included in the program process. One approach might involve conducting optional, socializing events for the group, such as a Shabbat dinner (teens and all!) after the third program session and group attendance at a Shabbat morning service, followed by lunch after the final session. A discussion point at either the dinner or the luncheon should be how to create an on-going group that would come together on a regular basis for a special "Jewishly-related" purpose ( i.e., once a month potluck Shabbat dinners; *tikkun olam* projects; Jewish study group, etc.). The greater the involvement of program participants in the planning and execution of these activities, the greater their personal investment will be in successful outcomes for these and perhaps additional events.

## VI. "The Parenting Your Jewish Teen" Program

This chapter contains important program planning considerations; notes for the program leader; a Single Session Format outline; an overview of a Six-Session Format, and two representative session outlines from the six-session format.

### Program planning considerations

***Qualifications of the program leader*** - Because the Parenting Your Jewish Teen program operates on so many levels, expertise on the part of the program leader is required in a number of disciplines—education, family dynamics, group processes, and Jewish literacy. Ideally, one program leader is preferred over multiple leaders because, in the best of cases, program participants can more readily identify with one "model." However, the broad range of skills necessary to successfully lead this program may require two co-leaders, such as a rabbi or a Jewish educator teamed with a social work professional.

***Confidentiality of the group*** - Typically, synagogue-based programs, even those to which the larger community is invited, will include participants who are acquainted with each other. For a program about parenting teens to be successful, a wide degree of personal sharing is necessary, as we have seen above. This sharing can sometimes be revealing, and embarrassing, and confidentiality of the discussion must be assured in some way. (In a group I led at a Conservative synagogue, the president recounted that two weeks after her son's rather spectacular bar mitzvah, he looked her right in the eye and ordered a

cheeseburger when out to dinner with their family and lifelong friends. Since both families were observant of *kashrut*, the Jewish dietary laws, this shocked and horrified the synagogue president and her husband. Though the parents were wise enough to let the moment pass without challenging their son, the mother told the story with pain and embarrassment, and clearly would not have been pleased to have the group share it with others.

***The Judaic/Hebrew language/knowledge level of the learners*** - This is truly a standing concern for *all* Jewish educators in *every* learning situation. In liberal Jewish communities (and in working with unaffiliated Jews), the knowledge and Jewish background level of the participants can be astonishingly diverse. Great care must be exercised, therefore, in selecting discussion materials that are accessible and comprehensible to the broadest possible range of participants, even before the materials are explained by the facilitator or through discussion. This is because many Jewish adults feel extremely uncomfortable when confronted by their own perceived "incompetence" in areas of Jewish knowledge or practice. Such feelings can be self-reinforcing, driving the learner even further away from Jewish study. Thus, our goal is to be sensitive to the situation of the learner, while at the same time introducing enough Jewish content to ensure that the Jewish messages and themes can be apprehended.

***Possible need for referral*** - It is characteristic of teenager behavior to occasionally engage in behaviors that carry significant risks. In addition, though the teenage suicide rate appears to have leveled off, according to the Centers for Disease Control, it is still the

sixth leading cause of death in the 5-14 age group and third in the 15-24 age group.<sup>33</sup>

Program facilitators should be alert to the possibility that families in attendance may be confronting problems serious enough to require professional intervention. Before launching a Parenting Your Jewish Teen program, therefore, educators would be well advised to meet with a professional from the community's Jewish family service agency to become familiar with danger signs, and to be able to suggest a referral or consultation, if necessary.

#### Notes for the Program Leader

The following pages contain a single-session program format, the outline of a six-session program format and full program outlines for these. Following each topic are notes and comments for the program leader. (This thesis contains a full program outline for Sessions 3 and 6 only. Resource and Text Study Sheets for the fully developed program sessions are included, and the longer articles are noted in the Bibliography.)

- single session program format. This highly abbreviated program format may be useful for certain congregations, but the program leader is advised to review the 6-session program for the purpose of importing information or materials that will enhance the single session program. (Every effort should be made to extend the single session by offering a follow-up group/program on a topic selected by participants.)
- six-session program format. There is a community-building opportunity

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<sup>33</sup>Centers of Disease Control, *CDC fact book year 2000/2001*.

here that should be capitalized upon. These include: the use of the 10-minute break each session to involve participants in informal conversation with the leader and with each other; the participation of the group in planning and implementing a Shabbat dinner following the third session, and attendance at a Shabbat morning service, followed by lunch following the final session; and even responsibility for bringing the group's "snack" each week.

A flip-chart, markers, and masking tape will be necessary, as well as space to hang completed charts. If a flip-chart is not available, a blackboard will suffice. It is preferable to schedule the program in a space that is comfortable for adults.

## The Program Models

### **Parenting Your Jewish Teen**

#### **Single Session Format**

##### **I. Introductions, including names, ages of children**

Some introductory remarks should precede the personal introductions. It's often useful to put the program in context; for example, to explain why it's being offered at this time, what the expressed or perceived need for it has been, etc. A relaxed, non-threatening environment should be established at this point.

##### **II. Examples of biblical figures who left parents' homes: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph —this is a separation issue. However, some separations are painful and destructive, while others are bittersweet, loving, and constructive.**

*Achieving the latter is our goal.*

Each of these biblical figures underwent a positive transformation after he left home. In our society, the period of adolescence is so extended that the separation process takes place, at least in part, when teenagers are still living with us. How we handle it can have a direct effect on feelings and relationships for years to come.

##### **III. What are the difficult issues?**

Here is where parents can begin to share their frustrations, fears, and concerns. The facilitator will have to listen carefully as parents speak so that their "issues" can be listed succinctly on the flip-chart. Based on my professional (and personal!) experience, typical entries might include: messy room; fresh talk; insufficient attention to schoolwork; laziness; opposition to Jewish observance, especially synagogue attendance; irresponsibility about spending money; etc. These issues are best not addressed at this point. When moving to the next program segment, it is preferable to simply reflect on the list that has been created and acknowledge where consensus exists among the parents present.

#### **IV. Parent-child relationship continuum**

How would we characterize the relationship for our children's childhood?

For our children's adulthood?

Teenage years as a transition - how do we get from here to there?

