

Emerging Adults Immersing in Tikkun Olam



**2013 MARE Capstone
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Introduction

The Emerging Adults Immersing in Tikkun Olam curriculum is designed to offer learners a chance to explore Hurricane Katrina's impact on the New Orleans Jewish community. Utilizing the unique voices of the Jews who experienced it, learners will begin to engage with and internalize a number of Jewish values which emerged from their stories. This curriculum is designed to be taught to college students who choose to embark on Hillel trips to New Orleans or other communities where social justice and service work are the focus (such as alternative spring break trips). The lessons are designed to each run for approximately two hours. They can be used as a program bank and taught independently or used as an entire unit depending on the length of the trip and the amount of time leaders choose to dedicate to educational programming. This curricular unit gives a personal voice to a contemporary historical tragedy which heavily influenced a significant Jewish population.

This curriculum utilizes transcripts and video clips of various oral histories taken by the Jewish Women's Archive. The educator who teaches this curriculum should be equipped to handle tough topics. Many of the clips that are included in this curriculum deal with sensitive subject matter. I strongly recommend that the educator watch the clips on his or her own before teaching any of these lessons. The educator should be prepared to handle difficult questions that students might ask. In addition, it should be made clear that there are no correct or wrong answers to the discussion questions that have been provided for the video clips. The educator must also understand that this tragedy is still very real for an entire community with noticeable and lasting impact still today. However, the universal nature of the values and lessons that this curriculum teaches are also applicable to Jews and non-Jews around the world.

In conjunction with the lessons, students should each be provided with a travel journal for their trip. Each lesson has a prompt during the closure activity. Students should write their answers to the questions in their journals. This will ensure that students have ample time for reflection in order to process their experiences and what they are learning on their trips. This also provides the educator with a method of noticing where the learners are with the material and assessing the effectiveness of

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these lessons and his or her own teaching. Educators should always leave time to encourage students, but never force them, to share some or all of what they have written with the group before ending the sessions. This is important because it will assist the educator in his or her own process of reflection on how the lesson went and how he or she might make any changes to improve their own presentation of the lessons or the lessons themselves in the future.

Background

The Jewish community of New Orleans has been a significant part of the city for the past 250 years. There were an estimated 10,000 Jews living in New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina. The population has seemed to stabilize since then at about 6,500. The Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans is working hard to encourage Jews to return to the city. Since the storm, they have organized several task forces to focus on various issues facing the community and have also initiated a financial incentive program to encourage young Jews to move to New Orleans. Of course, even now there is still a lot of rebuilding and recovering to be done all over the city and the area. The stories that you will hear in the clips that follow make up an important part of the Southern Jewish Experience. Retelling our stories is a significant piece of Jewish tradition. Today in New Orleans, everybody has their own Hurricane Katrina story. Each of them involves unique values and each teaches its own lessons.

Rationale

The target age of the Emerging Adults Immersing in Tikkun Olam curriculum is undergraduate university students, generally ages 18-22. In their book, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*, Christian Smith and Patricia Snell conducted in-depth research of a sample of 18-24 year olds across the United States. Smith and Snell named this age "emerging adults." They were looking to find out the importance of religion for emerging adults today as well as how this has changed with a transitioning definition of what it means to be a member of this age bracket. One consistent finding in their work was that emerging adults are, overall, less religious than older adults. They also found that the religiosity that emerging adults do demonstrate is determined most significantly by their parents or other important relationships in their lives. They draw attention to the fact that the transition to adulthood for young people today is "more complex, disjointed, and confusing than in past decades." For that reason, this curriculum is specifically designed to be implemented on a retreat where students will be surrounded by Jewish peers.

Educators who lead these trips should keep in mind that one major goal above and beyond the implementation of the lessons that follow is to build relationships and community amongst participants. In the words of Smith and Snell, "One thing is certain sociologically: operating at the heart of both personal and religious stability and change are the crucial matter of significant personal relationships – both those that affirm and bind and those that break down and set loose. Rarely do people's thinking and feeling and behaving change dramatically (or stay the same) without significant social relationships exerting pressures to do so and facilitating these outcomes." For that reason, a larger goal of this curriculum is to foster caring relationships amongst the participants and to demonstrate to them that the Jewish community on camps is a safe place for them to turn in order to deal with the challenges that they face as they make the important life transitions into adulthood. There are no numbers on the lessons that follow. They should be taught in whatever order the educator feels will be most appropriate in order to reach this goal.

This curriculum aims to reach young adults who would like to imbue their passion for social justice with a foundation in Jewish values. The general mood of the academic research on the topic of altruism seems to suggest that we are motivated to give to others by factors that actually serve us over the recipients of our good deeds. Whether those motivators are social pressure, guilt, sympathy, or simply a desire to feel good, these are generally the things that drive us to volunteer or give to others. In fact, Washington Post writer Shankar Vedantam cites research conducted by neuroscientists at the National Institutes of Health, stating that the part of subjects' brains that was activated by thoughts of donating money to charity was the same part that is activated by sex and food. Other findings by researcher James Andreoni build upon this idea. Andreoni found that when people give, they prefer to give directly. This equation, he found, produced the highest "warm-glow" feeling. All of this is to say that the participants on our trip who choose to give their time in order to volunteer are seeking these feelings of social acceptance and personal satisfaction. The Jewish lens through which this trip will be conducted is aiming to bring a Jewish vocabulary to these feelings for our young adult participants.

Research of over 400 Jewish adolescents commissioned by the Search Institute and documented by Nancy Leffert and Rabbi Hayim Herring in their 1998 article on their feelings regarding Jewish education found that young adults emphasize the importance of socializing, a sense of belonging, ownership, and relevance. The results also clearly indicated that participation in volunteer work positively impacted the adolescents' Jewish identity, their desire to belong to the Jewish community, and their feelings that Jewish learning is an important part of their life. In addition, one recommendation that the survey made for educators is to offer a variety of learning environments for adolescents, such as classroom learning as well as service learning. The research also highlighted the positive effects of short retreats, minicamps, and other residential programs on adolescents' Jewish identity. This research highlights the validity in the model proposed by this curriculum of taking young adults away on service learning retreats in order to enhance their feelings of belonging and, ultimately, their Jewish identities. Peter C. Scales and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain write about further research by the Search Institute. In this study, 1,799 public elementary, middle, and high school

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principals in the U.S. were interviewed on their perspectives of the impact of service learning on youth in public schools. The research indicates that there is a positive impact of community service and service learning on the students, their schools, as well as their communities and that involvement in service learning fosters healthy development in students of all ages.

Just as New Orleanians each have their own stories, it is important to recognize and remember that each of the individuals traveling on these Hillel Alternative Spring Break trips also has his or her own story that deserves to be heard. Some of the individuals might be coming from observant Jewish backgrounds, while others might be incredibly passionate about social justice. Perhaps some chose to come on the trip to be with their friends, or to learn more about Judaism. While we spend time listening to the stories and voices of the New Orleanians in the film clips, it is equally if not more important that we find the space to allow the students to bring in their own voices and their own stories to the lessons. It is my hope that this curriculum will help the students to feel as if their stories are an integral part of the larger Jewish experience. While engaging in social action, they will understand that their stories and their efforts can impact and change the lives of others.

Outcomes

Priority Goal for Learners: The students who choose to attend our alternative spring break trips will learn how Judaism encourages that we live a life of social justice. They will learn how to use common Jewish values in order to help rebuild New Orleans and the other communities to which they chose to travel. Students will bring a meaningful Jewish vocabulary into their lives of social justice. Through acts of tikkun olam, the emerging adults will begin to feel a sense of belonging to the Jewish community.

Enduring Understandings:

- 1) Emerging adults have the ability to help make the world a better place.
- 2) When tragedies happen, Judaism offers some important tools for coping.
- 3) Jews value helping other Jews.

Essential Questions:

- 1) What can the Jewish community do for me? What can I do for the Jewish community?
- 2) Do I have the power to make a difference?
- 3) How is social justice Jewish?

KDBB:

Know – Learners will understand the meanings of the values covered in each of the lessons.

Do – Learners will find ways to enact these values in their own lives as social advocates.

Believe – Learners will reflect on the belief that Jewish values can help them rise to the occasion and help out when times get tough.

Belong – Learners will enact Jewish values in order to better serve their own home communities and the communities to which they travel.

