

נלמד ונעשה : Nilmad v'na'aseh  
We will learn and we will do  
*Making Jewish Meaning through Informed Choice*

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for ordination

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## Thesis Digest

We are called “People of the Book.” This phrase elucidates that our Jewish lives revolve around reading, writing, discussion, and most importantly, learning and understanding.

As Jewish teachers and leaders of every variety, it is our job to engage the Jewish community socially, intellectually, and spiritually. This curriculum is aimed at those who are seeking more from their Judaism, willing to experiment with scripture, prayer, ritual, and theology. Ultimately, the goal is to enrich not only the individual, but also the community as a whole. When we take the time to talk about such intimate issues as prayer, belief, and God, we engage each other in sacred conversation.

Long past my *Bat Mitzvah*, through high school and college years, I craved Jewish learning. I made the decision to go to rabbinical school so that I could continue to learn about one of my deepest passions and share it with others. I wanted my Judaism to be an authentic expression of myself in a modern era, engaging with an ancient and ever present history. Being a devotee of the unofficial tenet of Reform Judaism, “choice through knowledge,” it has been my long-term goal to acquire as much knowledge as possible and making a choice that resonates with both my head and my heart.

I began asking friends, colleagues, and congregants about their Jewish experiences and inner monologue. By hosting conversations at Valley Temple and asking more directed questions through a Facebook group, I learned about the most important issues of today’s Reform Jews. From there, I structured a program that would hopefully fill a spiritual gap and help to foster deeper, more meaningful relationships within the community.

Here, I present a month long adult education series which can be executed without difficulty. Using a planning method called “understanding by design” or “backward design” I created each session with the end goal in mind. Throughout, I demonstrate a variety of teaching techniques<sup>1</sup> so that other rabbinical students, rabbis, rabbi educators, or knowledgeable lay people can easily replicate the series and even construct other programs based upon this model. I have also included all of the handouts meant to accompany each lesson.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Specific techniques are embedded within the lessons and explained in the footnotes.

<sup>2</sup> The handouts/appendices are explained in a guide, following my concluding remarks.

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## Introduction

I have long heard the phrase “choice through knowledge” ringing in my ears. I merely assumed that it was a widely accepted phrase within Reform Judaism. Tracking down its roots proved to be more difficult than expected. Even when I came very close, the wording was not exact. What little I could find officially committed to paper was Richard N. Levy’s reference to *The Centenary Perspective*. He affirms, “Reform Jews are called upon...[to exercise] their individual autonomy, choosing and creating on the basis of commitment and knowledge.” It led to the phrase “informed choice,” which, along with “autonomy,” became sacred watchwords of Reform Judaism.”<sup>3</sup>

I take my “job” as a Reform Jew very seriously. In fact, my decision to apply to rabbinical school was not so much because I wanted the title, but because I wanted to keep learning. As I approach ordination, I know how much I do not know. The possibilities are endless, and I have a lifetime of “informed decisions” to make. To do so responsibly, knowledge must precede choice. Therefore, I am dedicated to learning and teaching as much as I possibly can in adherence to this unofficial doctrine. Rabbi Debra Hachen explains, “As a Reform Jew, I believe deeply in informed decision making and I ask that each student be an informed decision-maker about his or her religious future.”<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Hachen’s statement was originally made within the context of conversion candidates. However, I believe that *all* Reform Jews should be engaged in the process of questioning and learning. Anything that we expect from our Jews-by-choice is applicable to the rest of the community.

Regarding the Jewish decisions we make over a lifetime, Richard Levy comments, “Choice is a rational process: I determine my goals for Jewish life, consider the pros and cons, benefits and costs, to particular observances, and how they do or don’t fulfill goals, and then decide which to accept.” Judaism is a life-long commitment. I believe it is our responsibility to constantly ask, “Why?” Our thought process and practice *ought* to change over the course of a lifetime.

As a student rabbi, I have access to hundreds of Jews, each possessing a unique story to tell. At Shabbat dinners and *onegs*, I would hear fragments of personal history. However, from the *bimah*, I looked out over many congregations, and I found it exceptionally difficult to determine where people were mentally or spiritually. At times, I wished for cartoon-strip thought bubbles that would pop up over each person’s head. Then, I would be able to tell who was in pain, who bored, who mourning, who celebrating, who seeking.

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<sup>3</sup> Levy, *A Vision of Holiness*, 4

<sup>4</sup> Einstein, *Introduction to Judaism: Instructor's Guide and Curriculum*, 134

Then I got braver and started asking congregants who I tagged as likeminded seekers, “What do you think about when we sing *Mi Chamocha*?” I hoped for the best and braced for the worst. I worried that I would hear answer like, “I mentally balance my checkbook,” or “I’m making my to-do list for the weekend.” I was surprised in the most wonderful fashion. I had made a very wrong assumption. One woman told me that when she envisions the splitting of the Red Sea and the Israelites’ march to freedom she thinks of her own freedoms and gives thanks. She went on to say, “I think of ways I could unburden myself, free up more of my time and energy.” After this conversation, I felt rededicated to my role as spiritual leader. As a leader, I often find it difficult to pray in the moment. However, the following week, amidst the strumming of my guitar, I, too, thought about my freedoms.

I was really excited to take part in more of these types of conversations, sharing with each other how and why we’ve made the “informed choices” we have. My interest in pursuing this project peaked when surfing Facebook. I have been blessed to have many different types of Jews in my life: from *Chasidim* to Converts, from secular, cultural, twice-a-year Jews to rabbis of many persuasions. While it feels strange to admit, Facebook has become an integral part of my Judaism. People that would ordinarily drop out of my life: childhood friends who moved far away, people I met once at a conference but with whom I would otherwise not keep in touch, ex partners that split for whatever reason. We can choose to use social media to broadcast our thoughts and emotions to hundreds or thousands of people, including some we may not know in “real life.” This technology that can be invasive at times, leaving a person “on the clock 24/7,” can also provide instant feedback and support.

Facebook allows a person to be as open or private as they feel comfortable. The “About” section asks for information such as birthdate, sexual orientation, political views, and religion. Many of my Jewish friends also list their denomination. I noticed a trend amongst my younger friends, in which, they spelled out their Hebrew name in between their first and last English names. I was proud to see them claiming their Judaism in such a creative and beautiful way. Then, one such friend, with whom I had shared but a single class during my final semester at the University of Kansas, changed her denomination from “Reform Judaism” to “*Nilmad V’na’aseh*.”

As a fourth year rabbinical student, I felt compelled to click the link. I pondered to myself, “We will learn and we will do?” This was not the proper rendering of Exodus 24:7:

וַיִּקַּח סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנוֹ  
הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר יְהוָה  
נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע :

Then he [Moses] took the record of the covenant and read it aloud to the people. And they said, “All that the LORD has spoken **we will do and we will hear!**”

*Na'aseh v'nishma*: we will do and we will hear. Several *midrashim* and a great deal of *aggadic* material try to explain the seemingly backward logic. My friend's Facebook change made me wonder, "Am I a "na'aseh v'nishma Jew" or a "nilmad v'na'aseh Jew"?"

*Nishma* has also been translated as "understanding." In such a case, learning *must* take place first, and analysis and choice after the fact. My mother explained that through her conversion process, she was frequently asked to learn, act, and reflect. Steven Einstein claims, "Reform Jews are committed to the eternal validity of Jewish tradition, but they emphasize the need to interpret the tradition from the perspective of individual conscience and informed choice. They believe, therefore, that Jews must study Jewish tradition. Whenever possible, they should adapt it to modern life. They may question ancient practices or attitudes that are inconsistent with the life of a modern person, and they may reject those ancient or medieval teachings that run contrary to one's moral conscience and contemporary spirituality."<sup>5</sup> My mother took this idea and ran with it. She was asked to try on dozens of rituals to see which ones fit. After the fact, she could embrace, adapt, or abandon it.

Flipping through the pages of my parents' copy of *Introduction to Judaism*, I noticed that most of the marginalia was in my father's script. This seemed strange to me, because after all, he was raised a Jew. He protested that he was never taught this "neat kind of stuff" when he was growing up. Reform Judaism has changed a great deal since 1960. After my mother's conversion, she encouraged special Shabbat meals, building a *sukkah* in the backyard, second night Passover seders, and *Tu B'shevat* fondue parties. We were living *The Jewish Catalog*. Every member of our *chavurah*, comprised of couples that my parents met during my mother's conversion process, would study between events, and the next time we gathered, add more content and meaning to our shared Jewish experience.

Leo Tripp states in his introduction to *The Complete Book of Jewish Observance* that, "Each Jew must look at himself or herself and ask, Where do I stand?" This can be an extremely difficult task for Reform Jews. Eugue Borowitz stated, "in placing the dignity of self on an equal or superior level to the Torah tradition, expected the individual to answer every significant call to duty with full human power. Reform Jews have therefore argued that their standard of proper Jewish behavior is more demanding than Orthodoxy, where one generally knows what to do. For Reform Jews must decide for themselves and thus bear responsibility for their standards as well as their actions. This insistence on personal freedom is too much for many people, who prefer having others think for them or otherwise refuse to think seriously for themselves."<sup>6</sup> It is much easier to flow along with the stream of the masses, however, I believe it is much more rewarding when one rises to the challenge of choice, turning an ordinary, unexamined Judaism into

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<sup>5</sup> Einstein, *Introduction to Judaism: a source book*, 238-239

<sup>6</sup> Borowitz, *Reform Judaism Today*, 37

something that is truly dynamic and meaningful. For some, choosing is a burden, for others it is the element that empowers and enhances Reform Judaism. Borowitz claims, “This freedom of choice is unusual in religion, because almost all the world’s faiths emphasize discipline and obedience.”<sup>7</sup>

The process of reformation is not new to Judaism, however. While Reform Judaism, as we know it, is a product of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, since the dawn of Judaism there have always been stricter and more lenient camps. Even amongst the ultra-Orthodox, interpretation, discussion, and the examination of Jewish practice are the center of attention. Borowitz reminds us, “The Torah does not tell us everything we need to do. It leaves a great deal up to us.”<sup>8</sup> Our reframing Judaism is neither new, nor inauthentic. In fact, it is precisely when we choose to engage Judaism and question what we do and why that we are most authentically Jewish. *Reform Judaism Today* encourages “the Jew “to “choose” from the tradition. Nothing could be more Reform Jewish or non-Orthodox.”<sup>9</sup> This ideal, however, requires our devotion to study and meaning making. Borowitz would further inspire us by saying, “I am not going to tell you what you *must* do but only to help you make your own informed, conscientious choice.”<sup>10</sup> It is in this spirit that I present a curriculum that can help Reform Jews make their own choices, in an environment where it is safe to question and experiment, and do so within the warm embrace of community.

Larry Hoffman writes, “Our Jews are intelligent and informed, though they are still struggling with the Jewish aspect of their education. They are still exploring the fullness of the Jewish tradition, giving no necessary priority to any specific aspect of it. In fact they are still in the first stage of discovering many traditional themes of whose existence they have often been completely unaware.”<sup>11</sup> Religious school should be a life long commitment.

Not only as a soon-to-be-rabbi, but as a soon-to-be-*rebbe*tin, and a constantly engaged member of the Jewish community, my deepest worry is that this notion of “informed choice” is echoed throughout our Movement, but that Reform Jews do not seem to be choosing for themselves. “Informed choice” means that study must take place first, knowledge second, which result in a personalized, well supported argument for why our religious practice is as it is. I am a firm believer in choice through knowledge. I do not want to envision or participate in a community that defaults to choice through ignorance. My mother reminds me that when we live our lives as our most authentic selves, we are *all* Jews-by-choice; we choose Judaism every day.

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<sup>7</sup> Borowitz, *Explaining Reform Judaism*, 49

<sup>8</sup> Borowitz, *Liberal Judaism*, 323

<sup>9</sup> Borowitz, *Reform Judaism Today*, 47

<sup>10</sup> Borowitz, *Liberal Judaism*, 411

<sup>11</sup> Hoffman (as cited in Meyer), *The Reform Judaism Reader*, 66



## How to Use this Curriculum

This series contain four 1½-hour sessions, complete with lesson plans, handouts, and teaching techniques. I prefer to be over-prepared rather than come up short, so this curriculum can also be divided into six or more sessions. The program does not require extensive background knowledge as I have included the necessary information so that virtually anyone could present the material and facilitate instruction without difficulty.

Through my trial runs and participant feedback, I learned that it is helpful to print each appendix on a different color of paper for easy reference. Hand out one appendix at a time so that the group can process together. Be forewarned that when distributing materials, participants begin reading immediately and may not be ready to listen while they are skimming. To avoid this problem, explain the directions first and then proceed.

In addition to the four classes, participants are asked to also keep a journal of their ideas and feelings throughout the experience. Guidelines for the journal are given at the beginning of the first session so learners can begin thinking about topics or emotions right from the start. At the beginning of sessions 2-4, there is an opportunity to share from these journals either verbatim or as a summary of their thoughts from the week.