Refer to the chart that follows and recreate the outline, as best you can, on flip-chart paper. Our goal here is to help parents identify the characteristics and behaviors in parenting young children and to then articulate a vision for the relationship with children when they are adults. Parents invariably describe the early parent-child relationship with words like these: "Dependency; thinking I was perfect, invincible; having control over my child's behavior," and go on to describe their vision for the future with words like these: "Independence; accepting me for who I really am; hoping for a good relationship as adults together; able to lead a happy life and still be close with our family." The leader's's job at this point is to

help parents identify how parental behavior should change during the teenager years to enable their children to achieve the desired outcomes. Reflective answers to that question have included: "I have to listen more carefully to what he is saying;" "I have to gradually give her more control over her life;" "I have to involve him more in the decision-making about family issues that affect him."

## V. Text study

Here you need to find texts that you think will evoke the feelings and insights appropriate to your discussion, and that are Judaic in character as well. I have had great success using these:

### I.

*All husbands and wives borrow their children. Our children are not our own; our children belong to God...They are not ours to keep, but to rear. They are not given to us to mold into our image. They are not given to us so that we can force them to fulfill our lives and thus, in some way, cancel our failures. They are not tools to be used, but souls to be loved. [Thomas C. Short, quoted in "Day to Day: Reflections on the Themes in the Torah, ed. Chaim Stern]*

### II.

*Alas for the children who are exiled from their parents' table.  
Alas for the parents who have exiled their children. [Talmud]*

### III.

*A man once complained to the Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of Chasidism, about his son. The youth had turned away from religion. "What shall I do, Rebbe?"*

*asked the distraught man. "Do you love your son?" "Of course I do." "Them love him even more." [Tale about Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, c1700]*

The preferred methodology is to organize the participants into groups (no less than four, no more than eight or nine, per group) and to assign one piece of text each for analysis and discussion. You can ask the groups to read the text, discuss them, and report back to the whole body when you reassemble (appx. 10 - 15 minutes). When there are few participants and it is therefore not feasible to break into groups, you can conduct a general discussion, going through the texts one by one.

**VI. We can't solve all the problems. What do we do to help ourselves and our families?**

- Learn from people who have been there: groups like these, people with slightly older children, books and other resources
- Celebrate your successes. Find reason to have fun.
- Be there for your child and just listen.
- Remember the "time-out" system and use it—for yourself! (When our oldest daughter was a high school senior, a period of time we both recall as the Year from Hell, I re-learned the art of fiction reading. At some, but unfortunately not all, the moments that I felt sanity slipping away, I would remove myself from the oncoming conflagration and calm myself by picking up a book. The issues about which we'd been fighting were always

there to come back to, and better addressed in a calmer mood.) Sometimes parents need a time-out; don't be afraid to take it.

*In "Ten Things You Can Do to Enhance Your Children's Jewishness," Joel Grishaver reminds us: "Parenting teenagers is the one thing that no one can do right—just ask any teenager." A goal of the program is to help parents develop perspectives and strategies that enable them to maintain the peaceful, and the Jewish, character of their homes. Program leaders should point out that continued involvement in the spiritual and communal aspects of synagogue life can contribute to these outcomes.*

#### **VI. Take-home materials**

It is essential that we provide additional materials for parents to take home, review, and use. I recommend providing a short bibliography, and actually bringing to the program those books that are referenced. This enables parents to glance through them and perhaps determine which would be most useful to them. In addition, program leaders should seriously considering providing the following:

- ✓ Articles for easy reading
- ✓ "When Families Have Teenagers, Changes Occur..." piece
- ✓ Grishaver's "Ten Things You Can Do To Enhance Your Children's Jewishness" by Joel Lurie Grishaver. Available from Torah Aura Productions, Los Angeles, California, Phone: 800/238-6724.

#### **VII. Conclusion: Midrash about the king and the son**

Here is a powerful story with which you may want to conclude. It is an adaptation (mine) of an interpretation (Grishaver's, I believe) of a midrash (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 19:20):

*A king had a beloved son who began to disobey him. The king warned the son many times, pointing out that the son's rebellious behavior was undermining the king's authority in the kingdom and could not be tolerated. Each time, the son apologized, and charmingly agreed to not disobey his father again, and each time he was forgiven, because the king loved his son so.*

*But nothing really changed, and when the king could no longer tolerate the threat to his authority, he warned the son that the next time he disobeyed his father, he would be exiled from the palace forever. And that is just what happened. The son disobeyed the father and was tearfully exiled.*

*Several years passed, and the king continued to mourn for his son. One day, the king and his entourage were passing through the nearby town square when, lo, they came upon the son—now a young adult, and a prosperous merchant. When the father and son recognized each other, they fell upon each other and wept with joy. After spending several hours together in the son's abode, talking, laughing, reminiscing, the son asked the king: "Father, I have grown and I have learned. Please let me come back to the palace and live with you in peace."*

*For a few moments, the father's heart struggled with the choice. Finally, he looked at his son and said, "No, my child. I exiled you from that palace forever. You cannot come back to it. Instead, we will tear down that palace and*

*build a new one-together.*

- **Thanks to attendees; everyone who made the program possible.**

Self-explanatory.