Resources for the Educator

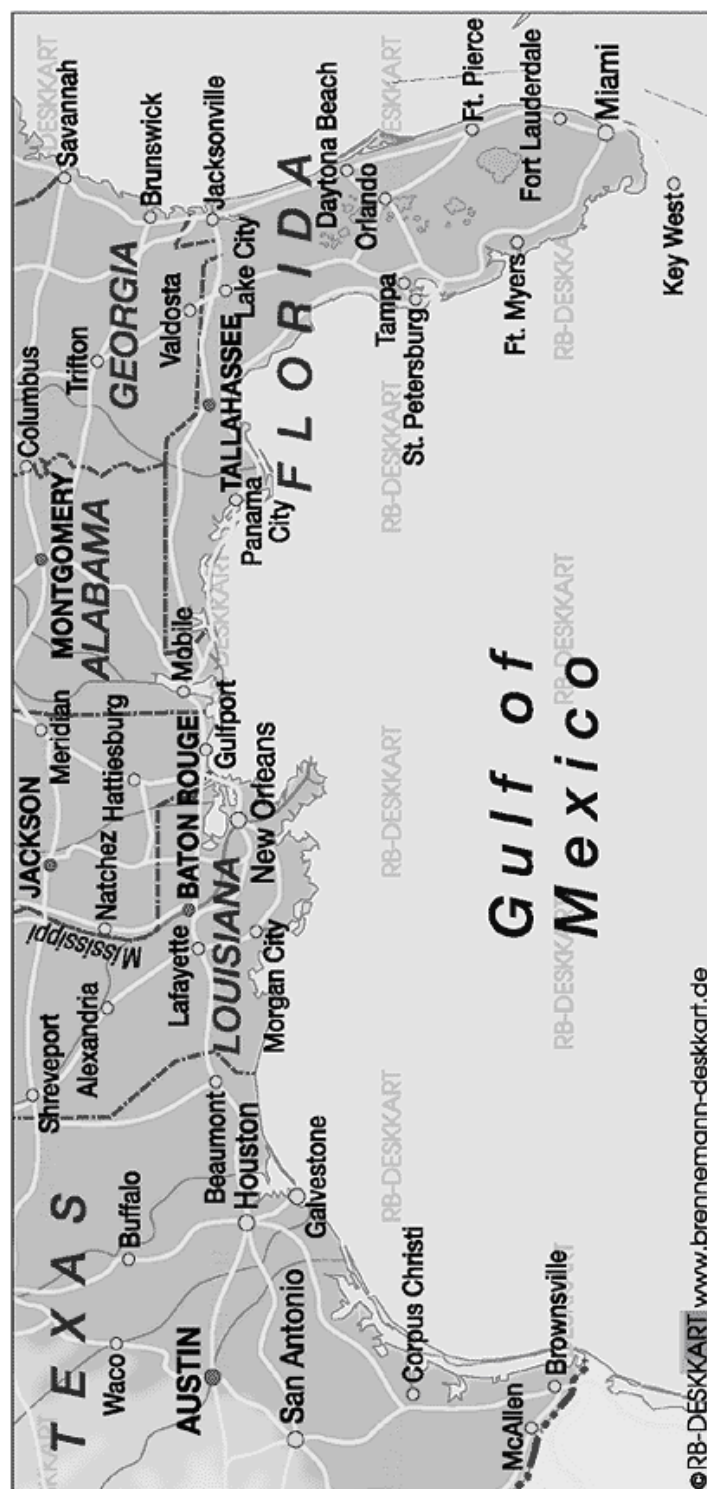
Dear Educator,

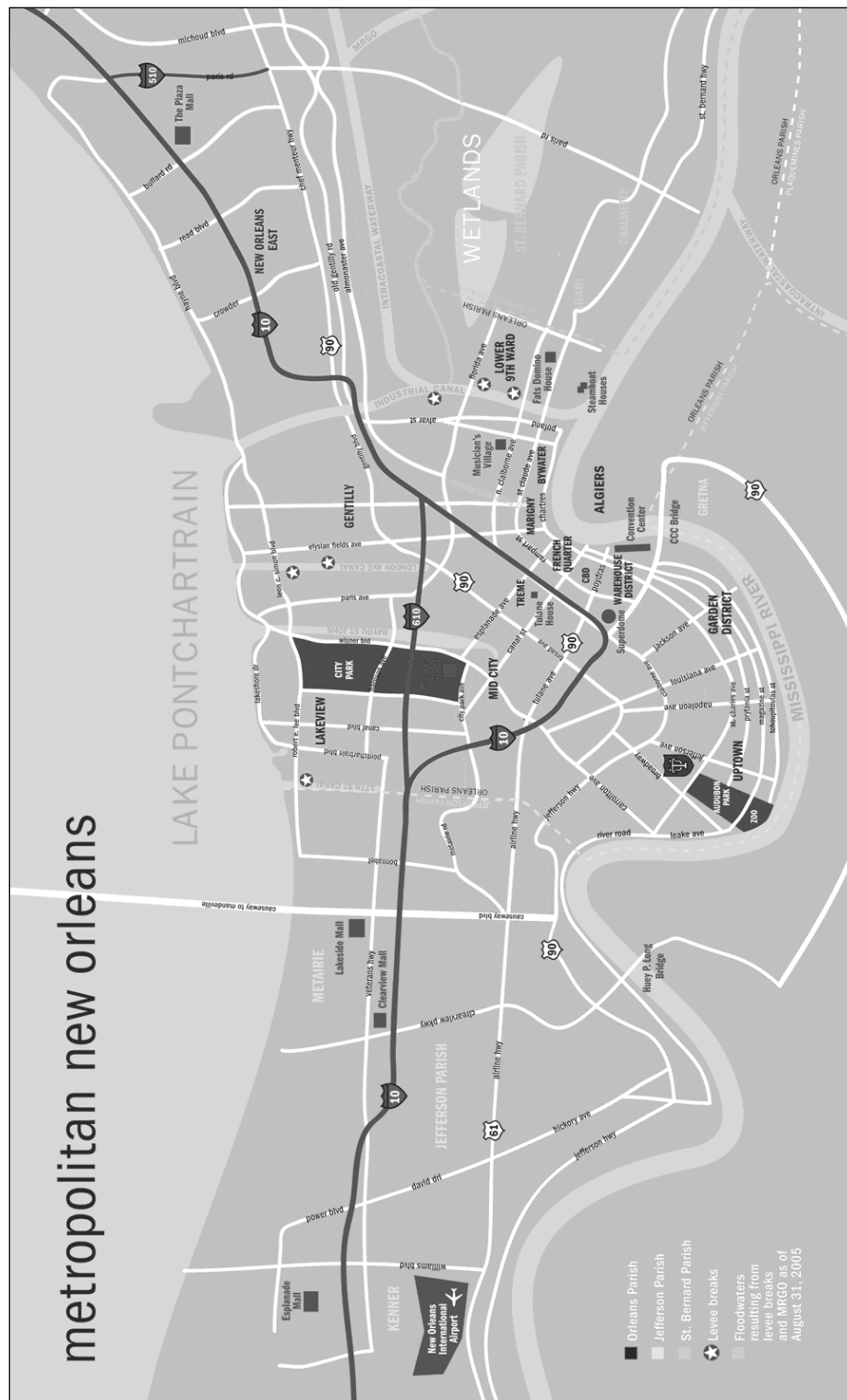
As a graduate of Tulane University and a passionate lover of all things New Orleans, writing this curriculum has been a very important experience for me. I graduated from Tulane a year and a half after Hurricane Katrina and immediately went to work in the field of Jewish education, excited at the prospect of sharing the Katrina stories of my friends, mentors, teachers, and fellow Jews as inspiration and lessons on how to deepen our connection with Judaism. These stories are an important part of the Southern Jewish Experience. I began this project with hundreds of pages from many interviews of Jews in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast conducted by the Jewish Women's Archive. I went into this project open-minded. As I read, it became increasingly obvious to me just how important it was to maintain the integrity of the voices and the lives behind the words. I let the clips speak for themselves. The topics for the lessons that follow came straight from the clips. I chose to represent the values that were repeated from person to person in many of their stories. These video clips are by no means a comprehensive look at the Hurricane Katrina experience. They are merely what I found to be a representative glimpse into hundreds of unique stories. I thank the Jewish Women's Archive for daring to take on such a significant project. I am excited to have the opportunity to share this curriculum you.

