

Text Immersion: Mishneh Torah and Experiential Education

Chase Foster,
Candidate for Rabbinic Ordination

*Text Immersion Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for Rabbinic Ordination*

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion,
Graduate Rabbinical Program,
New York, New York

January 30, 2017

Advisor: Dr. Alyssa Gray

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Chapters Studied.....	4
Rambam’s Understanding of Home.....	5
Rambam’s Metaphors for <i>K’vod HaRav</i>.....	24
Learning Module: <i>Bedikat Mezuzah</i>: A Congregational <i>Mezuzah</i> Audit for 6th Graders Using Mishneh Torah.....	35
Introduction.....	36
Facilitator Knowledge and Learning Materials.....	38
The Experience of the Students.....	40
Explanation of Terms/Rationale.....	41
Desired Results.....	46
Assessment and Evidence.....	47
Learning Module Outline.....	48
Lesson 1 – Mezuzah: What and Why?.....	52
Appendices.....	56
Bibliography.....	59

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I need to thank Dr. Alyssa Gray for her patience in helping me realize my own abilities, her encyclopedic knowledge that challenged me, and her wit that made working with her and learning from her a joy.

I need to thank my wife, partner, and best friend- Sarah. I began this project a year ago, and you encouraged me at every step. You read every word (sometimes many times). You put up with my odd work schedule and forgave me when I “fell into a rabbit hole” that cost us precious time together. Also, we got married in the middle of this project. That is what I call commitment to the cause and sacrifice! Now, on to the next journey.

Thank you to Dr. Lisa Grant who pushed me to deepen my curriculum and develop its purpose. It was your class that inspired me from the module’s earliest inklings, and gave me the space to explore my own thoughts and beliefs. My rabbinate will be richer because of your teaching.

Thank you to Rachel Kasten for all of the editing help when you were not guffawing at the news, disputing #alternativefacts, and #smashingthepatriarchy.

Thanks Danny Moss for your insightful help with editing the paper of *k’vod harav*. Your thoughts and feedback were invaluable.

Finally, I need to thank my classmates. The HUC-JIR NY Class of 2017 uplifts my spirit, gives me reason to think and laugh daily, and leaves me in awe of your individual abilities. I know you will change the world for the better, no matter where you go or what you do, because you have changed my life for the better.

Introduction

My hope with this text immersion was to combine many of my passions: text study, Jewish ritual (practice and objects), youth work, and experiential education. I believe it to be integral to the future of the Reform Movement to ensure that we find ways to teach the Jewish texts upon which our rituals (both ritual objects and ritual moments) are based with a pedagogically sound method. I believe that this encourages understanding, innovation, and a means for the student to incorporate or interpret that text and ritual into their lives.

My goal with this project was to learn what Maimonides has to say about study and teaching (Hilchot Talmud Torah) as well as his codification of various *halachot* dealing with ritual objects, ritual moments, and leadership. Then, based on this learning, I developed three projects/papers that will help me to incorporate these texts and their associated rituals into the lives of young Jews throughout my rabbinate.

My text immersions consists of two papers and a learning module. The first paper is an exploration of the Jewish concept of “home” using Rambam’s *halachot* surrounding *mezuzah*. The second paper develops Rambam’s metaphors for the student-teacher relationship as different understandings of *k’vod harav*, honoring the teacher. Finally, I have used my learning from this text immersion, in addition to learning in HUC’s *Ideologies of Education*, and *Curriculum Development* courses, to create a learning module/curriculum that combines my passions with this work. The curriculum is a project-based learning module for sixth graders, who will be tasked with “auditing” the congregation’s *mezuzot* as they learn about their importance and meaning to the community and themselves.

Chapters Studied

Talmud Torah – Chapters 1-7	(7)
Tzitzit – Chapters 1-3	(3)
Tefillin, Mezuzah, and Sefer Torah – Chapters 1, 4-5	(3)
Megilah v' Chanukah – Chapters 1-4	(4)
Issurei Bi'ah – Chapters 13 & 14	(2)
Shabbat – Chapters 29-30	(2)
Shofar – Chapters 2-3; 6; 8	(4)
Sanhedrin - Chapters 4, 21-25,	(6)
<hr/>	
31 Chapters Total	

Rambam's Understanding of Home

“Home is where the heart is” is a phrase that I have heard endlessly. Most notably, this was the slogan for Home Hospital, located in West Lafayette, IN, the main hospital near Purdue University, my college campus. Every commercial, billboard, and ad surrounded us with this oft-used phrase, searing this slogan into my memory.

While the phrase, placing home metaphorically in our hearts, is nice (and for many at Purdue University, clichéd), defining what constitutes a home is an important and worthwhile exercise. For many, divorces and other complications in family structure, constant moving due to a parent’s profession, or summer camps and other beloved locales complicate the definition of home in simple conversations. The question, “where is home for you?” can often be followed by the response: “that is complicated,” followed by an explanation of where a person was born, where they grew up, where they live now, and any number of other important places on their journey. Societally and legally, the definition of home is essential for social justice conversations surrounding who is homeless and what our society should do to help those in need. For Judaism, the definition of home is important for many halachic reasons, for example: *reshut hayachid* (the private domain) versus *reshut harabim* (the public domain), two terms that are used throughout halachic literature. “Home” is an important focal point for Jewish ritual, for Jewish law, for communities, and for individuals.

In this paper, I will try to reconstruct the definition of “home” based on Maimonides’s (Rambam’s) Mishneh Torah. The Mishneh Torah is Rambam’s 12th century attempt to summarize the entirety of Jewish law. For Maimonides, the definition of home can be found in the *halachot* of Hilchot Tefillin, Mezuzah, and Sefer Torah, *perek* 6, *halacha* 1 (6:1), through the vehicle of *mezuzah*, the ritual object through which

Jews are commanded to “write them upon the doorposts of your house and upon your gates.”¹ This definition begins:

עֲשֶׂהָ תְּנַאֵין יֵשׁ בְּבֵית ,
וְאַחֵר כִּף יִתְחַיֵּב הַדֶּר בוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת לוֹ מְזוּזָה,
וְאִם חָסֵר תְּנַאֵי אֶחָד מֵהֶן, פְּטוּר מִן הַמְּזוּזָה .

There are ten requirements [to make a] house,
and it is these that obligate the one who dwells in [the house] to affix a mezuzah.
And if one of these requirements is lacking, there is no obligation for a mezuzah.

Using this *halacha*, including the ten requirements, and the following *halachot* from the same *perek*, I will elucidate the definition of a home, according to the *halacha* of Maimonides.

The ten conditions are:

וְשִׁהְיָהּ בּוֹ אַרְבַּע אַמּוֹת עַל אַרְבַּע אַמּוֹת אוֹ יִתֵּר	1	[A house] will be four <i>amot</i> by four <i>amot</i> or more
וְשִׁהְיָהּ לוֹ שְׁנֵי מְזוּזוֹת	2	And it will have two <i>mezuzot</i> (doorposts)
וְיִהְיֶה לוֹ מִשְׁקוּף	3	And it will have a lintel
וְתִהְיֶה לוֹ סִקְרָה	4	And it will have a [sturdy] roof
וְיִהְיוּ לוֹ דְּלָתוֹת	5	And it will have doors
וְיִהְיֶה גֹבֵה הַשַּׁעַר עֲשָׂרָה טַפְחִים אוֹ יִתֵּר	6	And it will have an entrance greater than ten handbreadths
וְיִהְיֶה בֵּית חָל	7	And it will be a not-consecrated house
וְיִהְיֶה עָשׂוּי לְדִירַת אָדָם	8	And it will be made for the dwelling of a human
וְעָשׂוּי לְדִירַת כְּבוֹד	9	And made as a respectful dwelling
וְעָשׂוּי לְדִירַת קֶבֶעַ	10	And made as a fixed dwelling

The text begins with stating the number of items in the list, and then continues by enumerating each requirement. Using this structure, Rambam helps the reader access the Torah more succinctly and make the text more memorable by creating ten clear, definable conditions.

¹ Deuteronomy 6:9

How did Rambam arrive at a list of ten items? Biblically, thoughts turn immediately to the Ten Commandments. However, neither instance of these commandments, in Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5, uses the same format as Rambam. The seven days of creation could be considered a list, but again, that is a form unlike the Rambam's structure. The earliest appearances of the form that Rambam uses are in the Mishnah, notably Avot 5. There, in the first fifteen *halachot*, we find a series of series. Some of these *halachot* are completely outlined, and are therefore identical to Rambam's structure, while others include only the purpose of the list. Some of these *halachot* also take a completely different structure, but are still lists, nonetheless, such as Avot 5:9, which has lists inside of lists that describe the situations that bring about "destructive animals." It is also possible, and potentially most likely, that Rambam is simply following an established literary model that predates his work and likely extends beyond rabbinic literature. Here are some examples from Avot 5:

- Avot 5:1 mentions the עֲשָׂרָה מְאֻמְרוֹת, the ten utterances that created the world.
- Avot 5:2 characterizes the עֲשָׂרָה דּוֹרוֹת, the ten generations (between Adam and Noah) and the ten generations (between Noah and Abraham).
- Avot 5:3 mentions the עֲשָׂרָה נִסְיוֹנוֹת, the ten tests (of Abraham).
- Avot 5:4 includes the עֲשָׂרָה נִסִּים, the ten miracles (in Egypt), וְעֲשָׂרָה עַל הַיָּם, ten [more miracles] at the sea, עֲשָׂר מַכּוֹת, the ten plagues (upon the Egyptians), and עֲשָׂרָה נִסְיוֹנוֹת, the ten plagues (that the people brought against God in the wilderness).

Additionally, the lists are not always based upon "ten." *Halachot* 10-15 begin with the

same structure: ...אָרבע מידות פֿ., meaning there are four measures of...

- Avot 5:5 is the *halacha* that is identical to Rambam's structure. It begins with a statement that names the list: לעשרה נסים נעשו לאבותינו בבית המקדש, there are ten miracles that happened to our ancestors in The Temple. Then, there is a succinct listing of the ten miracles without citing the location of any of the miracles in the Biblical text.

This form continues into the Talmud. There we find additional examples of עשרה תנאים, ten conditions:

- In Bava Kamma 80b-81a, we learn of Joshua's ten conditions for the people as they entered the land of Israel.
- In 82a, there is a reference to the ten conditions from 80b-81a, followed by Ezra's עשרה תקנות, ten enactments.
- Finally, later in 82b, the *baraita* teaches of עשרה דברים, the ten sayings that are said of Jerusalem.

Rambam uses this structure in the Mishneh Torah, although not with the same frequency. In this same *hilchah*, *halacha* 1:3, Rambam lists the עשרה דברים, the ten pronouncements for *tefillin*. Finally, Rambam enumerates the עשרה דברים, the ten pronouncements that a Torah scholar needs in order to live in a city in Deah 4:23. Rambam's list of ten conditions for a home clearly makes use of an established rabbinic literary technique.