אַתָּה חוֹנֵן לָאָדָם דָּעַת  
וּמְלִמֵּד לְאֶנוֹשׁ בִּינָה.  
חֲנִינוּ מֵאַתָּה  
חֲכָמָה, בִּינָה וְדָעַת.  
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ, חוֹנֵן הַדָּעַת.

*Atah chonein l'adam daat  
um'lameid le-enosh binah.*

*Choneinu mei-it'cha  
chochmah, binah v'daat.*

*Baruch atah, Adonai, chonein hadaat.*

You grace humans with knowledge and teach mortals understanding.

Graciously share with us Your wisdom, insight, and knowledge.

Blessed are You, Adonai, who graces us with knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

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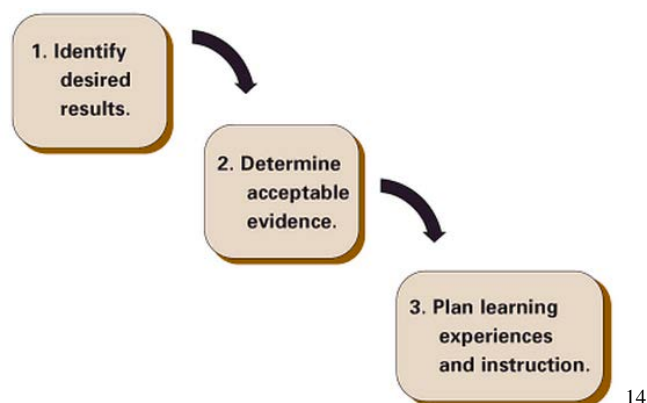
<sup>12</sup> Frishman, *Mishkan Tefilah*, 84

## Methodology

My father tells a story about one of his law school professors who compared students' brains to a bathtub. All semester long, the professor fills the tub with information. Upon the final exam, the professor pulls the plug, letting all the water out. The bathtub ring that remained was the transformation of information into knowledge, and ultimately, understanding.

During my second year at the Hebrew Union College, I was introduced to a lesson planning process called, "Understanding by Design." It is a design model published by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe whose curricular goal is "to engage students in exploring and deepening their understanding of important ideas," implementing a "backward design process."<sup>13</sup> This requires us, as instructors, to keep the end game at the front of our minds from the very beginning of our planning process.

The process can be simplified into three steps:



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The first step is identifying the big ideas, or enduring understandings. The second step is deciding what content will be taught. The third step is the intentional and mindful construction of the learning experience, based upon the information in steps one and two.

Wiggins and McTighe try to steer teachers away from what they call the “twin sins” of typical instructional design in schools: activity-focused teaching and coverage-focused teaching.”<sup>15</sup> While the activity may be fun, the lasting value is usually lacking. It then becomes our job as rabbis and educators to uncover an “enduring understanding” to help frame an objective, rather than activity, based lesson. They emphasize that “the word *understand(ing)* has a verb meaning and a noun meaning. *To understand* a topic or a subject is to be able to use . . . knowledge and skill wisely and effectively. *An understanding* is the successful result of trying to understand . . . [the] meaning of many

<sup>13</sup> Wiggins and McTighe, *Understanding by Design*, 3

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 18

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 3

discrete (and perhaps seemingly insignificant) elements of knowledge.”<sup>16</sup> They recommend that appropriate activities should be selected only after asking the question, “What should students come away understanding?”<sup>17</sup> At this point in the process, we are urged to focus on “big ideas that have lasting value beyond the classroom.”<sup>18</sup> If identifying enduring understandings is difficult at first, Wiggins and McTighe offer some “practical tool[s]” to help kick start end-goal thinking. We can fill in the sentence, “Students will understand *that . . .*”<sup>19</sup> If we keep these principles in our mind throughout the planning process, we can ascertain that the take-home message will be something significant, something students will “be able to use several years from now, after they’ve forgotten the details.”<sup>20</sup> With this intentional design process, both instructor and learner have a richer experience.

As teachers, we need to be aware that “different kinds of understanding exist”<sup>21</sup> and that “understanding takes time and practice.”<sup>22</sup> One of the ways we can help our students and ourselves is by “think[ing] differently about time-honored habits and points of view about curriculum, assessment, and instruction.”<sup>23</sup> Even though “backward design” might feel uncomfortable at first, it still has the same framework “that all purposeful and effective teachers” utilize: “plan-revise-teach-assess-reflect-adjust.”<sup>24</sup> I will address how I used this framework in my concluding remarks.

In facilitating understanding and knowledge making, we must ask ourselves three questions when choosing content, “Why this? Why now? So what?”<sup>25</sup> Drs. Richard D. and Elaine C. Solomon, who wrote *Toolbox for Teachers and Mentors*, a Jewish manual that supports “backward design,” condensed the procedure for “Content Decision Making,” to five steps which I have partially replicated: <sup>26</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 43

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 47

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 342

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 4

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 40

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 6

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 8

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 294

<sup>26</sup> Solomon, *Toolbox for Teachers and Mentors*, 15

- Step 1. *Decide what content or knowledge is enduring.*
  - Example: The Torah and the Talmud contain a body of wisdom that guides a person regarding how to lead a righteous and meaningful life
- Step 2. *Decide what question or questions you want your students to answer.*
  - Examples:
    - What are the Torah and Talmud?
    - Why are we commanded to study the Torah and Talmud?
    - How does the study of the Torah and Talmud help us live a righteous and meaningful life?
- Step 3. *Decide what evidence your students need to demonstrate to prove that they truly understand this enduring Jewish knowledge.*
  - Examples:
    - Students will be able to cite specific examples from the Torah and Talmud of *g'milut chasadim*, acts of loving kindness, i.e.
    - Visiting the sick, *Bikkur Cholim*, Genesis 19:1-3
    - Welcoming guests/strangers, *Hachnasat Orchim*, Genesis 18:3-5
- Step 4. *Determine what student skills and classroom activities students can do which demonstrate that they understand, and can apply this enduring Jewish knowledge.*
  - Example:
    - Students will generate a list of *g'milut chasadim* projects that they will implement individually, or as a class during the school year.
- Step 5. *Determine how to assess or measure whether individual students truly understand and can apply this enduring Jewish knowledge.*
  - Examples:
    - Students will define and give examples of *g'milut chasadim* from personal experiences, and from stories in the Torah and Talmud.
    - Students will write an essay, create a song, or draw a picture showing how doing an act of *g'milut chasadim* made a difference in their lives and those of others.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 15

This method is applicable for all types of learners. While I tend to teach to one's "inner child," there is a difference between an actual child, and a childlike zeal for learning. Because this series is intended for adults or high school students, the responsibility of these five steps is shared. In a less formal setting, the instructor must determine the enduring understandings and content while adult learners must take responsibility for inquiry, application, and assessment. The *Toolbox for Teachers*, references "Knowles' Five Principles of Adult Learning":

1. Adult learners have a wealth of experience that should be drawn upon whenever possible.
2. Adult learners tend to see themselves as self-directed and independent learners.
3. Adult learners tend to have a present orientation, wanting to learn skills, methods, and strategies that will help them now, not at some point in the future."
4. Adult learners tend to want to solve specific, not general or theoretical problems.
5. Adult learners tend to be highly motivated to make a difference in the lives of people.<sup>28</sup>

In my years of teaching, I've detected just *one* major difference between child and adult learners. Children are *required* to learn, and they understand their attendance and participation as compulsory. Adults learn as they want to, when they want to, how they want to. Many of the same ideas and techniques may be applied, but have to be tweaked in such a way as to honor what adult learners have already experienced and that "Jewish adult learners are volunteers and your classes are *not* "for credit" or mandated."<sup>29</sup> The benefit of working with adults is that we can teach richer content. Unlike elementary education, an adult learner is ultimately responsible for his/her learning. Wiggins and McTighe claim, "Authentic learning experiences shift a student from the role of a passive knowledge receiver into a more active role as a constructor of meaning."<sup>30</sup>

*Understanding by Design* is a perfect guide for creating an informed choice curriculum, because even in their guidance on lesson planning, Wiggins and McTighe state, "Given that there typically is more content than can reasonably be addressed, we are obliged to make choices."<sup>31</sup> Choice is a constant presence in our lives, Jewish and otherwise. We can default to a life based upon the choices others have made and risk feeling that our Judaism is antiquated, meaningless, or shallow. Or, we can actively choose to craft our practice into something beautiful and bursting with meaning and joy.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 254

<sup>29</sup> Schuster, *Jewish Lives, Jewish Learning*, 221

<sup>30</sup> Wiggins and McTighe, *Understanding by Design*, 11

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 9

## **Curriculum**

### **Session #1: Jewish Principles**

#### **ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS**

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- Reform Judaism has undergone dramatic change since planting its roots in America.
- Jewish practice has both communal and personal elements.
- History and tradition are shared experiences, made holy by the members of the community.

#### **QUESTIONS**

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- What Jewish principles are most important to you?
- How does your Judaism influence your day-to-day living?

#### **MATERIALS**

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- Nametags
- Markers, pens, and highlighters
- White board or flip chart (with appropriate markers)
- Appendices A-E

#### **TIME TABLE**

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**00:00-00:10**

##### **Nametags**

- While this might seem silly, hopefully the group is diverse enough that new connections and friendships will be made. If a member is not a regular, or for people who struggle with face and name recognition, this allows for a more intimate feel. No one will have to feel embarrassed

##### **Entry Question<sup>32</sup>**

- Introduction: say your name and why you're here tonight, or what you are hoping to get out of the series.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 342

An entry question is defined as “a simple, thought-provoking question that opens a lesson or unit. It often introduces a key idea or understanding in an accessible way. Effective entry questions spark discussions about a common experience, provocative issue, or perplexing problem, as a lead-in to the unit and essential questions.

**00:10-00:15****Introduction**

- “This is a month long study on “Informed Jewish Decision Making.” The four sessions build upon one another, but each has its own intrinsic value. Ideally, you can experience this experiment in its entirety, but if you can’t make it to some of the sessions, that is okay.
- You will be asked to keep a journal throughout this process, but you only have to share what you want to.”

**Guidelines for conversation:**

- “You are not obligated to share, but try to give as much as you take.”
  - For example, if there are ten people in the group, give 1/10<sup>th</sup> and take 1/10<sup>th</sup>

**00:15-00:20****Definition**

- Appoint a “secretary” to keep notes on the board or flip chart.
- Ask participants to define the word “principle.”<sup>33</sup>
- Share the Oxford English Dictionary definition:
  - 1) A fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning.
  - 2) A rule or belief governing one’s personal behavior.

**00:20-00:45****Read the platforms**

- Go around the table, each person reading one point/section of the document.
- “As we read, highlight the ideas that resonate with you, cross out those that do not. Feel free to make emendations.”
- After each statement is read, participants can explain what/why they highlighted, crossed out, or rewrote.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Solomon, *Toolbox for Teachers and Mentors*, 70

“Wait time” is critical to the success of this program. Allowing people the opportunity to think before speaking will render more complete and coherent responses. Silence can make people uncomfortable, but build in at least 30 seconds to 1 minute, explaining why it is acceptable and even preferred.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 107

This activity addresses “multiple intelligences” named by Dr. Howard Gardner in 1983: verbal/linguistic, logical, visual/spatial, body/kinesthetic, inter/intrapersonal.

**00:45 – 01:00****Thirteen Principles**

- Ask if participants are familiar with Maimonides' "Thirteen Principles of Faith." If so, they can share their knowledge.
- Provide short background.<sup>35</sup>
- Read Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of Faith, again using highlighters and pens, to agree, disagree, or amend.

**01:00 – 01:10****Yigdal**

- Sing Yigdal together (or play sound clip).<sup>36</sup> This addresses musical intelligence and may spark a different reaction than the written word. It is often the case that Reform Jews may not agree with the literal meaning of a prayer or hymn, but have great fondness of the melody.
- How do we reconcile a song/melody that we love with a meaning that may clash with our beliefs?

**1:10 – 1:25****Alternative Principles**

Return to highlighters and pens, reading:

- NFTY's Thirteen Principles
- Shira Dicker's "Thirteen Intimate Interactions with Nature That Are Key to Our Spiritual Well-Being"

**1:25 – 1:30****Journal**

"Using what we have learned and discussed today, take some time this week to think about your own Jewish principles and how they influence your thoughts and actions, life and family, and the decisions you've made over the course of your life. You can use Appendix I to organize your thoughts and Appendix J as inspiration for your journal."

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<sup>35</sup> See the Appendix Guide.

