

Creating Meaningful Holiday Observance in an Empty Nest

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| | |
|--|-------|
| Curriculum Rationale..... | 1-4 |
| Vision for Curriculum..... | 5-7 |
| Enduring Understandings and Goals..... | 8 |
| Letter to Facilitator..... | 9-10 |
| Lesson 1: Elul and the High Holidays | |
| Evaluating and Recreating Ourselves and Our Community..... | 11-13 |
| Lesson 2: Sukkot | |
| Exploring the Autumn of Our Lives through Ecclesiastes (fully scripted)..... | 14-19 |
| Lesson 3: Hanukkah | |
| Dedicating Ourselves to Education..... | 20-22 |
| Lesson 4: Tu B'Shvat | |
| Reawakening Interests (fully scripted)..... | 23-28 |
| Lesson 5: Purim | |
| Turning Masks into Costumes (fully scripted)..... | 29-34 |
| Lesson 6: Passover | |
| Bringing Our New Understanding of Observance to Our Seders | 35-37 |
| Lesson 7: Yom Haatzmaut | |
| Creating a Mature Relationship with Israel and the Jewish World..... | 38-40 |
| Lesson 8: Shavuot | |
| Confirming Our Commitment to the Covenant..... | 41-42 |
| Sukkot: Appendix A..... | 43 |
| Sukkot: Appendix B..... | 44 |
| Sukkot: Appendix C..... | 45 |
| Sukkot: Appendix D..... | 46 |
| Tu B'Shvat: Appendix A..... | 47-48 |
| Tu B'Shvat: Appendix B..... | 49-51 |
| Tu B'Shvat: Appendix C..... | 52-54 |
| Annotated Bibliography for Facilitator..... | 55 |
| Annotated Bibliography..... | 56-57 |

Curriculum Rationale:

- ט וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת-הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת, וַיִּתֵּן אֶל-הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי לֵוִי, הַנִּשְׂאִים אֶת-אֲרוֹן בְּרִית יְהוָה; וְאֶל-כָּל-זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.
- 9 And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, that bore the ark of the covenant of Adonai and unto all the elders of Israel.
- י וַיֹּצֵא מֹשֶׁה אוֹתָם לֵאמֹר: מָקוֹץ שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים, בְּמַעַד שְׁנַת הַשְּׁמִטָּה--בַּחֹג הַסִּכּוֹת.
- 10 And Moses commanded them saying: "At the end of every seven years, in the feast of Tabernacles,
- יא בָּבוֹא כָל-יִשְׂרָאֵל, לִקְרֹאת אֶת-פָּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, בַּמָּקוֹם, אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר: תִּקְרָא אֶת-הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת, בְּגֹד כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל--בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם.
- 11 when all Israel come to appear before Adonai your God in the place which God shall choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing.
- יב הַקָּהֵל אֶת-הָעָם, הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהַנְּשִׁים וְהַטָּף, וְגֵרְךָ, אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ--לִמְעַן יִשְׁמְעוּ וְלִמְעַן יִלְמְדוּ, וְיִירָאוּ אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, וְשָׁמְרוּ לְעֲשׂוֹת, אֶת-כָּל-דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת.
- 12 Assemble the people, the men and the women and the little ones and the strangers in your communities—that they may hear and that they may learn to revere Adonai your God and to observe faithfully every word of this Torah, this Teaching.

-Deuteronomy 31:9-12

These words from the final passages of Torah express the purpose of the holy teaching of which they conclude. It is the responsibility of the priests and elders of Israel to articulate Torah “בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם--לְכָל-יִשְׂרָאֵל—before all Israel in *their* hearing.” The leaders of the community are commanded to teach Torah in a manner in which *all* the people will hear. The subsequent verse explains that Israel is a diverse community consisting of adults, children, and even non-Israelites. The text also reveals the purpose of the people hearing Torah, which is two fold: in order to worship God and observe the tradition.

This passage of Deuteronomy provides a framework in which to view Jewish education today. Our American Reform constituency appears just as diverse as the Israelite community that stood on the seam of the wilderness. Clergy and educators today dedicate themselves to the transmission of Torah to the Jewish people. Indeed, the words

and teachings of Torah and presence of the Divine are palpable in Reform congregations across America.

But I believe that American Jewish leaders have missed some of the nuance in the above verses from Deuteronomy. In particular, that adults and children hear Torah and experience Torah, in different ways. Congregations have internalized the message of the *V'Ahavtah*, “וְשִׁנַּנְתֶּם לְבָנֵיכֶם”—teach the words of Torah diligently to your children,” spending much energy on child and family learning.¹ This, however, has fostered a ‘pediatric practice’ of Judaism among some congregation members, particularly those whose primary affiliation with the synagogue was through the religious school education and b’nei mitzvah of their children; many of these parents are now ‘empty nesters’ and the impetus underpinning their original connection to the synagogue has been lost. Adult education is therefore an area in need of growth, especially education that links study and observance.

Rabbi Jan Katzew, the director of the Union for Reform Judaism’s Department of Lifelong Jewish Learning, posed the following rhetorical questions in his 5768 (2007-2008) educational state of the Union:

- What can your congregation do to reach and teach people who may be marginal to the community of Jewish learners?
- What can our professional and volunteer educational leaders do to enable and encourage a culture of lifelong Jewish learning throughout the Reform Movement?

This curriculum seeks to address both of these questions for adult learners.

We are currently in the midst of what has been called a “Renaissance in Jewish Learning.” There are, indeed, more adults engaged in Jewish learning than ever before in

¹ Deuteronomy 6:7.

America. Congregations offer an array of adult learning opportunities including: short term classes, lecture series, Hebrew, and adult b'nei mitzvah studies. Major metropolitan areas offer high quality and advanced Jewish study opportunities for lay adults, such as the Melton Mini-School and the Me'ah program in Boston. While these classes speak to some, they do not reach out far enough, especially to “marginal Jewish learners.” For those who these programs do touch, a gap still exists between Jewish learning and observance. Programs like Melton and Me'ah promote the exploration of ritual Judaism through academic discussion, but the classes themselves do not include opportunities to engage in observance.

This curriculum seeks to challenge the pediatric practice of Judaism in Reform congregations. It is a tool in which to help adults transition from looking at Judaism solely through the lens of educating their children to a way in which to find meaning in their own adult lives. It is meant to speak directly to adults who are on the margins of Jewish learning, those who have not yet taken advantage of learning opportunities in their greater Jewish communities. However, the curriculum was also designed for those Jewish adults who are already committed learners.

A debate exists in the Babylonian Talmud between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarfon (Kiddushin 40b). When posed with the question, ‘Which is greater, study or action?’ Rabbi Tarfon argued that action is greater. Akiva supported the opposite view explaining that “study is greater than action because it leads to action.” This curriculum supports the view of Rabbi Akiva, but does not assume that all Jewish learners have the ability to translate their study into action on their own. This curriculum strives to give

Creating Meaningful Holiday Observance in an Empty Nest

adults opportunities and skills to create meaningful mature observance, an area of inquiry that even adults engaged in Jewish learning may not have appropriated.

Vision for Curriculum:

This curriculum was designed for parents transitioning from active parenting to the ‘empty nest’ phase in their lives. This is the perfect moment for parents to move away from a pediatric approach to Judaism, a Judaism that spoke to their children’s developmental needs, to an approach to Jewish learning and observance that speaks to them directly as adults. Diane Tickton Schuster and Lisa D. Grant, in their chapter “Teaching Jewish Adults” in *The Ultimate Jewish Teacher’s Handbook*, explain that adults “tend to seek new learning when their self-esteem is threatened or their life circumstances are changing.”² This curriculum will take advantage of this transitional period as an ideal moment to initiate Jewish learning. At the same time, the curriculum tries to address the needs and concerns of parents transitioning into an empty nest, especially the need for community, in a Jewish manner.

It is my vision that that the congregation would offer this curriculum to parents upon their youngest child’s completion of high school. These parents would come together at the beginning of the Jewish year, which conveniently coincides with the beginning of the academic year, and form a community of learners, a *chavurah*. This *chavurah* will not only provide empty nesters a community with whom to study, but also to observe the holidays within an adult context. This course will ideally be introduced and promoted to these parents as their children partake in the URJ *Packing for College* curriculum at the end of high school.

The benefits of the *chavurah* structure will also provide a support network to help in this transitional phase in life. The transition to an empty nest can sometimes be a

² Diane Tickton Schuster and Lisa D. Grant, “Teaching Jewish Adults.” in *The Ultimate Jewish Teacher’s Handbook*. Denver, CO: A.R.E. Publishing, Inc., 2003. Pp. 140-159.

painful one. Jana L. Raup and Jane E. Myers explain in their article, “The Empty Nest Syndrome: Myth or Reality?” that

“parents, especially mothers, may experience overwhelming grief, sadness, dysphoria, and depression... Since they have devoted a large number of years to the parenting role, women, in particular, may be left with a major void in their daily lives. This can lead to an identity crisis and concern for how one is going to fill the time previously devoted to childrearing.”³

While the curriculum itself helps to explore and redefine oneself within a Jewish context, the *chavurah* will also provide a place for more general social networking. It will create a peer group in which to forge new relationships around other personal interests.