These lessons are written for college age students. You may choose to use them as a program bank to draw upon during your Hillel social justice trip and/or you might want to use them before or after the trip as preparation and follow-up. Please bear in mind the importance of each of these elements. Should you choose to use these lessons during your trip, as long as you are going to New Orleans, also please note that many of the subjects of the video clips are still living in the New Orleans area today. You might choose to try and get in touch with them and invite them to come and share their story with your group in person. Many of the clips that are included in this curriculum deal with sensitive subject matters. I strongly recommend that you watch the clips on your own before using any of these lessons in your classroom. Be prepared to handle questions that your learners might ask. In addition, please make sure that your students understand that there are no correct or incorrect answers to the discussion questions that have been provided for the video clips. This curriculum is pluralistic in nature. It is designed with an intention to speak to and to include Jews across all movements. The voices in the clips are meant to speak to diverse learners. I ask that you please be mindful of this and should strive to reflect this attitude to the best of your ability. If you have any learners in your group that have had personal experiences with Hurricane Katrina, I encourage you to give them the space to speak about them. In addition, it is more than likely that each of them will have had some sort of experience with each of the values which serve as the themes for each lesson. It is equally important to give them the space to share these stories and memories in order to make their voices a part of this larger Jewish historical story.

Thank you for working with me to honor the stories of our Jewish brothers and sisters in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast.

B'Shalom,
Mandy Farb





Hurricane Katrina Timeline	
Wednesday August 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First alerts of a tropical storm stirring in Caribbean
Friday August 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most residents work a full day and take "wait and see" approach • 5 p.m. warnings from National Weather Service show Hurricane Katrina take a turn, set New Orleans within range
Saturday August 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saturday morning most residents learn that Katrina's path is set for New Orleans • Metro-area evacuations begin en masse clogging all outbound arteries of the city for 48 hours • Orleans and Jefferson Parish both announce voluntary evacuations • Governor Blanco sends "State of Emergency" letter to President Bush
Sunday August 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At 9:30 a.m. Orleans Parish issues first-ever mandatory evacuation • At 10 a.m. Katrina becomes a Category 5 storm with winds of 175 m.p.h. • State puts contraflow plan into effect on interstates • Superdome houses 26,000 residents as city's "refuge of last resort"
Monday August 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At 3 a.m., Katrina makes landfall as a Category 3 hurricane at the Southwest Pass at the mouth of the Mississippi River • At 7 a.m., water reported coming over the levee in the 9th Ward • At 8:45 a.m., six to eight-foot flood waters reported in Lower 9th Ward • At 9 a.m., winds rip hole in roof of Superdome • At 9 a.m., eye of the storm passes to the east of New Orleans central business district. Windows in high-rise buildings blow out • 11 a.m., NWS reports a breach in the Industrial Canal levee, emptying Lake Pontchartrain into the neighborhoods of Eastern New Orleans, the Lower Ninth Ward in Orleans Parish and all of St. Bernard Parish • 2 p.m., breach in the 17th Street Canal is confirmed. Flooding of Lakeview, Mid-City, Broadmoor, Gentilly result over the next 48 hours. • 2 p.m., flood waters in the Lower Ninth Ward reach 12 feet in some areas • Flood waters continue to rise and it becomes apparent that it is a worst-case scenario
Tuesday August 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looting reports go national presenting New Orleans as a lawless and violent haven for those still trapped in the city • Flood waters continue to rise throughout city
Wednesday August 31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flood waters reach an equilibrium as the "bowl" of the city is now even with Lake Ponchartrain • Some neighborhoods under as much as 20 feet of water • Hellish scenes reported from those stranded in the Superdome: assaults, rape and suicide reported though later most dismissed • Estimates of 30 days before city can be pumped out • Thousands stranded in houses, on roofs • Media reports that thousands are stranded in the New Orleans Convention Center without food or water as a steady stream of people, many from the flooded Central City neighborhood, trickled first toward Lee Circle and then

Resources for the Educator

	to the Convention Center, hoping to be saved from increasingly desperate straits
Thursday September 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Corps of Engineers begins to build dam to stop levee breach at the 17th Street Canal• First 5,000 of approximately 23,000 evacuees arrive at Houston Astrodome by bus
Friday September 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fires break out in various warehouses across the city• Airport becomes way station for refugees• Thousands of refugees still in Superdome, Convention Center and I-10
Saturday September 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rape, gunfire reported at Convention Center• Death toll expected to be in thousands, though nothing official yet• Last of evacuees taken from Superdome and Convention Center• Rescuers continue to pluck residents from hellish waters
Sunday September 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Estimated 2,000 people, many of them with serious medical problems, were still housed inside Louis Armstrong International Airport
Monday September 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 16,000 National Guard troops dedicated to search and rescue mission• Agencies begin trying to save stranded pets• Mayor Nagin says more than 10,000 could be dead

Timeline by the New Orleans Times-Picayune

To see an animated breakdown of the Hurricane Katrina timeline, please visit
<http://www.nola.com/katrina/graphics/flashflood.swf>

Outline of Lessons

Kehilla – Community

All Jews are responsible for one another. This important Jewish value of community is a fundamental player in the stories of New Orleans Jews post-Katrina. This lesson aims to aid students in translating this value back to their campus Jewish communities.

Pikuach Nefesh – Saving Human Life

As Jews, we value life above all else. Hurricane Katrina was a catastrophic event which required many hard decisions to be made. We must all recognize the impact that we can make in the lives of others. This lesson is meant to empower students by giving them some of the tools to recognize the power of their roles in relationships with others.

Yizkor – Remembrance

It is important to create meaningful ways to memorialize significant events in our lives and our community. Each of our stories plays an important part of building a memorial. This lesson guides students in learning that we can honor the experiences of the Jews of New Orleans by listening and adding our own voices to their stories and memories.

Tzedakah – Doing Righteous Acts/Charity

When tragedies happen, people often mobilize to help. This was a common theme in the stories of the Jews of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Tzedakah can encompass many things, such as donating time or money. As Jews who value responsibility to our community, it is important to embrace the value of tzedakah and to do whatever we can to help out.

Hiddur Mitzvah – Beautifying the Mitzvah

One fascinating Jewish value is the idea of hiddur mitzvah, or beautifying the mitzvah. Jewish synagogues are often decorated in elaborate ways, Torahs wear beautiful garments, some Jewish prayer books even contain moving words of poetry in order to

allow congregants to connect with the words of prayer. Sometimes when life presents difficult situations, it is necessary to find creative ways to cope. This lesson explores the power that many various art forms can have in transcending these moments.

Sever Panim Yafot – Being Cheerful

Sometimes life situations, no matter how difficult, require confrontation with a certain amount of humor and lightheartedness. New Orleans is an incredible example of how a community comes together in celebration each year. The Jews of New Orleans certainly found ways of bringing this spirit into their stories and memories of life during and just after Hurricane Katrina.

Deveikut – Cleaving to God

For some Jews, God provides hope and comfort. The Jewish value of cleaving to God is an important part of the Hurricane Katrina experience for these Jews as well as countless others who found themselves reaching out to God despite a lack of having ever done this in the past. This lesson is meant to help students confront their own God concepts.

Ometz Lev – Courage

Confronting new things is difficult for everybody. Hurricane Katrina and life immediately following was certainly something new for the Jewish community of New Orleans. This lesson acknowledges how the Jews in New Orleans coped with their new reality using incredible amounts of courage.

Kehillah

Enduring Understandings:

- 1) Members of Jewish communities are responsible for one another.
- 2) We can rely on the Jewish community to support us during hard times.

Essential Questions:

- 1) How can I help my Jewish community?
- 2) How can my Jewish community help me?

KDBB:

Know: Learners will know the Jewish texts which define the value of kehillah.

Do: Learners will feel a sense of belonging within their own Jewish community either in their hometown and/or at their university.

Believe: Learners will reflect on positive experiences that they have had within their own Jewish communities. They will also articulate a desire to participate in this community or another Jewish community of their choosing after their trip.

Belong: Learners will receive continued mentoring and check in meetings with Hillel professionals at their university.

Supplies:

Pen or pencil for each student
Video clips
Projector
DVD player
Small paper plates or paper towels
Plastic knives
Peanut butter
Jelly
Bread
Blindfolds for one half of your students

Other Things to Prepare:

Copy Appendix A, Questions for Students, for each student.
Copy Appendix B, Clip Introductions, for teacher.
Copy Appendix C, Chevrotah Texts, for each student.