<sup>36</sup> <http://media.urj.org/educate/blessings/01Yigdal.mp3>



## Appendix A: The Pittsburgh Platform – 1885: Declaration of Principles

1. **An attempt to grasp the Infinite**, and in every mode, source or book of revelation held sacred in any religious system the consciousness of the indwelling of God in man. We hold that Judaism presents the highest conception of the God-idea as taught in our Holy Scriptures and developed and spiritualized by the Jewish teachers, in accordance with the moral and philosophical progress of their respective ages. We maintain that Judaism preserved and defended midst continual struggles and trials and under enforced isolation, this God-idea as the central religious truth for the human race.
2. **We recognize in the Bible the record of the consecration of the Jewish people to its mission as the priest of the one God**, and value it as the most potent instrument of religious and moral instruction. We hold that the modern discoveries of scientific researches in the domain of nature and history are not antagonistic to the doctrines of Judaism, the Bible reflecting the primitive ideas of its own age, and at times clothing its conception of divine Providence and Justice dealing with men in miraculous narratives.
3. We recognize in the Mosaic legislation a system of training the Jewish people for its mission during its national life in Palestine, and **today we accept as binding only its moral laws, and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization.**
4. We hold that all such Mosaic and rabbinical **laws as regulate diet, priestly purity, and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas entirely foreign to our present mental and spiritual state.** They fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness; their observance in our days is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation.
5. We recognize, in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect, the approaching of the realization of Israel's great Messianic hope for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice, and peace among all men. **We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state.**

6. We recognize in Judaism a progressive religion, ever striving to be in accord with the postulates of reason. We are convinced of the utmost necessity of preserving the historical identity with our great past. Christianity and Islam, being daughter religions of Judaism, we appreciate their providential mission, to aid in the spreading of monotheistic and moral truth. We acknowledge that the spirit of broad humanity of our age is our ally in the fulfillment of our mission, and therefore we extend the hand of fellowship to all who cooperate with us in the establishment of the reign of truth and righteousness among men.

7. We reassert the doctrine of Judaism that the soul is immortal, grounding the belief on the divine nature of human spirit, which forever finds bliss in righteousness and misery in wickedness. We reject as ideas not rooted in Judaism, the beliefs both in bodily resurrection and in Gehenna and Eden (Hell and Paradise) as abodes for everlasting punishment and reward.

8. In full accordance with the spirit of the Mosaic legislation, which strives to regulate the relations between rich and poor, we deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve, on the basis of justice and righteousness, the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society.

## Appendix B: The Columbus Platform – 1937: The Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism

The Columbus Platform is broken down into three main sections: Judaism and its foundations, ethics, and Religious practice.

- **Judaism and its Foundations**

1. Nature of Judaism

- a. "...historical religious experience of the Jewish people..."
- b. universal message
- c. "Judaism welcomes all truth, whether written in the pages of scripture or deciphered from the records of nature."

2. God

- a. "...doctrine of the One, living God, who rules the world through law and love."
- b. transcends time and space
- c. "He is the indwelling Presence of the world"

3. Man

- a. "Judaism affirms that man is created in the Divine image."

4. Torah

- a. "Revelation is a continuous process..."
- b. "...certain...laws have lost their binding force"
- c. "Each age has the obligation to adapt to the teachings of the Torah to its basic needs in consonance with the genius of Judaism."

5. Israel

- a. "Judaism is the soul of which Israel is the body."
- b. "The non-Jew who accepts our faith is welcomed as a full member of the Jewish community."

- **Ethics**

6. Ethics and Religion

- a. "...religion and morality blend into an indissoluble unity."

7. Social justice

- a. "Judaism seeks the attainment of a just society by the application of its teachings to the economic order..."
- b. "...advocates the promotion of harmonious relations..."

8. Peace

- a. Judaism "abhors all violence and relies upon moral education, love and sympathy to secure human progress."

- **Religious Practice**

- 9. The Religious Life

- a. "...finds expression in home, synagogue, and school."
    - b. "Judaism as a living force depends upon religious knowledge and upon the Education of each new generation in our rich cultural and spiritual heritage."
    - c. "Prayer...directs man's heart and mind Godward . . . and reaches out after goals which invest life with supreme value."

"Judaism as a way of life requires in addition to its moral and spiritual demands, the preservation of the Sabbath, festivals and Holy Days."

## Appendix C: A Centenary Perspective – 1976

The document begins with a reflection of the past one hundred years:

- What We Have Taught
  - “...our tradition should interact with modern culture...its forms ought to reflect a contemporary esthetic.”
  - “...change has been and must continue to be a fundamental reality in Jewish life.”
  - “...women have full rights to practice Judaism”
  - “Jewish obligation begins with the informed will of every individual.”
  
- What We Have Learned
  - “...events of the past shattered our easy optimism about humanity and its inevitable progress.”
  - “The State of Israel, through its many accomplishments, raised our sense of the Jews as a people to new heights of aspiration and devotion.”
  - “...in carrying out our Jewish responsibilities we help move humanity toward its messianic fulfillment.”
  
- Diversity Within Unity, the Hallmark of Reform
  - “Reform Judaism does more than tolerate diversity; it engenders it.”
  - “While we may differ in our interpretation and application of the ideas enunciated here, we accept such differences as precious and see in them Judaism’s best hope for confronting whatever the future holds for us.”

Six planks follow these reflections:

1. God
  - a. "In our struggle through the centuries to preserve our faith we have experienced and conceived of God in many ways."
  - b. "...the challenges of modern culture have made steady belief and clear understanding difficult for some."
  - c. "...we affirm that human beings, created in God's image, share in God's eternity despite the mystery we call death."
2. The People Israel
  - a. "The Jewish people and Judaism defy precise definition because both are in the process of becoming."
3. Torah
  - a. "For millennia, the creation of Torah has not ceased and Jewish creativity in our time is adding to the chain of tradition."
4. Our Religious Obligations: Religious Practice
  - a. "Judaism emphasizes action rather than creed as the primary expression of a religious life..."
  - b. "Reform Jews are called upon to confront the claims of Jewish tradition, however differently perceived, and **to exercise their individual autonomy, choosing and creating on the basis of commitment and knowledge.**"
5. Our Obligations: The State of Israel and the Diaspora
  - a. "We have both a stake and a responsibility in building the State of Israel, assuring its security, and defining its Jewish character."
  - b. "We encourage aliyah for those who wish to find maximum personal fulfillment in the cause of Zion."
  - c. "We demand that Reform Judaism be unconditionally legitimized in the State of Israel."
  - d. "A genuine Jewish life is possible in any land, each community developing its own particular character and determining its Jewish responsibilities."

6. Our Obligations: Survival and Service
  - a. “Judaism calls us simultaneously to universal and particular obligations.”

The Perspective ends with a message of hope:

- “...our people has always refused to despair.”
- “The survivors of the Holocaust, being granted life, seized it, nurtured it, and rising above catastrophe, showed humankind that the human spirit is indomitable.”

## Appendix D: A Statement of Principles – 1999

### 1. God

- a. "...we may differ in our understanding of the Divine presence."
- b. "We affirm that every human being is created (*b'tzelem Elohim*), in the image of God, and that therefore every human life is sacred."
- c. "We encounter God's presence in moments of awe and wonder, in acts of justice and compassion, in loving relationships and in the experiences of everyday life."
- d. "We respond to God daily: through public and private prayer, through study and through the performance of other (*mitzvot*), sacred obligations -- (*bein adam la Makom*), to God, and (*bein adam la-chaveiro*), to other human beings."
  - i. **"In all these ways and more,  
God gives meaning and purpose to our lives."**

### 2. Torah

- a. "We affirm the importance of studying Hebrew, the language of Torah and Jewish liturgy, that we may draw closer to our people's sacred texts."
- b. "We are committed to the ongoing study of the whole array of (*mitzvot*) and to the fulfillment of those that address us as individuals and as a community."
- c. "Shabbat calls us to bring the highest moral values to our daily labor and to culminate the workweek with (*kedushah*), holiness, (*menuchah*), rest and (*oneg*), joy."
- d. "We seek dialogue and joint action with people of other faiths in the hope that together we can bring peace, freedom and justice to our world."
  - i. **"In all these ways and more,  
Torah gives meaning and purpose to our lives."**

### 3. Israel

- a. "We are linked . . . to all Jews in every age and place."
- b. "We embrace religious and cultural pluralism as an expression of the vitality of Jewish communal life in Israel and the Diaspora."
- c. "We are an inclusive community, opening doors to Jewish life to people of all ages, to varied kinds of families, to all regardless of their sexual orientation, to (*gerim*), those who have converted to Judaism, and to all individuals and families, including the intermarried, who strive to create a Jewish home."



- i. **“In all these ways and more,  
Israel gives meaning and purpose to our lives”**

The document ends with:

- *(Baruch she-amar ve-haya ha-olam).*  
Praised be the One through whose word all things came to be.  
May our words find expression in holy actions.  
May they raise us up to a life of meaning devoted to God's service  
And to the redemption of our world.

## Appendix E: Maimonides' "Thirteen Principles of Faith"

Maimonides' "Thirteen Principles of Faith," summarized what he viewed as the required beliefs of Judaism:

1. The existence of God.
2. God's unity and indivisibility into elements.
3. God's spirituality and incorporeality.
4. God's eternity.
5. God alone should be the object of worship.
6. Revelation through God's prophets.
7. The preeminence of Moses among the prophets.
8. The Torah that we have today is the one dictated to Moses by God.
9. The Torah given by Moses will not be replaced and that nothing may be added or removed from it.
10. God's awareness of human actions.
11. Reward of good and punishment of evil.
12. The coming of the Jewish Messiah.
13. The resurrection of the dead.

## Appendix F: Yigdal

### Yigdal

Yigdal Elohim chai ve'yishtabach,  
nimtza v'ein et el metsiuto.

Echad V'ein yachid keyichudo,  
ne'elam v'gam ein sof l'achduto.

Ein lo d'mut haguf v'eino guf, lo na'aroch eilav  
kedushato.

Kadmon l'chol davar asher nivra,  
rishon v'ein reishit l'reishito.

Hino adon olam l'chol notsar,  
yoreh g'dulato umalchuto.

Shefa n'vuato netano, el anshei s'gulato  
v'tif'arto.

Lo kam b'Yisrael k'Moshe od navi umabeet et  
temunato.

Torat emet natan le'amo el, al yad neveeo  
ne'eman beito.

Lo yachalif ha'el ve'lo yamir dato, le'olamim,  
lezulato.

Tsofeh v'yodea setareinu, mabeet l'sof davar  
B'kadmato.

Gomel l'ish chesed k'mif'alo, notel l'rasha ra  
kerish'ato.

Yishlach l'ketz yamin meshicheinu,  
lifdot m'chakei ketz yeshuato.

Metim y'chayeh El b'rov chasdo,  
baruch adei ad shem t'hilato.<sup>37</sup>

### יגדל

יגדל אלהים חי וישתבח, נמצא, ואין עת  
אל מציאותה

אחד ואין יחיד כיחודו, נעלם, וגם אין  
סוף לאחדותה

אין לודמות הגוף ואינו גוף, לא נערוך  
אליו קדשותה

קדמון לכל דבר אשר נברא, ראשון ואין  
ראשית לראשיתה

הנו אדון עולם, לכל נוצר. יורה גדלותו  
ומלכותה

שפע נבואתו נתנו, אל אנשי סגולתו  
ותפארתה

לא קם בישראל כמשה עוד נביא, ומביט  
את תמונתה

תורת אמת נתן לעמו, אל, על יד נביאו  
נאמן ביתה

לא יחליף האל ולא ימיר דתה. לעולמים,  
לזולתה

צופה ויודע סתרינו, מביט לסוף דבר  
בקדמותה

גומל לאיש חסד כמפעלו, נותן לרשע רע  
כרשעתה

ישלח לקץ ימין משיחנו, לפדות מחבי קץ  
ישועתה

מתים יחיה אל ברוב חסדו, ברוך עדי עד  
שם תהלתה

<sup>37</sup> [http://www.zemirotdatabase.org/php?song\\_id=95](http://www.zemirotdatabase.org/php?song_id=95)

1. Magnified and praised be the living God: he is, and there is no limit in time unto his being.
2. He is One, and there is no unity like unto his unity; inconceivable is he, and unending is his unity.
3. He hath neither bodily form nor substance: we can compare nought unto him in his holiness.
4. He was before anything that hath been created--even the first: but his existence had no beginning.
5. Behold he is the Lord of the universe: to every creature he teacheth his greatness and his sovereignty.
6. The rich gift of his prophecy he gave unto the men of his choice, in whom he gloried.
7. There hath never yet arisen in Israel a prophet like unto Moses, one who hath beheld his similitude,
8. The Law of truth God gave unto his people by the hand of his prophet who was faithful in his house.
9. God will not alter nor change his Law to everlasting for any other.
10. He watcheth and knoweth our secret thoughts: he beholdeth the end of a thing before it existeth.
11. He bestoweth lovingkindness upon a man according to his work; he giveth to the wicked evil according to his wickedness.
12. He will send our anointed at the end of days, to redeem them that wait for the end—his salvation.
13. In the abundance of his lovingkindness God will quicken the dead. Blessed for evermore be his glorious name.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Singer, *The Standard Prayer Book*

## Appendix G: NFTY's Thirteen Principles

### NFTY'S THIRTEEN PRINCIPLES

As North America's Reform Jewish Youth movement, NFTY strives to provide meaningful and engaging youth experiences for teens. These experiences are created and built off of NFTY's 13 Principles. These principles serve as the foundation of NFTY, ensuring that our movement's mission and journey are based on our shared values. Together, these 13 Principles are the preamble to NFTY's Constitution, guiding us as we create a holistic Jewish environment. They allow NFTY to continuously evolve, and remain a dynamic Jewish Reform Youth movement for years to come.