I chose to focus this curriculum around the *chaggim* for two reasons. First and foremost, I feel that, in general, congregations, with the exception of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, only offer family oriented holiday observances. This curriculum is not created to overhaul holiday services. Instead, this curriculum empowers adult participants to engage in holiday celebration as a *chavurah* in addition to, or outside of the setting of services. Participation in Jewish events outside the normative service transmits the value that holiday observance and Jewish life does not need to be confined to the sanctuary. Perhaps over time the culture of the congregation will change to reflect a growing constituency of actively learning adults; however the curriculum itself does not demand the congregation to change its holiday programming.

The *chaggim* are also a means by which to explore the multidimensional nature of Judaism. Jewish holidays encompass theology, history, values, and ritual. Holiday learning and observance, therefore, acts as a sort of survey course of Judaism. Hopefully

³ Jana L. Raup and Jane E. Meyers. “The Empty Nest Syndrome: Myth or Reality?” *Journal of Counseling and Development*, v68 n2 (Nov-Dec 1989). Pp. 180-83.

Creating Meaningful Holiday Observance in an Empty Nest

this introduction will spark further and deeper exploration into the Jewish disciplines touched on in the curriculum.

Chavurah and *chaggim*, the structure of this curriculum, work to support the educational goals for this curriculum along with the actual content of the lessons. The curriculum is comprised of eight individual lessons focused around holidays beginning during the month of Elul and ending with Shavuot. The content of the lessons during the first part of the year work to create community, address the transitional period from active parenting to empty nest through Jewish learning, and actively engage learners in holiday observance. Starting in Lesson 6, 'Passover: Bringing Our New Understanding of Observance to Our Seders,' lessons begin to ask learners, with the help of the facilitator and learning community, to begin to construct learning and observance experiences for themselves and others. This is intended to provide learners not only with skills, but also confidence to go on and create meaningful holiday observance for themselves after the duration of this curriculum.

Creating Meaningful Holiday Observance in an Empty Nest

Enduring Understandings

- Jewish holidays encompass *keva* and *kavanah*: holidays are fixed in our yearly calendar and have fixed ritual, but they take on new meaning each time we observe them throughout the different phases of our lives.
- Jewish holidays “open the door to Jewish life, offering insight into Jewish theology, history, and values” and thus promote further exploration of Jewish tradition beyond the calendar year.⁴
- A *chavurah*, a community of friends, is a critical component of Jewish learning, celebration, and observance.
- Participation in Jewish tradition and Jewish community help parents make a healthy transition from active parenthood to ‘empty nest.’

Goals

This curriculum seeks to:

- Create a *chavurah*, a community of friends and a context for those transitioning from active parenting to ‘empty nest’ to explore and observe Judaism.
- Provide adults with a mature understanding of the *chaggim* and concrete ways in which to observe the holidays in an adult manner.
- Help parents make a healthy transition from active parenthood to ‘empty nest.’
- Initiate lifelong learning; to promote further Jewish learning and involvement beyond the framework of this curriculum.

⁴ Nachama Skolnik Moskowitz. “Teaching Jewish Holidays.” in *The Ultimate Jewish Teacher’s Handbook*. Denver, CO: A.R.E. Publishing, Inc., 2003.

Letter to Facilitator:

This course requires a multifaceted teacher. The facilitator of this course should be someone who is knowledgeable about Judaism, aware of the specific needs of adult learners, and have experience living a meaningful, mature Jewish life. The curriculum does not presuppose Jewish knowledge beyond a pediatric level; however, it is not limited to those new to *adult* Jewish learning. Even those who do come to the class with a more mature understanding of holidays and Judaism, may still need help creating meaningful adult observance and Jewish support transitioning into the empty nest phase of their life.

I do not feel it is a prerequisite for the teacher to have been through the process of childrearing and subsequently having children leave home. I do, however, believe that it will be necessary for the facilitator to come into the classroom with a heightened sense of awareness of these learners' emotional needs. Academic literature on the subject provides one level of knowledge, but the facilitator may also find it helpful to speak with individuals who have transitioned into the empty nest to hear about their personal experience.

The facilitator should ideally have experience working with Jewish adults. Research shows that Jewish adults, just like children and adolescents, have unique needs as learners. While this curriculum does take into account varying needs of learners, creating multiple entry points for multiple orientations, it would be more than beneficial for the facilitator of this curriculum to familiarize themselves with the scholarly research and techniques of teaching adult Jewish learners. The 'Annotated Bibliography for

Creating Meaningful Holiday Observance in an Empty Nest

Facilitator' (found at the end of this document) should act as an resource when teaching this curriculum.

Whether the teacher is a younger or older adult themselves, I believe they must have experience living meaningful Jewish lives as Jewish adults. The teacher of this curriculum should be able to model and reflect on his/her own experience as a Jewish adult for his/her participants. They must personify a balance of Jewish study and Jewish practice.

Lesson 1:

Elul and the High Holidays: Evaluating and Recreating Ourselves and Our Community

Enduring Understanding: Individuals not only help to sustain community, but community helps to sustain individuals.

Essential Questions:

- How have you changed over your lifetime and how have the communities that you have been a part of reflected this change?
- How have the communities that you have been a part of affected you as an individual?
- What do you hope to gain from membership in a Jewish community at this, the empty-nest, stage in your life?
- What gifts do you have to give to a Jewish community at this stage in your life?

Assessment:

- Learners will begin to form a community with the members of their learning group through active participation in team building activities.
- Learners will evaluate and articulate through written reflection and group discussion what they hope to gain from this community of learners and what they hope to give to this community of learners.
- Learners will observe the themes, liturgy, and ritual associated with the month of Elul with an adult peer group.

‘Big Ideas’ to be addressed in this first session of learning:

- Personal and communal evaluation and change are an integral part of the Jewish yearly cycle taking place during the High Holiday season.
- This course, ‘Creating Meaningful Holiday Observance in an Empty Nest’ will act as a prolonged High Holiday experience; the theme of personal and communal growth is woven throughout this curriculum.
- A *chavurah*, a community of friends, is a critical component of Jewish learning, celebration, and observance.

Learning Experience:

- Group building/“getting to know you” activities
- Ideas for ‘text exploration’:
 - The High Holiday season incorporates personal and communal reflection. The month of Elul and Rosh Hashanah focus on personal *teshuvah*, but lead up to Yom Kippur where the liturgy highlights, with the recitation of the *Al Chet* (a communal confessional), the relationship between the individual and community.
 - While themes between the different holy days that comprise the High Holiday period vary, one piece of special liturgy that is a constant throughout this period is Psalm 27, which is recited from the beginning of Elul through Sukkot.
 - Address ‘essential questions’ through an exploration of Psalm 27, verses 4-6.
 - Relate verse 4 (“One thing I ask of Adonai, only that do I seek: to live in the house of Adonai all the days of my life”) to the concept of lifelong engagement with Judaism. Discuss the implications of “all the days of my life.”
 - Compare the varied forms of God’s shelter found in this section of the Psalm to the varied forms that community takes on throughout one’s lifetime.

Observance Activity:

- Facilitator creates a service for Elul around the themes of the curriculum, many of which lend themselves well to the season of the High Holidays (see ‘themes’ below). The facilitator should try to frame these themes around the special liturgical insertions for Elul and the blowing of the shofar. The service could take the form of a midnight Slichot service or could take place at another time and date during Elul.

Creating Meaningful Holiday Observance in an Empty Nest

- Themes:
 - Community
 - Change
 - Aging
 - Growth
 - Learning
 - Transition
- Explanation of Liturgical Insertions:
 - Reuven Hammer. *Entering the High Holidays: A Guide to the Origins, Themes, and Prayers*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998. Pp. 37-42.
- Resources for creative readings for service:
 - Dov Peretz Elkins (Ed). *Moments of Transcendence: Inspirational Readings for Rosh Hashanah*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1992.
 - Dov Peretz Elkins (Ed). *Moments of Transcendence: Inspirational Readings for Yom Kippur*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1992.
 - S.Y. Agnon. *Days of Awe*. New York: Schocken Books, 1948.
 - Kerry M. Olitzky and Rachel T. Sabbath. *Preparing Your Heart for the High Holidays: A Guided Journal*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996.
 - Paul Steinberg. *Celebrating the Jewish Year: The Fall Holidays*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2007.

Lesson 2:

Sukkot: Exploring the Autumn of Our Lives through Ecclesiastes

Enduring Understanding: Judaism encourages us to search for a more meaningful life and guides us along this journey.

Essential Questions:

- What aspects of our lives can we control?
- How does the need for meaning in our lives change as we grow older?
- Is all ‘vanity’?
- In what ways can Judaism provide support during times of transition?

Assessment:

- Learners will evaluate, through written reflection, how they would like to spend their time now that they are in the ‘empty nest’ phase of their lives.
- Learners will apply messages from the book of Ecclesiastes to their own lives and articulate these applications in group discussion.
- Learners will observe and celebrate the festival of Sukkot with an adult peer group.

Preparation:

- Facilitator will give learners their preparation assignment for this lesson during the first lesson of this curriculum which will take place during this month of Elul. This will give learners approximately a month and a half to complete their assignment. The facilitator should send periodic reminders to the class about their preparatory responsibilities.
- Facilitator will ask participants to read the book of Ecclesiastes and should supply students with a copy of a modern translation of the text. The facilitator should also provide an overview of *Kohelet* to guide students through their reading. The writer suggests:
 - Leonard S. Kravitz and Kerry M. Olitzky. *Kohelet: A Modern Commentary on Ecclesiastes*. New York: UAHC Press, 2003. Pp. xvii-xx.