- **Evaluation questions**

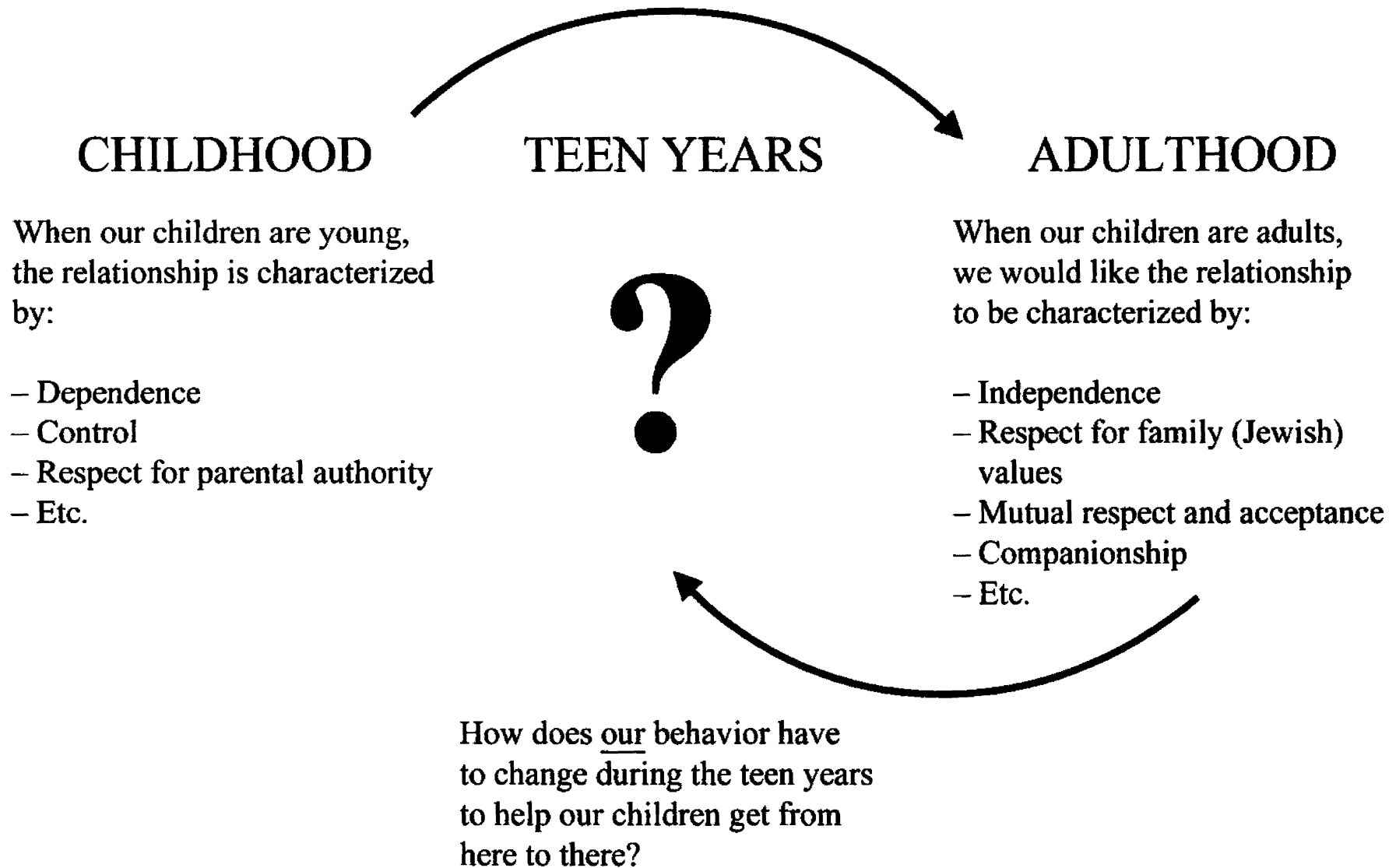
Detailed, formal evaluations are excellent tools that help us assess how well we achieved our goals. Unfortunately, the negative of post-program evaluations is that they tend to break the mood that the facilitator has worked so hard to create! An alternative is to ask for simple responses to very few questions, such as:

What did you find most helpful or interesting about today's program?

If you could change one thing about the program, what would it be?

# **“Parenting Your Jewish Teen”**

## **THE JEWISH PARENTING CONTINUUM**



## **Parenting Your Jewish Teen - 6-Session Format Topical Program Outline**

### **Session 1: Our Teenagers: American and Jewish**

- profile of American teens today
- profile of American Jewish teens today
- the teenage years as a separate process

### **Session 2: Dealing with Conflict**

- examining expectations
- enhancing communications
- improving negotiations (examining all reasonable options; separating fears from probable realities; striving for "win-win" choices or at least "best possible" outcomes)
- *shalom bayit*

### **Session 3: Family Relationships**

- sibling rivalry
- respectful behavior: theirs and ours

### **Session 4: Jewish Observance: Yours, Mine, and Ours**

- Defining our goals for them, defining our goals for us

- Articulating how changes in their observance might affect ours (Shabbat dinners, synagogue attendance, etc.)
- Developing accommodation strategies

#### **Session 5: From Control to Consultation**

- Developing a "Parent-Child Relationship Continuum" - how should our behavior change over time to enable them to grow?
- moving from authority to influence

#### **Session VI: Beyond Parenting Jewish Teens - Family Life Without the "Family"**

- the comfort of continued Jewish observance and affiliation as children leave home
- modeling consistency of Jewish practice for young adult children
- building a new "family" paradigm within the synagogue community

## **Parenting Your Jewish Teen (Six-Session Format)**

### **Session 1 Outline**

#### **Our Teenagers: American and Jewish**

##### **I. Introductions; reasons for attending program (15 minutes)**

The setting of the mood is important because in addition to helping participants improve their teen parenting skills, we are trying to establish an environment that will be conducive to building community. A relaxed, conversational approach on the part of the facilitator will be helpful here.

##### **II. Overview of the program, why it was developed, confidentiality statement (10 minutes)**

Give participants a brief description of the contents of this session: as well as an overview of the rest of the program; this session will examine the general state of the teenager, both in the larger American society, as well as within the Jewish community, touching upon some of the special challenges Jewish teenagers face. The teenage years will be considered as a separation process, using biblical models and stories to inform our understanding of this transition. Because personal stories may be shared that reveal situations and dynamics within the families, it is important for the group to agree to confidentiality about those aspects of the session, though participants should feel free to

discuss the content of the program with others.

### **III. Getting the picture: (30 minutes)**

- Write down 5 - 8 adjectives that describe your teenager.

Ask if anyone is willing to share the description (do not require that participants do so). This is an icebreaker that will hopefully bring insight about our own attitudes toward our teenagers to mind, and will perhaps bring some laughter as well. Ultimately, we hope to help parents develop the most objective perspective possible about their teenage children.

- What do today's high school age teens look like?

Distribute Resource Sheet #1-1. Invite reactions, comparisons with participants' families. Next, distribute Resource Sheet #1-2 (much lighter in tone) and invite reactions, comparisons.

- What do today's Jewish teens look like? Does the description you wrote generally fit this picture?

Distribute Resource Sheet #1-3 and discuss. Is there anything surprising in the data about Jewish teens, or teens in general?