#### TORAH - תורה

A commitment to God and Torah as a means of inter- and intra-personal fulfillment;

#### THE JEWISH PEOPLE – AM YISRAEL - עם ישראל

The unity of the Jewish People;

#### THE STATE OF ISRAEL – MEDINAT YISRAEL - מדינת ישראל

The centrality of the State of Israel to the strength and survival of the Jewish People;

#### HEBREW – IVRIT - עברית

The importance of the Hebrew language as a vital component to the strength of the Jewish People;

#### HISTORY – MIDOR L'DOR - מדור לדור

The recognition that in order to fully appreciate our present and ensure our future we must strive to understand our past;

#### TO LEARN AND TO DO – NILMAD V'NA'ASEH - נלמד ונעשה

The necessity of lifelong Jewish learning and teaching as a foundation for our observance through a life of continual discovery of Jewish tradition, law and ethics;

**PLURALISM – KOL YEHUDIM - כל יהודים**

The acceptance and encouragement of alternate modes of Jewish experience;

**SELF – TIKKUN MIDDOT - מידות תיקון**

The understanding that we are to be a light unto the nations by fostering an environment where every individual can meet and exceed their potential as Jews and citizens of the world;

**JUSTICE – TZEDEK - צדק**

The obligation to work for justice for all;

**COMMUNITY – KEHILAH - קהילה**

The need for community to provide an outlet for the individual needs of all Jews;

**REPAIRING THE WORLD - TIKKUN OLAM - תיקון עולם**

The obligation to repair the world;

**PARTNERSHIP – SHUTAFUT - שותפות**

The need and desire to work together to foster each individual's connection and commitment to ensuring the vibrancy of our movement;

**FUN AND SPIRIT – KEF v'RUACH - כיף ורוח**

The importance of fun and spirit as foundations of our movement;

do hereby ordain and establish the Constitution of the North American Federation of Temple Youth.

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<sup>39</sup> <http://www.nfty.org/about/13principles/thirteenprinciples/>

## Appendix H: Shira Dicker's "Thirteen Intimate Interactions with Nature That Are Key to Our Spiritual Well-Being"

I believe, with a deep and abiding faith, that it is a holy act to walk barefoot in the grass and occasionally roll down a soft grassy hill.

I believe, with a deep and abiding faith, that it is a holy act to sleep outdoors, under the canopy of heaven.

I believe, with a deep and abiding faith, that it is a holy act to watch the sun come up over the ocean.

I believe, with a deep and abiding faith, that it is a holy act to bask in the healing rays of the sun.

I believe, with a deep and abiding faith, that it is a holy act to stand in an open meadow on a clear, starry night.

I believe, with a deep and abiding faith, that it is a holy act to climb a mountain.

I believe, with a deep and abiding faith, that it is a holy act to sit among the branches of a tree.

I believe, with a deep and abiding faith, that it is a holy act to swim in a lake or a river or an ocean or a bay and feel your body supported by water.

I believe, with a deep and abiding faith, that it is a holy act to take a great gulp of country air by night or after rainfall.

I believe, with a deep and abiding faith, that it is a holy act to jump into great piles of crunch autumn leaves.

I believe, with a deep and abiding faith, that it is a holy act to build sandcastles and feel the sand run through your fingers and slip between your toes.

I believe, with a deep and abiding faith, that it is a holy act to plant vegetables and herbs or simply dig in dirt.

I believe, with a deep and abiding faith, that it is a holy act to dance barefoot in the moonlight, see the horizon, witness a rainbow, get grass stains on your shirts, smell a barnyard, ride a horse, milk a cow, pet a cat, hug a tree, touch the sky."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Sonsino, *Six Jewish Spiritual Paths*, 146

**Appendix I: I believe...**

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## Appendix J: Journal Guidance

Janet Ruth Falon, the author of *The Jewish Journaling Book*, offers “52 Jewish-journaling tools.”<sup>41</sup> “Why 52?” you might ask - a different technique for every week of the year. What is the difference between “Jewish-journaling” and keeping a “normal” journal? As it turns out, there is not a complete separation of the two. Journaling becomes Jewish when we with big ideas, explore our innermost thoughts, and tap into our most honest and authentic selves. The experience can be positively profound when we recall influential Jews who kept journals, from which we draw many lessons and knowledge. Where would we be today without the writings of Mordecai Kaplan, Sigmund Freud, Hannah Senesh . . . Anne Frank?

I think this is a book well worth having on your shelf, but before your Amazon shipment comes in, I’ve provided a sampling of tools to get you started:

- #2     You don’t have to write every day**
  - Daily writing is “an arbitrary rule . . . There is no rule book for proper journal-keeping.”<sup>42</sup>
- #4     Use any words, any topics**
  - Your journal is “the one place where you’re safe...to write about anything that burbles up into your consciousness.”<sup>43</sup>
- #5     Don’t cross out or worry about spelling and grammar**
  - “Keeping a journal is about expressing oneself in all one’s flawed glory.”<sup>44</sup>
- #11    Consider process as well as product**
  - Document “awareness in the margins” for a “richer, more multi-tiered journal entry.”<sup>45</sup>
  - “You might cry; circle the tear stain on the page, and note what it is.”<sup>46</sup>
- #16    Think twice before discarding**
  - Create a “personal *Genizah*”<sup>47</sup> for a while” and consider “whether you really want to discard them.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Falon, *The Jewish Journaling Book*, 47

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 53

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 62

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 65

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-87

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 87

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 107

A *Genizah* is “a place where Jewish documents and books that mention God’s name are stored until they can be properly buried.”

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

**#28 Don't try to be a "writer"**

- Just be you.

**#30 Try "time travel"**

- Mentally place yourself in a different time of your life. What did past experiences feel like, then and now? How do you envision your future?

**#32 Don't use only words**

- Consider using "the journal as more of a scrapbook"<sup>49</sup> where you can include notes, brochures, ticket stubs, etc.
- "Doodling" and "visual images" can be just as powerful as words.<sup>50</sup>

**#33 Write lists**

- "Cut right to the core of things without the distraction of excess verbiage."<sup>51</sup>
- Examples: "Things that worry me"  
                   "The ten most memorable days in my life"  
                   "Pleasures I can count on"<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 172

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 176

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 177-178

## Session #2: Jewish Journeys

### **ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS**

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- We are all on a journey, unique and interesting.
- All journeys have challenges.
- We feel more connected to a person when we know his/her story.

### **QUESTIONS**

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- What is the nature of God and Abraham in Gen. 12?
- How are our journeys similar and different?
- What is your calling?

### **MATERIALS**

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- Nametags & markers
- Appendix J

### **TIME TABLE**

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<b>00:00-00:10</b>	<b>Nametags</b> “In addition to your name, include one word that describes you.”
<b>00:10-00:20</b>	<b>Review</b> Briefly summarize the last session. There may be new attendees who need to be caught up to speed. Those who feel comfortable can share some or all of the 13 Principles they wrote. “What was the process like? Was it difficult coming up with 13, or narrowing it down to only 13?”
<b>00:20-00:25</b>	<b>Introduction</b> “Our Jewish values are reflected in our Jewish journey, sometimes consciously, at other times, unconsciously. We will use a Biblical example of Jewish journey to segue into sharing our own stories.”

00:25-00:40

**Torah Study**

- Ask for a volunteer to read Gen. 12:1-4 in English, Hebrew, or both
- Break into *chevruta* (study partners), to reflect on the passage. Using a timer, person A will have five minutes to tell their thoughts and interpretations to person B. Then switch.<sup>53</sup>

**Guiding Thoughts**

Some groups might need more guidance. In that case, they can discuss the following questions:

- How would you describe God/Abram in this passage?
- What would your reaction be if you were told to pack house on a whim?
- Have you ever been in a situation in which you were the only Jew?

"The Hebrew text does not say that God *spoke*. *Vayomer Adonai el Avram* is best translated as "God *communicated* to Abram" (Genesis 12:1). Callings are most often felt, rather than literally heard. More than coming from "on High" they come from deep within, from a knowing, and intuition. Maybe God's *vayomer* came vis-a-vis a feeling, an inclination, a hunch. Perhaps Abram had a dream, a vision, or a gut feeling in response to some issue he was struggling with, in response to some question from deep in his soul. Maybe this was how God communicated; what Abram "heard" was "*Lech lecha* -- Go forth."<sup>54</sup>

00:40-01:00

**Group Reports**

- Person A will report what Person B expressed and vice versa.

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<sup>53</sup> Solomon, *Toolbox for Teachers and Mentors*, 88

This technique, called "Think, Pair, Share," sets a tone for careful listening and a desire to honor another person's telling. Of course, the person whose ideas are being shared is allowed the opportunity to clarify to the group.

<sup>54</sup> HaLevi and Frankel, *Revolution of Jewish Spirit*, 10

**1:00-1:25****Share Journeys**

- I've included my personal story<sup>55</sup>, which session leaders are welcome to use; although it's a fairly simple exercise, in which the facilitator can be engaged alongside the learners, but not everyone will feel comfortable sharing such personal details.
- Guide the storytelling process by asking learners to answer questions such as:
  - What is your current Jewish practice like?
  - How did you get here?
  - Have you ever heard a calling?
  - How has your belief in God changed over time?
  - Can you see similarities between your Jewish story and episodes from the Torah?

**1:25-1:30****Journal**

- The journal is a way to continue the conversation with one's self. It is another sacred text. Each year we read the same Torah portion, but every year, we are new to it.

For example, from my journal:

- "I read *imahot* in a drastically different way, now that I am married. Having even a few years experience got me asking questions from a new perspective. Marriage takes a lot of work between two people. I can't imagine trying to balance the needs of three. How jealous I would feel if I was Sarah!"

Journal ideas for the week:

- Create a family tree, listing spiritual attributes you've learned from as many people as you can
- Reflect on the weekly Torah portion before and after Shabbat
- Compare the Jewish observance of your parents' generation, to your own, your children's, grandchildren's, etc.
- How has your Judaism changed over time?

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<sup>55</sup> Solomon, *Toolbox for Teachers and Mentors*, 138  
 "Model what you want the students to do."

**Appendix K: *Lech L'cha*, Gen. 12:1-4<sup>56</sup>**

The LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your native land and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you.	<b>Gen. 12:1</b>	וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם לֵךְ-לָךְ מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וּמִמִּזְדֹּתֶיךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֹרְאָךְ :
I will make of you a great nation, And I will bless you; I will make your name great, And you shall be a blessing.	<b>Gen. 12:2</b>	וְאֶעֱשֶׂה לְךָ גִּדּוֹל וְאֶבְרַכְךָ וְאֶגְדָּלְךָ שְׁמֹךָ וְהָיָה בְרָכָה :
I will bless those who bless you And curse him that curses you; And all the families of the earth Shall bless themselves by you.”	<b>Gen. 12:3</b>	וְאֶבְרַכְהוּ מְבָרְכֶיךָ וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ אֶאָר וְנִבְרְכוּ בְּךָ כָּל מִשְׁפְּחוֹת הָאָדָמָה :
Abram went forth as the LORD had commanded him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.	<b>Gen. 12:4</b>	וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֵלָיו יְהוָה וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתּוֹ לוֹט וְאַבְרָם בֶּן-חֲמִשָּׁה שָׁנִים וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה בָּצְאוּ מִחָרָן :

The LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your native land and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you.	<b>Gen. 12:1</b>	וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם לֵךְ-לָךְ מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וּמִמִּזְדֹּתֶיךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֹרְאָךְ :
I will make of you a great nation, And I will bless you; I will make your name great, And you shall be a blessing.	<b>Gen. 12:2</b>	וְאֶעֱשֶׂה לְךָ גִּדּוֹל וְאֶבְרַכְךָ וְאֶגְדָּלְךָ שְׁמֹךָ וְהָיָה בְרָכָה :
I will bless those who bless you And curse him that curses you; And all the families of the earth Shall bless themselves by you.”	<b>Gen. 12:3</b>	וְאֶבְרַכְהוּ מְבָרְכֶיךָ וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ אֶאָר וְנִבְרְכוּ בְּךָ כָּל מִשְׁפְּחוֹת הָאָדָמָה :
Abram went forth as the LORD had commanded him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.	<b>Gen. 12:4</b>	וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֵלָיו יְהוָה וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתּוֹ לוֹט וְאַבְרָם בֶּן-חֲמִשָּׁה שָׁנִים וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה בָּצְאוּ מִחָרָן :

<sup>56</sup> Save paper – print multiple copies on one page!

## Appendix L: My Story

I was raised as the only child of a secular Jew and a Jew-by-Choice. We lived with my paternal grandfather, someone once extremely active in the Jewish community who had proudly retired himself to the life of a scholarly curmudgeon. So I am aware that my case is already a unique one.