Creating Meaningful Holiday Observance in an Empty Nest

- Ask students to prepare a list of five passages from the book of Ecclesiastes that they find meaningful and five passages they would like to disregard. These lists are a way to engage learners in a close reading of the text before class. They will also refer to these lists during one of the lesson's learning activities.
- When Ecclesiastes is assigned in preparation for the Sukkot session, the facilitator should explain that Ecclesiastes is the biblical text traditionally read on the Shabbat that falls during the intermediate days of Sukkot. It is one of the five *megillot* (scrolls) that are read at different Jewish holidays.

Setting:

This lesson will take place during *Chol HaMoed* Sukkot (the intermediate days of Sukkot) inside the congregation's *sukkah* (weather and space permitting). The learning will be followed by a festive meal to help facilitate the observance of the *mitzvah* of dwelling in the *sukkah*. The total duration of this lesson should be approximately 2 hours (60 minutes for active learning and 60 minutes for the festive meal).

Learning Experience:

I. Set Induction: (15 min.) *See Sukkot: Appendix A*

- Compare and contrast Ecclesiastes, Chapter 3, vv.1-8 with "Turn, Turn, Turn," sung by the Byrds (1965), written by the folk singer Pete Seeger.¹
- Ask for a volunteer to read the biblical text and a volunteer to read Seeger's lyrics.
- Have learners turn to the person sitting next to them and focus on the last verse of the Ecclesiastes' text and the Byrds' addition to the Seeger lyrics. Answer the following questions:
 - How does the Byrds' addition differ from Eccles. 3:8?
 - The Byrds add "A time to love, a time to hate, A time of peace, *I swear it's not too late.*"
 - What is Ecclesiastes' message in the above passage?

¹ Text study inspired by: Michael Katz & Gershon Schwarz. *Searching for the Meaning in Midrash: Lessons for Everyday Living*. Philadelphia: JPS, 2002. Pp. 211-212.

- “There is a time for everything in life, predetermined by a power beyond our control.”²
 - What is the Byrds’ message?
 - “War and peace are in the hands of human beings; the choices that people make can change the world.”³
- Have group come back together. Facilitator should ask the following questions and take a few of the learners’ responses.
 - Which text’s message resonates with you the most?
 - Do you think that the choices that we make have an effect or that everything in life is predetermined?

II. Lesson Overview: (5 min.)

The Talmud teaches that rabbinic authorities made a conscious choice to include Ecclesiastes in the biblical canon (*Shabbat* 30b). An earlier generation of rabbis argued against its inclusion because the text contradicts not only itself but also other teachings from the Torah. For example, while Ecclesiastes’ most famous saying is “all is vanity,” he also explains that “the only good a man can have under the sun is to eat and drink and enjoy himself” (8:15). Wisdom, as described by *Kohelet* and the book of Proverbs, could not be more different. Ecclesiastes distains wisdom, stating, “For as wisdom grows, vexation grows; to increase learning is to increase heartache” (1:18). For Proverbs, on the other hand, “Happy is the man who finds wisdom, the man who attains understanding” (3:13). While the earlier generation of rabbis could not reconcile these differences, a latter generation advocated for *Kohelet*’s inclusion, which was ultimately recognized as a holy book, because it begins and ends with words of God.⁴

Perhaps our ancestors in the rabbinic period not only felt discomfort with Ecclesiastes’ contradictions, but also with the author’s uncertainty. Contemporary rabbi and author Harold S. Kushner describes the work of Ecclesiastes as “the work of an

² *Ibid.* P. 212.

³ *Ibid.* P. 212.

⁴ Louis Jacobs. *The Jewish Religion: A Companion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. P. 139.

angry, cynical, skeptical man who doubts God and questions the value of doing good.”⁵ While we and our rabbis may question the holiness of this book, Ecclesiastes’ tone and struggle often resonates with the modern reader. Its inclusion in the *Tanakh* (Bible) explains that Jewish tradition has long acknowledged the attempt to find meaning on and in the path of life.

This lesson will explore how the modern Israeli poet, Yehudah Amichai, relates to themes found in Ecclesiastes and creates his own midrash on the text through poetry. After a close reading of the Amichai poem, we will explore how themes found in Ecclesiastes touch on the story of your lives, in particular at the crossroads of entering into an ‘empty nest.’

III. Text Exploration: Modern Poetic Interpretation of Ecclesiastes (20 min.) See *Sukkot: Appendix B*

- Background: Yehudah Amichai (1924-2000). The poet was “inspired by Jewish lyric poetry dating back to the Psalms, which he then combined with modern elements. His blend of classic Hebrew with colloquialisms, idioms and slang revolutionized the language of Israeli poetry.”⁶
- In small groups (3-4) have learners read the Yehudah Amichai poem “Lying in Wait for Happiness” and answer the following questions:
 - How does Amichai’s poem challenge Ecclesiastes 3:1-8?
 - Amichai points out that there is a space between “destroyed and built...”
 - How are the ‘in betweens’ described by Amichai different or the same as *Kohelet*?
 - What is “between the hoped for and the imagined” in your life? Is there reason for you to dwell in this space?
 - Does Shoshana believe that “all is vanity”? Explore the metaphor of the human soul as lace.

⁵ Harold S. Kushner. *When All You’ve Ever Wanted Isn’t Enough*. New York: Summit Books, 1986. P. 34.

⁶ “Author Biographies: Yehudah Amichai.” *International Literature Festival Berlin*, 2008. Accessed online: http://www.literaturfestival.com/bios1_3_6_509.html

- The conclusion of the poem infers that there is beauty in the toils of our lives.
 - Humans are torn and partial like the lace.
- Based on the lists that you composed for homework and your reading of the book of Ecclesiastes, do you think that Ecclesiastes believed that “all is vanity”? Cite passages to support your answer.
- What verse of this poem speaks to you most? How does it speak to your story?
- Come back together as a large group and explore the learners’ personal connection to the Amichai poem and the book of Ecclesiastes.

IV. Observance Activity: (15 min.) *See Sukkot: Appendix C and D*

- *Ushpizin* (Aramaic for guests) is a Kabbalistic (mystical) ceremony stemming from the Middle Ages where on each night of Sukkot a different biblical guest and their attributes are invited into the *sukkah*.⁷ In more recent times, modern liturgists have composed ceremonies that also invite biblical women into *sukkot*.
- In *chevrutah*, explore one example of these modern texts (*Sukkot: Appendix C*).⁸
 - What does each woman bring with her into the *sukkah*?
- Playing off of the themes of inclusion found in the *Ushpizin* ceremony and the concept of inclusion and exclusion found in the rabbinic debate of whether or not to embrace the book of Ecclesiastes in the canon, we will create a personal *Ushpizin* ceremony that asks us to evaluate which of our personal attributes and what of our lives would we like to bring into this *sukkah* and the coming year.
- The following prompts and questions should be printed on tag board and attached to string (*Sukkot: Appendix D*).
 - “Go, eat your bread in gladness and drink your wine in joy, for your action was long ago approved by God. Let your cloths be freshly washed and your head never lack ointment. Enjoy happiness with a woman you love

⁷ Lesli Koppelman Ross. *Celebrate! The Complete Jewish Holidays Handbook*. Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1994. P. 224.

⁸ Jack Moline. “Inviting Jewish Foremothers into the Sukkah: A Contemporary Twist on the Traditional Ceremony.” *MyJewishLearning.org*.

all the fleeting days of life that have been granted you under the sun.
Whatever it is in your power to do, do with all your might.”

Ecclesiastes 9:7-9

- What is ‘in your power’ that you would like to ‘do with all your might’ in the coming year and years?
- “Vanity of vanities, said Kohelet; vanity of vanities, all is vanity.
What profit has man in all his toil that he toils under the sun?”

Ecclesiastes 1:2-3

- What are some of the toils in your life that you would like to eliminate from your coming year and years?
- Ask learners to reflect and respond in writing to the above prompts and questions.
- For learners who like to express themselves artistically, the facilitator should supply materials to embellish these *sukkah* decorations. These could include extra copies of the Amichai poem, the lyrics to “Turn, Turn, Turn,” water colors, decorative paper, etc. The art component to this activity should be nondirective, as not to come across as infantilizing for these adult learners.
- Learners can choose to hang their creative reflections in the community *sukkah* or bring them home to place in their own *sukkah* or another place of choice.

V. Conclusion: (5 min.)

- Have learners come back together as a large group. Ask students to stand in a circle.
- Invite learners to share what they would like to ‘do with all their might’ in the coming year and years. Ask them to frame their answers as blessings: “May my year and years be filled with....” Lead the community in answering the blessings with “Amen.”
- Facilitator should conclude this ceremony with a blessing of his/her own for the group. For example:
 - As we continue down the paths of our lives, may we all find strength, support, guidance and meaning from our community and our tradition.

Lesson 3:

Hanukkah: Dedicating Ourselves to Education

Enduring Understanding: Jewish learning is a lifelong endeavor. Jewish adults have unique and varying needs as learners.

Essential Questions:

- What is the right balance between engagement in Jewish life and the secular world?
- What does it mean to be a knowledgeable Jew?
- How does Jewish study differ from other pursuits of knowledge?
- How does Jewish education work against assimilation?