Set Induction:

(15-20 minutes)

Introduction to *Kehillah*

Ask your students to get in pairs. Explain to them that they are about to participate in an activity that might seem a little bit silly, but that they are going to learn about teamwork and being a member of a community.

Go around and assign one person in each pair to be “Group A” and the other person to be “Group B.”

Ask all of those in “Group A” to sit down at a table.

Instruct those in “Group B” to blindfold their partners in “Group A.”

Once they have blindfolded their partners, instruct “Group B” to sit across from their partners.

Tell “Group B” that they must now put their hands behind their backs. Tell them that they may not use their hands until they have been instructed otherwise.

Place a plate with two slices of bread, some peanut butter, some jelly, and a knife in between each pair

Tell the class that “Group B” must guide their partners, using only their words, to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

If you have time once they have made their sandwiches, those in “Group A” and those in “Group B” may switch places and repeat the activity. If you do not have time to repeat the activity, you may have “Group B” instruct their partners to cut the sandwich in half, so that they may share it.

NOTE: For a faster or less messy alternative, you may choose to do the same type of activity, but instead of having the goal to make a sandwich, the partners can guide each other in drawing a picture (house, car, dog, flower, etc.)

Ask your students the following questions:

? Was this easy or difficult? Why?

? What were some of the challenges you faced?

? What things helped you be successful in this exercise? Why might it be important to do these things in the real world?

“Keep in mind what we just discovered through this activity. Today we are going to watch some clips from the Jewish Women’s Archive’s oral history project, Katrina’s Jewish Voices, that have to do with *kehillah*. *Kehillah* means “community.” In the activity we just did, if we had not had somebody to help us, none of us would have been able to eat. We had to work together in order to help each other, and then we all got to share a delicious snack! Working with and being a part of a community is important for many reasons. We are going to discuss some of them today.”

Activities:

Video Clips and Questions

(40-60 minutes)

“ “The video clips that we are about to watch are all oral histories of different Jews in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast that have been taken about their experiences during and since Hurricane Katrina. I am handing out some sheets of paper to each of you with the names of the people that we will be seeing. After we watch each clip, I will give you time to write responses and then we will discuss them as a class. Please follow along with the questions and answer them as we go.”

Hand out Appendix A, Questions for Students, to each student. For each clip there will be an introduction before the viewing. These can be found on Appendix B, Clip Introductions. Be sure to read the introductions aloud to your students as you go. Between each clip, pause the video and give your students time to write answers and then to discuss their thoughts with the group.

Kehillah Chevrutah

(15-20 minutes)

Break students into three groups and give each group a different text from Appendix C, *Chevrutah* Texts. Ask the students to read their text and discuss the following questions with the group.

- ? Why are relationships an important part of who we are as people?
- ? What are the implications of our relationships?
- ? Have you ever felt responsible for someone else? Share that story with your group. Why do you think Jews should look out for one another?

Closure:

(10-15 minutes)

Once the groups have finished discussing, allow them to share their texts and their responses with the class. Ask them how these texts and discussions relate to their experiences with Jewish community in the past or ones they have had or anticipate having on their spring break trip.

Journal Prompt: How do I feel about the idea of continuing to participate in my university's Jewish community when I return to school? How might I do this? What might I be able to gain from or contribute to the community?

Questions for Students

Joel Colman

Cantor Colman talks about having a private moment in a public forum; have you ever had a similar experience?

Do you think that prayer and community become any more or less important after an experience like Hurricane Katrina?

Other thoughts:

Jonathan Cohen

Cohen mentions that only a few people wanted to attend *Shabbat* services and that camp was not trying to be programmatic with the evacuees. Do you think that the community can still be considered a *kehillah* even if they were not all praying or engaging Jewishly with one another? Why or why not?

Why do you think the community at camp was so willing to take in the family from Westwego? How do you think the experience of taking care of them might have affected the community that was already there?

Other thoughts:

Kehillah - Appendix A

Steven Richer

Richer mentions the entire community standing up for the “Prayer for the Sick.” Can you imagine your entire congregation going through a disaster together? How do you think it would change the dynamics? Would you find any more or less comfort in praying with your community after sharing an experience like Hurricane Katrina?

Richer says that spirituality and kindness came out of Hurricane Katrina. Can you think of any other historical events that have sparked similar ideals?

Other thoughts:

Brian Bain

Bain mentions some rituals that have become more meaningful to him since Katrina. Do you think that living through a disaster like Hurricane Katrina might make you find more or less meaning in Jewish rituals? Which ones?

How do you think that the New Orleans Jewish community might continue to change because of Katrina?

Other thoughts:

Kehillah - Appendix A

Bluma Rivkin

What do you think the “spirit of Monroe” felt like? Rivkin mentions how nice it was to be able to pray in a setting where status was stripped away. How do you think that made a difference? Have you ever experienced any similar feelings to what you think the people in Monroe felt that Rosh Hashanah?

A lot of the New Orleans Jewish community still has not come back to the city. Why do you think so many people chose not to return? Since Judaism places so much importance on *kehillah*, how do you think the people that chose not to return have affected those that are back in the city? How would you feel if a significant portion of your congregation left and never came back?

Other thoughts:

Overall Questions

What do these clips teach us about *kehillah*?

How are these stories Jewish?

Why is it important for us to hear these stories?

Clip Introductions

Katrina Introduction

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast. 80% of New Orleans was flooded after many of its levees broke. In many ways, Jews did not suffer the worst of the flood. Most, though not all, were able to evacuate the city prior to the storm. Most had the resources to take care of their families in the crisis. But many New Orleans Jews lost their homes and possessions, and had to rebuild their lives. Jews around the South and the entire country responded to help those in need. The New Orleans Jewish community and other Jewish communities around the area did some amazing things to help one another. By listening to Katrina's Jewish Voices, we can better understand the meaning and importance of *kehillah*.

Clip #1 – Joel Colman:

Joel Colman is the cantor and religious school director at Temple Sinai in uptown New Orleans. He also serves as the Chaplain for the New Orleans Fire Department. Katrina washed out his home. He returned to New Orleans before Thanksgiving to a home that had no hot water or heat. He used the showers at the New Orleans Fire Department staging areas. He eventually got a FEMA trailer, and put it in the side driveway at Temple Sinai. His wife and son stayed in Novi, Michigan for the year. Here he speaks about a service that he and Rabbi Ed Cohn participated in at the convention center on the one year anniversary after Hurricane Katrina.

1) Cantor Colman talks about having a private moment in a public forum; have you ever had a similar experience?

2) Do you think that prayer and community become any more or less important after an experience like Hurricane Katrina?

Clip #2 – Jonathan Cohen:

Jonathan Cohen lives in Jackson, Mississippi. He is the director of Henry S. Jacob's Camp in Utica, Mississippi. As people began evacuating from New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina, Jacob's Camp opened its doors to both Jews and non-Jews who needed a place to stay.

1) Cohen mentions that only a few people wanted to attend Shabbat services and that camp was not trying to be programmatic with the evacuees. Do you think that the community can still be considered a kehillah even if they were not all praying or engaging Jewishly with one another? Why or why not?

Kehillah - Appendix B

2) Why do you think the community at camp was so willing to take in the family from Westwego? How do you think the experience of taking care of them might have affected the community that was already there?

Clip #3 – Steven Richer:

Steven Richer is the executive director of the Mississippi Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau. He has been a principle player in the Casino driven recovery, and came to Mississippi from Atlantic City in 1996. At the time of the interview, he was President of the Congregation Beth Israel in Biloxi on the Gulf Coast.

1) Richer mentions the entire community standing up for the “Prayer for the Sick.” Can you imagine your entire congregation going through a disaster together? How do you think it would change the dynamics? Would you find any more or less comfort in praying with your community after sharing an experience like Hurricane Katrina?

2) Richer says that spirituality and kindness came out of Hurricane Katrina. Can you think of any other historical events that have sparked similar ideals?

Clip #4 – Brian Bain:

Bain is a modest Southern gentleman whose Jewishness resides comfortably within his Southernness. This is clear from *Shalom Y'all*, a documentary he directed in 2002. Like many who have come through Katrina, family and community have risen in priority. Bain has re-affiliated with Touro Synagogue and is in charge of the welcoming committee for the new cantor. In the following clip, Bain reflects on his view of Judaism and the New Orleans Jewish community post-Katrina.