- What are the special challenges Jewish teens face?

Discuss issues of sameness and difference - wanting to be accepted in the teenager years,

against the distinctiveness of Jewish identity and affiliation; issues of anti-Semitism and self-image; balancing school/social activities with Jewish observance. These issues do not need to be resolved in this session, but only touched upon to demonstrate the difficulties Jewish teens confront in organizing their lives.

**IV. Break (10 minutes)**

**V. The teenage years as a separation process (35 minutes)**

Introduce the idea of the teenage years as a separation process. Encourage parents to identify and, if possible, articulate the painful feelings of loss as teenagers move toward independence. Use the Text Study Sheet #1-1 to explore two biblical models of separation: Abraham and Jacob. Note the peaceful, spiritual quality to Abraham's leaving home compared to the violent, family conflict-filled nature of Jacob's departure. In both cases, a physical separation resulted in tremendous spiritual growth (and material prosperity) for our biblical models. Ask the group to reflect on why this might be the case.

**A midrash worth sharing:**

*A king had a beloved son who began to disobey him. The king warned the son many times, pointing out that the son's rebellious behavior was undermining the king's authority in the kingdom and could not be tolerated. Each time, the son apologized, and charmingly agreed to not disobey his father again, and each time he was forgiven, because the king loved his son so. But nothing really changed, and when the king could no longer tolerate the threat to his authority, he warned the son that the next time he*

*disobeyed his father, he would be exiled from the palace forever. And that is just what happened. The son disobeyed the father and was tearfully exiled. Several years passed, and the king continued to mourn for his son. One day, the king and his entourage were passing through the nearby town square when, lo, they came upon the son—now a young adult, and a prosperous merchant. When the father and son recognized each other, they fell upon each other and wept with joy. After spending several hours together in the son's abode, talking, laughing, reminiscing, the son asked the king: "Father, I have grown and I have learned. Please let me come back to the palace and live with you in peace." For a few moments, the father's heart struggled with the choice. Finally, he looked at his son and said, "No, my child. I exiled you from that palace forever. You cannot come back to it. Instead, we will tear down that palace and build a new one—together.*

#### **VI. Conclusion (10 minutes)**

- Invite the group to reflect on what was covered in this session. How might insights and information from today's session help parents develop a new understanding of the relationship with their teenager? How do stories from our tradition give us a perspective on that relationship?
- Preview next week's topic: **Dealing With Conflict**
- Assignments for next time: 1) read poem, "What is a Teenager," by Elizabeth Langsdale and 2) decide who will bring snacks

Additional handouts: articles about teens, Jewish teens

## **Parenting Your Jewish Teen**

### **Resource Sheet #1-1**

#### **A Profile of American Teenagers**

##### **Quality of Life Issues**

- ✓ Stress: 70% believe they face more problems than their parents did
- ✓ Family time: 61% believe their parents spend enough time with them
- ✓ Computers: 21% have looked at something on the Internet that they wouldn't want their parents to know about
- ✓ Peer pressure: 69% said that, if they had to choose between fitting in and becoming outstanding, they would become outstanding
- ✓ Sex: 21% say that most of the teens they know have already had sex
- ✓ Religion: 78% say that religion is either very important (43%) or somewhat important (35%) to them. [Note: Other sources report that within mainline groups, there is a persistent overall decline in religiousness during adolescence (Donahue & Benson, 1995, in Jewish Youth Databook)].

##### **What Do Teens Worry About?**

- ✓ The cost of their college education: 54%
- ✓ Violence in society: 59%
- ✓ Sexually transmitted diseases: 58%
- ✓ Unsure about future job opportunities: 43%
- ✓ Not having enough money to buy the things they want: 34%

##### **Teens Need More Snooze Time...**

- ✓ Most teens need 9 hours and 15 minutes of sleep a night.
- ✓ The average teenager's brain is not ready to wake up until 8 or 9 AM.

***...and Recreation Time***

- ✓ *The average 10<sup>th</sup> grade student spends little time on homework (average: 30 minutes per day) and a great deal of time with friends (Jewish Youth Databook)*

***Some Dangers are Real***

- ✓ *90% of high school seniors report that if they want marijuana, they can easily get it.*
- ✓ *One in four high school students considers suicide each year, according to surveys. By the time they graduate, many have actually tried to kill themselves.*

*Sources: "A World of Their Own," Newsweek, May 8, 2000, "The Secret Life of Teens," Newsweek, May 10, 1999, "Inside the Teen Brain," U.S. News & World Report, August 9, 1999.*

## **PARENTING YOUR JEWISH TEEN**

### **Resource Sheet #1-2**

***When families have teenagers, changes occur...***

#### ***In Parents:***

- *Our intelligence decreases - our kids think we got dumber*
- *Physical changes occur - our kids think we look embarrassing*
- *Senility or amnesia develops - we have no idea what it's like to be a teenager*
- *Regression occurs - we reminisce about the days when we were young*
- *Our ability to communicate decreases - they can't seem to understand what we are trying to say*
- *Our influence decreases - everyone else has better advice than we do*

#### ***In Adolescents:***

- ▶ *Their intelligence increases - they have suddenly become very smart and have profound opinions about everything*
- ▶ *Friends (theirs, of course) become more knowledgeable - their friends speak the truth and possess the key to real knowledge*
- ▶ *Communication decreases - why should they bother talking to people who can't understand them?*
- ▶ *Their room gains great importance - if it weren't for the bathroom or the refrigerator, they'd probably have no need to leave it*

- ▶ *They acquire stocks - At some level, they must believe they have acquired stock in the phone company, radio stations and/or CD companies. They more they use, the higher the stock will go.*
- ▶ *Anger is present - muttering and mumbling under the breath seem to be appropriate responses to the stupid requests of parents*
- ▶ *Peer influence increases - much better to be with people with whom you can actually communicate*
- ▶ *Moodiness is common - Erratic mood swings are typical of this age*
- ▶ *A dress code develops - the uniform may not be recognizable to parents; still, it's a "must have" situation for the teenager*
- ▶ *Academic interests decline - Schoolwork often gets crowded out of the huge teenage agenda*
- ▶ *Work becomes a four-letter word - their primary job is to be an adolescent, and this leaves little time for anything else.*