Assessment:

- Through the study of the historical story of Hanukkah, learners will explore and articulate, in group discussion, the balance between Jewish and secular pursuits in their own lives.
- Learners will identify what type of Jewish learner they are through an exploration of themselves as secular learners.
- Learners will observe and celebrate the holiday of Hanukkah with an adult peer group.

Learning Experience:

- Explore the connection between the roots of the words ‘Hanukkah’ and ‘education.’ See:
 - S.C. Reif. “Dedicated to חנוכה.” *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. 22, Fasc. 4 (Oct., 1972). Pp. 495-501.
- Explore the historical account of Hanukkah and relate it to modern times; compare the story of the Hasmoneans and Hellenists to Jewish assimilation in America today.
 - What are the similarities?
 - What are the differences?

- Resources for historical accounts of Hanukkah:
 - Martin A. Cohen. “The Hasmonean Revolution Politically Considered: Outline of a New Interpretation.” *CCAR Journal*. 22, 4 (1975). Pp. 13-34.
 - Shaye J.D. Cohen. *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1987.
- Connect the first and second parts of this learning experience by discussing Jewish education as a way of working against assimilation.

Observance Activity:

- Learn about the possible connection between the origin of Hanukkah *gelt* and honoring Jewish teachers. Idea explored in:
 - Eliezer Segal. “What Is the Origin of Hanukkah-Gelt?” *Holidays, History, and Halakhah*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 2000. Pp. 87-89.
 - Tina Wasserman. “Who Invented Chanukkah Gelt.” *Reform Judaism Magazine*. Winter 2005. Accessed online:
<http://reformjudaismmag.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=1081v>
- Ask learners to think of a teacher that has had a profound impact on their lives (this teacher does not need to be a Jewish educator). Instruct learners to write a description of this educator’s teaching style with as much detail as possible.
- From these descriptions, have learners create a list of their needs and likes as a general (secular) learner.
- Have learners compare their needs as a secular learner to the different types of adult Jewish learners described in the field of adult Jewish education. *See*:
 - Diane Tickton Schuster and Lisa D. Grant, “Teaching Jewish Adults” in *The Ultimate Jewish Teacher’s Handbook*. Denver, CO: A.R.E. Publishing, Inc., 2003. Pp. 156-159.
 - Barry W. Holtz. *Textual Knowledge: Teaching the Bible in Theory and Practice*. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2003. P. 95.

Creating Meaningful Holiday Observance in an Empty Nest

- After learners have identified who they are as a Jewish learner, have them write a description of qualities that they would like to see in a Jewish teacher and a Jewish learning experience.
- Have learners light *chanukiyot* and dedicate their candle to the teacher that they described as having a profound impact on their lives. Have them share one thing that they discovered about themselves as a learner from this teacher.

Lesson 4:

Tu B'Shvat: Reawakening Interests

Enduring Understanding: People are multifaceted in nature; transition to an 'empty nest' creates an opportunity to explore one's different dimensions.

Essential Questions:

- How do you create new balance in your life after your children have left home?
- What are the different components that make you a whole person?
- Who are the people and what are the things and activities that help keep you rooted?
- Who are the people and what are the things and activities that nourish you and help you grow as a person?

Assessment:

- Learners will work to evaluate, through study and discussion, who they would like to see themselves transition to personally, during this period of transition, from active parenting to 'empty nest,' in which they find themselves.
- Learners will identify, through study and discussion, a personal support system in which to rely upon during this transitional time in their lives.
- Learners will observe and celebrate the holiday of Tu B'Shvat with an adult peer group.

Preparation:

- Facilitator should encourage learners (who feel inclined) to prepare creative contributions to help personalize a Tu B'Shvat seder which will serve as this lesson's 'observance activity.' Submissions should be on themes related to the holiday of Tu B'Shvat (trees, springs, renewal, creation, natural elements). Contributions could include: art, poetry, a musical performance, etc. Learners should feel free to create something new for the seder or perhaps, submit something that they created in the past. The learners' pieces will help to reinforce the theme of renewing and exploring personal interests, which will be a focus of

this lesson. Note: Facilitator will need to receive submissions in advance in order to include them in the Tu B'Shvat seder. *See Tu B'Shvat: Appendix C*

- The facilitator may want to ask participants to provide fruit and wine/grape juice for the seder that will take place during the 'observance activity.'

Setting:

This lesson will take place on or close to the holiday of Tu B'Shvat. The total duration of the 'learning experience' and 'observance activity' is approximately 75 minutes.

Learning Experience:

I. Set Induction: (20 min.) *See Tu B'Shvat: Appendix A*

- During the holiday of Tu B'Shvat, *Rosh Hashanah La-Ilanot* (the "New Year for Trees") it is customary to eat fruit from trees. Before the fruit is consumed, just as before anything is consumed in Jewish tradition, a blessing is recited recognizing God's role in creating "the fruit of the tree."
- While Jewish legal tradition prescribes blessings to say over everything we eat, fruit that comes from trees is unique because it warrants a cycle of blessings. Jewish tradition provides us with multiple *brakhot* that guide us from the first indication that a tree will give us sustenance to the moment our mouths taste its sweet fruits.
- Have learners study the *brakhot* associated with fruit trees and discuss the following questions. (Note: The discussion of the first two questions should take place in the big group, led by the facilitator, because they necessitate arriving at specific answers to move to the ensuing personalization questions).⁹

⁹ Text study inspired by the following sources: Rabbi Abe Avrahami. "Birkat Ha'ilanot: Blessing on the Trees during the Month of Nisan." *Jewish Agency for Israel*. Accessed online: <http://www.jafi.org.il/education/festivals/ilanot.html> and Rabbi Asher Meir. "Meaning in Mitzvot: Blessing of Fruit Trees." *The OU/NCSY Israel Center: Torah Tidbits*. Accessed online: http://www.ou.org/torah/tt/5760/tazria60/specialfeatures_mitzvot.htm

- Why do the three brakhot move from being more general to more specific?¹⁰
 - The *berakha* on eating is said on the actual pleasure of tasting the fruit. This is the most concrete enjoyment, and the most specific *berakha*.
 - The *shehechyanu* blessing is said when we have the definite ability to enjoy the fruit. Even so, this ability is not yet realized, so the *berakha* is more general - once for each kind of fruit.
 - But the *berakha* we say on the flowering is made on the mere promise of future enjoyment. As soon as we see the trees blossoming in spring, we see that the natural world has awakened from its winter slumber. We are filled with hope and confidence that nature will fulfill its promise to provide us with fruit. The very first fruit blossom of the year embodies the longing and anticipation of the entire new year, and so this blessing is said only once for the entire year.
- Deuteronomy 20:19 compares people to “trees of the field.” In terms of the above brakhot, how is this statement true?
 - Just like trees, every human has the potential to give to the world.
- What is your potential for the coming season? What are your budding gifts?

II. Lesson Overview: (10 min.)

- The tree is an important metaphor in Jewish mystical tradition, it is likened to the mystical concept of the divine emanations (*sefirot*) of God, and in turn, is likened to humans because we were created in the image of God. This concept of divine emanation stems from the 16th century. Rabbi Isaac Luria and his constituency in the

¹⁰ Commentary on blessings from: Rabbi Asher Meir. “Meaning in Mitzvot: Blessing of Fruit Trees.”

community of Tzfat, reinterpreted and popularized a preexisting mystical tradition in Judaism and devised their own system known as Lurianic Kabbalah.

- Isaac Luria, in “his kabbalistic theology asserted that when God, Who is Everything, decided to create the universe, God had to withdraw (*tsimtsum*) God’s Self to make space for that universe. This divine creation of space and time became the ‘vessels’ of our world. God then began pouring divine energy into the vessels in the form of the 10 *sefirot* or ‘divine emanations,’ which were meant to fuse with the vessels. But before the process was completed, the very large amount of divine energy caused the vessels to shatter in an event called ‘The Breaking of the Vessels’ (*Shevirat Ha-Keilim*). Creation was neither completed nor perfected. Our world, very simply described, is broken, because the emanations incompletely connected to the vessels and to each other. We are left, literally, picking up the pieces. God has given us the responsibility and the ability to repair the world [*tikkun olam*] which we can accomplish through our rituals and our ethical behavior.”¹¹
- One of the most common symbols for the *sefirot* is the “tree of life.” We therefore see the metaphor of the tree used extensively in mystical literature.
- During this session, we will explore the metaphor of trees and *sefirot* to help us better understand ourselves during this transitional period from active parenting to the ‘empty nest’ phase of our lives. We will begin by exploring a contemporary mystical teaching from a traditional source and then move on to our ‘observance activity’ which is a modern take on the medieval kabbalistic practice of the Tu B’Svat Seder.

III. Text Exploration:¹² (20 min.)

- Background on Rabbi Yaakov Alter and Hasidic Judaism.
 - Rabbi Yaakov Alter is the current spiritual leader of the Ger Hasidic sect. He was born in Poland in 1939 and currently lives in Israel. Today, Ger Hasidim primarily live in Israel and Borough Park, Brooklyn.

¹¹ Paul Steinberg, *Celebrating the Jewish Year: The Winter Holidays*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2007. Pp. 83-84.