Condition #1 - [A house] will be four *amot* by four *amot* or more

Maimonides explains this condition further in *halacha* 6:2, stating that the

requirement refers to the size of the structure and not its shape. Essentially, any building, regardless of shape, that is larger than 16 square *amot* (cubits) will fulfill this condition.

An *amah* is the distance between one's elbow and the tip of their middle finger. The Koren Talmud explains that an *amah* is usually 48 cm (about 18.9 inches), although some say it is as large as 57.6cm (about 22.68 inches).²

The important question is: why 16 *amot* square? What makes a four by four space more “livable” than a three by three, when they both are small spaces by today's standards? I believe that Rambam is drawing this number directly from Deuteronomy 3:11. In this verse, we read of the sarcophagus of King Og of Bashan. He is described in this verse as נִשְׂאָר מִיָּתֶר הַרְפָּאִים, the last of the Rephaim, who for some were giants, it makes sense that a giant's tomb would be nine cubits long and four cubits wide, nearly 13.5 feet by six feet. The verse ends with the phrase בְּאֶמַת־אִישׁ, literally “according to a man's cubit.” This phrase's meaning is debated greatly by the commentators. Rashi and Onkelos say that it refers to Og himself, while Rashbam, Ramban, and Ibn Ezra say that it refers to a regular man. Either way, this phrase can be used as the justification of four *amot*.

Another potential basis for four *amot* continues to Sukkah 7b and the preceding five *dapim* of discussion. Sukkah 7b does the same thing as this condition- it makes a statement, that a *sukkah* must be at least four *amot* by four *amot*, without offering a concrete reason. In Rashi's commentary on Genesis 28:13, he describes “the land upon which (Jacob) rested” during his famous ladder dream, explaining that “four cubits is the

² Steinsaltz, Adin, Hersch, Tzvi, Weinreb, Shalom, Zvi, Berger, and Schreier, Joshua. *Koren Talmud Bavli, Vol. 10: Tractate Sukkah*. (Jerusalem: Shefa Foundation, 2012), pg. 7.

place (covered) by a man.” It is unclear if Rambam had access to Rashi’s writing.

Four *amot* most likely comes from Deuteronomy 3:11. However, four *amot* is a convenient number that is included in varying instructions for the *Mishkan*,³ The Temple,⁴ and Solomon’s Palace.⁵ Any of these places could have served as Rambam’s source text. I did not find any references that specifically used four cubits by four cubits. It is simply what Rambam and Jewish tradition consider spacious enough. Since four-by-four has been established, this measurement has been read back into previous texts.

Condition #2 - [A house] will have two *mezuzot* (doorposts)

To set up this condition, Maimonides explicates two separate structures. First, he writes about an *exedra*, which he defines as a structure with three walls and a roof. Secondly, he writes of “a roof without walls which stands on pillars.” In both instances, Rambam does not require a *mezuzah*. In doing so, Rambam eliminates a large segment of Talmudic discourse from Menachot 33b and Bava Batra 11b that discusses different kinds of *exedra*, making it easier for him to establish what he believes to be the one and truest *halacha*. For instance, Menachot 33b explains a *baraita* in which “a lodge, an *exedra*, and a balcony” require a *mezuzah*, and Bava Batra 11b discusses in more detail the differences between a “school *exedra*” and a “Roman *exedra*.” Rambam refers to an *exedra* as a singular entity.

Rambam does not mention directly nor does he infer “two doorposts” to stem from Deuteronomy 6:9, the source text for *mezuzah*. An extensive Talmudic discussion in

³ Exodus 26:2, 26:8, 36:9, 36:15

⁴ Ezekiel 41:5, 43:14-15

⁵ I Kings 7

Menachot 34a bases the concept of two doorposts upon the plural-nature of the word *מְזוּזוֹת*, *mezuzot*, in the biblical commandment. This is a perfect example of Rambam's style throughout the Mishneh Torah, in which he regularly omits his sources in his effort to make the *halacha* more accessible to reader.

In Rambam's own explanation, a *mezuzah* (a doorpost and not the ritual object) is a side of an entryway that is unrelated to structural integrity. By contrasting the concept of "two doorposts" with the exemption for an *exedra*, Maimonides helps to narrow down the idea of a dwelling. For Rambam, the condition necessitates four walls to better enclose the space. This explanation comes from *halacha* 6:7, and Rambam better elaborates on the concept of a dwelling in later *halachot*, which I will discuss in conditions #8, #9, and #10.

Additionally, from a more practical perspective, if as one enters a room they are to "encounter" God's presence because of the *mezuzah*,⁶ having an entrance that is too large would make it harder to encounter God's presence. For example, if you enter a structure that met all of the conditions for a *mezuzah* and its doorway was 20 feet wide, would you notice the *mezuzah* if you entered the structure near the doorpost furthest from the *mezuzah*? Rambam, as he eloquently states in *halacha* 13, wants people to embrace God and God's commandments. It is logical for Rambam to enact a *halacha* that makes it easier for others to encounter God.

Condition #3 - [A house] will have a lintel

The condition of needing a lintel (*מְשַׁקֵּץ*), "a horizontal architectural member

⁶ Based on MT Talmud Torah 6:13

spanning and usually carrying the load above an opening,”⁷ is peculiar. Rambam’s explanation in *halacha* 6:4 (the only other time that he mentions the word מִשְׁקוֹף in his discussion of *mezuzot*) gives no real reasoning for this condition. This term is only used three times in Torah, zero times in the Babylonian Talmud, a handful of times in the Palestinian Talmud, and one other time in Mishneh Torah.

It is possible that Rambam takes this condition from the story of Exodus mentioned in the Torah and Palestinian Talmud. This is the story of the people placing blood upon their two doorposts and lintels to ward off the Angel of Death. Specifically, in Yerushalmi Pesachim 65b, we find:

ר' חונה בשם ר' ירמיה: מכיון שכתיב בה כפרה כקדשים כמי שיש מהם למזבח ותני כן שלשה מזבחות היו לאבותינו במצרים משקוף ושתי מזוזות. אית תניי תני ארבעה סף ומשקוף ושתי מזוזות אית תניי תני סף כלי אית תניי תני סף אסקופה.

R. Huna in the name of R. Jeremiah: Because it is written here: “atonement is as holy as the waters that are for the altar,” we are taught that there were indeed three altars for our ancestors in Egypt: the lintel and the two doorposts. Another teaching teaches that there were four [altars]: the *saf*, the lintel and the doorposts. Some say the *saf* was an instrument and others say that it was the threshold.

This teaching makes the doorposts and lintel altars for the paschal lamb. Based upon this interpretation, it could be a strong basis for Rambam’s belief that both doorposts, connected by the lintel, and the ritual object of the *mezuzah*, are a place to encounter God.

Condition #4- [A house] will have a [sturdy] roof

Much like Conditions #1 and #3, needing a roof is a condition that does not appear to be based upon any particular text. The word, תַּקְרָה, used here, is not a typical word for “roof.” *Takrah* does not appear in Tanakh, but it appears six times in Mishnah,

⁷ Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary

twenty-nine times in the Talmud Bavli, and thirteen times on nine *dapim* of Talmud Yerushalmi. For comparison, the most common word for roof, גג, appears thirty times in Tanakh alone.

Ovadiyah Bartenura's 15th-century commentary on the Mishnah for Sukkah 1:7, describes *takrah* as: גג העשוי מקורות או נסרים, a “roof made of beams or planks.” In the same commentary on Middot 4:6, Bartenura describes a *takrah* as: שנותנין על הנסרים, “the planks that are put up as beams that are a cubit wide.” While these two sources agree that a תקרה is a beam that is a part of the roof, either as the roof or supporting the roof, they were written almost 500 years after the Mishneh Torah.

Much of the Talmudic conversation surrounding roofs involves the varying issues if one's roof were to collapse. A roof shields from the weather and can add to the structural integrity of the building. Therefore, a roof fits the greater themes of security and shelter, even if it does not have a specific basis in Jewish text.

Condition #5 - [A house] will have doors

Rambam uses *halacha* 6:5 to explain that this condition is not related to the purpose of a door and instead focuses on the order of operations that one completes. This breaks with a piece of Rambam's internal structure, as many of his *halachot* typically offer a purpose for each condition. Because of the lack of additional information in Rambam's *halachot*, it appears that he had no further explanation to add and simply stated the *halacha* according to the Talmud.

Using Menachot 33a, Rambam declares, “The doors should be hung, and then [one should] affix the *mezuzah*.” This is based off a simple example given in Menachot

33a: “The exilarch built a house and said to R. Nachman: ‘Affix a *mezuzah* for me.’ R. Nachman said to him: ‘attach the doors first.’” There is no surrounding discussion or counter arguments. Because of this story, Rambam determines that a door is needed to hang a *mezuzah*.

However, for me, the placing of a door is more than just a formality. Placing a door on a structure allows for the creation of privacy and security. The physical barrier separates you from an unwanted visitor, makes it harder for a criminal to enter, insulates from the weather, and keeps “Toms” from peeping. Mentally, the layer of security and privacy that one receives because of a door provides fewer restless nights and the ability to assume that your property is still there when you arrive home after time away. A door is invaluable.

Halachically, a door provides for a clear delineation between *reshut harabim* and *reshut hayachid*, the public and private domains. This makes a difference on Shabbat and *chagim*, in adjudicating damages, and many other instances. The Talmudic discourse of Yoma 11a, which I will discuss further in conditions #8 and #9, speaks of the definition of a dwelling as a place a woman could bathe. A door makes this easier as a person’s nakedness can be shielded from the public.

Condition #6 - And it will have an entrance greater than ten handbreadths

Rambam’s reasoning behind this condition is unusual. In *halacha* 6:4, he states: “if [the doorposts] are not ten handbreadths it does not require [a *mezuzah*] because it does not have a lintel.” This is not a part of the Talmudic discourse, and there is no specific reason given to justify this condition.

In Talmudic discourse, the measure of the distance “ten handbreadths” is discussed extensively. One example, in Tractate Sukkah, states that a kosher *sukkah* must be at least ten handbreadths, but no more than twenty handbreadths. Ten handbreadths is high enough to be able to cover the Ark of the Covenant, as stated in Sukkah 5a. This explains Exodus 25:22, where God says: “I will be met by you there, and I will speak with you *from above* the ark’s cover...” A *sukkah*, a temporary dwelling that reminds us of our time in the wilderness, must be able to fit the Ark of the Covenant and leave a little room for God too. This is only one of the many instances of ten handbreadths affecting the laws of *sukkah*.