*(Adapted from Keys to Parenting Your Teenager (second edition) by Don Fontenelle, Ph.D.)*

## **PARENTING YOUR JEWISH TEEN**

### **Resource Sheet #1-3**

#### **A Profile of Jewish Teens**

##### **What's important to them:**

- ✓ Developing skills and abilities: 89%
- ✓ Spending time with friends: 85%
- ✓ Being Jewish: 62%
- ✓ Being a leader: 58%
- ✓ Being physically attractive: 57%
- ✓ Making lots of money: 56%
- ✓ Helping others or your community: 44%

##### **Jewish identity and religious observance:**

- ✓ Jewish teens attend religious services less often than teens in the general society. Only 11% attend weekly.
- ✓ The importance of Judaism is set early in life and does not change significantly over the middle and high school years.
- ✓ 52% believe that marrying someone Jewish is important.\*

*(From: The Jewish Youth Databook - Research on Adolescence & Its Implications for Jewish Teen Programs)*

*\*Note: The American Jewish Committee's 2000 Annual Survey of American Jewish Opinion (adults) found that 50% of the respondents believe it is racist to oppose intermarriage.*

**Parenting Your Jewish Teen**  
**Text Study #1-1**

I.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם לֵךְ מֵאַרְצְךָ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָה: וְאֶעֱשֶׂה לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְאַבְרָכְךָ וְאַגְדִּלָּהּ שְׁמִי וְהָיָה בְּרָכָה: וְאַבְרָכָה מִבְּרַכְיָךָ וּמִסֻּלָּלָה אֲאָר וְנִבְרָכְוּ בָךְ כָּל מְשֻׁפְחוֹת הָאָדָמָה: וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם כָּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֵלָיו יְהוָה וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתּוֹ לוֹט וְאַבְרָם בֶּן-חָמֶשׁ שָׁנִים וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה בְּצֵאתוֹ מִחָרָו:

The Lord said to Abraham, "Go forth from your native land, where you were born, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you. And I will make you a great nation and I will bless you and I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and who curses you I will curse, and all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you." And Abraham went when God spoke to him and Lot went with him." (Genesis 12:1-4)

II.

וַיִּשְׁטֹם עֵשָׂו אֶת-יַעֲקֹב עַל-הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר בָּרַכּוּ אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו בְּלִבּוֹ יִקְרְבוּ יָמַי אֲבָל אֲבִי וְאַחֲרָנָה אֶת-יַעֲקֹב אָחִי: וַיִּגַּד לְרֵבְקָה אֶת-דִּבְרֵי עֵשָׂו בְּנָהּ הַגָּדֹל וּתְשַׁלַּח וּתִקְרָא לְיַעֲקֹב בְּנָהּ הַקָּטָן וְתֹאמַר אֵלָיו הִנֵּה עֹשֶׂה אֲחִיד מִתְנַתֵּם לָךְ לְהַרְגֶּךָ: וְעַתָּה בְּנִי שָׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי וְקוּם בָּרוּחְךָ אֶל-לְבָן אָחִי חַרְנָה:

Now Esau harbored a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing which his father had given him, and Esau said to himself, "When the days of mourning come for my father, I will kill Jacob." When the words of her older son, Esau, were made known to Rebecca, she cried out and sent for her younger son, Jacob and said to him, "Your brother is planning to take revenge upon you and to kill you. Now, my son, hear my voice and flee to Laban my brother in Haran." (Genesis 27:41-43)

וַיֵּדַר יַעֲקֹב נֶדֶר לֵאמֹר אִם-יְהִיָּה אֱלֹהִים עִמָּדִי וְשָׁמְרֵנִי בַדֶּרֶךְ הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִכִּי הוֹלֵךְ וְנָתַן-לִי לֶחֶם לֵאכֹל וּבְגָד ללְבָשׁ: וְשָׁבְתִי בְּשָׁלוֹם אֶל-בֵּית אָבִי וְהָיָה יְהוָה לִי לֵאלֹהִים:

Jacob made a vow saying, if it will happen that God remains with me and protects me on this journey (lit., this road) I am walking and gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear and I return in peace to my father's house, God will be my God. (Genesis 28:20-21)

## WHAT IS A TEENAGER?

"WHAT IS A TEENAGER?"  
I WAS ASKED ONE DAY.  
I KNEW WHAT HE WAS,  
BUT WHAT SHOULD I SAY?

HE IS NOISE AND CONFUSION.  
HE IS SILENCE THAT'S DEEP.  
HE IS SUNSHINE AND LAUGHTER,  
OR A CLOUD THAT WILL WEEP.

HE IS SWIFT AS AN ARROW.  
HE'S A WASTER OF TIME.  
HE WANTS TO BE RICH,  
BUT HE CAN'T SAVE A DIME.

HE IS RUDE AND NASTY,  
HE IS POLITE AS CAN BE.  
HE WANTS PARENTAL GUIDANCE,  
BUT FIGHTS TO BE FREE.

HE IS AGGRESSIVE AND BOSSY,  
HE IS TIMID AND SHY  
HE KNOWS ALL THE ANSWERS  
BUT STILL WILL ASK "WHY?"

HE IS AWKWARD AND CLUMSY,  
HE IS GRACEFUL AND POISED.  
HE IS EVERY CHANGING  
BUT DON'T BE ANNOYED.

"WHAT IS A TEENAGER?"  
I WAS ASKED ONE DAY,  
HE IS THE FUTURE UNFOLDING,  
DON'T STAND IN HIS WAY.

—Elizabeth Langsdale (*The Herald News*, 10/99)

## **Parenting Your Jewish Teen (Six session format)**

### **Session 3**

#### **Family Relationships**

##### **I. Introduction (5 - 10 minutes)**

If any new participants are present, the group should re-introduce itself, as in Session 1. Ask participants to summarize key points/discussion topics from last session. Ask for volunteers to share any family experiences that came up since last session, and that related to last session's topic/discussion. Invite participants to articulate any goals or objectives they might have for this session. *Our goal: to examine how the messages about family relationships expressed in Jewish texts might apply to our current realities.*

##### **II. Overview of this session (5 minutes)**

Describe process of using classical (and modern) Jewish texts to explore models and messages of expected behaviors in the family. [Sometimes the absence of available texts tells us about societal changes, a subject covered in the "Parent-Child relationship" segment.]