¹² Text from: Yitzhak Buxbaum, *A Person is Like a Tree: A Source Book for Tu BeShevat*. Northvale, NY: Jacan Aronson Inc., 2000. Pp. 117-118.

- Hasidic Judaism is a Jewish mystical sub-tradition founded in Eastern Europe in the 18th century by Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (also known as the *Ba'al Shem Tov*). The *Ba'al Shem Tov*'s disciples went on to spread his teachings throughout Eastern Europe and to create dynasties (one of which is Ger Hasidim).
- While Hasidism was considered radical and inclusive for its time, today Hasidim are known for separating themselves from contemporary society. The text which we will explore reflects this worldview, and therefore, does not use gender inclusive language.
- Have learners break up into small groups to explore the text and answer the following questions:
 - Do you ever feel like you are “fighting gravity”?
 - What are aspects of your life that have gone into hibernation for the winter, or perhaps longer?
 - Working with Rabbi Yaakov Alter's metaphor, how are you like a tree?
 - What are the elements of your trunk that stay the same?
 - What are your roots? What keeps you grounded?
 - What is the “moisture” in your life, what helps you grow to “great heights”?
 - Which of your “higher qualities” are concealed? How might you work to uncover them?
 - Do you agree that Torah is the only form of spiritual nourishment?
 - What was your “water” last year? What helped to nourish you in the past year?
 - What will be your water in this coming year? What will help nourish you in this transitional period in your life?

IV. Observance Activity:¹³ (25 min.) *See Tu B'Shvat: Appendix C*

- Explain that the Kabbalists of Tzvat created the Tu B'Shvat seder to correspond to the four worlds of creation “through which the *sefirot* flow. These are *atzilut* (“emanation”), *beriyah* (“creation”), *yetzirah* (“formation”), and *assiyah* (“action”). Each world corresponds to one of the four letters of the ineffable name of God... formed by the Hebrew letters *yud*, *heh*, *vav*, and *heh*. All together, the worlds show the unity of the universe; and as we elevate spiritually from one world to the next, we are better able to understand the unity of God.”
- As we contemplate God’s unity through the seder, we will also reflect upon the different elements that comprise us as individual human beings and explore our personal understanding of “unity.” Prompted by this time of transition in which you find yourself, we will ask during the seder: ‘How will I work to realign my life to move from the world of emanation, the place of initial inspiration, to the world of action, of self actualization?’
- Facilitator should help group conduct Tu B'Shvat seder.
- The seder moves through each of the four seasons, the four worlds of creation, the four essential elements, and the four principle *sefirot*. As in a traditional Tu B'Shvat seder, during each of the four sections, a glass of wine will be drunk and different fruit consumed. Hopefully, each of the four sections will also include a creative contribution from one of the learners in the class.
- During each section, a few questions are also posed which relate elements of the ‘empty nest’ experience to the themes in that section. The facilitator should decide and vary how these questions are addressed. For example, some could be discussed in *chevrutah*, others as a personal journal prompt, etc.

¹³ Background from: Paul Steinberg. *Celebrating the Jewish Year: The Winter Holidays*. Pp. 88-89 and 110-111.

Lesson 5:

Purim: Turning Masks into Costumes

Enduring Understanding: Just as one must understand a joke in order to laugh at it, so too must one understand their community in order to gain meaning from it.

Essential Questions:

- How can our shared stories create laughter and meaning for a diverse group of individuals?
- What are your needs as a Jew that your community is meeting?
- What are your needs as a Jew that your community is falling short of meeting?
- How do we create a balance between self autonomy and membership in a community in terms of our Jewish lives?

Assessment:

- Learners will identify ways in which their communities have shaped their Jewish practice and observance.
- After becoming aware of this reality, learners will articulate, as part of discussion, aspects of their Jewish life that they would like to reclaim and reframe to fit their individual needs.
- Learners will observe and celebrate the holiday of Purim with an adult peer group.

Preparation:

- Prior to this session, the facilitator should divide the chapters of Megillat Esther between the learners in the class. Each section should be prepared by at least two learners. (If there are less than 20 people in the class, some participants should prepare two shorter chapters). Learners will be instructed to prepare the entire Book of Esther, but should become most familiar with their assigned chapter(s). During the learning experience of the lesson, participants will be asked to prepare a Purim *shpeil* (skit) of their chapter(s).
- Instruct learners to read through the Book of Esther two times. They should read through the Megillah the first time without any preparation or background reading.

Then learners should read Adam Gopnik's piece "A Purim Story" which appeared in *The New Yorker* magazine (18 Feb. 2002). The facilitator should make copies of this piece which is available online for a nominal fee. After reading the Gopnik piece, which speaks of the author's experience of struggling to understand the story of Purim without knowledge of its comedic nature, learners should return and read their assigned chapters from Megillat Esther.

Setting:

This session is to take place, if possible, on the actual holiday of Purim. It could take place either on the eve or day of the holiday. The duration of the 'learning experience' and 'observance activity' of this lesson is approximately 75 minutes. Following the formal session, it would be nice for the group to join together and share in a *seudah* (festive meal), which is one of the *mitzvot* associated with the holiday.

Learning Experience:

I. Set Induction (15 min.)

- Show a short clip from the cartoon 'The Simpsons' that includes an 'Itchy & Scratchy' cartoon. (This show is readily available on DVD). If the facilitator is unfamiliar with this cartoon, they may select another that illustrates the criteria of a comedy mentioned below.
- Ask the learners to brainstorm: What makes this clip funny? The facilitator should try to have learners list each of the items below. If items are missing after they brainstorm the Simpsons clip, have them brainstorm comedy in general.¹⁴
 - Exaggeration
 - Caricature
 - Ludicrous situations
 - Practical jokes
 - Coincidences

¹⁴ List compiled from "style associated with burlesque, farce, and other types of low comedy." In: Adele Berlin. "Esther as Comedy." *The JPS Bible Commentary: Esther*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001. P. xix.

Creating Meaningful Holiday Observance in an Empty Nest

- Improbabilities
- Verbal humor
- Repetition of scenes, events, and phrases
- Inversions and reversals

II. Overview: (5 min.)

The creators of *The Simpsons* have clearly shaped their script with their audience in mind; they created a show using cultural context and literary technique to illicit a favorable reaction from their audience. The author(s) of Megillat Esther constructed their text in a similar manner. Unfortunately, some of the humor of the story has been lost to us. Perhaps, like Adam Gopnik, we did not know to read its words as a comedy. Or perhaps we have only heard the Megillah in the family friendly environment that is the American synagogue. While those of us in the room are growing older, we are not old enough to laugh at jokes specific to the late Persian or early Greek Period. We do, however, hold much in common with the target audience for whom the Megillah was comprised. During today's session, we will look at the Book of Esther as a comedy written for us, a group of mature, light hearted adults, in need of a laugh.

Just as Megillat Esther was shaped with a specific audience in mind, so too have all aspects of Judaism been constructed over time to serve the needs of specific time bound communities. While many rituals and observances are timeless, some have lost their humor or meaning throughout the years. In today's lesson, through the study of Megillat Esther and the holiday of Purim, we will gain an awareness of how Jewish practice has been shaped by history and by those that surround us. Through this heightened awareness, we will gain the ability to reclaim aspects of our observance that perhaps need to be better shaped to suit our needs.

III. Text Exploration: (30 min.)

- Ask learners to find the other learner in the class who prepared the same chapters of the Megillah as home work.

Creating Meaningful Holiday Observance in an Empty Nest

- As *chevrutah*, have these pairs analyze their chapters using the class' brain stormed list of what makes a comedy. Have learners create a list of examples of humor in their chapter.
- Relying on their created lists and paying specific attention to their audience, have pairs of learners create a brief Purim *shpeil* (skit) based on the plot of their chapters.
- Have learners perform their *shpeils* for the class in order of the Megillah. Facilitator should provide *graggers* (noise makers), costumes, and props to add to the festive atmosphere.

IV. Observance Activity: (20 min.)

- Explain that there are four major *mitzvot* associated with the holiday of Purim that are all drawn from the text of Megillat Esther:
 - Reading of the Megilah (*Mikra Megilah*)
 - Festive Meal (*Seudat Purim*)
 - Gifts to the Poor (*Matanot l'Evyonim*)
 - Sending Gifts (*Mishloach Manot*)
- Our 'observance activity' will focus on: Sending Gifts (*Mishloach Manot*)
- Facilitator should summarize ideas from the article: "Purim 'Gifts'" by Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld.¹⁵ Herzfeld is rabbi of Ohev Sholom--The National Synagogue in Washington, D.C.
 - The idea of sending gifts stems from Esther 9: 19: "Therefore the Jews of the villages, that dwelt in the unwalled towns, made the 14th day of the month of Adar a day of gladness and feasting, a holiday, and of sending portions to one another (*mishloach manot*)."
 - But, the text does not overtly explain the reasoning behind giving gifts. One approach sees the *mitzvah* (commandment) of *mishloach manot* as counteracting the accusations of Haman. Haman accused the Jews of being "a scattered, and divided nation." Thus, the Jewish People send gifts

¹⁵ Accessed online:

http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Purim/TO_Purim_Home/Gifts_217_Prn.htm

to each other in order to show that they are not divided, but rather are united. (Following this *mitzvah* can be understood as a positive reinterpretation of *midah ke-neged midah*--measure for measure.) The *mishloach manot* bring peace and harmony to an, at times, divisive and fractured Jewish community.

- Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld's take on *mishloach manot* reveals a new dimension to looking at how holiday observance and practice should be constructed. Our exploration of Megillat Esther asked us to reclaim the story of Purim to meet our needs as a mature adult audience. In creating our *shpeils*, we focused on the importance of being aware of the uniqueness of audience when creating humorous, or rather, meaningful Jewish observance. While not all of us laughed at the same jokes, we, as audience, share much in common. But Megillat Esther and Herzfeld remind us that the Jewish community is not a uniform one; our needs as individual Jews are not always the same as the needs of the majority in a community.
- Discuss the following questions as a group:
 - What are some of the ways in which your Jewish community has had an impact on your personal Jewish observance (both positive and negative)?
 - When have you felt your Jewish community has not been able to meet your needs as an individual?
 - Are there instances when you are willing to concede your individual Jewish needs for the majority population in your Jewish community?
 - Are there ways that you think your Jewish community could do a better job of meeting the needs of all sub-groups in your community?
- Traditionally *mishloach manot* consist of food that could help to comprise a festive meal, meaning, the foods in the 'gift basket' should help facilitate the saying of multiple *brakhot* or blessings which comprise a festive meal.
- During this session, learners will create *mishloach manot* with a twist. Our baskets will contain *brakhot* (blessings), but these will be blessings for our Jewish lives, rather than blessings to be said over edible treats.

Creating Meaningful Holiday Observance in an Empty Nest

- Ask learners to write down on individual strips of paper, ways in which their community (Jewish and non-Jewish) have influenced their Jewish practice. Instruct learners to write down both negative and positive influences and as many as they can think of.

V. Conclusion: (5 min.)

- Have learners stand in a circle. Place a decorative basket and a recycling bin in the middle of the circle.
- Ask learners to share one positive influence of community on their Jewish practice and one negative. Have learners place their positive influences in the decorative basket. Explain that these are blessings that have been sent to them by their communities. Have learners tear up their negative influences and recycle them. Explain that if learners choose, now that they have recognized these influences, they have the ability to take them or leave them; if they choose they have the ability to shape their Jewish lives.

Lesson 6:

Passover: Bringing Our New Understanding of Observance to Our Seders

Enduring Understanding: “All people, in every generation, should see themselves as having experienced the Exodus from Egypt.”

Essential Questions:

- How can your generation experience the Exodus from Egypt?
- How does one balance tradition and innovation concerning family ritual?
- How do you ensure that everyone at your seder is both teaching and learning?
- How is ritual created?

Assessment:

- Learners will apply concepts learned in class to their home ritual by creating an observance activity to include in the Passover seder they will make or attend.
- Learners will gain confidence in making their own meaningful holiday observance by creating ritual with the help of their learning community.
- Through engagement in text study, learners will prepare for the festival of Pesach, intellectually and spiritually, with an adult peer group.

Learning Activity:

- Ideas for ‘text exploration’:
 - Study the evolution of the ‘four questions’ from a process of organic questioning (as seen in the Mishnah) to the prescribed set of four questions we find today in the Passover Haggadah (fixed in the Geonic period).
 - Traditionally, it is the youngest person at the seder who asks the ‘four questions.’ The above text study will reveal that historically, it was parents who asked these prescribed questions only if their children were lacking the ability to spontaneously question on their own.
 - Explain that the ‘four questions’ begin the *Maggid*, the ‘Telling’ of the Exodus from Egypt at the Passover seder. One educational theory holds that often times, it is not the material studied that one remembers, but

rather the questions that one asks about the material. Questioning in the seder helps one to engage, or rather experience, the story of the Exodus for oneself. Just after the recitation of the ‘four questions,’ the Haggadah explains that, “All people, in every generation, should see themselves as having experienced the Exodus from Egypt.”

- Ask learners to brainstorm questions that they have about the Exodus, Passover, and the Seder. Questions can be both practical and theological.
- List of resources for text study:
 - David Arnow and Lawrence A. Hoffman (Eds.) *My People’s Passover Haggadah: Traditional Texts, Modern Commentaries*. Vol. 1. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008. Pp. 146-159.
 - Noam Zion and David Dishon. *A Different Night: The Family Participation Haggadah*. Jerusalem: Shalom Hartman Institute, 1997. Pp. 40-43.

Observance Activity:

- Learners will create a ritual, with the help of the facilitator and their learning community, to add to a seder that they will attend this Pesach. Creating this ritual will give learners an opportunity to try their hand at creating meaningful, mature holiday observance for themselves and to help integrate their learning into their home ritual.
- The questions that learners asked about Passover in the above ‘learning experience’ should act as a spring board for the creation of the learners’ rituals.
- Learners should form small groups with other learners who focused on similar themes and sections of the seder. These small groups should first study texts from the seder that are associated with their questions. The facilitator will most likely need to help shape these groups and point groups to resources.
- After groups have studied historical background for their ritual in groups, they should work individually, with the help of their small group, to create a ritual that will speak to the participants at their upcoming seder.

- Learners should keep the dynamics of their seder in mind. They should be conscious of balancing old and new traditions. They should decide if they want to recreate a preexisting tradition or explore a section of the seder with less family tradition associated with it.
- Learners should keep in mind the following overarching goal when creating their ritual: “All people, in every generation, should see themselves as having experienced the Exodus from Egypt.” Learners should ask themselves:
 - Who will my ritual engage?
 - Who might it alienate?
 - How can I create multiple entry points for the different people who will be at my seder?
- Resources for background:
 - *My People’s Passover Haggadah: Traditional Texts, Modern Commentaries*. David Arnow and Lawrence A. Hoffman (Eds.) Vol. 1. & Vol. 2. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008.
 - Philip Goodman. *The Passover Anthology*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1987.
 - Moshe Dov Stein. *Pesach: Its Observance, Laws and Significance/A Presentation Based on Talmudic and Traditional Sources*. New York: Mesorah Publications, 1995.
- Resources for creating rituals:
 - David Arnow. *Creating a Lively Passover Seder: An Interactive Sourcebook of Tales, Texts, and Activities*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004.
 - Alan and Jo Kay. *Make Your Own Passover Seder: A New Approach to Creating a Personal Family Seder*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishing, 2004.
 - Marge Piercy. *Pesach for the Rest of Us: Making the Passover Seder Your Own*. New York: Schocken Books, 2007.
 - Mishael Zion and Noam Zion. *A Night to Remember: The Haggadah of Contemporary Voices*. Jerusalem: Zion Holiday Publications, 2007.

Lesson 7:

Yom Haatzmaut: Creating a Mature Relationship with Israel and the Jewish World

Enduring Understanding:

Being Jewish means being a member of a People; being Jewish means constantly exploring your relationship with Israel and the greater Jewish community.

Essential Questions:

- How do you see yourself in relation to the Jewish People and the Jewish State?
- What are your responsibilities towards the Jewish People and the Jewish State?
- What do you see as the Jewish People's and the Jewish State's responsibilities toward you?

Assessment:

- Learners will apply concepts that they have learned in class to learning opportunities offered 'outside' of the curriculum.
- Learners will experience being a part of the larger Jewish People by participating in a local Jewish community event.
- Learners will celebrate Yom Haatzmaut (Israeli Independence Day) in a meaningful mature way, with their greater Jewish community.

Learning Experience and Observance Activity:

- The learning and observance activities are less defined in this lesson than they were for previous holidays. While the lesson for Passover asked learners to begin to integrate their learning from this curriculum into their family life, this lesson asks them to begin to integrate learning into their relationship with the larger Jewish world: Israel and the greater Jewish community.
- In this lesson, learners will participate in a community celebration for Yom Haatzmaut with their learning community. They will also learn skills to help them engage in the event (and other events) in accordance with the curriculum of the class; they will engage in a mature, adult way.
- Prior to the group meeting, the facilitator should ask learners to independently explore different options of engaging with Israel in their greater Jewish community.

Creating Meaningful Holiday Observance in an Empty Nest

This could take the form of: lecture, film festival, concert, art exhibition, or community Yom Haatzmaut celebration. When choosing an event, learners should begin to explore some of the overarching questions of this lesson. The facilitator should ask them the following questions:

- How does the advertising for this event define the Jewish People? Who does the advertisement include or exclude?
 - How does the advertising for the event define a relationship with Israel? Is it a celebratory relationship or a critical relationship or perhaps both?
- Learners should share their findings via the class list-serve and come to a consensus over cyber space about which event the group would like to attend for the next meeting of this class.
- Once the event has been decided upon, the facilitator will provide learners with questions that will help them to frame their participation in the event as an exploration of Jewish Peoplehood.
 - How did the experience make you think and feel about where you stand in relationship to Israel?
 - How did the experience define your responsibility towards the Jewish State? What was your reaction?
 - How did the experience define the Jewish State's responsibility towards you? What was your reaction?
 - How did the experience make you think and feel about where you stand in relationship to the Jewish People?
 - How did the experience create or not create a sense of Jewish Peoplehood?
 - How did the experience define the Jewish People? Do you agree or disagree with this definition?
- Following the event, the group will meet to process their experience. This could take place directly after the event or a few days latter, depending on scheduling. Along with giving learners an opportunity to share and hear their peers' answers to the above questions, the facilitator should also encourage learners to view this process as a model for participating in further events in the greater Jewish community. Facilitator should ask:

Creating Meaningful Holiday Observance in an Empty Nest

- Did the experience spark an interest in further engagement with Israel and Jewish Peoplehood? Why or why not? If not, what might an experience look like that would?
- What are questions that you might ask yourself the next time you attend an event in the greater Jewish community that would help you frame the experience in a mature and meaningful way?