Rambam does not discuss the width of the door at all. Extensive discussion in Eruvin 11b, and elsewhere, explicitly states that a door must be at least four handbreadths wide for it to be “proper.” The entire opening of the door must be of a certain size for *mezuzah* and other purposes. In some instances, the Rabbis go further and state that if an opening could be made larger, it would still receive a *mezuzah*, even if it were not four by ten handbreadths. In another case, they discuss the differences of allowable door sizes between a home and a court.

Rambam’s omission of this discussion shows, in my opinion, his desire to transcend the discussion of the Talmud. For Maimonides’ *halacha*, a door must meet a minimum standard of usefulness. Ten handbreadths, not even four feet tall, is a low standard. The thought of someone having to bend over to get through a door that short seems to be an inordinate burden, but it sets a standard that requires almost any opening used by a human to receive a *mezuzah*.

Condition #7 - And it will be a not-consecrated house

This condition frames a different conversation about a home than the previous six conditions. The first six conditions speak of physical features that a structure needs in order to be considered a home, whereas conditions #7 - #10 set forth a series of philosophical values. These values, although explained in detail by Rambam, are at times subjective and could produce a variety of modern interpretations.

The first of these conditions focuses on *בַּיִת*, *bayit*, while the final three discuss *דִּירָה*, *dirah*. A sentence in *halacha* 6:6 helps to clarify this nomenclature. In the Hebrew, Rambam writes of a *בַּיִת דִּירָה*. This is difficult because both a *dirah* and a *bayit* are two quasi-synonyms for a dwelling or home. However, *bayit* is a much more general term than *dirah*. A useful example is the term, *מִיץ תְּפוזָהּ*, apple juice. Apple juice is a type of juice and not a type of apple. Therefore, when thinking about *בַּיִת דִּירָה*, a *dirah* is a type of *bayit*. *Dirah* is the more specific term for a place that one dwells or a person's residence. *בַּיִת דִּירָה* is then best thought of as “the place where one dwells.”

Additionally, while *bayit* can be translated as “home,” a more exact translation when it is paired in the *smichut* form would be “a central location.” A *בַּיִת קָפָה* is not just a “coffee shop,” but also a location to “do” things coffee-related, i.e. drink, purchase, etc. Using this understanding, *בַּיִת הָל* implies the place that is the center for unconsecrated, day-to-day, mundane things, and *בַּיִת הַמִּקְדָּשׁ* implies the place that is the center of consecrated things, The Temple in Jerusalem. I have purposefully translated *mikdash* as “consecrated” and not “holy” because the word “unholy” has a connotation that diverges completely from Rambam's use of the word. In today's parlance, the thought of someone's home being “unholy” is considered extremely insulting. I believe that

Rambam's use of this term, translated as "consecrated," refers to a place set aside by a Temple priest or communal leader for a communal ritual purpose.

The Talmudic discussion in Yoma 10b-12a contains a robust and complex conversation surrounding *mezuzah*. Most notably is the statement on *daf* 11b: מה בית נִשְׁהוּא, חול, אף כל שֶׁהוּא חול יֵצֵאוּ אֵלָיו שֶׁהֵן קוֹדֶשׁ, "just as a house is unconsecrated [and obligated to have a *mezuzah*], so too all that are unconsecrated [are obligated to have a *mezuzah*], except for those that are holy." Because this statement is preceded by the Talmudic rhetorical device "יָכוֹל שֶׁאֲנִי מֵרַבָּה אֵף," meaning, "I might have thought that...", this statement shows there is a great pushback from the Tannaim (rabbis of the 1st and 2nd centuries C.E.) against Rav Yehuda. Rav Yehuda, in the opinion of the Tannaim and, therefore, Rambam, has a list of exemptions from *mezuzah* that is much greater than those of these unnamed Sages. Indeed, the *baraita* teaches that this statement stands as a תְּיִוְבָתָא, a "complete refutation" of Rav Yehuda.

Rambam's own explanation of Condition #7 can be found in *halacha* 6:6. There, he discusses which spaces at The Temple need a *mezuzah* and situations when a synagogue also needs a *mezuzah*. His explanation is in line with the view of Rav Kahana, as opposed to the view of Rav Yehuda, and he succinctly turns these *dapim* of Talmud into a few sentences for *halacha* 6:6, that is then summarized by the two simple words of this condition. Through the second sentence of Rambam's explanation of this condition, in which he states: "A synagogue in a village in which guests reside is obligated in *mezuzah*. Also, a synagogue in a large city, if it has a place of dwelling, is obligated," we learn that Rambam's understanding of a home is dependent upon it being a place where someone lives.

Condition #8 – [A House] will be made for the dwelling of a human

This condition begins the conversation surrounding the *dirah*, the actual place of dwelling. *Halacha* 6:7 grounds this concept of a דִּירַת אָדָם by giving it the functional purpose of a place for human dwelling. Rambam uses apophatic examples before making his point. The place where one stores straw, where one stores cattle, where one stores wood, nor the place where one stores treasures receives a *mezuzah*. Only when the place “stores” humans or human items does it need a *mezuzah*.

The word יוֹשֵׁבֹת is used as the verb to describe the function of the *dirat adam*. The Hebrew word *yoshevet* implies a rootedness to the location. Literally, this condition states that a *dirat adam* is for someone who “sits” in a location, though יוֹשֵׁבֹת is used biblically to mean that someone resided or lived in the area.

Maimonides’ explanation for this condition is a perspective that differs from the Talmudic discourse of Yoma 11a. The classifications of structures that need *mezuzot* and that are exempt from *mezuzot* are identical in the Mishneh Torah and the Talmud, but Rambam’s reasoning differs greatly. Elaborating on the previous discussion of Yoma 11a and 11b in Condition #5, the Talmudic discourse is centered on determining the differences between the structures that get a *mezuzah* and those that do not. Abaye and Rav Yehudah both rely upon different interpretations of the word “use” to show that a person is not obligated in affixing a *mezuzah* upon a building in which women bathe. Rav Kahana, whose opinion Rambam most closely follows, is the first rabbi to point out that there is a difference between a place that oxen “use” and that women “use.” This leads into a lengthy discussion about bathhouses and the uncleanness that exists therein.

Rambam selectively utilizes this Talmudic discussion and cites Deuteronomy 6:9's use of the Hebrew word בֵּיתָךְ, meaning "your home." He affirms that a place used by humans, even if it is "a barn that a woman uses and gets dressed in,"⁸ is obligated to affix a *mezuzah*.

Condition #9 – [A house] will be made as a respectable dwelling

Condition #9 is linked to the same discussion as Condition #8. They both mirror the language of the Talmudic discourse of Yoma 11a and 11b, and they both are explained by Rambam in ways that completely ignore the Talmudic discussion. The difference is that a דִּירַת כְּבוֹד, a respectable dwelling, has a second explanation. This second explanation is signified by "בְּאַמַּת אֶמְרוּ," a Talmudic phrase that points to a majority opinion upon which all agree and, in more traditional interpretations, attributes a phrase directly to Moses at Sinai.⁹ This second explanation simply points to the "filth therein" of a toilet, bathhouse, *mikveh*, and tannery. Rather than stating that this is because of women, this second reasoning attributes the filth to the smells that come from these places.

A respectable dwelling is, therefore, a place that does not literally offend the senses. Thinking to modern society and living in New York City, one's scent is the easiest sense to offend. An early lesson learned when you move to New York is to never ride in an empty subway car, because it is assumed that that car is empty for a reason. People will shove themselves into subway cars like sardines, train themselves to stare off

⁸ Bavli Yoma 11a and 11b

⁹ Steinsaltz, Adin, Tzvi Hersh. Weinreb, Shalom Zvi. Berger, and Joshua Schreier. *Koren Talmud Bavli Noe, Vol. 9: Tractate Yoma*. (Jerusalem: Shefa Foundation, 2012), pg. 47.

into space without actually looking at others, and listen to proselytizing about the aliens. But, when someone gets into a subway whose stench reeks, that car will clear out at the next stop, even it means waiting for the next train. For a respectable dwelling, aesthetics matter.

Condition #10 – [A house] will be a fixed dwelling

The final condition of the definition of a home, according to Rambam, is explicated in the middle of *halacha* 6:9. There, Rambam explains three types of structures that do not qualify as meeting this condition. The first is a *sukkah* during the holiday of Sukkot. This is expected, as the Talmudic discussion at the beginning of Tractate Sukkot, referenced earlier, speaks directly to the idea that a *sukkah*, by definition, is not to be meant as a permanent dwelling. However, based on Rambam's language, if one were to live in a *sukkah* throughout the rest of the year, then a person would be obligated in affixing a *mezuzah* on their *sukkah*.

The second example, a house on a ship, is more complex. The concept of a house on a ship is used in Tosefta and Bavli Eruvin 55b, but there does not seem to be a source text that links it directly, especially regarding *mezuzah*. A ship, when it becomes unmoored is able to move at whim, even against the will of the owner. This ability to be unintentionally itinerant is unsafe and causes halachic problems pertaining to *Shabbat* and *eruvim*. Rambam, in his need to make the *halacha* comprehensive, includes this example.

The final example of a permanent dwelling is of a potter who lives in a room inside of their store. The room in which the potter lives, because it is permanent, receives a *mezuzah*. However, the outer structure, the potter's store, does not receive a *mezuzah* if

the store is not a permanent structure. This evokes the image of a *shuk* where many shopkeepers are able to close their shop and go home.

These three examples lead me to synthesize a “permanent dwelling” as a dwelling that is used long-term and that is intentionally placed.

Conclusion

The definition of a home according to Rambam is: a structure with four walls and a sturdy roof that has enough space, with a comfortably sized doorway and door that allows people to choose who enters their space, which is used by people to live their private lives for an extended period of time.

If one were to follow the *halacha* according to Rambam, when a structure is able to adequately meet these standards, it should be religiously marked with a *mezuzah*. For Rambam, placing a *mezuzah* is the ultimate act of bringing God into our lives. When we encounter a *mezuzah*, we are reminded of God’s love and God’s presence, which will motivate us to remember and perform God’s work in the world.

As I evaluate the purpose of Rambam’s definition of “home” and the theology behind his reasoning for *mezuzah*, I come to see that a “proper” home will allow you to better live a life of God’s work. If your family lives in cramped quarters, if you do not have a roof over your head, or if you are living in filth, completing *mitzvot* becomes more difficult. By setting the standard at this level, Rambam is helping to create a lifestyle that is conducive for doing God’s work. These standards make Jewish home life easier and allow more energy to be expended outside of the home.

Are Rambam’s standards still relevant today, as societal norms have changed? A

“respectable” home would look very different today than it would have 900 years ago. With data showing that humans are taller today than they were 900 years ago,¹⁰ is four cubits by four cubits still a good standard? Should the countless people who live permanently on moored houseboats around the world be obligated to affix *mezuzot*? These questions are not just halachic questions; they also highlight Judaism’s adaptive nature. This continual need and ability to adapt goes back to the original question: “What is a home?”