##### **III. Sibling rivalry - three Torah models, and a modern commentary (20 - 30 minutes)**

Distribute the Peanuts cartoon (Resource Sheet #3-1), invite opinions about the message. This is a good, light introduction to the sometimes painful topic of sibling rivalry. Distribute Text Study Sheet #3-1; have a parent read the English aloud. For discussion: What is going on in this story? What is Cain jealous of? Why did God "prefer" Abel, and what did God suggest that Cain do to make his own life better? What does God represent in this story? (Perhaps the message that we have control over our behavior, and that to succeed requires focusing on our own efforts, not the gap between us and others.) Do the parents, Adam and Eve, actually play a role in the conflict? Go to Text Study Sheet #3-2; have a parent read the English aloud. For discussion: What is going on in this story? Why might Rebecca want Jacob to receive the blessing and the birthright rather than her older son, Esau? Is Isaac really fooled by the deception? (Later commentators believe that he knew that Jacob was in disguise—why would he go along with the deception?) Invite the group to reflect on the family relationships: parent-to-parent; parent-to-child; and child-to-child. Do the parents play a role in this conflict? Finally, distribute Text Study Sheet #3-3; have a parent read aloud. What is going on in this story? Why do Joseph's brothers hate

him? Does the parent play a role in this conflict? Does Joseph?

Follow-up discussion point: sibling rivalry appears to be a natural phenomenon and not entirely avoidable. How can parents work toward fairness, if not equality, in family relationships?

#### **IV. Break ( 10 minutes)**

#### **V. Respectful behavior - what the sources teach us (30 minutes)**

Break into groups, ideally 6 - 8 people per group. Answer these questions: What are the five or six most important things a parent should do for a child? What are the five or six most important things a child should do for a parent? Reconvene as a whole group and have the individual groups share their responses; write these on board or flipchart. Invite discussion. Then distribute Text Study Sheet #3-4. Discuss the obligations of parents to children, and then children to parents, as defined by the rabbis of the Talmud. Compare to participants' lists. It might be interesting to note that parents are not required to be "in awe" of their children; that is, to show them respect. In fact, the societal structure in Talmudic times (and until recently) had been hierarchical; we, however, are living in an environment of democracy and egalitarianism. How does that affect family relationships? Are there behavioral paradigms that we would like to recapture?

#### **VI. Conclusion (10 minutes)**

- Invite the group to reflect on what was covered in this session. Did the study of Jewish texts provide any insights or perspectives that parents might find useful today?
- Preview next week's topic: **Jewish Observance: Yours, Mine, and Ours**
- Assignments for next time: 1) read article, "Smells Like Teen Spirit," by Susan Berrin and 2) decide who will bring snacks

Resource Sheet #3-1

Peanuts cartoon



**Parenting Your Jewish Teen**  
**Text Study #3-1**

וְהָאָדָם יָדַע אֶת-חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד אֶת-קַיִן וַתֹּאמֶר קָנִיתִי אִישׁ  
אֶת-יְהוָה: וַתִּסָּף לָלֶדֶת אֶת-אָחִיו אֶת-הָבֶל וַיְהִי-הֶבֶל רֹעֵה צֹאן וְקַיִן הָיָה  
עֹבֵד אֲדָמָה: וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ יָמִים וַיָּבֵא קַיִן מִפְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה מִנְחָה לַיהוָה: וְהֶבֶל  
הֵבִיא גַם-הוּא מִבְכּוֹרוֹת צֹאנוֹ וּמִחֲלָבָהּ וַיִּשַׁע יְהוָה אֶל-הֶבֶל  
וְאֶל-מִנְחָתוֹ: וְאֶל-קַיִן וְאֶל-מִנְחָתוֹ לֹא שָׁעָה וַיַּחַר לְקַיִן מְאֹד וַיִּפְּלוּ פָנָיו:  
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-קַיִן לָמָּה חָרָה לָךְ וְלָמָּה נָפְלוּ פָנֶיךָ: הֲלוֹא אִם-תַּיְטִיב  
שְׂאֵת וְאִם לֹא תִיטִיב לַפֶּתַח חַטָּאת רֹבֵץ וְאֵלֶיךָ תִּשְׁוֹקֶתוּ וְאַתָּה  
תִּמְשָׁל-בּוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל-הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיְהִי בִּהְיוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיִּקָּם קַיִן  
אֶל-הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-קַיִן אֵי הֶבֶל אָחִיךָ וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא  
יָדַעְתִּי הֲשֹׁמֵר אָחִי אָנֹכִי: וַיֹּאמֶר מַה עָשִׂיתָ קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ צֹעֲקִים אֵלַי  
מִן-הָאֲדָמָה:

Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gained a male child with the help of the Lord." She then bore his brother Abel. Abel became a keeper of sheep, and Cain became a tiller of the soil. In the course of time, Cain brought an offering to the Lord from the fruit of the soil and Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock. The Lord paid heed to Abel and his offering but to Cain and his offering He paid no heed. Cain was much distressed and his face fell. And the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you distressed, and why is your face fallen? Surely if you do right, there is uplift. But if you do not do right, sin couches at the door; its urge is toward you. Yet you can be its master."

Cain said to his brother Abel...and when they were in the field, Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him. The Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" Then He said, "What have you done? Hark, your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground!"