Lesson 8:

Shavuot: Confirming Our Commitment to the Covenant

Enduring Understanding: While it is important to mark learning milestones, creating a covenant with God and the Jewish People is an ongoing process that requires lifelong learning.

Essential Questions:

- How do I define my covenant with Judaism?
- What is my Torah to teach others?
- What are ways that I can create meaningful Jewish observance for myself in the future?

Assessment:

- Learners will apply concepts learned in class to their own teaching of Torah by creating their own learning experience for their learning community.
- Learners will articulate, in the form of personal reflection, how they can create meaningful Jewish observance for themselves in the future.
- Learners will observe and celebrate the festival of Shavuot with an adult peer group.

Learning Experience and Observance Activity:

- It is a tradition for the holiday of Shavuot to celebrate God's giving of the Torah to the Jewish People by staying up all night and engaging with Torah through study. This late night study is called Tikkun Leil Shavuot.
- This lesson asks learners to create learning experiences for their classmates. In essence, the participants in the class, through their own learning and teaching, will help each other observe the holiday of Shavuot by creating a Tikkun. This will reinforce to the learners that they are ready and able to create their own meaningful holiday observance.
- This lesson is not only a celebration of the holiday of Shavuot, but also a celebration of the learners' accomplishments over the course of the curriculum. This lesson will act as a *siyyum*, a closing celebration for the year's learning.

- Prior to this session, the facilitator should ask learners to prepare a short lesson for their peers on one of the many texts associated with the holiday of Shavuot or any other Jewish text that speaks to them (this is more than appropriate for it is traditional for excerpts for all sacred texts to be studied at a Tikkun). Each learners' lesson should not only teach a text, but should also incorporate their personal Jewish story; in these lessons, each learner should teach *their* Torah. The form of the lesson should reflect each learner. It could incorporate text study, music, art, poetry etc.

Observance Activity for Siyyum:

- Traditionally, the Tikkun is concluded at dawn with the *shacharit* (morning) service. While it may not be realistic to literally stay up all night, a service would be a nice way to formally conclude this curriculum. The service could follow the structure of a *maariv* service, rather than a *shacharit* service depending on the hour.
- Similar to the 'observance activity' in the first lesson of this curriculum on Elul, the facilitator should create a service that incorporates themes from this course and themes from the holiday of Shavuot. The facilitator should focus specifically on the learners' personal commitment to Judaism and provide a space for them to reflect on ways in which they can actualize their covenant in the coming year and years.

Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8

¹To everything there is a season,
And a time for every purpose under heaven:
²A time for being born and a time for dying,
A time for planting
 and a time for uprooting the planted;
³A time for slaying and a time for healing,
A time for tearing down and time for
building up;
⁴A time for weeping and a time for laughing,
A time for wailing and a time for dancing;
⁵A time for throwing stones
 and a time for gathering stones,
A time for embracing
 and a time for shunning embraces;
⁶A time for seeking and a time for loosing,
A time for keeping and a time for
discarding;
⁷A time for ripping and a time for sewing,
A time for silence and a time for speaking;
⁸A time for loving and a time for hating;
A time for war and a time for peace.

“Turn, Turn, Turn”

Lyrics by: Pete Seeger

Chorus:

To everything, turn, turn, turn,
There is a season, turn, turn, turn,
And a time for every purpose under heaven.

A time to be born, a time to die,
A time to plant, a time to reap,
A time to kill, a time to heal,
A time to laugh, a time to weep.

A time of live, a time of hate,
A time of war, a time of peace,
A time you may embrace,
A time to refrain from embracing.

Byrds addition:

A time to love, a time to hate,
A time of peace, I swear it's not too late.

Questions:

- How does the Byrds' addition differ from Ecclesiastes 3:8?
- What is Ecclesiastes' message in the above passage?
- What is the Byrds' message?

Lying in Wait for Happiness

Written by: Yehudah Amichai

Translated from Hebrew by: Glenda Abramson & Tudor Parfitt

On the broad steps leading down to the Western Wall
A Beautiful woman came up to me: You don't remember me,
I'm Shoshana in Hebrew. Something else in other languages.
All is vanity.

Thus she spoke at twilight standing between the destroyed
And the built, between the light and the dark.
Black birds and white birds changed places
With the great rhythm of breathing.
The flash of tourists' cameras lit my memory too:
What are you doing here between the promised and the forgotten,
Between the hoped for and the imagined?
What are you doing here lying in wait for happiness
With your lovely face a tourist advertisement from God
And your soul rent and torn like mine?

She answered me: My soul is rent and torn like yours
But it is beautiful because of that
Like fine lace.

Questions:

- How does Amichai's poem challenge Ecclesiastes 3:1-8?
- How are the 'in between' described by Amichai different or the same as *Kohelet*?
- What is "between the hoped for and the imagined" in your life? Is there reason for you to dwell in this space?
- Does Shoshana believe that "all is vanity"? Explore the metaphor of the human soul as lace.
- Based on the lists that you composed for homework and your reading of the book of Ecclesiastes, do you think that Ecclesiastes believed that "all is vanity"? Cite passages to support your answer.
- What verse of this poem speaks to you most? How does it speak to your story?

Modern Ushpizin Ceremony: Inviting in Matriarchs

Each evening:

Enter, holy guests, in the spirit of hospitality. Enter, nurturing ancestors through whose deeds and devotion our lives are inspired. Enter our Sukkah and share our meal. Enter Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, Deborah, Ruth, and Esther.

First night:

Sarah our mother, whose laughter reached heaven
Enter our Sukkah this first night of seven.
The Holy One blessed you with insight profound.
May we hear your voice; may your wisdom abound.

Second night:

Rebecca our mother, renown for your modesty,
Directed your son on his personal odyssey.
Enter our Sukkah; provide inspiration.
Let your sense of vision encourage our nation.

Third night:

Rachel our mother, beloved and cherished
Devotion completed the path where you perished.
Though exiled children recounted your sorrow
Returning, we promise a bringer tomorrow.

Conclude each night:

Each mother our leader, our teacher, our guide
With gifts from the One who has blessed her.
Ushpizin, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, Deborah, Ruth and Esther.

Fourth night:

Leah our mother, whose nurturing care
Provides an example for Jews everywhere,
Enter our Sukkah, and share harvest's prize
As bountiful as the stars in night skies.

Fifth night:

Deborah our leader, so valiant and wise,
Your judgments were fire that burned in your eyes.
Enter our Sukkah as you sat 'neath your tree
Dispense to us visions of your prophecy.

Sixth night:

Ruth our sister, whose choices we laud
In embracing our people, our land and our God,
Enter our Sukkah; your praises we sing,
Grandmother and teacher of David the King.

Seventh night:

Esther our heroine, queen of the land,
You offered your life to thwart Haman's hand.
Enter our Sukkah, recounting your story
Of how your adventures restored s to glory.

Question:

- What does each woman bring with her into the *sukkah*?

“Go, eat your bread in gladness and drink your wine in joy, for your action was long ago approved by God. Let your cloths be freshly washed and your head never lack ointment. Enjoy happiness with a woman you love all the fleeting days of life that have been granted you under the sun. Whatever it is in your power to do, do with all your might.”

Ecclesiastes 9:7-9

- What is ‘in your power’ that you would like to ‘do with all your might’ in the coming year and years?

“Vanity of vanities, said Kohelet; vanity of vanities, all is vanity.
What profit has man in all his toil that he toils under the sun?”

Ecclesiastes 1:2-3

- What are some of the toils in your life that you would like to eliminate from your coming year and year?

Talmud Bavli, Brakhot 43b

Said Rav Yehuda:

A person who goes out during the days of [the month of] Nisan and sees the blossom of [fruit] trees recites [the following blessing]:

“Blessed are You Adonai, our God, Ruler of the universe, who did not allow anything to lack in God’s world and [Who] created within it good creatures and good trees to give pleasure to humankind through them.”

The blessing on fruit trees is said at the time of blossoming, and the following *brakhah* includes all kinds of trees:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
שֶׁלֹא חָסַר בְּעוֹלָמוֹ דָּבָר, וּבָרָא בּוֹ בְּרִיּוֹת טוֹבוֹת וְאֵילָנוֹת טוֹבִים,
לְהִנּוֹת בָּהֶם בְּנֵי אָדָם.

Blessed are You, Adonai, Our God, Ruler of the universe, for nothing lacking in God’s universe, and God created in it good creatures and good trees, to cause humankind pleasure in them.

When the blossom becomes a ripe fruit, then we say the *shehechyanu* blessing on the arrival of a new fruit. This blessing is said on each species individually. [It should be noted that nowadays the custom is to say *shehechyanu* only when we eat the fruit].

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
שֶׁהַחַיִּינוּ וְקִיָּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה.

Blessed are You, Adonai, Our God, Ruler of the universe, for giving us life, sustaining us, and for enabling us to reach this season.

Finally, whoever eats the fruit will say ‘*borei pri haetz*.’ This is said each time fruit is eaten.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

Blessed are You, Adonai, Our God, Ruler of the universe, who creates the fruit of the tree.