As a teenager in North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY), I was fascinated with what Judaism had to offer me. I attended every Missouri Valley regional event, except for the fall of my freshman year. I wasn't quite ready to be that far from home yet. When my friends returned from the fall event, I was jealous of the t-shirt they all proudly wore at school and the synagogue. My envy was not of the shirt itself, but of the fringes tied to its corners. At that point in time, I was already certain that I wanted to be a rabbi, and it was my goal to soak up as much Jewish learning as I could. So when I learned that there was an entire paragraph of *V'ahavta*, that specifically mentioned the fringes, *tzitzit*, I felt like I had been cheated out of valuable knowledge and a potentially meaningful ritual. I felt as if I missed out on a nearness to God that I so desperately craved. I was always encouraged to experiment with my Judaism, and I regretted not being a part of that group who got to study, understand, and decide.

As I approached high school graduation, I felt as if I had reached a plateau in my learning within my Reform synagogue. I wanted to know more Hebrew, what the words actually meant, and expand my practice. This was how I ended up working at Aish Ha-Torah. After my 8<sup>th</sup> period statistics class, wearing shorts and a tank top, I would dash out to my car, to change in the back seat of my Geo Metro into a floor length skirt and long sleeved black sweater, despite the heat. My mother's sister, also a Jew-by-Choice, found herself as the administrator of Aish Denver, a five-minute drive from my high school. When hired as her assistant, I was exposed to a Judaism like none I'd ever experienced.

Then again, the only Orthodox Jews I knew were my *bat mitzvah* tutor who co-owned a kosher deli across town. I was intrigued by her world – so seemingly full of peace, order, and holiness. She was demanding of her students, always pushing to view things from a different perspective. I haven't eaten often at the deli. About as often as I remember my grandfather leaving the house. But when my father's cousin, Murry, or Moishe, came to visit from Israel, we went to the deli. I didn't know then that he is *ba'al teshuva*. I was too fascinated that he had **eight** children, one with whom I shared a birthday! When he arrived, I was sent to the front door to show him into my grandfather's room. When I opened the door, I thought an 18<sup>th</sup> century leprechaun landed on the front porch. First I noticed his black, scuffed shoes, then his wrinkled, black pants, his long, dusty black coat and his fine, black hat. The black façade was only broken up by his bright white *tzitzit* and bushy, **red** beard.

He seemed excited to be in the States, but I didn't understand why he wouldn't eat in his Uncle Irwin's kitchen. Didn't he like my PaPa's cooking? I didn't understand why

he kept touching all our doors. I was afraid he was going to knock Mama's pretty glass mezuzah off its tiny nails. It had already fallen once before. I would be so sad if it broke. I didn't think he liked our house or even *us* very much. But then, he asked my dad to drive all of us to the kosher deli where he would treat us to dinner.

Despite knowing the owners, I felt like I didn't belong there. After dinner, we all matched my grandfather's slow pace back to the car, except for Moshe. He was in a mild fervor. Outside, he ran into some boys he knew them from his *yeshiva* in Jerusalem. He assured us that he would find another ride home and not to worry. He seemed to like them better than us and I resented that he would talk to those boys, but not to me.

When I began my work at Aish Denver, I initially experienced some of the same emotions I had with my father's cousin. But to many people in the community, my Irish red hair was frequently mistaken for Russian, and given my dress and actions, nobody asked. The *mashgiach* came once a week. I was afraid of her. More precisely, I was afraid of the kosher kitchen. While everything was color coded, labeled, and separated, I feared that I might upset the order. It still felt like "their" world and not mine. I wasn't "Jewish enough."

However, I connected with the children in the community and the *rebbetzin*. She was not intimidating like the *mashgiach*. I learned all I could from her. What I thought I saw was the oppression of women, she explained to me were differentiated gender roles. I fielded phone calls for the rabbi, but didn't understand why a spoon would be buried in the backyard to become kosher again. I certainly didn't call my rabbi with such questions. I would just make a decision myself and declare it good. That was the moment that I realized my dalliance with Orthodoxy was over. I wanted to know more, but I didn't want to have to hide or be denied certain rites.

My father gave me my great-grandfather's *tefilin*. During this period of my life, I found myself wanting more ritual, thinking that more ritual would lead to more spirituality. It took me months to find someone to teach me how to wrap *tefilin*. When I asked my Reform rabbis, they didn't know how. I couldn't ask at Aish Denver. I had to teach myself.

Meanwhile, my mother was proficient in creating ritual. After she took *Intro to Judaism* and was exposed to every aspect of Judaism and then asked to try it on for size. I've never known my mother to back down from a creative challenge. So even through my teenage years, I thought every Reform Jewish family celebrated Tu B'Shevat with chocolate fondue: white, milk, and dark, of course. I didn't know that, at best, it was usually a dried fruit excuse to break from the normal religious school schedule. I thought that every Reform Jewish family made their own Passover *Haggadot*. I didn't know that *Maxwell House* was standard. I thought every Reform Jewish family celebrated Shavuot by reading from our individual, hand-assembled scrolls of Ruth. I didn't realize that many of my peers didn't even know what the holiday was because it fell outside of the



religious school calendar. However, during my adolescence, this holiday was paramount *because* my mother and aunt converted and were proud of having done so.

We were and are *not* the “typical Jewish family.” I used to think there was such a thing, but I just wasn’t part of it. At the time, I felt attacked by some of my classmates who used to tease me for having two “natural born” Jewish parents. I replied that I did too! But counting my grandfather as part of two didn’t count for them. They teased me for my Irish freckles, the funny way my name was spelled, for having a middle name like “Clark.” I could withstand all of that. But when it turned into teasing because I actually wanted to learn something in religious school, I had crossed a line. I spent a lot of time, hiding in the library, looking up topics I was interested in using the Encyclopaedia Judaica in print, before the CDs were available. It served me well as a *madricha*. That spring, I taught my fourth graders how to tie *tzitzit*. We read some verses of the Torah. I explained what *techelet* was, some of the issues surrounding it, and then each student could choose if they wanted a blue strand or not. I only taught them how to tie one corner. By the end of the class, students were lining up to ask if they could have enough cord to finish the project at home. I swelled with pride. Even if I was teased for my interest in Judaism, I could create an atmosphere in which Judaism, and the privilege of making meaningful choices, could be fun.

My family’s traditions were so wonderful and heart-felt, that I felt like I was coming up short in my synagogue. I had reached a point where I thought the only way to pursue the knowledge and understanding I longed for was available in rabbinical school. Through this avenue, I thought that I would finally discover the link between prayer, scripture, and spirituality.

The reality is that under close examination, I have often felt the spirituality pressed out of what I once so dearly treasured. I wanted to be like the German Jewish reformers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Or maybe back track to witness the evolution of my grandfather’s and his siblings’ Orthodoxy to atheism, *ba’al teshuva*, and everything in between. I wanted to handcraft my Judaism, and be able to sort through tradition and create my own spiritual identity. This was what I hoped would happen in rabbinical school. Hearing the phrase “choice through knowledge” throughout my adolescent years, I squealed when I was accepted to rabbinical school, because I would finally be able to carry out my grand experiment. With more knowledge, I would be able to make choices that made sense for my Jewish life. After many conversations over the past several years, I discovered that there were others like me – who wanted more, but didn’t know where to start, or if it was legitimate.

Then, it occurred to me that I was in a prime position to both teach and learn what I love. If I didn’t begin this project, savoring my last year of rabbinical school, being in proximity to the greatest teachers, a diverse Jewish community which lovingly supports rabbinical students, and with access to the very best resources, when would I have time or desire to do so?

My thesis is not simply an extended essay to prove that I have endured. It is preparation for the next leg of my Jewish journey, a new and different beginning. Judaism is a life long engagement. My family, synagogue, and NFTY established a solid foundation for me to creatively engage and study Jewish tradition. Graduating high school, I thought that certainly, through Hillel, Keshet, and Birthright I would continue to uncover my true Jewish identity. I had a strong sense of self, but I still felt like something was missing. Maybe, rabbinical school would answer more of my questions and establish my adult Judaism.

As it turns out, I have more questions than answers as I begin my transition from a student at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion to communal rabbi. I know how much I do not know. I am deeply grateful for having learned that the journey is eternal, relationships are of the utmost importance, and God willing, our thirst for knowledge, community, and holiness is never quenched, but ever growing. I don't proclaim to know any definitive answers, but I am ever willing to explore, question, and learn while "celebrating Judaism"<sup>57</sup> with my fellows.

My experimentation with ritual became more intense after I got married. My father had presented me his grandfather's *tefilin*. I committed myself to wrapping *tefilin* every morning in the Scheuer Chapel. I asked a male classmate to give me a refresher course. I still got confused when wrapping my hand. In the beginning, I was clumsy. I couldn't evenly space the seven wraps around my arm. Halfway through the service, they would coil at my elbow. Everyday I got faster, my technique more refined, no longer trying to hold down the *siddur* with my elbow. I could even play guitar while securely wearing them. Slowly, I fell in love with the practice. Being right handed, and newly married, I slipped my wedding and engagement rings off and handed them to my husband, while he went to reserve seats. I whispered the words of Hosea 2:21-22 as I wrapped the leather strap around my middle finger, the same words I thought as I circled my husband under the *chupah*.

וְאֶרְשָׁתִּיךָ לִי לְעוֹלָם,  
וְאֶרְשָׁתִּיךָ לִי בְצֶדֶק וּבְמִשְׁפָּט  
וּבְחֶסֶד וּבְרַחֲמִים.  
וְאֶרְשָׁתִּיךָ לִי בְאֱמוּנָה,  
וְיָדַעְתָּ אֵת יי.

I WILL BETROTH you to Me forever;  
I will betroth you to Me  
in righteousness and in justice, in kindness and in mercy.  
I will betroth you to Myself in faithfulness,  
and you shall know Adonai.

<sup>57</sup> Trepp, *The Complete Book of Jewish Observance*, xi

<sup>58</sup> Frishman, *Mishkan Tefilah*, 28

Sometimes, the two minutes I was laying *tefilin* was the only quiet moment I would have to myself all day. I cherished the silence at the back of the room, standing in between two of my more observant, male classmates. I appreciated that others knew not to interrupt. Whatever pressing business could wait. What I loved even more was when I would return to my *tefilin* bag, my husband stood patiently by my side as I released the wrapping, pulling my rings from his pocket and replacing them on my finger. We were newlyweds, like new converts. The outward sign of my marital status and observance felt necessary, or at least incredibly precious.

There were days that I didn't want to wrap, but I did anyhow. I was committed to the experiment. I don't don *tefilin* regularly, like I used to. One day, I may do so again, and then again, maybe not. I am still a work in progress.

### Session #3: Kedusha – Holiness

#### **ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS**

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- Shabbat is a time to reflect on the holiness in our lives.
- Holiness exists where we allow holiness to enter.

#### **QUESTIONS**

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- Can you describe holiness?
- When do you feel holy?

#### **MATERIALS**

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- Nametags & markers
- Appendix K

#### **TIME TABLE**

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<b>00:00-00:10</b>	<b>Nametags</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ask participants to choose two keywords : one that describes how they viewed God as a child, and the other which describes how they view God as an adult. Go around the room and share.</li> </ul>
<b>00:10-00:25</b>	<b>Review</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Share journal entries from last week. Hopefully, the suggestions generated a wide array of journals that highlight many different areas of thought within Judaism.</li> <li>○ This can also be a time for learners to engage each other, or for follow up questions</li> </ul>
<b>00:25-00:40</b>	<b>Kiddush</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Using Appendix J, chant the <i>Kiddush</i> together and read the English translation.</li> <li>○ Ellen Frankel states, “<i>Kiddush</i> turns the wine into an agent of memory.”<sup>59</sup></li> <li>○ Share any stories or memories that the <i>Kiddush</i> inspires. <i>Kiddush</i> was originally said at home but has moved into the synagogue.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Where do you say it most often?</li> <li>○ When does it have the most meaning?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

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<sup>59</sup> Hoffman, *My people's prayer book: Shabbat at Home*, 92

00:40-01:00

**Themes**

- Using the white board or flip chart, what themes can be identified in the prayer?
  - For example: creation, work/rest, community, blessing, sanctification, Shabbat, the exodus from Egypt, God's love, etc.
  - Rank these ideas, and any others that are generated, by importance, first individually, and then as a group.

1:10 – 1:25

**Discussion Questions**

- What other *brachot* have special meaning to you?
- What are other ways of imbuing Shabbat with holiness?
- How can we find holiness between *Shabbatot*?

1:25-1:30

**Journal**

- "According to *Chasidic* tradition, the Sabbath table thus becomes more than the mere locus of a meal; it is transformed into an altar evoking the sacrificial altar in the Temple of old. And each Jew therefore becomes a priest performing a sacred ritual...Before the Jew are a series of ritual objects, each requiring its own sequence of gestures, melodies, and...words."<sup>60</sup>
  - Imagine yourself at The Temple in Jerusalem and describe the scene you see.
  - What do the three main symbols of Shabbat (candles, wine, and *challah*) mean to you?
  - What Jewish ritual objects are important to you?