*Genesis 4:1-10*

Parenting Your Jewish Teen  
Text Study #3-2

וַיְהִי כִּי-זָקֵן יִצְחָק וַתִּכְהֶין עֵינָיו מִרְאֹת וַיִּקְרָא אֶת-עֵשָׂו בְּנֵו הַגָּדֹל  
וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בְּנִי וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הִנְנִי וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה-נָא זָקֵנְתִי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי  
יוֹם מוֹתִי: וְעַתָּה שְׂא-נָא כְלִיד תְּלִיד וְקִשְׁתְּךָ וְצֵל הַשָּׂדֶה וְצֹדֶה לִי  
צִידָה [ציד]: וַעֲשֵׂה-לִי מִטְעָמִים כָּאֲשֶׁר אֶהְבֵּתִי וְהָבִיֵּאָה לִי וְאֹכְלָה  
בְּעָבוּר תִּבְרַכְךָ נַפְשִׁי בְּטָרִם אֲמוֹת: וּרְבִקָּה שָׁמְעַת בְּדָבָר יִצְחָק  
אֶל-עֵשָׂו בְּנֵו וַיֵּלֶךְ עָשׂוּ הַשָּׂדֶה לְצֹד צִיד לְהָבִיֵּא: וּרְבִקָּה אָמְרָה  
אֶל-יַעֲקֹב בְּנָה לֹאמֹר הִנֵּה שְׁמַעְתִּי אֶת-אָבִיד מִדָּבָר אֶל-עֵשָׂו אַחִיד  
לֹאמֹר: הָבִיֵּאָה לִי צִיד וַעֲשֵׂה-לִי מִטְעָמִים וְאֹכְלָה וְאִבְרַכְךָ לִפְנֵי  
יְהוָה לִפְנֵי מוֹתִי: וְעַתָּה בְנִי שְׁמַע בְּקֻלִּי לֹאֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מַצְנֶה אֹתְךָ:  
לֵךְ-נָא אֶל-הַצֹּאן וְקַח-לִי מִשָּׁם שְׁנֵי גִדְיִי עֲאִים טֹבִים וְאֶעֱשֶׂה אֹתָם  
מִטְעָמִים לְאָבִיד כָּאֲשֶׁר אֶהֱבֶ: וְהָבֵאתָ לְאָבִיד וְאָכַל בְּעָבֹר אֲשֶׁר  
יִבְרַכְךָ לִפְנֵי מוֹתִי: וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל-רְבִקָּה אִמּוֹ הֵן עָשׂוּ אֲחִי אִישׁ  
שָׂעִר וְאֲנֹכִי אִישׁ חֲלָק: אוֹלֵל יִמְשְׁנִי אָבִי וְהִיִּיתִי בְּעֵינָיו כְּמִתְעַתֵּעַ  
וְהִבֵּאתִי עָלַי קִלְלָה וְלֹא בְרָכָה: וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִמּוֹ עָלַי קִלְלָתְךָ בְנִי  
אֵךְ שְׁמַע בְּקֻלִּי וְלֵךְ קַח-לִי:

When Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see, he called his older son Esau and said to, "My son." He answered, "Here I am." And he said, "I am old now, and I do not know how soon I may die. Take your gear, your quiver and bow, and go out into the open and hunt me some game. Then prepare a dish for me such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my innermost blessing (lit., the blessing of my soul) before I die."

Rebecca had been listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau had gone out into the open to hunt game to bring home, Rebecca said to her son Jacob, "I overheard your father speaking to your brother Esau, saying, 'Bring me some game and prepare a dish for me to eat, that I may bless you, with the Lord's approval, before I die.' Now, my son, listen carefully as I instruct you. Go to the flock and fetch me two choice kids, and I will make of them a dish for your father, such as he likes. Then take it to your father to eat, in order that he may bless you before he dies." Jacob answered his mother, Rebecca, "But my brother Esau is a hairy man and I am smooth-skinned. If my father touches me, I shall appear to him as a trickster and bring upon myself a curse, not a blessing." But his mother said to him, "Your curse, my son, be upon me! Just do as I say and go fetch them for me."

Genesis 27:1-13

Parenting Your Jewish Teen  
Text Study #3-3

וַיָּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִגְוָרֵי אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן: אֵלֶּה | תְּלֻדֹת יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף  
בֶּן-שִׁבְעֵ-עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה הָיָה רָעָה אֶת-אָחִיו בְּצֹאן וְהוּא נָעַר אֶת-בְּנֵי בִלְהָה  
וְאֶת-בְּנֵי זִלְפָּה נְשֵׁי אָבִיו וַיְבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת-דִּבְתָּם רָעָה אֶל-אֲבִיהֶם: וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל  
אָהַב אֶת-יוֹסֵף מִכָּל-בָּנָיו כִּי-בְרִזְקָנִים הוּא לוֹ וַעֲשָׂה לוֹ כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים:  
וַיַּדְאֵוּ אָחָיו כִּי-אֵלֹהֵי אָהַב אֲבִיהֶם מִכָּל-אָחָיו וַיִּשְׂנְאוּ אוֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַּבֵּר  
לְשָׁלָם: וַיַּחַלֵּם יוֹסֵף חֲלוֹם וַיַּגֵּד לְאָחָיו וַיִּסְכְּפוּ עוֹד שָׁנָה אוֹתוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר  
אֲלֵיהֶם שְׁמְעוּ-נָא קְהֵלֹם הִנֵּה אֲשֶׁר חֲלָמְתִּי: וְהִנֵּה אֲנִינִי מֵאֲלֹמִים  
אֲלֹמִים בְּתוֹךְ הַשָּׂדֶה וְהִנֵּה קָמָה אֲלַמְתִּי וְגַם-נִצָּבָה וְהִנֵּה תִסָּבֵינָה  
אֲלַמְתֵּיכֶם וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶיּוּ: לְאֲלַמְתִּי: וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ אָחָיו הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּמְלֹךְ עָלֵינוּ  
אִם-מִשּׁוֹל תִּמְשָׁל בָּנוּ וַיִּסְכְּפוּ עוֹד שָׁנָה אוֹתוֹ עַל-חֲלָמְתוֹ וְעַל-דִּבְרָיו:

Now Jacob was settled in the land where his father had resided, the land of Canaan. This, then, is the line of Jacob.

At seventeen years of age, Joseph tended the flocks with his brothers, as a helper to the sons of his father's wives, Bilhah and Zilpah. And Joseph brought bad reports of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age; and he made him an ornamented tunic. And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him.

Once Joseph had a dream which he told his brothers; and they hated him even more. He said to them, "Hear this dream which I have dreamed: there we were binding sheaves in the field, when suddenly my sheaf stood up and remained upright; then your sheaves gathered around and bowed low to my sheaf." His brothers answered, "Do you mean to reign over us? Do you mean to rule over us?" And they hated him even more for his talk about his dreams.