1) Bain mentions some rituals that have become more meaningful to him since Katrina. Do you think that living through a disaster like Hurricane Katrina might make you find more or less meaning in Jewish rituals? Which ones?

2) How do you think that the New Orleans Jewish community might continue to change because of Katrina?

Clip #5 – Bluma Rivkin:

Bluma Rivkin and her husband, Rabbi Zelig Rivkin, moved to New Orleans thirty years ago. The Lubavitch Rebbe sent them to open a Chabad House on the Tulane Campus in 1976. The Chabad community has grown from a small Uptown community near Tulane to a two-campus community with a beautiful building on West Esplanade, the Jewish corridor, in Metairie. In this clip, Rivkin speaks about the first Rosh Hashanah after Hurricane Katrina, before she and the majority of the community had returned to New Orleans.

1) What do you think the “spirit of Monroe” felt like? Rivkin mentions how nice it was to be able to pray in a setting where status was stripped away. How do you think that

Kehillah - Appendix B

made a difference? Have you ever experienced any similar feelings to what you think the people in Monroe felt that Rosh Hashanah?

2) A lot of the New Orleans Jewish community still has not come back to the city. Why do you think so many people chose not to return? Since Judaism places so much importance on kehillah, how do you think the people that chose not to return have affected those that are back in the city? How would you feel if a significant portion of your congregation left and never came back?

Overall Questions:

- 1) What do these clips teach us about kehillah?*
- 2) How are these stories Jewish?*
- 3) Why is it important for us to hear these stories?*

Chevrutah Study: Text #1

²⁰ So the whole community of the Israelites left Moses' presence. ²¹ And everyone who excelled in ability and everyone whose spirit moved him came, bringing to the Lord his offering for the work of the Tent of Meeting and for all its service and for the sacral vestments. ²² Men and women, all whose hearts moved them, all who would make an elevation offering of gold to the Lord, came bringing brooches, earrings, rings, and pendants — gold objects of all kinds. ²³ And everyone who had in his possession blue, purple, and crimson yarns, fine linen, goats' hair, tanned ram skins, and dolphin skins, brought them; ²⁴ everyone who would make gifts of silver or copper brought them as gifts for the Lord; and everyone who had in his possession acacia wood for any work of the service brought that. ²⁵ And all the skilled women spun with their own hands, and brought what they had spun, in blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and in fine linen. ²⁶ And all the women who excelled in that skill spun the goats' hair. ²⁷ And the chieftains brought lapis lazuli and other stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece; ²⁸ and spices and oil for lighting, for the anointing oil, and for the aromatic incense. ²⁹ Thus the Israelites, all the men and women whose hearts moved them to bring anything for the work that the Lord, through Moses, had commanded to be done, brought it as a freewill offering to the Lord.

-Exodus, chapter 35,
verses 20-29

Chevrotah Study: Text #2

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves on the earth”

-Genesis, Chapter 1,
verses 27-28

Chevrotah Study: Text #3

Hillel said, do not separate yourself from the community.

-Pirke Avot 2:5

“All who occupy themselves with the affairs of the community shall be engaged with them for the sake of God”

-Ethics of Our Fathers: Avot 2:2

Rabbi Chalafta Dosa of Kfar Chananya explained “If ten people sit together and occupy themselves with *Torah*, the Divine Presence rests among them.”

-Ethics of Our Fathers: Avot 3:6

Every one of Israel has for his soul one letter of the 600,000 letters of the *Torah*... Indeed, Israel is an acronym for *yesh shishim ribo otivot laTorah*, “there are 600,000 letters in the *Torah*.”

-Migaleh Amukot: Section 186

Pikuach Nefesh

Enduring Understandings:

- 1) Jews value life over all else.
- 2) Everybody has the potential to save a life.

Essential Question:

- 1) Why should I value pikuach nefesh?
- 2) How can I save a life?

KDBB:

Know: Learners will know the Jewish texts which define the value of pikuach nefesh.

Do: Learners will feel a sense of appreciation for the mitzvah of pikuach nefesh.

Believe: Learners will reflect on experiences that they have had which might have, potentially, helped to save a life.

Belong: Learners will return to their campus and continue to be leaders amongst their community, looking out for the well-being of others around them.

Supplies:

- Pen or pencil for each student
- Video clips
- Projector
- DVD player

Other Things to Prepare:

- Copy Appendix A, Chevrotah Texts, for each student
- Copy Appendix B, Questions for Students, for each student
- Copy Appendix C, Clip Introductions, for teacher
- Copy Appendix D, Agree/Disagree Scenarios, for teacher

Pikuach Nefesh

Set Induction:

(15-20 minutes)

Introduction to Pikuach Nefesh: Chevrotah Study

Pass out Appendix A, Chevrotah Texts, to students. Each group should have one of the texts.

“ “Today we are going to begin with a brief text study.”

Allow participants time to read and discuss their texts. Then ask the following questions. Each group or individual should have a response to each question.

? How would you summarize this passage?

? In what ways are these passages similar?

- They all have to do with saving lives

Introduce the students to the concept of pikuach nefesh.

“ “In Judaism, human life is essential and so pikuach nefesh, the obligation to save a life in jeopardy, is considered a major value to uphold. This obligation applies to both an immediate threat and a less grave danger that has the potential of becoming serious. According to pikuach nefesh a person must do everything in their power to save the life of another, so long as it does not put their life in danger. For even the strictest of Jews, it is permissible to travel on Shabbat to save a person's life. Similarly, a patient is allowed to eat non-Kosher food if it is essential for recovery and, on Yom Kippur, a sick person is forbidden to fast if it will impair their recovery and health.”

Activities:

1. Video Clips and Questions

(40-60 minutes)

“ “Now we will be watching a series of video clips. These are all oral histories of different Jews in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast that have been taken about their experiences during and since Hurricane Katrina. Please be advised that some of these clips will deal with sensitive subject matters. After we watch each clip, I will give you time to write responses and then we will discuss them as a class. I am handing out some sheets of paper to each of you with the names of the people that we will be seeing. Please follow along with the questions and answer them as we go.”

Pikuach Nefesh

Hand out Appendix B, Questions for Students, to each student. For each clip there will be an introduction before the viewing. These can be found on Appendix C, Clip Introductions. Be sure to read the introductions aloud to your students as you go. Between each clip, pause the video and give your students time to write answers and then to discuss their thoughts with the group.

2. Agree/Disagree Spectrum

(10-15 minutes)

Designate one side of the room as “agree” and one side as “disagree.” Read the scenarios in Appendix D and ask students, keeping in mind what they have just discussed, to stand somewhere on the spectrum. Let them share why they chose to stand where they did.

Closure:

(10-15 minutes)

Bring students back together. Allow them to ask any questions that they might have. Explain to them that, although it is rare that we have the opportunity to physically rescue someone, there are many opportunities that may come up during our lives to perform the mitzvah of pikuach nefesh. It can be as simple as listening to a friend when they are in need. Give students a chance to think about how this important mitzvah can play a role in their own lives. Have them respond to this in their journals and then allow them the opportunity to share their thoughts with the group.

Chevrotah Study: Text #1

The slaughter of Jewish rebels, described below, and the decision of Mattathias and his advisors to violate the Sabbath to fight the enemy may have influenced the thinking of later sages. The events occurred after Mattathias and his sons had disobeyed the orders of Antiochus IV Epiphanes to worship idols, about 167 B.C.E. They fled to the Judean hills, and many of their followers hid in the desert.

Word soon reached the king's officers and the forces in Jerusalem, the city of David, that men who had defied the king's order had gone down into hiding-places in the wilds. A large body of men went quickly after them, came up with them, and occupied positions opposite. They prepared to attack them on the Sabbath.

"There is still time," they shouted. "Come out, obey the king's command, and your lives will be spared."

"We will not come out," the Jews replied. "We will not obey the king's command or profane the Sabbath."

Without more ado the attack was launched; but the Israelites did nothing in reply; they neither hurled stones, nor barricaded their caves. "Let us meet death with a clear conscience," they said. . . .

So they were attacked and massacred on the Sabbath, men, women, and children, up to a thousand in all, and their cattle with them.