Undoubtedly, there are and will always be many ways to answer this question. This conversation, or sometimes even debate, can be difficult as we seek to find answers when we frame this question as a social justice issue, or when we try to answer as a means to get to know someone. For some, home is a tangible place- a room with a bed or a summer camp; for others, home is more of a feeling of comfort. For some, home is dream- wishing to be able to live in a place that meets Rambam’s ten conditions; for others, home is the realization of a dream.

¹⁰ Nikola Koepke and Joerg Baten. “The Biological Standard of Living in Europe during the Last Two Millennia.” *European Review of Economic History* 9, no. 1 (April 1, 2005): 61–95.

Rambam's Metaphors for *K'vod HaRav*

Teachers are amongst the most revered people in Jewish tradition. Judaism's greatest leader, and the first link in the chain of tradition, Moses, is commonly referred to as *Moshe Rabbeinu*, Moses our teacher. The root *lamed-mem-daled*, the word most directly meaning teach or learn, appears 86 times in the Tanakh. Mishnah Avot 1:4 includes Yosi ben Yoezer's statement: “יְהִי בֵיתְךָ בֵּית וַעַד לְחֻכְמִים, וְהָיוּ מִתְאַבְּקִים בְּעֶפְרַר רַגְלֵיהֶם, וְהָיוּ שׁוֹתֵהִים בְּצִמָּא אֶת דְּבָרֵיהֶם,” “may your house be a house of communing for sages, and may you wrestle in the dust at their feet, and may you drink their words thirstily.” The teacher is so central in Jewish life that our tradition emphasizes showing our admiration and exaltation of teachers.

K'vod harav (literally “respecting/honoring the teacher”) is the phrase that our tradition created to show the deference for teachers and the way students and communities should treat them. However, *k'vod harav* has become more than just respect, it has become a *midah* (literally “measure,” but taken colloquially as an important Jewish “value”). *Midot*, the plural for *midah*, while important in Jewish life, are often expanded beyond their original use, leaving them representing more than originally intended. For example, *tikkun olam* has become a catchall for social justice in our world, while it was originally used in the Mishnah in reference to legal debates.¹¹ While the concept of respecting a teacher has been, and will always be, an important part of Jewish education, *k'vod harav* is an expansive topic ripe with interpretations.

Rambam's Hilchot Talmud Torah, and his varied understandings of the teacher's role in Jewish life, is only minimally different from the Talmudic discourse and prior rabbinic understandings. Rambam's explication of the teacher's responsibility in the lives

¹¹ Mishnah Gittin 4:3

of individual students and in the community is extensive and replete with metaphor.

Rambam symbolizes the student-teacher relationship with four evocative metaphors: the teacher as parent, the teacher as king, the teacher as master, and even the teacher as God.

These four metaphors, when examined together, begin to show the grandiose understanding of *k'vod harav* in rabbinic literature while also grounding our understanding of its significance in relationships that are familiar to the reader. However, *k'vod harav* is not an Early Rabbinic phrase.

The word *k'vod* in the biblical text is most often used for God, although it is used in reference to an abundance of peoples (e.g. the Israelites¹²), places (e.g. Moab¹³), and individuals (e.g. Jacob¹⁴). The first use of the word¹⁵ in relation to a teacher is in Pirkei Avot 4:12. In this text, we find: וְהוּא כְבוֹד פְּלִמְיָדָה תְּכַיֵּב עָלֶיךָ כְּשֶׁלָּדָה, וְכְבוֹד הַבֶּרֶךְ כְּמוֹרָא רַבָּה, וּמוֹרָא יְהִי כְבוֹד פְּלִמְיָדָה תְּכַיֵּב עָלֶיךָ כְּשֶׁלָּדָה, וְכְבוֹד הַבֶּרֶךְ כְּמוֹרָא רַבָּה, וּמוֹרָא יְהִי כְבוֹד פְּלִמְיָדָה תְּכַיֵּב עָלֶיךָ כְּשֶׁלָּדָה, רַבָּה כְּמוֹרָא שְׁמַיִם, “May the honor of your student be as dear to you as your own, and the honor of your friend be like the honor for your teacher, and the honor of your teacher like the honor of the heavens.” However, nowhere in the Mishnah do we see “*k'vod harav*” as a singular phrase.

Not until the 7th century, in the Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 19a, do we find the first appearance of the phrase “*k'vod harav*”- בכ"ד מקומות בית דין מנדי' על כבוד הרב - for 24 reasons a *Beit Din* (rabbinic court) can excommunicate on account of [lack of] *k'vod harav*. A far leap from broad concepts of reverence and respect, *k'vod harav* is a phrase that is a societal prerogative. If this prerogative was not met, then it could lead to the offender's excommunication. The introduction of *k'vod harav* as a stand-alone concept

¹² I Samuel 4:11

¹³ Isaiah 16:14

¹⁴ Isaiah 17:4

¹⁵ Search completed with Bar Ilan Responsa Project; www.responsa.co.il

pairs with the rise of the “rav,” the Rabbi who is not just a teacher, but also a judge of issues pertaining to Jewish law (*halacha*). In addition, this Bavli text shows that the early Rabbis interpreted the word *k’vod* as a powerful term, emphasized by the fact that it is used most often with God.

Talmud Torah 5:1 begins immediately drawing a metaphor between a teacher and a parent. Rambam wrote: וְכִבְדּוֹ אָבִיו, וְכִבְדּוֹ רַבּוֹ, וְכִבְדּוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים, “just as a person is commanded to honor his father and revere him, so too is he commanded to honor his teacher and revere him.” A parent is the first person responsible for the education of a child. Taking the responsibility further than the commandment in Deuteronomy 11:19: וְלִמַּדְתֶּם אֹתָם אֶת בְּנֵיכֶם, “you will teach them to your children,” Rambam in *halacha* 1:6 states:

מֵאַיִמִּי מִתְחִיל אָבִיו לְלַמְדוֹ תּוֹרָה? מִשְׁנֵיתֶחֱלִיל לְדַבֵּר, מִלְּמַדוֹ "תּוֹרָה צִוָּה-לָנוּ, מֹשֶׁה" וְפָסוּק רִאשׁוֹן מִפְּרָשֶׁת שְׁמַע; וְאַחֲרֵי כֵן מִלְּמַדוֹ מֵעֵט מֵעֵט פְּסוּקִים פְּסוּקִים, עַד שֶׁיִּהְיֶה בֶן שָׁשׁ אוֹ בֶן שִׁבְעֵי לְפִי בְּרִיּוֹ, מוֹלִיכּוֹ אֶצְל מְלָמֵד הַתִּינוּקוֹת.

At what point does a father begin to teach Torah? From the time that (the person) can speak, he teaches "*Torah tzivah lanu Moshe*" (Deut. 33:4), and the first *pasuk* from the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4). Then he will teach him little by little, *pasuk* by *pasuk*. At the time that he is six or seven, depending upon his health, he should be taken to the teacher of young children.

This *halacha* sets up the parent, specifically the father, as the giver of knowledge during the most important stages of life for intelligence and brain development.¹⁶ While Rambam obviously did not have as much knowledge about brain science as we do now, having the parent take responsibility at such a young age would create an indelible bond between parent and child. This metaphor equating the teacher to a parent expresses *k’vod*

¹⁶National Research Council (US) and Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, ed. Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press (US), 2000),

harav as a metaphor of closeness. The teacher and student should be as close, emotionally, as a parent and child. The child should look up to the teacher, love the teacher, ask the teacher for advice, and rely upon the teacher for (spiritual and religious) nourishment, just as a child needs all of these things, and more, from a parent.

Rambam codifies this with two statements. First, in *halacha* 1:2, Rambam states: "מפי השמועה למדו, בניהם אלו תלמידים, שהתלמידים קרויים בנים, שנאמר 'וַיֵּצְאוּ בְנֵי-הַנְּבִיאִים' "The Oral Torah teaches: your children are your students, since students are also called children, as it is written: 'and the sons of the prophets went out'" (II Kings 2:3). This use of Tanakh biblically grounds the idea that students and children can be interchangeable in rabbinic discussions. For Rambam, it isn't just that students are equated to children, but as *halacha* 5:12 states: וְצָרִיךְ אָדָם לְהִזָּהָר בְּתַלְמִידוֹ, וּלְאַהֲבֵהוּ, שֶׁהֵם הַבָּנִים הַמְהֵינִן בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, וְלַעֲוֹלָם וְצָרִיךְ אָדָם לְהִזָּהָר בְּתַלְמִידוֹ, וּלְאַהֲבֵהוּ, שֶׁהֵם הַבָּנִים הַמְהֵינִין בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, וְלַעֲוֹלָם, "a person needs to care for his students and love them for they are his sons and bring him joy in this world and the world to come." This metaphor for *k'vod harav*, the metaphor of the teacher as a parent, appears deeply ingrained in Rambam's personal values.

Rambam's statement in *halacha* 5:1 continues: וְרָבוּ יִתָּר מֵאָבִיו, “and his teacher even more than his father.” Rambam believes that this reverence for a teacher goes beyond the reverence for a parent. This is illuminating because כְּבֹד אֶת-אָבִיךָ, וְאֶת-אִמְךָ,¹⁷ “honor your father and mother” is one of the Ten Commandments. For Rambam, the concept of *k'vod harav* even surpasses one of the most important core commandments of the Jewish tradition. However, the rabbis do not just state this as fact nor accept it at face

¹⁷ Exodus 20:11; Deuteronomy 5:15

value. They give many examples of how you should demonstrate that *k'vod*, including using many more metaphors.

In *halacha* 5:12, we find a more extreme metaphor for the understanding of the barrier that is empowered between a teacher and student. In this *halacha*, Rambam writes: עושה לרבו, תלמיד עושה לרבו, וכל מלאכות שהעבד עושה לרבו, “all of the work that a servant does for his master, a student should do for his teacher.” In this *halacha*, there is no demarcation between a teacher and a master, as the Hebrew word for both is identical. While this relationship is not defined as clearly as others are in Hilchot Talmud Torah, Rambam does include some examples to help clarify what this relationship will look like.

One such example can be found in *halacha* 5:5. There Rambam writes,

ולא יתן שלום לרבו או יחזיר לו שלום, כדרך שנותנין הרעים ומחזירין זה לזה; אלא שוקה
לפניו, ואומר לו ביראה וכבוד, שלום עליך, רבי. ואם נתן לו רבו שלום,
יחזיר לו, שלום עליך, רבי ומרי-“

[A student] should not greet his teacher or respond to his teacher's greeting, as two friends would do. Instead, he should bow before him and say with awe and honor: 'Peace be upon you, my master.' If his teacher greeted him, he should respond: 'Peace be upon you, my master and my teacher.'”