*Genesis 37:1-8*

**Parenting Your Jewish Teen**  
**Text Study #3-4**

Almost 2,000 years ago, the rabbis of the Talmud discussed questions of parent-child responsibilities. Here is one set of lists found in their answer.

Kiddushin 29a

Parents must do the following for children:

- (a) Enter them into the covenant.
- (b) Redeem them.
- (c) Teach them Torah.
- (d) Provide a spouse.
- (e) Teach them a craft.
- And some say (f) Teach them to swim.

Kiddushin 31b

The Torah teaches:

You should be in *awe* of your mother and father. (Leviticus 19.2)

You should *honor* your father and mother. (Exodus 20:12)

To show *awe* of parents, a child:

- (a) Must not stand or sit in a parent's place.
- (b) Must not contradict a parent's words.
- (c) Must not tip the scales against them.

To *honor* parents, a child:

- (d) Must give them food and drink.
- (e) Must clothe and shelter them.
- (f) Must lead them in and lead them out.

*From: "What Must Parents Do?—What Must Children Do? A Family Instant Lesson. Torah Aura Productions, Los Angeles, California*

## VII. Summary and Conclusion

The evolution of the field of Jewish family education has been a response to a particular historical and sociological circumstance—the sharp decline in Jewish literacy and practice among American Jewish adults within one or perhaps two generations. Responsibility for the most rudimentary aspects of Jewish education of children had fallen to the supplementary schools by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century because parents could no longer be teachers to their own children, as Jews had been for countless generations before. When it became clear that this burden was too great for the schools to bear alone, Jewish family education emerged to create educational experiences in which parents and children could learn about Judaism together. The hope, of course, was that study would lead to practice.

But American Jews don't live in a vacuum. Just as the appeal of the secular society had such an impact on traditional approaches to learning within the family structure, so, too, do current trends affect the way Jews experience their personal and communal identity. These current trends, characterized by a "constructivist" approach to identity and affiliation, represent a powerful counterforce to the previous assumptions underlying Jewish family education; that is to say, we can no longer presume that by teaching parents the *skills* of Jewish living, they will be empowered to use them. Instead, if Jewish family education is to be effective in 21<sup>st</sup> century America, Jewish educators will need to understand and address the sense of spiritual journey that has come to so characterize the population of today's Jewish adults. Further, Jewish family education practitioners will have to revolutionize their thinking about what is important in terms of family education programming. The shift must be made from a primarily "how-to" focus to an adult learner's need-based focus.

In Chapter Four, we identified four primary needs that would have to be addressed in order to strengthen the Jewish identity of today's Jewish parents. We must provide:

- (d) Experiences that challenge and satisfy them intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually through the engagement in text study conducted at their cognitive level

- (e) Experiences that connect them to a Judaism they can understand as historically meaningful, yet relevant in their lives through the exploration of Jewish perspectives, insights, and wisdom about today's most challenging parenting issues
- (f) Experiences that address their real life needs and concerns;
- (g) Experiences that facilitate their search for meaning within a caring community.

The "Parenting Your Jewish Teen" program addresses these needs in several ways. First, it demonstrates relevance by taking on a subject most parents find to be the most stressful in their families' lives. Second, it helps parents examine their concerns through the lens of Jewish tradition by weaving Jewish texts and perspectives into the learning experience. And finally, the "Parenting Your Jewish Teen" program facilitates personal growth within community by engaging and challenging adults *at their own cognitive, emotional, and spiritual level* within a caring, nurturing synagogue-based environment.

***Final words of a Jewishly seeking educator and parent***

All that we have studied here affirm my own experiences, both as a Jewish educational professional, and as a parent. In my role as a Jewish family educator, I have sensed that many contemporary parents, lacking, perhaps more traditional boundaries and values, focus to extreme on the "happiness" of their children. They tend to engage, as the Boston Jewish community's research confirms, in activities that they believe will be good for the child, and having a connection to Jewish heritage and tradition falls into this category. Jewish family education programs are generally understood to support this purpose and tend to be well-received for this reason. But there is, in my opinion, something very wrong with this situation for at least two reasons. First of all, Judaism is hardly a child-focused approach to life, thought, or practice. Whereas most Jewish family education programs bring adults down to the learning level of children, Judaism tends to bring children up to a more adult level. (As my rabbi observes, "Who else would expect a 12 or 13-year-old child to stand before hundreds of strangers, chanting in a language he

doesn't really understand and preaching about a book his listeners may not have read? It's crazy when you think about it. But what's even crazier is—they do it!")<sup>34</sup>

Second, today's parents are on an intense search for meaning, which Jewish practice and celebration does not, in itself, touch. Those of us who are passionate about the relevance of Jewish values and thought in our everyday lives believe that Jewish study can provide a satisfying meeting place where that search can encounter the power of Jewish tradition. We need to continue building that meeting place.

In the past, I have tried to create the kind of provocative Jewish outreach programming that I hoped would engage adult parents in Jewish learning. At the same, I was struggling with my problem of how to parent Jewish teenagers, and here I found the synagogue environment, that had been so helpful in guiding me on my Jewish journey, came to a dead end. Secular books on raising teenagers were somewhat helpful, but limited—my family had issues that were sometimes the same, but were often different. And I needed more than a book, more than an evening lecture at the local high school. I needed the love, the support, and the wisdom of the tradition that had so helped me in my search for a meaningful, values-based approach to parenting and Jewish family life.

For these reasons, I am advocating the "Parenting Your Jewish Teen" program. By enabling parents to explore difficult issues during the period of their children's adolescence, a time when marital satisfaction has been found to reach its lowest point<sup>35</sup>, we can send the message that the central address of the Jewish people is a place of sanctuary and healing, as well as of prayer and education. I believe the expansion of Jewish family education to include meaningful, real-world issues-based programming for Jewish parents has the potential to transform the way American Jewish adults experience being Jewish.

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<sup>34</sup>Conversation with Rabbi Jehiel Orenstein, March, 1995.

<sup>35</sup>Demo and Acock, p.459.

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\*\*Indicates material appropriate for hand-outs to parents in "Parenting Your Jewish Teen" program.