Great was the grief of Mattathias and his friends when they heard the news. They said to one another, "If we all do as our brothers have done, if we refuse to fight the Gentiles for our lives as well as for ours laws and customs, then they will soon wipe us off the face of the earth."

That day they decided that, if anyone came to fight against them on the Sabbath, they would fight back, rather than all die as their brothers in the caves had done.

-I Maccabees, chapter 2,
verses 31-41

Chevrotah Study: Text #2

The Mishnah says: "Whenever a human life is endangered,
the laws of the Sabbath are suspended."

The more eagerly someone goes about saving a life, the
more worthy he is of praise. . . .

If a person sees a child fall into the sea on the Sabbath,
he may spread a net and rescue the child – the sooner the
better – and he need not get permission from a court of
law, even though in spreading the net he may also catch
fish [which is forbidden on the Sabbath].

If he sees a child fall into a pit, he may break through
the earth on one side and step down to pull the child up – the
sooner the better – and he need not get permission
from a court of law, even though in the process of rescuing
the child he may be building stairs.

And if he sees a door shut on a room in which an infant
is alone, he may break down the door to get the baby
out – the sooner the better – and he need not get permission
from a court of law, even though by breaking down
the door he may knock off chips that can be used for
firewood.

-Babylonian Talmud, tractate
Yoma, page 84b

Chevrotah Study: Text #3

[A group of rabbis] were walking along a road. They discussed the following question:

How do we know that the duty of saving a life supersedes the Sabbath laws?

Rabbi Eleazar Azariah, answering the question, said: "If we may disregard the Sabbath laws in order to perform a circumcision, which affects only one member of the body, how much more should we disregard those laws for the whole body when it is in danger?" . . .

Rabbi Yose ha-Gelili says: "When the Bible says, 'Nevertheless you must keep my Sabbaths,' (Exodus 31: 13) the word 'nevertheless implies a distinction. There are Sabbaths on which you must rest, and there are Sabbaths on which you should not rest."

Rabbi Simeon Menasya says: "Behold it says: 'You shall keep my Sabbath, for it is holy for you' (Exodus 31 :14). This means, the Sabbath is given to you, but you are not surrendered to the Sabbath."

Rabbi Nathan says: "Behold it says: 'The Israelite people shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout the generations' (Exodus 31 :r6). This implies that we should disregard one Sabbath for the sake of saving the life of a person so that person may be able to observe many Sabbaths."

-Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael,
tractate "Shabbata," chapter I

Chevrotah Study: Text #4

We may do anything to save ourselves except for three things: idolatry, sexual immorality [including incest and adultery], and murder.

-Babylonian Talmud, tractate
Pesachim, page 25a

Rabbi Judah said in the name of Samuel: "If I had been there I would have told them something better: 'You shall keep My Laws and My norms by the pursuit of which man shall live' (Leviticus 18:5).

"He shall live by them, but he shall not die because of them."

-Babylonian Talmud, tractate
Yoma, page 85b

Questions for Students

Allan Bissinger

Why do you think it was so important to Miss Mary to pack makeup and make her bed before she evacuated with Bissinger? What would you bring with you if you were rescued from a flooding house?

Why do you think Bissinger felt so responsible for the lives of his neighbors? He doesn't mention religion, but do you think it should have made a difference in his decision-making if Bissinger had lived in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood? What about a predominantly Christian one? Athiest?

Other thoughts:

Esteban Gershanik

Do you think it is fair that Dr. Gershanik broke the rules to get a family out of New Orleans together even when so many sick people were waiting to be evacuated? If you were in Dr, Gershanik's place, what would you have done?

A lot of the efforts to save lives after Katrina were dangerous. Many required a lot of time and energy. In your opinion, is there ever a point when saving a life isn't worth the effort?

Other thoughts:

Pikuach Nefesh - Appendix B

Rodney Steiner

Dr. Aria and Dr. Tess could very easily have been putting their lives in danger in order to enter New Orleans and rescue Moose. Would you ever put your life in danger for an animal?

Do you think that what Dr. Aria and Dr. Tess did an example of pikuach nefesh? What do you think Judaism would say?

Other thoughts:

Richard Lipsey

If the rescuers had known the people were in danger, even though they didn't want to leave, should they have forcefully saved them? Is it wrong to leave someone who does not want to evacuate? What would you consider someone's "best wishes" in this kind of scenario?

Do you think Lipsey and his crew should have made more of an effort to rescue the Jews or were they right to pick up whoever they found?

Other thoughts:

Pikuach Nefesh - Appendix B

Lainie Breaux

Do you think that Breaux and her husband made the right decision to leave their son? What would you have done in this situation?

Breaux mentioned that if she stayed with her son, she would not have been evacuated from the hospital if it got to that point. In your opinion, is the mother or the baby's life more important? Why?

Other thoughts:

Overall Questions

What do these clips teach us about pikuach nefesh?

How are these stories Jewish?

Why is it important for us to hear these stories?

Clip Introductions

Katrina Introduction

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast. 80% of New Orleans was flooded after many of its levees broke. In many ways, Jews did not suffer the worst of the flood. Most, though not all, were able to evacuate the city prior to the storm. Most had the resources to take care of their families in the crisis. But many New Orleans Jews lost their homes and possessions, and had to rebuild their lives. Jews around the South and the entire country responded to help those in need. Unfortunately, many lives were lost, but even more were saved. By listening to Katrina's Jewish Voices, we can better understand the meaning of pikuach nefesh.

Clip #1 – Allan Bissinger:

New Orleans Jewish Federation President Allan Bissinger stayed through the storm on Monday and swam out on Thursday. Everything in between is quite a story. Ultimately he, and his rescuer, a stranger who it seems stole a boat, began their own rescue mission. They made it to dry land after dodging hidden cars, and other debris covered by flood waters with fourteen people, three dogs, and two cats. He ended up, with elderly neighbors he had rescued, at his mother's home, which did not flood. Since the storm water he and his neighbors swam through was rancid and burned their skin, they took soap into his mother's pool and bathed.

1) Why do you think it was so important to Miss Mary to pack makeup and make her bed before she evacuated with Bissinger? What would you bring with you if you were rescued from a flooding house?

2) Why do you think Bissinger felt so responsible for the lives of his neighbors? He doesn't mention religion, but do you think it should have made a difference in his decision-making if Bissinger had lived in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood? What about a predominantly Christian one? Atheist?

Clip #2 – Esteban Gershanik:

Unlike most people who were evacuating New Orleans, Dr. Esteban Gershanik was already in Chicago for a wedding, and worked hard to get back into the city so that he could help. His help during the evacuation and recovery was invaluable, as there were few people who understood the city, knew what was underwater, and knew where to deploy teams doing various types of medical work. In this interview clip, Dr. Gershanik speaks about the day that he volunteered in the New Orleans airport triaging and treating patients.

Pikuach Nefesh - Appendix C

1) Do you think it is fair that Dr. Gershanik broke the rules to get a family out of New Orleans together even when so many sick people were waiting to be evacuated? If you were in Dr. Gershanik's place, what would you have done?

2) A lot of the efforts to save lives after Katrina were dangerous. Many required a lot of time and energy. In your opinion, is there ever a point when saving a life isn't worth the effort?

Clip #3 – Rodney Steiner:

Rodney Steiner is a pediatric surgeon. He and his family stayed at Tulane Medical Center through the storm. Steiner was involved in the evacuations of the acute care patients at charity. Evacuations were through the private resources of HCA, the owners of the hospital, not Homeland Security. Here, Steiner tells the story of what two of the doctors that he has trained since he began working at Tulane did when they heard that he had left his puppy in the Tulane medical school when he evacuated.

1) Dr. Aria and Dr. Tess could very easily have been putting their lives in danger in order to enter New Orleans and rescue Moose. Would you ever put your life in danger for an animal?

2) Do you think that what Dr. Aria and Dr. Tess did an example of pikuach nefesh? What do you think Judaism would say?

Clip #4 – Richard Lipsey:

Richard Lipsey lives in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. His wife's aunt and uncle remained in New Orleans through Katrina and afterwards, their children could not find them. They called Lipsey for help. Meanwhile, more and more people were showing up in Baton Rouge needing help. The city doubled overnight because of Katrina evacuees. Lipsey knew the East Baton Rouge sheriff's office Chief Deputy, Greg Phares. They mounted a rescue mission using the names that the Baton Rouge Jewish Federation had collected. Many of the original people were already out, but they picked up others who were in the area no matter what their denomination or race.