The slavery of the Torah and of Rambam's metaphor for teacher as a slave master are closer to what we would consider “indentured servitude.” As we learn from Exodus 21 and the commentaries of Rashi and Rashbam, a person most often became a slave to work off a financial debt owed to another person or to the government. After six years of working, the slave would be freed in the seventh year. The slave could choose to remain with the master for any number of reasons, however.

This reverence, in the metaphor of a teacher being a master with slaves, is a *k'vod* based on power. The teacher has all of the power over a student, just as a master has all of the power over a slave. Even in a system of “indentured servitude,” the power still

resides completely with the master/teacher. This metaphor creates a system in which the *k'vod* that the student gives to the teacher is one based on acknowledging the power that the teacher holds over the student. Power, however, is not just reserved for the metaphor of the teacher as master.

In Talmud Torah 5:6, Rambam teaches that one should not recline in the presence of one's teachers, but instead: יושב כיושב לפני המלך, "one should sit as if he is sitting before a king." This metaphor of the teacher as king goes even further. One should not pray in front of his teacher, behind his teacher (if too close), or at his teacher's side. One should not enter a bathhouse with his teacher or sit in his teacher's place. One should not object to the teacher's opinion, one should not sit until he/she are told to, and when one leaves the presence of their teacher, one should not turn their back. These are all ways that describe how one should interact with a monarch, including rising and sitting as the monarch sees fit, never embarrassing the monarch, and not disagreeing with the monarch without permission.

Interacting this way shows a *k'vod* that emphasizes the separation between the student and teacher. One should always be aware of the physical separation between oneself and the monarch. While maintaining this proper separation empowers the king and the teacher, it also produces a sense of mystery. For the student or the commoner, there arises a desire to learn more or to have a greater glimpse into the life of the teacher or the monarch. This leads to a culture in Jewish education of striving for learning and discovery, and a guaranteed role model to whom you can aspire to emulate.

As a student, one's goal is to become the teacher, a great scholar and sage, and yet the metaphor of the teacher as the king creates a standard that seems impossible to reach.

Talmud Bavli Berakhot 62a is filled with situations that break down this boundary. Most notably is the story of Rav Kahana hiding under the bed of Rav (Abba Arika). Rav Kahana wanted to narrow this separation by “learning Torah” from Rav in his most private moments. Obviously, this crossed a line for Rav. While the story could imply that a student should be willing to go that far to learn Torah, this story also amplifies the necessity of having a healthy separation between a teacher and student.

In comparing this structure to a student-teacher relationship, I came to the realization that Rambam’s educational structure is effectively defining developmental states. From birth until the child is six or seven years old, their parent should teach the child. At the end of that period, the child enters another six or seven-year period until they become a Bar Mitzvah, in which their teacher serves as their ruler. At that point, being approximately thirteen years old, the child (now adult) is able to take on full halachic responsibilities. In this stage of life, they can choose to whom they commit themselves for the next period of their life, in which the student would commit to the rav whom they most revere. In these developmental stages, the teacher responsible for the education of the student is the defining factor.

While all relationships can be examined through a lens of power dynamics, Rambam’s last major metaphor is the relationship between man and God. This metaphor is brought to life best in *halacha* 5:1, where Rambam writes:

וְאִין לָךְ כְּבוֹד, גָּדוֹל מִכְבוֹד הָרַב; וְלֹא מוֹרָא, יִתֵּר מִמוֹרָא הָרַב. אֶמְרוּ חֲכָמִים, מוֹרָא רַבָּךְ כְּמוֹרָא שְׁמַיִם. לְפִיכָךְ אָמְרוּ, כָּל הַחוֹלֵק עַל רַבּוֹ כְּחוֹלֵק עַל הַשָּׁכִינָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמָר "בְּהִצָּתָם, עַל-ה'." וְכָל הַעוֹשֶׂה מְרִיבָה עִם רַבּוֹ כְּעוֹשֶׂה עִם הַשָּׁכִינָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמָר "אֲשֶׁר-רַבּוֹ בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אָת-ה'." וְכָל הַמִּתְרַעַם עַל רַבּוֹ כְּמִתְרַעַם עַל הַשָּׁכִינָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמָר "לֹא-עָלִינוּ תִּלְוֹתֶיכֶם כִּי עַל-ה'." וְכָל הַמְהַרְהֵר אַחֵר רַבּוֹ כְּמְהַרְהֵר אַחֵר הַשָּׁכִינָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמָר "וַיִּדְבֹּר הָעָם, בְּאַלְהֵים וּבְמִשְׁחָה."

One should have no greater honor than the honor for the rav, and no greater awe than the awe for the rav. The sages said: "the awe of your rav is like your awe for heaven." There it is said: "All that contests his teacher is as if he

contested the Shechina," as it says: "they who contested against God" (Numbers 26:9). All who quarrel with their teacher are like quarrelling with the Shechina. As it says: "where the Jews struggle with God..." (Numbers 20:13). And all that complain about their rav is as if they complained about the Shechina, as it says: "your complaints are not upon us, but upon God" (Exodus 16:8). All that murmur against their teacher, is as if they murmured against the Shechina, as it says: "And the people spoke against God and Moses." (Numbers 21:5).

Rambam's use of four different biblical texts, in addition to one attribution to the Sages, as proof texts for this metaphor elevates the teacher to a uniquely, revered status grounded in Torah. Based on this *halacha*, one's teacher and God are synonymous. In addition, Rambam skillfully uses wordplay to make his point as the word for struggle, מְרִיבָה, has a similar root to the word for teacher, רַבּוֹ. Because of the equation between a teacher and God, this echoes the Hebrew word יִשְׁרָאֵל, which means "the one who struggles with God." This shows a deft ability to ground his relationship with God in text, and is an example of Rambam's need to rationalize his beliefs in God.

In many respects, for Rambam, the teacher fulfills many of the roles of God. However, no matter how important an individual sage may be, the teacher is not God. Still, these five statements, equating the teacher to God, create a *k'vod* based on faith and trust. In order to enter an honorific relationship in which one cannot ask a question, cannot create controversy, cannot complain, and cannot speak against the other party, one must have complete trust in the other party. In this case, putting one's faith in the teacher is of the utmost importance. If a teacher were to make a mistake without being caught and/or delicately corrected, the possibilities are endless of how that mistake could change the interpretation of *halacha*. Ironically, this mistake could lead to the creation of customs that would be considered entirely new based on the *k'vod* that is given to the teacher for the purpose of the perpetuation of tradition.

Jewish tradition usually speaks of this metaphor from the opposite viewpoint, however. Rather than God being a metaphor for the way a teacher should interact in the world, we often use the metaphor of teacher as a way to understand our experience with God. God is both *avinu* and *malkeinu*, our father and our king. God teaches Moses.¹⁸ How we speak about God and how we relay our interactions with God are entirely through our interactions with the world around us. Through studying Jewish texts, we can learn the metaphors that Jews of every generation used to express this same struggle to be near to God's presence.

While these metaphors allow for a robust conversation about the meaning of *k'vod harav*, the majority of Rambam's educational ideology is a top-down approach. That is to say that Rambam believes that knowledge and education flow linearly from generation to generation; and hierarchically from teacher to student, from parent to child, from king to subject, from master to slave, and from God to the people.

Rambam's articulation of these metaphors for *k'vod harav* creates an understanding of the interaction with a teacher, which is a complex system. In many ways, the teacher is a parent, yearning to bring their children closer. In other ways the teacher is a king, creating boundaries that allow for a more appropriate relationship. In some ways, the teacher is a master, the all-knowing bearer of knowledge to whom reverence is due. In others, the teacher is God-like, and students must come before him in total submission and faithfulness.

Under the auspices of "respect," we have a biblically grounded, multi-faceted concept that can be interpreted in a seemingly infinite number of ways.

¹⁸ Exodus 4:15

While this is what makes *k'vod harav* so difficult to understand and pinpoint, this is exactly what has allowed it to grow into a dominant *midah*. For those who love a top-down educational ideology, you are able to balance these four metaphors into an understanding that you love. For those who prefer a more balanced ideology that thrives on a bottom-up approach, it is also possible to find a meaningful interpretation using these metaphors as well. This polyvocalic nature has allowed Talmud Torah to be mined repeatedly for new meaning for almost 2000 years as we seek to ground our modern understanding of *k'vod harav* in our sacred texts.

By presenting us with these metaphors for the student-teacher relationship, Rambam helps us to better understand the concept of *k'vod harav*, and allows us the opportunity to find the metaphor that works for us individually. Whether we opt for one of his metaphors, balance aspects of his metaphors, or develop our own metaphor, this allows us the ability to, like Rambam, ground our educational ideology in our textual tradition.

Learning Module:
Bedikat Mezuzah:
A Congregational *Mezuzah* Audit
for 6th Graders Using Mishneh
Torah

Learning Module created with the guidance of Dr. Lisa Grant

Introduction

This part of my text immersion serves to develop a curricular unit that combines Hebrew text study, Jewish ritual objects, and experiential education for youth. It creates a learning module that is based upon Ron Berger's project-based learning. The learning module includes a Congregational *Mezuzah* Audit that will be completed by a 6th grade class, using many of the *halachot* of *mezuzah* according to Rambam's Mishneh Torah. Study of the *halachot* will be interspersed throughout the lessons as the class engages with questions, such as: Why is *mezuzah* important, what is a *mezuzah*, where should *mezuzot* be placed, and how are *mezuzot* made and affixed?

In my experience and observations of experiential education programs, participants rarely engage with Jewish text sources without translation. Often, text study falls into one of two categories: 1) participants are presented with a text in Hebrew and English and then are asked to engage with it; 2) several texts, sometimes in Hebrew and English but more often English only, are presented to the group and the participants are asked to choose a "favorite" or compare the texts to one another. While the presentation of these texts may be engaging, using scavenger hunts, digital media, and more cutting-edge methods, they do not truly challenge the participants to interact with the Hebrew text. This learning module is created with the intention of challenging students to read, understand, and then interpret Rambam's *halachot* in their original Hebrew, with some learning aids.

In *Eitz Hayim: Torah and Commentary*, Michael Fishbane, writes: "Judaism is a text culture that always has been nurtured by study and interpretation. The interpreter and the text interpenetrate in dynamic ways. The individual finds and realizes that the layers

of his or her deepest self have been ‘textualized’ by study, so that the sacred texts provide the language for ongoing life experience and inspiration.”¹⁹ Studying Jewish texts in their original language allows students to develop their ability to read and understand Hebrew, and to see him/herself as a more “authentic” next link in the chain of tradition. This “authenticity” creates a stronger identification with Judaism as they interpret the texts to affect their lives today.