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 104

## Appendix M: Kiddush

### קידוש

וְיִהְיֶה עֶרֶב נִיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי. וַיִּכְלּוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל  
צָבָאָם: וַיִּכְלּוּ אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה,  
וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: וַיְבָרֶךְ  
אֱלֹהִים אֶת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ, כִּי בּו שְׁבֹת מִכָּל  
מְלַאכְתּוֹ, אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְרִי הַגֶּפֶן.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו  
וּרְצָה בָּנוּ, וְשָׁבַת קִדְּשׁוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרָצוֹן הִנְחִילָנוּ זְכוֹרֹן  
לְמַעֲשֵׂה בְרָאשִׁית, כִּי הוּא יוֹם תְּחִלָּה לְמִקְרָאֵי קִדְּשׁ, זְכוֹר  
לִיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם, כִּי בָנוּ בְּחֶרֶת וְאוֹתָנוּ קִדְּשָׁתָּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים,  
וְשָׁבַת קִדְּשָׁךְ בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרָצוֹן הִנְחַלְתָּנוּ. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ,  
מִקְדֵּשׁ הַשְּׁבֹת.

61

*Va'yehi erev, va'yehi voker yom ha'shishi: Va'yechulu ha'shamayim ve'ha'aretz v'chol  
tzeva'am. Va'yechal Elo-him ba'yom ha'shevi'i melachto asher asa, va'yishbot ba'yom  
ha'shevi'i mikol melachto asher asa. Va'yevarech Elo-him et yom ha'shevi'i va'yekadesh  
oto, ki vo shavat mikol melachto asher bara Elo-him la'asot.*

*"Baruch Ata Ado-nai Elo-heinu Melech Ha'Olam, borei peri ha'gafen*

*Baruch Ata Ado-nai Elo-heinu Melech Ha'Olam, asher kideshanu b'mitzvotav v'ratzah  
vanu, v'Shabbat kodsho b'ahavah u'v'ratzon hinchilanu, zikaron lema'aseh bereshit. Ki hu  
yom techilah le'mikraei kodesh, zeicher li'yetziat Mitzrayim; Ki vanu vacharta v'otanu  
kidashta mi'kol ha'amim, veShabbat kodshecha be'ahavah u'veratzon hinchaltanu.  
Baruch ata Ado-nai Mekadesh HaShabbat.*

<sup>61</sup> <http://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/kiddush-friday-evening>

There was evening and there was morning: a sixth day.

Heaven and earth and everything associated with them were completed. On the seventh day, God completed the work He had done. On the seventh day, He rested from all the work He had done. God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, for on it He rested from all the work God had created to do.

With our masters' and teachers' approval:

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, ruler of the world, creator of the fruit of the vine.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, ruler of the world, who sanctified us with his commandments and adored us, lovingly and adoringly granting us his holy Shabbat as our inheritance, in memory of acts of creation. For it is the first day of holy festivals, a memorial of the Exodus from Egypt. For You have chosen us and sanctified us above all nations, lovingly and adoringly granting us your holy Shabbat as our inheritance.

Blessed are You, Adonai, who sanctifies the Shabbat.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Hoffman, *My People's Prayer Book: Shabbat at Home*, 91

## Session #4: *Menucha* – Rest

### **ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS**

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- Shabbat is a time to take a break from our busy work weeks.
- Resting is hard work!
- We have to reinterpret what “rest” and “work” mean.

### **QUESTIONS**

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- How can we embrace *menucha* in our 21<sup>st</sup> century lives?

### **MATERIALS**

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- Nametags & markers
- Appendices L and M

### **TIME TABLE**

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<b>00:00-00:10</b>	<b>Nametags</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Include one word that describes what Shabbat means to you.</li> </ul>
<b>00:10-00:25</b>	<b>Review</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Summarize last week’s session.</li> <li>○ Share journals and answer any follow up questions.</li> </ul>
<b>00:30-00:45</b>	<b>V’shamru</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Read/sing V’shamru together, including the translation</li> <li>○ How do you find rest and refreshment on Shabbat?</li> </ul>
<b>00:45-1:10</b>	<b>39 Prohibitions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Go around the room, reading the prohibitions</li> <li>○ It might be helpful to reference Leo Trepp’s breakdown: <p style="margin-left: 40px;">"The Rabbis designated as work all those activities that were once performed in building the sanctuary in the desert. In this manner, they wished to indicate that the entire world is God's sanctuary (Isa. 66:1); we toil for Him and we cease from work at His behest.</p> </li> </ul>



They [the rabbis] arrived at seven basic categories of prohibited work, subdividing them into a total of 39 prohibitions:

1. The growing and preparation of food; 11 prohibitions
  2. The production and preparation of clothing; 13 prohibitions
  3. Leather work and writing; 9 prohibitions
  4. Providing shelter; 2 prohibitions
  5. Kindling and extinguishing fire; 2 prohibitions
  6. Work-completion; 1 prohibition
  7. Transportation; 1 prohibition.”<sup>63</sup>
- The Prohibitions have been divided into 7 categories. In Judaism, the number 7 corresponds to Shabbat, the 7<sup>th</sup> day, and therefore, a sense of completion or wholeness.
    - When and where do you feel most complete?
    - How can we more often capture that feeling and share it with others?
    - In general, we tend to prefer focusing on what we *can* do, rather than what we can't. How can we embrace this text as Reform Jews?

**1:10-1:30**

### **Concluding Remarks and Feedback**

- Ask for feedback on this series and any other topics they would like to learn about in future adult education programs.

### **SUGGESTION**

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Plan a *Shabbaton* wherein the ideas sparked by this series can be acted upon and expanded.

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<sup>63</sup> Trepp, *The Complete Book of Jewish Observance*, 70

## Appendix N: *V'shamru*

### Exodus 31:16-17

וְשָׁמְרוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת, לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת לְדֹרֹתָם  
בְּרִית עוֹלָם. בֵּינִי וּבֵין בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֹתָהּ הִיא לְעֹלָם, כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת  
יָמִים עָשָׂה יְיָ אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ, וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שָׁבַת  
וַיִּנָּפֶשׁ.

*V'shamru v'nei Yisrael et HaShabbat,  
laasot et HaShabbat l'dorotam  
b'rit olam.  
Beini u'vein b'nei Yisrael  
ot hi l'olam,  
ki sheishet yamim asah Adonai  
et hashamayim v'et haaretz,  
u'vayom hashvi-i shavat vayinafash.*<sup>64</sup>

The children of Israel shall keep Shabbat, observing Shabbat throughout their generations  
as an eternal covenant.

It is an eternal sign between Me and the children of Israel, for in six days Adonai made  
heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> <http://www.reformjudaism.org/practice/prayers-blessings/shabbat-evening-worship-services-vshamru-and-yismechu>

<sup>65</sup> Hoffman, *My people's Prayer Book: Shabbat at Home*, 155

## Appendix O: Shabbat 7:2

Shabb. 7:2     **The generative categories of acts of labor [prohibited on the Sabbath] are forty less one:**

- (1) he who sows,
  - (2) ploughs,
  - (3) reaps,
  - (4) binds sheaves,
  - (5) threshes,
  - (6) winnows,
  - (7) selects [fit from unfit produce or crops],
  - (8) grinds,
  - (9) sifts,
  - (10) kneads,
  - (11) bakes;
  - (12) he who shears wool,
  - (13) washes it,
  - (14) beats it,
  - (15) dyes it;
  - (16) spins,
  - (17) weaves,
  - (18) makes two loops,
  - (19) weaves two threads,
  - (20) separates two threads;
  - (21) ties,
  - (22) unties,
  - (23) sews two stitches,
  - (24) tears in order to sew two stitches;
  - (25) he who traps a deer,
  - (26) slaughters it,
  - (27) flays it,
  - (28) salts it,
  - (29) cures its hide,
  - (30) scrapes it, and
  - (31) cuts it up;
  - (32) he who writes two letters,
  - (33) erases two letters in order to write two letters;
  - (34) he who builds,
  - (35) tears down;
  - (36) he who puts out a fire,
  - (37) kindles a fire;
  - (38) he who hits with a hammer;
  - (39) he who transports an object from one domain to another—
- lo, these are the forty generative acts of labor less one.

## Community in Conversation

### Information Gathering

To get a better sense of what Reform Jews are wanting and feeling, I took to the resources available to me. I held three “community conversations” at the Valley Temple of Cincinnati. I also set up a group on Facebook, which I titled “The Sounding Board,” inviting a total of 250 friends to partake. This type of experiment is not appealing to all Jews, but I knew that a smaller group would self-select to be a part of the journey. It happened to be the case, both in the synagogue, and the online forum.

I live in a rabbi-intensive world yet we do not often enough make time, space, or energy available to talk about spirituality, prayer, and faith. Therefore, I wanted to create a program in which we would, resulting in a more intimate community.

In creating this curriculum, I first turned to my community, looking for ideas, memories, and stories that would help bring us closer together and create sacred relationships. I held three hour-and-a-half conversations at the Valley Temple, where I asked people to sound off on the evolution of their practice. This section features general trends I noticed that helped guide me in creating the four session series.

The information-gathering phase was a magical process. In a safe space, we talked about history, God, and our deepest beliefs. These very special conversations were quite revealing. While telling their personal stories, others would comment on their experiences in the same time period or co-construct shared memories of Jewish Cincinnati.

### Valley Temple Discussions

To get a better idea as to how to shape the series, I hosted three evenings of community conversation at the Valley Temple. I asked participants about their Jewish education, Jewish choices, and feeling commanded. Twenty people attended the first evening, which formally concluded at 9:30. Afterwards, I answered a few remaining questions, but noticed that people weren’t grabbing their coats and heading for the door as I expected. Small groups of people splintered off, in the hallways, corners of classrooms, and the atrium, continuing the conversation. At 10:45, I unplugged the coffee, indicating that it was time to go home. I was in complete shock. Not only did I have significant attendance, but people also connected with each other, sharing stories and memories that may not have been otherwise sparked. That evening, the synagogue was both *Beit Midrash* and *Beit K’nesset*.

Over the course of our three discussions, members were very gracious and honest in their answers, respectful of other opinions, and eager to help me with my project. I detected several overarching themes: the evolution of one's Jewish practice over time, the influence of a rabbi, the power of ritual and prayer, and the pursuit of God and spirituality. While most people shared their experiences, there were also a few listeners. Later, they shared their story with me privately, or spoke up in the later sessions, which were more intimate.

### Evolution/Jewish Experience

The make-up of the group was diverse in background, observance, age, and practice, which made for a particularly lively discussion. The discussion was mostly between Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), a few from the "Silent Generation" (born between 1928 and 1964), three Gen Xers (1965-1980)<sup>66</sup>. I was the only Millennial in the room.

Many spoke openly about a Conservative or Orthodox childhood, having found their way to the Reform Movement, and specifically to the Valley Temple. The synagogue prides itself on its welcoming atmosphere, diverse population, and its ability to find a place for everyone. The synagogue is 50-75% intermarried, but has a thriving and vibrant religious school. One parent shared, "We don't really consider ourselves as Reform Jews. We are Jews who belong to a Reform synagogue. Our loyalty is to Valley, not to Reform Judaism. When we were shopping around . . . very nice people, but we were not spiritually at home there at all. If we were in a different city, would we still be in a Reform synagogue? I don't know..." This parent continued by saying, "Especially having young children, brevity of a service has become very attractive. I still find myself singing the conservative melodies. They just come to me. But the habit of having to do things twice or three times is annoying. But I still find myself doing chores around the house unconsciously *davenning* with the conservative melodies."

Many told stories of having to shape their own Judaism, unsatisfied in other movements, even in the Reform Movement, until finding Valley Temple. Spirituality was a topic that cropped up frequently. Those who mentioned it said that it was something they craved but weren't quite sure how to obtain it. One of the Gen-Xers emphasized, "It's important that you're able to worship in a place that allows you to be yourself." The majority of the room shared this sentiment.

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<sup>66</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/12/03/infographic-survey-of-jewish-americans/>

On the other end of the spectrum, another congregant confessed, “I am not knowledgeable. I wish I was, but I’m not. And I regret that.” This statement addressed the assimilationist tendencies of Reform Judaism during the 1950s-1960s. However, a native of Long Island spoke up, reminiscing of the “Gilded Ghetto, when everyone around you was Jewish, the values were upheld.” She said that she didn’t even realize she was Jewish because everyone around her was Jewish. It was only when she was sent to a Methodist college that she realized just how different the non-Jewish world could be.