1) If the rescuers had known the people were in danger, even though they didn't want to leave, should they have forcefully saved them? Is it wrong to leave someone who does not want to evacuate? What would you consider someone's "best wishes" in this kind of scenario?

2) Do you think Lipsey and his crew should have made more of an effort to rescue the Jews or were they right to pick up whoever they found?

Clip #5 – Lainie Breaux:

Lainie Breaux's son, Zachary, was born two days before the storm. Her older son, Benjamin, was a problem pregnancy and had problems with sleep apnea as a baby. Zachary failed his apnea test on Wednesday, and Breaux was forced to leave the hospital without him. When the storm came, they had to make a decision. Leave the baby in the hospital with excellent medical care, or take the baby without medicine or a monitor on an evacuation drive that could last twelve to fifteen hours.

- 1) Do you think that Breaux and her husband made the right decision to leave their son? What would you have done in this situation?
- 2) Breaux mentioned that if she stayed with her son, she would not have been evacuated from the hospital if the storm got that bad – which we now know, it did. In your opinion, is the mother or the baby's life more important? Why?

Overall Questions:

- 1) What do these clips teach us about pikuach nefesh?
- 2) How are these stories Jewish?
- 3) Why is it important for us to hear these stories?

Agree/Disagree Scenarios

David is on a trip in Jerusalem with a few of his friends. They are staying in a very observant part of Jerusalem. On Shabbat, one of David's friends gets very sick. They decide to take a taxi to the hospital, even though they are worried that they might offend some of the people in the neighborhood. Did David and his friends do the right thing?"

Rachel takes her medicine everyday with food, but today is Yom Kippur. Rachel knows it could be dangerous if she doesn't take her medicine, but she also knows she is supposed to fast. She decides not to eat and to just wait until tomorrow to take her pill. Thinking about what you know about Jewish law, do you agree with Rachel's decision?"

Ari is in the middle of his Bar-Mitzvah. He is doing a great job. Suddenly, someone in the front row passes out. The rabbi stops Ari's Bar-Mitzvah to call for help. Do you agree with the rabbi's decision?"

Rebecca is in 10th grade. She is supposed to be in Chemistry class when she finds her friend outside in the hall crying. Rebecca decides to sit and talk to her friend, who she knows has had some major emotional issues in the past. Do you agree that this could be an example of pikuach nefesh?"

Josh is standing outside the pool watching his instructor show him how to hold on to the wall and kick when his baby brother falls into the deep end. Really wanting to help, he jumps in too. According to Jewish law, do you agree with Josh's actions?

Yizkor

Enduring Understandings:

- 1) Jews have prescribed methods for remembering.
- 2) It is very important for Jews to create and share memory.

Essential Questions:

- 1) What is worth remembering?
- 2) How do Jews remember?

KDBB:

Know: Learners will understand the importance of collective Jewish memory.

Do: Learners will share their own stories in order to contribute to the community.

Believe: Learners will understand how their stories make a difference in the group.

Belong: Learners will choose to continue sharing their stories with one another and creating ways of remember important events in their lives.

Supplies:

Pen or pencil for each student
Video clips
Projector
DVD player
Loose-leaf paper

Other Things to Prepare:

Copy Appendix A, *Yizkor* Text, for each student.
Copy Appendix B, Questions for Students, for each student.
Copy Appendix C, Clip Introductions, for teacher.

Set Induction:

(10-15 minutes)

Introduction to Yizkor

Hand out a copy of Appendix A, Yizkor Text, to each student and read the text aloud. Ask the participants to think about the text and then invite them to make up their own similes or metaphors for what a Jew could represent. Write each of their suggestions on a blackboard or flip chart, depending on where you are holding your sessions. Ask participants to explain for the group why they came up with this symbol. Once everybody has had an opportunity to share their own metaphor, you may say the following:

“Maurice Lamm’s simile of the Torah scroll was a way of encouraging Jews to respect and remember one another once they have died. Yizkor is a Hebrew word that means “remembrance.” Yizkor is a very important component of the Jewish lifecycle. As Jews, we place a large value on remembrance and the retelling of stories from our tradition.”

? Who can think of a specific holiday where we retell our stories?

- Pesach – Exodus from Egypt
- Purim – Megillat Esther
- Yom HaShoah – names of victims
- Shavuot – Megillat Ruth

“As you can see. Each year in, the Jewish calendar gives us several specific days that we are to set aside with the purpose of retelling the stories of our ancestors. Remembrance is a very important part of Jewish tradition. In addition, when somebody dies, Judaism creates a very methodical structure for the family and the community to deal with the death. The family of the deceased follow shiva, a seven day mourning process established in biblical times. There are many specific laws that apply to the mourners and the house of mourning during the week of shiva. Many of these laws are in place in order to console mourners and help them get through such a hard period. Throughout the year, Jews who have died are remembered by their families and communities on their yahrzeit, or the anniversary of their death, as well as at yizkor services which are held on Yom Kippur, Shemini Atzeret (the day after Sukkot), the last day of Pesach, and on Shavuot. Today we are going to take a look at the importance of yizkor through some of the stories of Jews in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast during Hurricane Katrina.”

Activities:

1. Video Clips and Questions

(40-60 minutes)

“ “Now we will be watching a series of video clips. These are all oral histories of different Jews in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast that have been taken about their experiences during and since Hurricane Katrina. Please be advised that some of these clips will deal with sensitive subject matters. After we watch each clip, I will give you time to write responses and then we will discuss them as a class. I am handing out some sheets of paper to each of you with the names of the people that we will be seeing. Please follow along with the questions and answer them as we go.”

Hand out Appendix B, Questions for Students, to each participant. For each clip there will be an introduction before the viewing. These can be found on Appendix C, Clip Introductions. Be sure to read the introductions aloud to your group as you go. Between each clip, pause the video and give your students time to write answers and then to discuss their thoughts with the group.

2. Write Your Own Hespel

(15-20 minutes)

A hesped (eulogy) is a very important part of a Jewish funeral. Introduce students to the term hesped and then hand each one a blank sheet of paper. Ask them to think about what they would like to be remembered for some day. They may include any of their aspirations in life or things that they would like to achieve. Tell them you would like them to write their own hesped including all of these things.

Give students the opportunity to share what they have written. You may ask students the following questions:

- ? Does anybody want to be remembered for something similar to somebody else?
- ? Who thought of something unique?
- ? Why is being remembered for these things so important to us?

Closure:

(10-20 minutes)

Journal Prompt: Try to create your own ritual in order to fulfill the mitzvah of Yizkor. Your ritual could be a poem, a prayer, a service, an action, or anything else which you can think of. It could be done either individually or in a community. Your ritual could be to remember Hurricane Katrina or any other event that you find worthy of remembrance. Be sure to give participants time to share their rituals, should they choose.

Yizkor Text

“A human being is equated with a *Torah* scroll that was impaired and can no longer be used at religious services. While the ancient scroll no longer serves any useful ritual purpose, it is revered for the exalted function it once filled. Man was created in the image of God and, although the pulse of life is no more, the human form must be respected for having once embodied the spirit of God, and for the character of the personality it housed.”

Maurice Lamm,
The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning, p. 3

Questions for Students

Irwin Lachoff

Circumstances like Hurricane Katrina can be traumatic in that they disrupt the normalcy in victim's lives. Do you think that there is ever a point, during such traumatic disasters, that following Jewish rituals should be excused?

Do you think that disasters can make religious traditions any more or less meaningful? Why or why not?

Other thoughts:

Joel Brown

Judaism has a proscribed method for dealing with the death of human beings. Do you think that any of it should apply to animals? Why or why not?

How is losing a pet similar to losing a human member of the family? How is it different?

Other thoughts:

Yizkor – Appendix B

Jackie Gothard

What do you think of the whole idea of rescuing *Torah* scrolls? What do you think would be important to keep in mind during such an operation?

What do you think of the idea of burying *Torah* scrolls? Do you think that this is the best thing to do with them? Why or why not?

Other thoughts:

Ann Levy

Knowing that Ann Levy is a Holocaust survivor, do you think that she might have experienced any of the same feelings that she had back in Europe upon returning home to New Orleans and seeing the state of her house? Put yourself in Levy's place – how do you think it would feel to return home and find that you have lost almost everything?