This learning module offers avenues for the participants to delve deeply into Jewish meaning. It also offers them the ability to become active participants in the community, blending skills that most congregations deem vital in becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. The entire module is framed around a task - examining the congregation’s *mezuzot* - that Rambam’s *halacha* requires. Checking one’s *mezuzot* is also a part of other Jewish legal codes, including the Shulchan Aruch, and has become a normative practice. This project asks students to read and understand Hebrew, discover the meaning of their learning personally and communally, present their learning and meaning to members of the community, and participate in a project that improves the community around them. As George Barna, in his book *Real Teens: A Contemporary Snapshot of Youth Culture*, writes in the section on experiential education:

[T]he most effective way to teach young people is to engage them in the process. Talking at them may work well if our objective is memorization and regurgitation, but experience has amply demonstrated that teens absorb principles and values best when they have the chance to participate in developing a deeply-rooted comprehension and application of those elements. Great youth workers emphasize interactive, hands-on learning experiences. Preaching at kid has

¹⁹ Michael Fishbane, “A Note on The Spirituality of Texts,” in *Eitz Hayim: Torah and Commentary*, ed. David L. Lieber (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2001).1503.

surprisingly little effect; working alongside of them to enable them to live the lessons of Scripture changes their lives.²⁰

This module requires participants to think of themselves as a part of something greater than individuals, ultimately presenting their findings to the synagogue board. In doing so, it asks them to act as a literal Bar or Bat Mitzvah, one who is of commandments.

When I began constructing this learning module, I conducted research to see what other resources existed to fill the void at the intersection of experiential education, Hebrew text study, and youth. I could not find anything. My research, which consisted of evaluating seven summer camp and religious school experiential curricula, reinforced my beliefs about the paltry nature of Hebrew text study in these venues. I now believe, more than ever, that it is important to think deeply about the role of Hebrew in our curricula and how to better engage learners with the Hebrew texts of our tradition.

While this unit is crafted as an eight-week learning module for a 6th grade class, as a part of a typical Religious School curriculum, it could be adapted to a variety of ages and settings, including camps, Hillel, and youth groups.

Facilitator Knowledge and Learning Materials

The Congregational *Mezuzah* Audit requires the use of Maimonides' Mishneh Torah text, specifically Hilchot Tefillin, Mezuzah, and Sefer Torah, *perek 5* and *perek 6* (NOTE: All references to the text in this curriculum will be referring to this location. e.g.: MT 5:1 is *perek 5, halacha 1*). The lesson will also require access to a dictionary, either paper or digital.

²⁰ George Barna, *Real Teens: A Contemporary Snapshot of Youth Culture* (Adi, MI: Baker Books, 2001). 154.

Because there are many different methods for teaching Hebrew that could accompany this module, I have purposefully built flexibility into the curriculum. For example, in Lesson 1, you will see: “25-30 Work on *V’ahavtah*.” The facilitator of the curriculum will be able to customize the curriculum to fit their needs.

In order to succeed, the educator needs to have an intermediate understanding of the typical halachic process. This process generally follows these steps: 1) a problem is presented, 2) knowledgeable Jews (usually Rabbis) submit arguments based on Jewish sources (with deference going first to Torah, then Talmud, and then Rabbinic Law), and 3) then a decision is made that the community will follow, occasionally with minor/dissenting practices. Rabbi Dr. Mark Washofsky states: “we see *halakhah* as a discourse, an ongoing conversation through which we arrive at an understanding, however tentative, of what God and Torah require of us.”²¹ The facilitator needs to be willing to guide the students through the interpretive process so they can think critically about their own questions. This process will be highlighted during Lesson 5, when the students will convene a *Beit Din* to discuss any discrepancies between the various groups’ audits.

The facilitator should also embrace the core of Barry Chazan’s description of “The Holistic Educator” in the fourth iteration of his groundbreaking article on Experiential/Informal Education, now titled “The Philosophy of Informal Jewish Education.” He writes:

[The facilitator] is a person-centered educator whose focus is on learners and whose goal is their personal growth...His/her role in this context is to create opportunities for those experiences and to facilitate the learner’s

²¹ Mark Washofsky, *Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice* (New York, NY: UAHC Press, 2010), xxii.

entry into the moments...This requires proficiency in the skills of asking questions, listening and activating the engagement of others.²²

In essence, the facilitator needs to have both content and pedagogical knowledge, with the flexibility to make adjustments in order to ensure each student's needs are met.

The Experience of the Students

Small groups – ideally of three students each - will help the participants build relationships, while also allowing for active engagement at every step in the module. The participants will be purposefully mixed based on their Hebrew level, interests, and strengths. By creating a classroom ethic of collaboration, the group mates will encourage the learning and growth of each individual. This will be explained in more depth later.

When the curriculum requires the students to engage with a text, accompanying worksheets will serve as a guide for the text work. The worksheets are designed to be completed in the small groups. Students of varying Hebrew levels can assist each other and bring their strengths to the learning. The worksheets will not include a simple word bank; the participants will need to use a dictionary to find the meanings of words. The worksheets are designed, using the theory of Bloom's Taxonomy²³, to help the students quickly move past the basics of "knowledge" and "comprehension."²⁴ Students will be asked to read and define the key Hebrew words for each *halacha*, creating a translation. Then they will seek to understand the translation so they can apply it to the day's lesson

²² Barry Chazan "The Philosophy of Informal Jewish Education," in *Experience and Jewish Education*, ed. David Bryfman (Los Angeles: Tora Aura Publications, 2014), 20.

²³ Lorin W Anderson, David R. Krathwohl, and Peter W. Airasian, *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (Harlow: Longman Publishing, 2001).

²⁴ "Center for Teaching," 2016, accessed December 27, 2016, <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/>.

and their work throughout this project. These translations could be shared with the class to compare from group to group, allowing the teacher to assist with any obvious errors.

At various points throughout the curriculum, the participants will be asked to synthesize Rambam's *halachot* based on bigger themes that are related to *mezuzah* (e.g. How do you define a home?). A sample conversation will be based upon the question: How would you change Rambam's definition of a home? These conversations will allow all of the participants to apply the learning to their lives today. Grounded in the work of John Dewey, the participants will bring outside experiences into the classroom while also taking their learning from this module out of the classroom.

Explanation of Terms/Rationale

In order to explain my rationale and further elucidate the intersection of Jewish ritual objects, youth, Hebrew text study, and experiential education, it is necessary to define some important terms.

Jewish ritual objects are items that the Jewish community prescribes as significant for marking importance. I have focused on the *mezuzah* because it is a uniquely pervasive and visible object. In a 1999 Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) article,²⁵ a study showed that "89 percent [of Jewish homes in Palm Beach, Broward, and Miami-Dade counties] post a *mezuzah*." This study confirms my personal observation that at least one *mezuzah* is present in an overwhelming majority of Jewish homes. While the meaning behind hanging a *mezuzah* varies by individual, *mezuzot* are relatively cheap and easy to purchase or make (save for a kosher parchment made by a scribe), and there

²⁵ Lola M Gertz, "South Florida's Jewish Population Grows," *Features* (Jewish Telegraphic Agency), December 15, 1999, <http://www.jta.org/1999/12/15/life-religion/features/south-floridas-jewish-population-grows>.

are living “models” of their existence throughout the Jewish community, in Jewish homes and organizations.

Why **youth**? The sixth grade is the start of an important transition in Jewish life. Physically and emotionally, they are maturing into adolescence. Religiously, they are nearing the point of Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the moment in which they take responsibility for their Jewish journeys. Adolescence is a time in which humans begin their first major quest for personal meaning. Today’s adolescents are complex thinkers in a world that doesn’t reward complexity, need to be challenged by ideas, are looking for adults who they can admire and connect to, and want to be taken seriously²⁶. This curriculum strives to do all of that.

Youth work is my personal passion, and focusing on this age allows me to combine my prior experiences and my passion to create this learning module.

Hebrew text study is the mode through which Jews engage with the knowledge of our tradition. For thousands of years, the Jewish people have grounded our existence in Torah, and we have created and perpetuated an interpretive, legalist tradition that allows us to apply ancient texts to our lives today. I believe that this tradition has created an eternal wisdom that can better the lives of those who take part.

In order to engage with this tradition, one needs to know Hebrew. Nuance is always lost in translation. This is true when you translate from the original Hebrew/Aramaic, and this is especially troublesome when you meticulously parse a translation that has lost some or all of the rhetorical, semantic, or grammatical problems from the original text. By engaging with the texts in the original language with the

²⁶ Class Notes from Dr. Betsy Stone’s *Adolescents – Discovery and Danger*; HUC-JIR NY; Spring 2016

guidance of their teacher, the participants will improve their Hebrew skills and feel personally responsible for the *shalsholet d'kabbalah*, the chain of tradition.

Mishneh Torah was selected for this unit for a few reasons. First, the Hebrew vocabulary and grammar used in the texts is fairly easy to understand. Maimonides wanted the text to be accessible to the average Jew²⁷. Second, Rambam's structure is meticulously terse, which makes the text more accessible to sixth graders who would struggle to follow the complex "logic puzzles" that exist in other halachic texts.

Experiential education. The primary experts in experiential/informal education are Barry Chazan, Joseph Reimer, and David Bryfman. Bryfman's edited volume, *Experience & Jewish Education*, contains the most recent understandings of this field. Rather than give a full definition of experiential education, I will focus on the relevant pieces from this compendium. I have chosen to use the term experiential education over informal education because, as Bryfman writes, "experiential Jewish education is now regarded in many circles as the more descriptive terminology that binds the field."²⁸

Chazan, using his own terminology for this same field of education, outlines eight defining characteristics of the field in his article, "The Philosophy of Informal Jewish Education." In particular, my curriculum emphasizes Chazan's sections on the *centrality of experience, the group as educator, and an immersive culture. The Centrality of Experience* is based upon John Dewey's concept "that people are active centers of impulse rather than passive vessels."²⁹ The students need to be fully enveloped in the

²⁷ Rambam's *Hakdamah* to the Mishneh Torah

²⁸ David Bryfman, "Introduction: Experience and Jewish Education," in *Experience and Jewish Education*, ed. David Bryfman (Los Angeles: Tora Aura Publications, 2014), 5.

²⁹ Chazan, "The Philosophy of Informal Jewish Education," in *Experience and Jewish Education*, ed. David Bryfman (Los Angeles: Tora Aura Publications, 2014), 17.

process, engaging their senses; there must be flexibility for each student to find their niche in the assignment. For Chazan, this creates “a pedagogy that attempts to create settings which enable values to be experiences personally and events to be experiences in real time and in genuine venues...”³⁰ In my curriculum, each participant will be able to see the value of the project for their own learning and for the surrounding community. They will be active participants at all stages, and they will find their own moments to shine throughout the process.

The Group as Educator emphasizes “the dynamic role of the collective in expressing and reinforcing values... they are social networks that teach ideas and values through the essence of the group process.”³¹ By placing the students into diverse small groups, each student will find moments of teaching as well as many moments of learning.