## The Rabbi

Most of those present in the room the first night had experienced the tenure of at least two rabbis at the Valley Temple. As much as they revered these men, they were not the only influence. It pained me that many encounters with other rabbis had caused deep and irreversible damage. A woman’s mother “was sick in the hospital for seven weeks.” With a mixture of sadness and anger, she said she “was there every single day. The rabbi came and never said one word to me in seven weeks. Never said a word. And I said, “Who needs this?” So we left.” Another woman, who grew up in a small town, shared a raw experience of her childhood. She “hated” the rabbi so much that it was almost enough to drive her away from the Jewish community. When I asked her why she didn’t leave, she spoke about meeting her husband who was rumored to be more observant than he actually was. When they moved to Cincinnati, the whole family was “miserable.” The children were bored in religious school. Even when synagogue hopping, they could not find a good fit. Their marriage eventually crumbled, the children moved away, but the woman is present at almost every Valley event.

At the other end of the spectrum, the rabbi could be a very positive presence: being innovators of Judaism, inspiring ethical behavior, and bringing the spirituality so many Jews were craving. A beloved regular debated whether he “should discuss” a Yom Kippur incident before finally giving in. Forgoing his usual *shtick*, he regaled us with story, “I don’t know if I should discuss it, but I will anyway. There was some woman who did me great harm here. And I was really annoyed. And during the Yom Kippur service, Rabbi said some things in English that moved me tremendously. So after the service, I was just singing to our young cantor over there, privately. And the woman that did a very egregious act to me was standing next to her. When I got done, by the virtue of the rabbi’s English, participation in that service, I took this woman around and gave her a big hug.”

A well-respected attorney in the community made the most poignant comment that evening. It addressed the relationship one has with the rabbi, one’s spirituality, and one’s sense of self. He said, “The rabbi, you will find, if you haven’t already, sets the aura. How do you carry yourself? What do you say? How do you say it? When do you say it? When do you not say it? And that sets the tone. If you want a spiritual, God-like place, then you have to be the leader, because you’re the spiritual leader – that’s your job.

For example, not to pick on you, but since you're here, it occurred to me, and I think it's a very common thing. We didn't start with a prayer. We never start with a prayer, is my guess. The rabbi sets the tone and the way it's conducted will translate out through the congregation." A moment of silence descended upon us all as we drank in his words.

I approached the community asking them to share their stories with me, while focusing on the notion of "informed choice." Who was making the choices? This man contended that the rabbi made the choices and that the congregation followed. Congregants were able to make choices, but the rabbi is the one who is truly "informed" and serves as a model and guide, in addition to spiritual leader.

Suddenly the room turned to focus on me. I confessed my project. I realized that very soon my Jewish practice would be widely watched, and I still felt so uncertain about it all. I would soon be responsible for a Jewish home. In the not so distant future, I could be the source of our children's therapy bills! To make the decisions that I thought I needed to make, I might as well document my process, complete a thesis requirement, and create something that would be useful to others. I was called out by a woman in the back of the room, "You have perspective, making a definite choice, because of the role you're involved in now. You're trying to figure out what your meaning is, because you are going to be responsible to teach others. And so you're trying to define that, and pigeon hole it, and try it on and get comfortable with it, because we, as congregants, are going to look to you for answers. And you want to have that all solidified. You're not going to." Reality hit, and I felt my stomach drop. I had been found out. I was terrified and relieved all at the same time. I would have my whole life to experiment, and while others might look to me, I can ask them to join me in expanding our learning together.

## Ritual

I asked when they felt most Jewish and many fond memories were shared; but there was also a tension between personal traditions and the tradition of their family of origin. The discrepancy was most evident in three different situations: when a Jew-by-choice was speaking, when someone who was raised more traditionally but now identified with the Reform Movement, and when someone was raised in a Classical Reform synagogue and was now more observant because of changes within the Movement.

One woman found special meaning in lighting Shabbat candles. Her mother always said, "Why are you doing this? Why are you doing this?" While others may not have had the strength or confidence to talk back to a Jewish mother, she simply replied, "This is important to me." In reviewing the audio recording of our discussion, this story stuck out to me. Without realizing it, this congregant revealed what I was trying to capture for others and myself. Informed decision-making is really about identifying what is important in one's Jewish life. At times, this may include going against the grain.

A woman clad in her *tallit* is no longer taboo in the Reform Movement. At one time, it was extraordinary to even see a *man* wearing a prayer shawl, but once again, the Movement has changed in such a way that we are embracing more tradition and learning than we ever have, since the creation of the Movement. A couple of women affectionately recalled attending temple with their fathers. Not necessarily being able to follow the service, they would “sit there and play with [father’s] *tzitzit*. This was heaven. Listening to these people, watching them. It was just marvelous. I never knew what was going on, but it was great - I loved it.” My father was also raised in an assimilated household. While he usually puts on a *kipah* when entering a sanctuary, he only wore a *tallit* on *Kol Nidrei*. With their stories, I was immediately transported to the synagogue of my childhood, my head on my father’s shoulder, his *tallit* enveloping both of us. Through many sermons, I also played with the fringes, not yet knowing what they were for or what they represented, just feeling safe and loved, connected to generations of other Jews who donned them.

Not under the *tallit* of her father, but enveloped in her very own, another woman shared, “I have a *tallis* that means a lot to me. I moved to Eugene, Oregon, and at the time there was only one synagogue. One size fits all. It called itself Conservative, but in fact, it had a Reform rabbi. My daughter came of age there and had her Bat Mitzvah. In the class before her, there was a very fine weaver, and all of the people in my daughter’s class got their *tallis* from this weaver. And pretty much, you would go to a service in the synagogue, and everyone would be wearing this same *tallis*. So this *tallis*...binds me to my Judaism in Eugene, Oregon. It binds me to my children. I was living in Cincinnati when my son came to be Bar Mitzvah, and he flew to Eugene to see some examples and order his *tallis*.” Furthermore, she added, “I chose a congregation where women were wearing *tallises*, because I wanted to wear my *tallis* from my congregation back in Eugene... Combine that with a Friday night evening dining group for 17 years. I never went to Friday night services, but I always go to Saturday morning, where I can wear my *tallis*. My *tallis* is part of what holds me together and binds me with my history.” A simple garment is more than the sum of its parts.

Another member of the congregation, who was known for always wearing a *kipah* and *tallit katan*, had recently decided to take her ritual garb off. She explained her relationship to Jewish law, “I have an interesting relationship with halakhah. I don’t find it binding, but I feel it compelling. For a long time, I wore *tzitzit* and I felt very strongly about wearing them at the time.” Someone, who had not noticed, shockingly asked, “When did you give that up?” She simply replied, “Three or four months ago. It stopped being compelling for me, and I never found it binding.”



However, when she first started wearing *tzitzit*, it was because “It was a simple ritual. You put it on in the morning. You say a blessing. And it's a reminder that God commanded you to do something. And that is what *I* did. And I stopped feeling commanded basically. It was not enhancing my spirituality anymore. In fact, I feel more centered in my spirituality since giving up *tzitzit* and a *kipah* every day.” The conversation continued, “-You become more sure of yourself and no longer need an outward expression of Judaism anymore.”

## Prayer

The most difficult topic that we discussed was prayer. The entire Jewish community of Cincinnati was greatly affected when Ethan Kadish was struck by lightning at Camp GUCI. One congregant asked, “Where was God in that moment?” Another answered by saying, “In a really perverse way, can you turn it around and show how that's connected people. There are people all over the world praying – not just Reform. We shared in an experience that broke down any barriers between the synagogues, because affiliation didn't matter when everyone was praying *Mi Shebeirach* for the same person.”

I have learned first hand, in my rounds as a chaplain, that we, as Reform Jews, are not quite comfortable with personal or spontaneous prayer. Members who came from a more traditional background spoke freely and openly about it. One, whose family enhances the Shabbat experience for all those around them, told the group, “Prayer, for me, has always been very important. My parents were very spiritual people. I needed to do something to show that I was Jewish. My parents said that praying is a really good place to start. At night, my parents would come in, sit on my bed, and we would talk about praying. How to pray, what to pray for, and I would fall asleep praying. It was wonderful - it was marvelous. What I got out of it the most . . . is continuing to pray, but praying for STRENGTH. I think strength is the most important thing. Everything that goes wrong or goes right, it's the strength to accept it, to go on, to understand, to try and understand, to have patience, to listen to people, to not get frustrated. Everything comes from that strength. So much of my prayer now is asking God to give me strength. Give me strength to understand this and get on and try to understand why.” Bouncing off of this idea, another congregant said that for her, “Prayer has to do with opening my self up to God, “Teach me as you want me to be.” Sometimes just saying “Thank you.””

Prayer was also linked to the *Kotel*. Living in Israel for a year, I was fortunate enough to have many different prayer experiences at The Wall. Most congregants, even those who had been to Israel several times, expressed frustration. They expected to feel a rush of excitement, standing in a place called holy their entire lives. A few people felt more spiritually moved while standing on the plaza, looking at the wall, rather than trying to remain upright amidst the pushing and shoving. But both men and women didn't know how to pray alone, or felt uncomfortable around so many people. There is certainly an amazing experience to be had at The Wall, but it saddens me when I hear perfectly legitimate Jews feel tell me they feel out of place in various aspects of Judaism.

## God

While I thought prayer was a difficult subject to discuss, God was even more so. The first time that God was mentioned, it was not in a positive context. The most observant of her family, a woman explained, "prayer talked about God, but as a Reform Jew, you weren't spiritual . . . I came close to leaving Judaism because there was a lack of spirituality." Another woman expressed a certain disdain, even in discussing God. In a mocking tone, she mimicked her friend, "God is speaking to me." Her relationship with God is extremely "private." It sets her "teeth on edge" to hear others carrying on about how God acts or doesn't act in the world.

A woman in our community who has seen more than her fair share of hard times has an immensely close relationship with God. In a hospital setting, the chaplain is rarely Jewish, so she has a wide experience of ecumenical prayer. Over the years, she has noticed, "Jews don't like the "ah-ha" moment." Having had plenty of time to explore her own theology, she commented, "God helps support us; we make the choice." Several other heads nodded in the room.

Returning to the Ethan Kadish tragedy, a woman clearly stated, "It comes down to if you believe in a personal God who controls you, or whether you believe in spirituality, and that random acts of nature are random acts of nature." Many of us found ourselves once again dancing with God, not knowing how to react, where to place blame, and how to make sense of it all. I described it as an "Elijah moment." Alluding to 1 Kings 19:11-12, "God was not in the fire or the earthquake, but rather a still, small voice. God was in the rescuers. God is in the community when we pray for Ethan's healing. God was at the front gate to keep reporters out of the camp. God was with the ambulance drivers, who arrived in seven minutes. And it's still not a satisfying answer, but it allows me to sleep at night." The room was quieter than it was before, but once again heads nodded, hanging a little lower in an attempt to hide any tears.

The silence was broken by an incredibly quiet voice. Most of the community is greatly intrigued by his South American accent and his unbelievable life story. It is truly a gift whenever he speaks. The magic of the “Old Country” floods the room, and everyone is transported with him. “He's God. I am nothing, but I feel like He looks at me when I pray, “God, please accept [my prayers],” in the evening and morning. The more that science discovers, the more deeply I believe.” He emanates spirituality. While others, myself included, are jealous, as is often the case, his spirituality did not come without a cost.

Of course, we couldn't entertain a conversation about God without mentioning gender. One woman explained, “When I hear God called “HE” - I think “Nah.” When I hear God called “SHE” - I think “Nah.” My idea of God, it's evolved; it's changed through my life.” I believe one of the downfalls of the Reform movement is that we do not often enough emphasize that just like any other relationship, ours with God takes on many forms over the course of our lives. We lose many *b'nei mitzvah* aged children because they have outgrown their pediatric notions of God, but have not been given another model to grow into. Thankfully, there are those who are outspoken about their beliefs that, if nothing else, others can rebel against! Another soft-spoken congregant eloquently ended our second session by saying, “I've come to believe there is a God. The same way Einstein believed there was a God. We've learned more and more about the universe, both with microscope and with telescopes, that has nothing to do with our survival, but has a real beauty associated with it. How can you explain this kind of beauty without believing in a creative source?”

### **The Facebook “Sounding Board”**

After the community conversations, I had new questions and wanted to begin piloting some material. Again, I knew that of the 250 invitees, there would be a small group that self selected. There were several people who consistently posted remarks, and others who commented when they could. This virtual community is different in that it is global, rather than strictly Cincinnati-based. It includes not only the Jewish friends of my childhood, high school, and Hillel, but other rabbinical students, rabbis in the field, and lay people. Would Jews who didn't know each other in real life feel comfortable exchanging comments, as those who sat at the Valley Temple, discussing our Judaism over decaf and lemon squares? With so many different Jews, of various backgrounds and geography, I began with a simple question, in the hopes of producing a vast array of responses and the initiation of cross-conversation.