Home is considered the central place for Jewish expression. Levy says that Europe is not her home because she has bad memories from there. New Orleans, she said, is good memories. New Orleans is home. However, a lot of Jews chose not to return to New Orleans after the storm. At what point, do you think, that loss might change one's concept of home? How central is this concept to your identity?

Other thoughts:

Yizkor – Appendix B

Steven Richer

Richer mentions the entire community standing up for the “Prayer for the Sick.” Do you think that people involved in disasters such as Hurricane Katrina can find any more or less meaning in prayer and community? Why or why not?

The final stage of the mourning process is acceptance. Do you think that, even if they hadn’t physically lost anybody during the storm, the people Richer spoke about were demonstrating this stage? How?

Other thoughts:

Overall Questions

What do these clips teach us about *yizkor*?

How are these stories Jewish?

Why is it important for us to hear these stories?

Clip Introductions

Katrina Introduction

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast. 80% of New Orleans was flooded after many of its levees broke. In many ways, Jews did not suffer the worst of the flood. Most, though not all, were able to evacuate the city prior to the storm. Most had the resources to take care of their families in the crisis. But many New Orleans Jews lost their homes and possessions, and had to rebuild their lives. Jews around the South and the entire country responded to help those in need.

The retelling of these victim's stories is a powerful yet important component of remembering this historic event. By listening to Katrina's Jewish Voices, we can better understand the meaning of *yizkor*.

Clip #1 – Irwin Lachoff:

Irwin Lachoff lost his father in the storm, and he and his wife lost both of their homes. He married late in life and he and his wife were the last marriage to ever take place in Beth Israel in Lakeview, July 2005. At the time of the interview, they were still living in a rental in Uptown New Orleans. They eventually bought a home in Metairie. Lachoff is an archivist and Jewish historian specializing in the Orthodox community of New Orleans. He works at a historically black college, Xavier University. In the following interview clip, Lachoff speaks about tracking down his father's body and the struggle of conducting a proper Jewish funeral in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

1) Circumstances like Hurricane Katrina can be traumatic in that they disrupt the normalcy in victim's lives. Do you think that there is ever a point, during such traumatic disasters, that following Jewish rituals should be excused?

2) Do you think that disasters can make religious traditions any more or less meaningful? Why or why not?

Clip #2 – Joel Brown:

Joel Brown is an Orthodox Jew raised in Metairie who is also the owner of the Kosher Cajun, the only kosher restaurant and grocery in the New Orleans area. Even though Brown lives and works in Metairie, Katrina had a profound affect on his business, on his home and on his family. Here, Brown tells the story of his family's evacuation with their dog on Sunday afternoon.

1) Judaism has a proscribed method for dealing with the death of human beings. Do you think that any of it should apply to animals? Why or why not?

Yizkor – Appendix C

2) How is losing a pet similar to losing a human member of the family? How is it different?

Clip #3 – Jackie Gothard:

Jackie Gothard is a native New Orleanian. At the time of the interview, she was serving as the first female president of her Orthodox congregation, Beth Israel, in its 104-year history. Beth Israel was destroyed in Hurricane Katrina, its membership was scattered and its rabbi chose not to return. The *Torah* scrolls, seven, in total, had to be buried. Gothard commented “Most people do not see one *Torah* scroll buried in their lifetime, and we buried seven at once.” Gothard’s clip opens with her speaking about Beth Israel’s former secretary, Becky.

1) What do you think of the whole idea of rescuing Torah scrolls? What do you think would be important to keep in mind during such an operation?

2) What do you think of the idea of burying Torah scrolls? Do you think that this is the best thing to do with them? Why or why not?

Clip #4 – Ann Levy:

Ann Levy is a quiet, and soft-spoken woman, and a Holocaust survivor. The interview was taken in her home, which was flooded and still in the middle of being put back together. She and her husband live in the Broadmoor area, an area that had significant flooding. She and her husband were in the antique business for many years, so they had collected quite a few things that were now ruined.

1) Knowing that Ann Levy is a Holocaust survivor, do you think that she might have experienced any of the same feelings that she had back in Europe upon returning home to New Orleans and seeing the state of her house? Put yourself in Levy’s place – how do you think it would feel to return home and find that you have lost almost everything?

2) Home is considered the central place for Jewish expression. Levy says that Europe is not her home because she has bad memories from there. New Orleans, she said, is good memories. New Orleans is home. However, a lot of Jews chose not to return to New Orleans after the storm. At what point, do you think, that loss might change one’s concept of home? How central is this concept to your identity?

Clip #5 – Steven Richer:

Steven Richer is the executive director of the Mississippi Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau. He has been a principle player in the Casino driven recovery, and

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came to Mississippi from Atlantic City in 1996. At the time of the interview, he was President of the Congregation Beth Israel in Biloxi on the Gulf Coast.

1) Richer mentions the entire community standing up for the “Prayer for the Sick.” Do you think that people involved in disasters such as Hurricane Katrina can find any more or less meaning in prayer and community? Why or why not?

2) The final stage of the mourning process is acceptance. Do you think that, even if they hadn’t physically lost anybody during the storm, the people Richer spoke about were demonstrating this stage? How?

Overall Questions:

1) What do these clips teach us about yizkor?

2) How are these stories Jewish?

3) Why is it important for us to hear these stories?

Annotated Bibliography

Andreoni, James. "Impure Altruism and Donations to Public Goods: A Theory of Warm-Glow Giving." *The Economic Journal*, volume 100, p. 464-477. JSTOR. Great Britain, June 1990.

Andreoni proves through scientific and mathematical study, the validity of the warm-glow theory of giving. In his, he article examines pure versus impure altruism. He finds that giving is actually driven by many possible motivators such as social pressure, guilt, sympathy, or a desire for a 'warm-glow' feeling. Significant findings include Andreoni's discovery that when people give, they prefer to give directly. This is the option that he correlates with the most resulting warm-glow. He also finds that altruism tends to decrease as income increases for all but the highest class, a finding that he suggests could come with potential tax implications.

Leffert, Nancy and Rabbi Hayim Herring. "Shema: Listening to Jewish Youth." Search Institute. Minneapolis, MN, 1998.

In this publication, the Adolescent Task Force of the Minneapolis Jewish Federation studied a sample of over 400 Jewish adolescents in order to find out their interests regarding their Jewish education. The findings of the study emphasize the importance of socializing, a sense of belonging, ownership, and relevance. The results also clearly indicated that participation in volunteer work positively impacted the adolescents' Jewish identity, their desire to belong to the Jewish community, and their feelings that Jewish learning is an important part of their life. In addition, one recommendation that the survey made for educators is to offer a variety of learning environments for adolescents, such as classroom learning as well as service learning. The research also highlighted the positive effects of short retreats, minicamps, and other residential programs on adolescents' Jewish identity.

Scales, Peter C. and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain. "Community Service and Service-Learning in U.S. Public Schools." Search Institute and National Youth Leadership Council. Minneapolis, MN, 2004.

The Search Institute commissioned a study of 1,799 public elementary, middle, and high school principals in the U.S. on their perspectives of the impact of service learning on youth in public schools. From the principals' perspectives, the goals of service learning involve "helping students become more active in the community, encouraging

altruism, and increasing student knowledge of the community.” The actual research indicates that there is a positive impact of community service and service learning on the students, their schools, as well as their communities and that involvement in service learning fosters healthy development in students of all ages.

Smith, Christian and Patricia Snell. Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults. Oxford University Press, Inc. New York, NY, 2009.

The authors of this book conducted in-depth research of a sample of 18-24 year olds across the U.S. They were looking to find out the importance of religion to them today as well as how this has changed with transitioning definition of what it means to be an emerging adult. One consistent finding in their work was that emerging adults are, overall, less religious than older adults although the extent to which this is true might actually be less dramatic than what is generally thought to be the case. Their research has countless significant findings for religious youth workers in the field today.

Vedantam, Shankar. "If It Feels Good to Be Good, It Might Be Only Natural." The Washington Post, May 28, 2007.

This article describes research conducted by neuroscientists at the National Institutes of Health. The scientists scanned subjects' brains as they were instructed to think about scenarios involving donating money to charity or keeping it for themselves. The results showed that when the interests of others were placed before their own, the part of the brain which is usually activated by food or sex was lit up in the subjects' brains. This research indicates that altruism is hard-wired in the brain and produces pleasurable effects in humans.