An Immersive Culture is Chazan’s phrasing for the “culturalist perspective” of education, the idea that education should “imitate real life.”³² This curriculum goes beyond Chazan’s understanding as a project that is truly integrated into the fabric of the congregation. Students meet with board members, explore the synagogue’s building, and work in groups. It is my hope that the participants will understand the project as a communal need they are able to fulfill.

I also push back upon Chazan’s understanding of informal education’s “curriculum.” In this article, Chazan focuses almost entirely on the “what” of curriculum and not the “why.” Curricula need to guide students to ask and answer the question: “Why is learning/doing this so important?”

³⁰ Ibid, pg. 17.

³¹ Ibid, pg. 19.

³² Ibid, pg. 19.

Building off these understandings, I agree with Bryfman's definition of experiential education as "a philosophy and pedagogy that purposefully engages learners in their direct experiences and focused reflection within settings inspired by Jewish values, traditions and texts, in order to create knowledge, develop skills, clarify values and develop the individuals' capacities to contribute to their communities."³³

Building on these educators' work, my goal is to create a developmentally appropriate, experiential project that challenges Jewish youth to engage more deeply with the polyvocal nature of Jewish texts and learn how our tradition is interpreted concerning *mezuzot*.

³³ David Bryfman, "Introduction: Experience and Jewish Education," in *Experience and Jewish Education*, ed. David Bryfman (Los Angeles: Tora Aura Publications, 2014), 5.

Desired Results

Priority Goals:

- Participants will learn to be active members in the congregation and community
- Participants will develop a personal relationship with Judaism and Jewish ritual through Jewish text study

Enduring Understandings (EUs):

- Holding fast to ritual symbols enables us to remember our link to God and to history and can infuse our daily lives with awe and wonder.
- Studying Jewish texts about ritual symbols and moments reveals and models a process for healthy and productive debate.

Enduring Questions (EQs):

- How is fulfilling the mitzvah of *mezuzah* significant for you?
- What does Hebrew text study teach you about how to handle disagreements?
- What does it mean to become Bar/Bat Mitzvah in our community?

Assessment and Evidence:

Knowing:

Explain where and how to affix mezuzot

Tool: Develop an assessment tool based on text study, and then use the tool to conduct an inventory of the community and decide where *mezuzot* should be

Evidence: Students will recommend to the congregation any necessary or preferred changes, grounding their recommendations with textual support

Eilu v'eilu divrei Torah- Respect others who interpret the same text differently

Tool: Students will develop a *brit l'machloket l'shem shamayim*, a *brit* for how they will confront any further disagreements

Evidence: There will be an observable positive change in the classroom discourse

Learn what a mezuzah is and why it is important for many Jews, including themselves

Tool: Students will engage with peers, teachers, clergy, and congregants who express their varying understanding of the importance of *mezuzah* and its many forms

Evidence: Students will articulate why they believe hanging *mezuzot* is an important Jewish ritual, and they will make *mezuzot* for the congregation and themselves

Doing:

Students will put up mezuzot at home

Tool: Students will record themselves hanging a *mezuzah* at home

Evidence: Class will watch a compilation of the videos

Students will assist others in affixing mezuzot at the congregation

Tool: Students will lead the ritual for affixing *mezuzot* with other classes in the Religious School. Students will teach others age-appropriate information about *mezuzot*

Evidence: Successful participation in leading ceremonies

Believing:

Express their reasoning for fulfilling (or not) the mitzvah of mezuzot

Tool: Write a personal statement about the reasons why they want to affix a *mezuzah*

Evidence: They will complete the statement and feel comfortable discussing their statement with classmates, teachers, community members, and family

Belonging:

Seek further opportunities to participate in congregational life

Tool: One-on-one conversations with each student to explore future areas of communal engagement and interest

Evidence: All conversations completed by teacher and/or congregational professional

Learning Module Outline

Lesson 1 (Attached): *Mezuzah* Intro and Why *Mezuzah*?

Core Concepts:

-*Mezuzah* is one of the most recognized Jewish ritual objects, and it has many different personal meanings.

-Jewish tradition thrives on the concept that people can engage in a respectful (even holy) disagreement that opens us to hearing different opinions and growing together in deeper understandings called *machloket l'shem shamayyim*.

- Introduction to Project & *Halacha* 5:9
 - Project Info & *Halacha* discussing how often to check *mezuzot*
- What do you know about *Mezuzot*?
 - Before we begin the audit, we need to determine what is a *mezuzah* and where this mitzvah originates
- Why Does TBC need a *Mezuzah*? (“What does it mean to love”)
 - “Panel”: Rabbi - Core text *V'ahavtah*; Hebrew and English line-by-line translation
 - Board Member
 - Two others
 - Why is *Mezuzah* important?
 - Explore four different understandings of why one would place a *mezuzah* on their doorposts
 - God commanded us in Torah
 - *To remember the mitzvot and do them...*
 - How does the *mezuzah* do this?
 - Physical reminder (acknowledge or kiss)
 - Reminder of being Jewish
 - Point of identification; pride in being Jewish
 - Sign of marking this as holy space

Lesson 2: What is a home? What makes a home a Jewish home?

Core Concepts:

-Rambam's definition of a “home” is based on the ten conditions that are all needed in order to affix a *mezuzah*.

-“Home” is an important place in our lives and in Jewish tradition, even if we do not define “home” the same way.

- What makes a home?
 - 10 requirements of a structure to have a *mezuzah* (MT 6:1)
 - Research topics: cubit, lintel, consecrated dwelling...
 - How does this definition of a home match up with your own definition?

- Does the congregation meet the qualifications of a place that needs a *mezuzah*?
 - MT Ch. 6:6
 - Rambam defines home as a place that one literally lives in.
 - What is problematic about this?
 - Rambam's *halachah* states that we should not place a *mezuzah* on our Synagogue because it is not a place where people live.
 - What are the reasons that we might choose to affix *mezuzot* on our synagogue?
 - Learning tool, comfort, synagogue is home, Shulchan Aruch (Yorei Deah 286:10) says *batei midrash* do get it, synagogue hosts a shelter, synagogue has a parsonage
 - Discuss why or why not.
 - Answer: Yes; The congregation is a place that needs a *mezuzah*

Lesson 3: Where Do We Place a *Mezuzah*?

Core Concepts:

-*Mezuzot* are placed on permanent, human dwellings that are treated with *k'vod* (respect).

-Jewish tradition allows us to make informed choices that make *mitzvot* accessible to more people.

- Rambam's Jewish Home: A Deeper Dive; what are the qualifications of a room that needs a *Mezuzah*?
 - *Mezuzot* go on the doorpost of dwellings, homes...the Hebrew word for home is *bayit*.
 - Use MT 6:2-5;8-11 -Rambam's description of places
- Rambam states that Jews need to "encounter" an affixed *mezuzah*. How does Rambam define "encounter," and how does your definition differ?
 - Use MT 6:13b
 - Many follow the custom of kissing the *mezuzah*. How can we accommodate this request in our congregation?
 - Students evaluate what it means to be at the "top of the doorpost"
 - Students can determine what is the top of the doorpost
 - Where their hand goes up to is the top of the doorpost
 - Use the kids to measure; bring in guests (one in wheelchair, etc.) to help determine where a *mezuzah* goes
 - Is the *mezuzah* hung correctly to this 6th grade innovation -> "rabbinic innovation" conversation
 - 6th grade is, in a way, creating a new *halachah* for the congregation
 - Hopeful resolution/conversation: Accessibility => 1 high and 1 low

Lesson 4: *Mezuzah* Audit:

Core Concepts:

-Jewish teachings are both action-oriented and intellectual exercises.

-Applying the laws of Jewish texts from 900 years ago is not always an easy task.

- Go around the Temple (break the Temple into sections for each group) and create three lists:
 - Where are *mezuzot* that are hung correctly,
 - Where are *mezuzot*, but hung incorrectly, and
 - Where are *mezuzot* missing

Reminder: one *mezuzah* high and one low

Lesson 5: *Mezuzah* Audit Pt. 2 + How to Make *Mezuzah*:

Core Concepts:

-*Beit Din* is one of Jewish tradition's ways of adjudicating disputes in Jewish law and the interpretations of Jewish law.

-Because there are few restrictions on what a *mezuzah* looks like, there is a robust art culture that can meet varied aesthetic preferences.

- *Beit Din* + *machloket l'shem shamayim* – handling conflict between groups' assessments
 - Teacher + Rabbi + Board Member = *Beit Din*
 - Student groups present case + evidence
 - *Beit Din* makes decision, students learn how to respond in situation when it doesn't go their way
- How to Make a *Mezuzah*:
 - Bring in different types of *mezuzot* so we know what it looks like
 - Look at styles of various *mezuzot*
 - "Dissect" a *mezuzah*
 - MT 5:1-6

Lesson 6: Create Presentations + Present their project

Core Concept:

-An important part of being a member of the community means properly communicating your efforts on behalf of the community to other members.

-An important part of community is sharing your own understandings with others.

- Based on the information collected from the previous 5 weeks, create a presentation for the Board
 - Science Fair boards with pertinent information (what percentage of the Temple was correctly fulfilling the *mitzvah*, etc.).
- Meet with members of the RS committee and Board to discuss the project, teach the important pieces of learning, the findings, where are *mezuzot* needed.

Lesson 7: Make *Mezuzot* – *Hiddur Mitzvah*

Core Concepts:

-*Hiddur Mitzvah*, literally “beautifying a *mitzvah*,” is the Jewish tradition of creating aesthetically pleasing methods of Jewish ritual that deepen meaning.
-Jewish ritual offers a means to combine centuries-old communal customs for fulfilling mitzvot with modern understandings and aesthetics.

- Make enough *mezuzot* for the congregation plus one *mezuzah* to keep, personally.
- Spend time writing Shema and V’ahavtah
 - Try to mimic “traditional” *claf* - (MT 5:1-3;5)
- Frame the care needed to make a *mezuzah* and the *claf* as *Hiddur Mitzvah*
- How to affix a *mezuzah*? Help to create a ritual for affixing *mezuzot* throughout synagogue
 - Use MT 6:12; 5:7
 - Incorporate a modern touch: singing? liturgy?
 - Learn and practice saying: Blessings for affixing a *Mezuzah*

Lesson 8: Affixing *Mezuzot*

Core Concepts:

-Jewish rituals are at their best when they are combination of modern and ancient, as exhibited by the ritual created by the class for the affixing of *mezuzot*
-*Mezuzah* is an ancient Jewish ritual that has many meanings for many people; its meaning continues to be reinterpreted today

- Practice ritual created in lesson 7 in small groups in class.
- Split up the *mezuzot* that need to be hung and assist other classes/students/groups in hanging the *mezuzot* throughout the synagogue
- What meaning does the affixing of a *mezuzah* mean to you?
 - What does *mezuzah* mean to Rambam – MT 6:13
- Closing class ritual planned by the teacher (and potentially some of the participants) that would build organically from the class’ experience.