I chose Shabbat as a point of departure because it is the holiday most frequently celebrated, and we have more opportunities to experiment with it, as opposed to once yearly holidays. Many of my friends from the University of Kansas Hillel are Conservative and embrace a fuller Shabbat ritual, including *Eishet Chayil* and singing *z'mirot* long into the evening. Others from my young adult life yearn for our *Shabbatot* of years ago. Often, “life got in the way,” and formal ritual is on hold for now. With my Colorado roots, Shabbat is an opportunity to hit the slopes. While not partaking in a *minyan*, my naturalist friends find God in fresh powder and black diamonds, or doing something to “feel relaxed and whole.” Almost always, Shabbat is a second priority at best. Work, school, and house projects become the agenda of the day in a digital age where every minute and hour is packed to the fullest.

Several friends are negotiating interfaith relationships and feel responsible not only for their own spiritual well being, but that of their partner. Grateful for the end of the week, numerous friends prefer to stay home to relax with family instead of dressing up and venturing out to the synagogue, sometimes leaving other family members at home. Consistently, Shabbat requires family. Family was the most important component of Shabbat, as opposed to candles, wine, *challah*, or service attendance.

## Discoveries

As opposed to creating a curriculum out of thin air, I wanted to put my energy into something that spoke to people. I had an idea of what I wanted to do, but the discussions at Valley and postings from Facebook helped me decide what material to teach and how I would disseminate information, facilitate conversation, and renew a dedication to Judaism.

I learned that each individual remembers shared experiences differently. These memories are influenced by time, age, and geography. Valley Temple is blessed in that it is truly a multi-generational experience. The nights when I see four generations of a family sitting together in the front row are awe-inspiring. The dialogue between them is infused with something special that cannot quite be captured in words. This provides an institutional memory as well as a perspective on the evolution of the synagogue throughout the decades.

In executing this process, I worried that “choice through knowledge” was not something congregants paid much attention to. However, when asked directly, “What Jewish decisions have you made throughout your lifetime?” I listened to several anecdotes that credited a rabbi for why and how Reform Jews do as they do. There is no doubt that the rabbi is very important to communal Jewish life, organizing the mundane to facilitating access to holiness. It seemed easier for older members of the community to articulate their Jewish decisions. Regardless of what their Jewish practice looked and felt like in their childhood and teenage years, when they had children, everything changed. Suddenly, it was important to recite *HaMotzi*, bless the children on Erev Shabbat, and

putting them to bed with the bedtime Sh'ma. The presence of a little Jewish person enhanced the Judaism of bigger Jewish people, ever propelling Judaism *midor l'dor*, from one generation to another.

I was surprised as well as far as God was concerned. It had been my experience that people clam up when the topic of the Divine arises. However, the second session at Valley Temple revealed that many of us felt as if our theology was either lacking or underdeveloped, somehow unacceptable by Jewish standards. Once we confronted the subject head on it was relatively easy for people to describe how their relationship with God has changed over time and when they outgrew the God of their childhoods and began engaging God in a more mature manner. Especially for those congregants who feared that their concept of God was so radically different from that of their peers, it was soon revealed that we shared similar beliefs.

## Appendix Guide

In order to understand where we are, it's important to remember from whence we came. This applies to familial as well as communal Jewish history. By comparing the four platforms, participants will not only get a sense of Reform ideology and its changes over time, but also inherit a greater understanding of the Reform Jewish values that are most important to them. Furthermore, after this exercise, they will be better able to express what is meaningful to them, propelling them toward a more informed Judaism.

### Appendix A: The Pittsburgh Platform

Once Reform Judaism had established itself as a separate identity from the German reformers, a group of rabbis, presided over by Isaac Mayer Wise, drafted a document that laid out eight clear planks. It emphasized “an attempt to grasp the Infinite”<sup>67</sup> without tossing aside science. It prioritized morality and sanctification, but “reject[ed] all such [rituals] as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization.” Holiness was valued over ritual, declaring “diet, priestly purity, and dress” as “foreign” and more likely to “obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation.” The “Messianic hope” was no longer a descendent of King David, but rather “the kingdom of truth, justice, and peace among all men.” They proudly claimed themselves as “progressive,” concerned with “the spreading of monotheistic and moral truth.” They made it clear that while “the soul is immortal, grounding the belief on the divine nature of human spirit . . . Gehenna and Eden [are] abodes for everlasting punishment and reward.” The last plank is dedicated to social justice, calling it “the great task of modern times.” Of this document, Dr. Michael Meyer explains, it was “an attempt to lay down a set of defining and definitive principles which would distinguish Reform Judaism from a wholly nonsectarian universalism.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> All of the platforms can be found at: <http://ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/platforms/>

<sup>68</sup> Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 265

## Appendix B: The Columbus Platform

More than fifty years later, the Central Conference of American Rabbis felt that it was time to update the guiding document of Reform Judaism. It became necessary to issue a new platform because the written ideals of Reform Judaism and the practice of Reform Jews no longer matched. The Columbus Platform “muted what many had perceived to be the extreme universalism and antiritualism of the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform.”<sup>69</sup> One of the most significant changes was a reclaiming of ethnic identity. American Reform Jews of this period found meaning in sharing a “language, land, history, culture and institutions.”<sup>70</sup>

The preface makes an attempt to include as many Reform Jews as possible, as this platform was “not as a fixed creed but as a guide for the progressive elements of Jewry.” Compared to the universalism of the Pittsburgh Platform, the Columbus Platform emphasized “action rather than creed”<sup>71</sup> indicating a shift toward a more particularly Jewish identity

The Columbus Platform is broken down into three main sections: Judaism and its foundations, ethics, and religious practice. Still, ethical behavior was stressed as the central pillar along with a Jewish foundation and religious practice. The concluding paragraph of this platform reads, “These timeless aims and ideals of our faith we present anew to a confused and troubled world.” Undoubtedly, in fifty years, Judaism in America had changed drastically. Reform Judaism has always specialized in meeting people where they are. When a platform no longer aligns with the beliefs and practices of enough Reform Jews, it is time for a change.

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<sup>69</sup> Kaplan, “The Reform Theological Enterprise at Work,” *Platforms and Prayer Books*, 5

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 6

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

## Appendix C: A Centenary Perspective

Between 1937 and 1976, two major events came to define the Jewish people. The Second World War and the Holocaust claimed the lives of more than six million European Jews. Additionally, Israel gained its statehood, providing a safe haven for Jews the world over. These events forever changed the Jewish people, their theology, religiosity, and theodicy. By this point, “one hundred years after the founding of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Hebrew Union College,” American Reform Judaism was trying to “balance the universal with the particular.”<sup>72</sup>

This document strived to accentuate “personal autonomy” through “the informed will of every individual.”<sup>73</sup> While it was the goal to strike a balance between one’s Jewish identity and one’s American identity, this document concretized and acknowledged the struggle in trying to live in two worlds at once. While it is impossible to issue a statement that all Reform Jews could agree on, this era was characterized by diversity, hoping that within a wide enough range of options and education, every Jew could discover belonging to a niche and act upon beliefs that were personally meaningful.

## Appendix D: A Statement of Principles

More than one hundred years after the first meeting in Pittsburgh, the CCAR reconvened and produced yet another document “to help guide the thought and practice of our movement.” As with the Columbus Platform, the CCAR felt it necessary to address “individuals (who) are striving for religious meaning, moral purpose and a sense of community.” The preamble prides the Reform Movement’s ability “to introduce innovation while preserving tradition.” Rather than eight or nine planks, this Statement claims three central tenets, “God, Torah and Israel.” Written in a straightforward, beautifully simple way, the “bullet point” format appeals to our fast paced life. Its brevity allows for quick reading, discussion, and understanding. The closing phrase of this document radically departs from its predecessors in that it is the only platform that made use of Hebrew. Albeit, it’s one short phrase from *P’sukei D’zimra*, “*Baruch she-amar ve-haya ha-olam*. Praised be the One through whose word all things came to be.” After so many years of trying to “pass” as purely American, the Jews of the past decade have demonstrated a desire for more spirituality, greater knowledge of Hebrew, a yearning for rituals, old and new, and a greater pride in claiming one’s own Judaism.

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<sup>72</sup> Bronstein, *Hineini in our Lives*, 35

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.



## **Appendix E: Maimonides' "Thirteen Principles of Faith"**

Maimonides, also known as Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, from which we get the abbreviation, RaMBaM, was a 12<sup>th</sup> century Spanish philosopher, physician, and Torah commentator. His Thirteen Principles lay out what he believed to be the foundation of Jewish faith.

## **Appendix F: *Yigdal***

*Yigdal* is a liturgical poem attributed to Daniel b. Judah reflecting Maimonides' "Thirteen Principles of Faith." It is often used as a closing song to a service.

## **Appendix G: NFTY's Thirteen Principles**

This year, the North American Federation of Temple Youth turned 75! It has been my experience that NFTY, a sort of congregation comprised of youth nationwide, is on the cutting edge of Reform Jewish change. Congregations the world over struggle to harness the power of prayer, community, friendship, and ritual that NFTY promotes. Within the safe space NFTY provides, Jewish teens can experiment with creative ritual and prayer, leadership, and social justice. The organization is well aware that these American teenagers will shape the future of Reform Judaism.

## **Appendix H: Shira Dicker's "Thirteen Intimate Interactions..."**

I include this alternative list of thirteen principles to demonstrate the wide variety of Jewish belief and practice. It is my hope that Shira Dicker's list will inspire participants' creativity in writing their own principles.

## **Appendix I: I believe...**

Participants are welcome to use any format to organize their principles, whether using this template or in their writing journals.

## **Appendix J: Journal Guidance**

Some participants will have an easier time writing than others. For those who need help getting started, I have offered some guidelines and prompts, but by no means do they form a strict rubric to which we must adhere. I would encourage participants to write about new information, a change in perception, or the emotional process of analyzing our Judaism.

### Appendix K: *Lech L'cha*, Gen. 12:1-4

Sparked by a conversation with Dr. Barry Kogan, these four verses are powerful in and of themselves. However, more meaning can be created and profound insights reached when we are able to see our stories reflected in scripture and vice versa. Regardless of background, belief, or practice this is an activity in which everyone can participate because we each contain a sacred story within ourselves. By no means should participants be forced to share if they are uncomfortable, but the experience is greatly enhanced when everyone contributes.

### Appendix L: My Story

Why did I choose to bare my soul? In part it is because I enjoy writing and as I approach ordination I am in the process of reviewing my Jewish journey up until this point. Through the discussions at Valley Temple and on Facebook, I learned that others are much more willing to share after someone has broken the initial barrier. I know that my Jewish history is atypical, so hopefully it will give others courage to share their stories.

### Appendix M: *Kiddush*

There is no such thing as a “long *Kiddush*” and a “short *Kiddush*.” On Friday night, we recite the “long” version because through the blessing of the wine, we sanctify the day of rest. It reflects the Jewish paradigmatic trifold: creation, redemption, and revelation. Saturday we sing the “short” version as the day has already been sanctified.

### Appendix N: *V'shamru*

From Exodus 31:16-17, frequently sung on Shabbat as a reminder of the biblical relationship between God and Israel, it also prompts us to not only observe Shabbat but to do so in such a way that we greet the new week feeling rested and refreshed.

## Appendix O: Shabbat 7:2

Throughout the Valley Temple discussions, I was frequently asked about the 39 Prohibitions on Shabbat. Despite the fact that as Reform Jews, most of us do not cease from these activities on Shabbat, there was a great deal of curiosity surrounding them.

In Judaism, the number seven represents wholeness and completion. I suspect that Reform Jews will relate more easily to dedicating themselves to this holy wholeness, as opposed to layering restrictions one upon the other to the point that we lose track of the modern realities of our time. The prohibitions are not without their use, however. This process has taught me that grappling and disagreeing with a document is one way of finding what we *do* believe, value, promote, and observe.

## Concluding Remarks

I had the great fortune to present a sampling of the curriculum to members of the Valley Temple, as well as the confirmation class. Both groups were deeply engaged in the process, not minding in the slightest that product took a backseat. The adults were able to articulate their beliefs with greater speed and certainty than the teens, as I think it ought to be. Our teenagers are just now beginning to create a Judaism of their own, a separate identity from that of their parents.

In piloting the program, we always ran out of time. I would rather be over-prepared with more content than I know we are capable of getting through than coming up short and ending a program early. Therefore, Lesson #1 can easily be divided into two sections (beginning with the platforms and continuing with the 13 principles), depending on the group dynamics.

It is my hope that between the lessons and content I have provided that this program could be implemented by anyone “right out of the box.” After experiencing the process once, it could be applied to a wide variety of other Jewish topics. Thankfully, my fears were put to ease when I learned that Jewish parents, especially, made intentional Jewish choices, far more often and with more consistency than non-parents, feeling responsible for imparting Jewish knowledge and nurturing the Jewish souls of their children.

However, the evidence of “choice through knowledge” was rather thin. As leaders of the community, it becomes our responsibility to expose our congregants to more and varied Jewish concepts. We all have the potential of becoming “stuck” in our Jewish routine. After all, “*siddur*” and “*seder*,” two words used quite frequently, come from the same root meaning “order,” are central foci of Jewish action and participation. When the “order” becomes monotonous and loses some of its original meaning, we, as Reform Jews, are empowered to embrace and adapt – a process that forever defines what it means to be an American Reform Jew.

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