Lesson 1 – *Mezuzah*: What and Why?

Priority Goals:

- Learn how to be active members in the congregation and community
- Develop a personal relationship with Judaism and Jewish ritual through Jewish text

EUs:

- Using ritual symbols enables us to remember our link to God and to history and can infuse our daily lives with awe and wonder.
- Studying and interpreting Jewish texts about ritual symbols reveals and models a process for healthy and productive debate.

EQ's:

- How is fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *mezuzah* significant for members of the community?
- What does Judaism teach us by allowing multiple answers to the question: “Why do X”?

Core Concepts:

- Mezuzah* is one of the most recognized Jewish ritual objects, and it has many different personal meanings
- Jewish tradition thrives on the concept that people can engage in a respectful (even holy) disagreement that opens us to hearing different opinions and growing together in deeper understandings called *machloket l'shem shamayyim*

Materials:

- Copies of *Shema* and *V'ahavtah* – Not attached
- 5 Copies of Appendix A and B – 1 per presenter + 1 for teacher
- Copies of Appendix C and Appendix D (1 per participant)
- Pens for each participant

Timetable:

- 09:30-09:35 Settle In
- 09:35-09:50 Project Introduction & *Halacha* 5:9
- 09:50-10:00 *Mezuzah* & Rambam Basics
- 10:00-10:05 Break into groups and Instructions
- 10:05-10:10 Move to locations
- 10:10-10:20 Rotation #1
- 10:20-10:25 Rotate
- 10:25-10:35 Rotation #2
- 10:35-10:40 Rotate
- 10:40-10:50 Rotation #3
- 10:50-10:55 Rotate
- 10:55-11:05 Rotation #4
- 11:05-11:10 Return to Class
- 11:10-11:20 Rehash four points of view
- 11:20-11:30 Hebrew work on *V'ahavtah*

Method:

30-35 Settle in class

Students are settled in class

35-50 Project Introduction & *Halacha* 5:9

Teacher: “Hello everyone. *Plonit bat Plonit*, the President of our congregation, is here to introduce an exciting opportunity for all of us. Please give her your attention.”

PbP: “Hi everyone. For those I have not met, I am PbP, and I am the President here. I have been working with your teacher, *madrachim*, Rabbi, and Board because I/we want and need your help. Before I explain exactly how you are going to help, I want to spend time learning/teaching a line of Jewish text that frames the assistance you are going to give to our community.”

Appendix D: Mishneh Torah *halacha* 5:9

“It has come to our attention that we, as a community, think that we have been doing our best to fulfill the mitzvah of *mezuzah*, but we need your help in completing our *b’dikah*, our check. We know that you are going to be studying the laws of *mezuzot*, and we wanted to use your expertise to help us. At the Board meeting in a month, we want you to put together a presentation that helps us: 1) figure out where we missed the mark and 2) recommend how we as a community can do better. We also need a refresher on the laws, so we would love for you all to share a bit more of your learning, and in return, we will help you to be successful in any way possible.”

Do the students have questions?

50-00 *Mezuzah* & Rambam Basics

What do you know about *mezuzot* [constructivist with students’ answers]?

On the door. Have a scroll in them. Some people kiss them when they enter a room. Shin on the outside.

“For our study of these questions, we will be using, most of the time, the *halacha* (Jewish law) according to the Mishneh Torah of Maimonides. Does anyone know anything about him?”

Items to share: 12th century; b. Spain and d. Egypt; 8 levels of tzedakah

“We will be using his laws surrounding *mezuzot* to guide us, and since we are using the original Hebrew in many instances, you will need to do a little work trying to interpret what he said.”

00-05 Break Into Groups & Instructions

The following instructions will be given:

“You will now have the opportunity to hear from four people who have differing viewpoints about why *mezuzah* is important for the congregation and for themselves. They will answer this important question, and then they will take questions from anyone who needs clarification.” Prompts are in Appendix B

Group 1 – Rabbi in Rabbi’s Office Group 2 – Board Member in Library

Group 3 – Teacher in classroom Group 4 – Congregants in Location #4

05-10 Move to First Locations

Give students a copy of Appendix C and pen on the way to their first rotation

10-20 Rotation #1

See Appendix B for info regarding the content of the rotations.

20-25 Rotate

The students will rotate stations. *Madrich* will keep track of time and announce when it is time to rotate. Presenters should feel free to adlib based on the points given in Appendix B

25-35 Rotation #2

Same as Rotation #1

35-40 Rotate

The students will rotate stations. *Madrich* will keep track of time and announce when it is time to rotate.

40-50 Rotation #3

Same as Rotation #1

50-55 Rotate

The students will rotate stations. *Madrich* will keep track of time and announce when it is time to rotate.

55-05 Rotation #4

Same as Rotation #1

05-10 Return to Class

10-25 Rehash four points of view and discuss

1. Recap key information from the witnesses
 - a. In your own words, what were the four themes or ideas on which our presenters based their understanding of *mezuzah*?
 - i. Rabbi– Text Basis, *V'ahavtah*
 - ii. Board Member – Sign of marking this as our place
 - iii. Teacher – Reminders to be Jewish
 - iv. Congregant/4th Person – *Hiddur Mitzvah* – Beautifies the holy space
 - b. What did you hear that did or did not make sense?
 - c. What are other reasons you can think of that were not presented to you?
 - d. What were some of the similarities/contradictions of the reasons you heard?
2. “Another tradition about *mezuzah* is based on another moment when we marked our doors with blood in Egypt so the Angel of Death would know to pass over our homes. This tradition teaches that a *mezuzah* acts like the blood and wards off evil.”
 - a. In what ways does this conflict with the previous four understandings?
3. Introduce concept of *machloket l'shem shamayim*
 - a. Why do we think Judaism allows so many different understandings of the same ritual?
 - b. What happens when someone you know does something for different motives than you that you do not agree with?
 - i. For example: Exercise - Some do it to get fit; others do it because they enjoy it

- c. Why is it important to be right?
- d. How do we “prove” ourselves right?
- e. What do you think Judaism says about being correct?
 - i. *Machloket l'shem shamayim* - An argument for the Sake of Heaven, an important argument that happens respectfully.

25-30 Work on *V'ahavtah*

- 1. 30 seconds to transition and prepare materials
- 2. 30 seconds – Whisper *V'ahavtah* to yourself
 - a. It is important that they are using their vocal chords to practice saying it, but trying to do it softly enough to not be able to copy the person next to them
 - b. The student does not need to finish; reading slower and more accurately is preferred.
- 3. 1 minute – Reading *V'ahavtah* to a partner (30 seconds each)
- 4. 90 seconds - Individually, find two words that have the same *shoresh*, Hebrew root. Using the translation on the page, can you figure out what the word means? Write the word on the board for the whole class to see.
- 5. 1 minute – Think about the meaning of the prayer and condense *V'ahavtah* into one sentence. Tell the teacher your sentence on the way out the door.

Appendix A – Rotation + Schedule:

	Rotation 1	Rotation 2	Rotation 3	Rotation 4
Rabbi's Office	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D
Library	Group D	Group A	Group B	Group C
Classroom	Group C	Group D	Group A	Group B
Location #4	Group B	Group C	Group D	Group A

Appendix B –

These are guidelines. If you feel comfortable, feel free to ad lib, but try not to veer from your main point.

Rabbi: Textual Basis:

- Biblical Underpinning (V'ahavtah text handout)
- *Mitzvah* is not a good deed. A *mitzvah* is something that I feel compelled to do
- Textual grounding leads me to link between today and 1500 years ago

Board Member: Marker of our space; Marker of Holy Place:

- Judaism spends a lot of time defining and acknowledging that things are holy. We bless food and wine, and mark important milestones in life, both good and bad. *Mezuzot* are no different. *Mezuzot* are Judaism's way of making this space ours. When I put a *mezuzah* on my house, it is a holy space that is my home. It is special to me, and it is a Jewish space.

Teacher: Reminder to be Jewish and do Jewish; *Mezuzah* = proudly saying: I am Jewish:

- Whenever I walk into or out of a room and I see a *mezuzah*, it is my constant reminder of God's presence and a sign of how proud I am to be Jewish. When I visit apartment buildings or walk down the street, I love seeing the *mezuzot* on doors. It connects me via my love for Judaism to those families, even though I have never met them.

Congregant: More than just fulfilling a *mitzvah*, it is beautifying my space:

- I love thinking of the *mezuzot* in my house and in other places as an art gallery. They are beautiful, and I love seeing the various kinds. For me, I sometimes think of them as God. Rabbi talks about how we are all made in God's image, meaning we are all unique and holy. So too are the many different shapes, sizes, and colors of *mezuzot* reminiscent of God.

Appendix C

Who	#1	#2	#3	#4	Class Notes:
Role					
What are their main points/ ideas?					
What questions do you have for them?					
Do you like their reasoning?					

Bibliography

Anderson, Lorin W, David R. Krathwohl, and Peter W. Airasian. *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. Harlow: Longman Publishing, 2001.

Barna, George. *Real Teens: A Contemporary Snapshot of Youth Culture*. Adi, MI: Baker Books, 2001.

Bryfman, David. *Experience and Jewish Education*. Edited by David Bryfman. Los Angeles: Tora Aura Productions, 2016.

Dewey, John. *Experience and Education*. United States: Peter Smith Publisher, 1983.

Fishbane, Michael. "A Note on The Spirituality of Texts." In *Eitz Hayim: Torah and Commentary*, edited by David L. Lieber, 1503–5. New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2001.

Gertz, Lola M. "South Florida's Jewish Population Grows." *Features* (Jewish Telegraphic Agency), December 15, 1999. <http://www.jta.org/1999/12/15/life-religion/features/south-floridas-jewish-population-grows>.

Koepke, N. and J. Baten. "The Biological Standard of Living in Europe During the Last Two Millennia." *European Review of Economic History* 9, no. 1 (April 1, 2005): 61–95.

Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary.

National Research Council (US) and Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development. *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Edited by Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips. Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press (US), 2000. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK225557>.

Steinsaltz, Adin, Tzvi Hersh, Shalom Weinreb, Zvi Berger, and Joshua Schreier. *Koren Talmud Bavli Noe, Vol. 9: Tractate Yoma*. Edited by Adin Steinsaltz. Jerusalem: Shefa Foundation, 2012.

-----, *Koren Talmud Bavli, Vol. 10: Tractate Sukkah*. Edited by Adin Steinsaltz. Jerusalem: Shefa Foundation, 2012.

Vanderbilt. "Center for Teaching." 2016. Accessed December 27, 2016. <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/>.

Washofsky, Mark. *Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice*. New York, NY: UAHC Press, 2010.