Questions:

- Why do the three *brakhot* move from being more general to more specific?
- Deuteronomy 20:19 compares people to “trees of the field.” In terms of the above *brakhot*, how is this statement true? Just like trees, every human has the potential to give to the world.
- What is your potential for the coming season? What are your budding gifts?

THE POWER OF JEWISH ROOTS

A Tu B'Shvat teaching of Rabbi Yaakov Alter, the current Rebbe of Ger

One of the essential characteristics of a tree is that even after its fruits drop off one year, its trunk remains to produce fruits the next year...

The Holy One, blessed be He, gave the earth the power of gravity. All objects are drawn by this heaven-ordained power toward the earth. This is, in fact, the secret of their ability to remain in existence; without gravity, they could not maintain themselves.

But the wonder is that a tree's existence rests on the ability of its roots to draw its life from the earth and to transport life-giving water in the opposite direction, against gravity! From the depths of the earth, the roots suck in moisture and transport it [along with nutrients] way above, to the tree's trunk, branches, and fruit. The deeper the roots penetrate into the earth, the more moisture they then can transport to the tree's leafy crown.

This power hidden in the roots never disappears. Even when there are no fruits on the tree or when it sheds its leaves in the middle of winter, and its external appearance is bare and forlorn, at that very time the blessed moisture in the depths of the earth is being drawn in to keep the trunk of the tree alive, that very trunk which in the future, at the right time, will sprout forth new leaves and new fruit.

A person is also blessed with this tree-like trait. The Holy One, blessed be He, created a powerful gravity that draws him down to earthliness, to animalness, to hell below. But he has the strength to overcome this gravity and to reverse it in the exact opposite direction. There are times when a person's "trunk" loses its leaves and ceases to produce fruit. Hard and bitter trials lower his spirit to the dust. But: "You [God] return a person to the dust and say, 'Return O children of men!'" A human being has the wonderful quality, like the trees that "his trunk does not change" from year to year. His trunk and roots—his ancestral merit and his divine soul—are permanent aspects of his Nature that never disappear.

My ancestor [Rabbi Yitzhak Meir], the first rebbe of Ger, used to say that every Jew has hidden, deep within him, a holy point that cannot be lost; this is the meaning of the phrase "shield of Abraham" in the [*Shemoneh Esreh*] prayer. This holy point, these deep roots, continue to draw and imbibe holiness even in the most difficult times, even when things appear, externally, hopeless. But a person who perseveres and labors and refuses to bow to the power of gravity pulling him earthward, will overcome.

He will succeed in reversing the force and direction heavenward. Those deep roots will infuse into him the moisture of holiness and purity, a moisture that is able to lift him to great heights, so that he once again sprouts leaves, flowers, and fruits.

Questions:

- Do you ever feel like you are “fighting gravity”?
- What are aspects of your life that have gone into hibernation for the winter, or perhaps longer?
- Working with Rabbi Yaakov Alter’s metaphor, how are you like a tree?
 - What are the elements of your trunk that stay the same?
 - What are your roots? What keeps you grounded?
 - What is the “moisture” in your life, what helps you grow to “great heights”?

The Gerer rebbe continues:

How can a person, who is drawn downward by his earthly Nature, fulfill what is expected of him according to the higher qualities concealed within his [heavenly] soul?

The answer is again found by considering the tree. What causes a tree’s growth? And why was the date of the fifteenth of Shvat [Tu B’Shvat] chosen for the new year of trees? The Talmud tractate *Rosh Hashanah* explains that this date was fixed according to the attraction of the tree for the eater that enlivens it. Until the fifteenth of Shvat, a tree grows from the water of the previous year. After the fifteenth of Shvat, it grows from the water of the new year; this year’s waters begin to permeate in from the soil and nourish the tree’s roots. We also know which “water” nourishes a person’s spiritual growth. The sages, of blessed memory, say: “There is no ‘water’ except Torah, as it says: ‘All who thirst, come to the water!’” [Isaiah]. The Torah is the sole means by which a person can attain the desired spiritual goal.

Year after year, new heavenly lights of Torah descend to the world. On Tu B’Shvat, the New Year of the Trees, one can base one’s spiritual growth on the “water’s of the new year. The divine spiritual influx that descends specifically for this year, the new illumination in Torah study, the diligence and joy in Torah study, they are the waters that will help a person, a “tree of the field,” to grow spiritually.

(Text from: Yitzhak Buxbaum, *A Person is Like a Tree: A Source Book for Tu BeShevat*. Northvale, NY: Jacon Aronson Inc., 2000. Pp. 117-118.)

Creating Meaningful Holiday Observance in an Empty Nest: Tu B'Shvat Seder

WINTER

עשיה *assiyah*—World of Doing and Making—Earth
מלכות *malkut*—Sovereignty

1st Cup of Wine: All White (Make blessing here for all four cups)

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

Baruch Ata Ado-nai Elo-heinu Meleck Ha'Olam, Borei peri ha'gafen.

Blessed are You, Adonai, Our God, Ruler of the universe,
Who creates the fruit of the vine.

Fruit: With a hard outside shell, outer defense (walnuts, almonds, coconuts, pomegranates).

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

Baruch Ata Ado-nai Elo-heinu Meleck Ha'Olam, Borei peri ha'etz.

Blessed are You, Adonai, Our God, Ruler of the universe,
Who creates the fruit of the tree.

Questions:

- What in your life hinders your sovereignty (your self autonomy)?
- What is keeping you from being an active member of a World of Doing and Making?

SPRING

יצירה *yetzirah*—World of Formation,
Crafting One Thing from Another Thing—Water
תפארת *tiferet*—Harmony

2nd Cup of Wine: White with a drop of red.

Fruit: With a pit: shell on the inside, inner defenses (olives, dates, avocados, cherries).

Questions:

- What are ways in which you would like to create harmony in your life?
- How can you work with the resources you already have to create a better sense of balance for yourself?

SUMMER

בריה *beriyah*—World of Creation,
Creating Something from Nothing—Air
בינה *binah*—Understanding

3rd Cup of Wine: Half red, half white

Fruit: Completely edible, no shells (apples, pears, oranges, grapes).

Questions:

- What are new elements that you would like to add to your life?
- How might they provide you with a better understanding of yourself?

FALL

אצילות *atzilut*—Emanation, Birthing,
Being Next to God—Fire
חכמה *hokhmah*—Wisdom

4th Cup of Wine: All Red.

Fruit: Level beyond physical fruit. Enjoy sweet smells, such as cinnamon or bay leaf, or special tastes, such as scotch.

Blessings for smelling:

Fruit

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַנוֹתֵן רֵיחַ טוֹב בַּפְּרוֹת.

Baruch Ata Ado-nai Elo-heinu Meleck Ha'Olam, ha'notein re'ach tov ba-peiros.

Blessed are You, Adonai, Our God, Ruler of the universe,
Who places a good aroma into fruits.

Trees

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא עֵצִי בְשָׁמִים.

Baruch Ata Ado-nai Elo-heinu Meleck Ha'Olam, borei atzei v'samim.

Blessed are You, Adonai, Our God, Ruler of the universe, Who creates fragrant trees.

Plants

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא עֲשָׂבִי בְשָׁמִים.

Baruch Ata Ado-nai Elo-heinu Meleck Ha'Olam, borei isvai v'samim.

Blessed are You, Adonai, Our God, Ruler of the universe, Who creates fragrant herbage.

Prepared Spices

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מִיְּנֵי בְשָׁמִים.

Baruch Ata Ado-nai Elo-heinu Meleck Ha'Olam, borei minei v'samim.

Blessed are You, Adonai, Our God, Ruler of the universe,
Who creates spices of fragrance.

Questions:

- What adds color to your life?
- What are the things that you would like to have in your life or keep in your life that are beyond the physical world?

Annotated Bibliography for Facilitator:

*Note: Resources for holidays are included within the body of the lessons.

Barry D. Cytron. "Midlife: From Understanding to Wisdom." *Celebration and Renewal: Rites of Passage in Judaism*. Rela M. Geffen, ed. Philadelphia: JPS, 1993. Pp. 132-150.

Cytron explains that "Jewish voices, modern and classical alike, illustrate meaningful correspondence between authentic Jewish teachings and modern psychology on the critical midlife issues" (143). The author begins by presenting juxtaposing views of midlife in contemporary American culture and Jewish tradition: American culture presents midlife as a crisis where Judaism associates this time with increased wisdom. Cytron goes on to provide social scientific discussions of midlife, including Erikson's theory of 'generativity versus stagnation.' He also states that middle age adults seek integration of the different aspects of their lives. The author uses Jewish sources to demonstrate the same points found in secular psychology, drawing on modern Jewish thinkers, modern rituals, the Jewish lifecycle, and traditional ritual. The author also provides a helpful bibliography which includes the Jewish books that he referenced as well as books by Christian thinkers on midlife.

Diane Tickton Schuster and Lisa D. Grant. "Teaching Jewish Adults" in *The Ultimate Jewish Teacher's Handbook*. Denver, CO: A.R.E. Publishing, Inc., 2003. Pp. 140-159.

Schuster and Grant write this chapter for Jewish educators who are unfamiliar with working with Jewish adults. They provide a framework, illustrated with real life examples, for meeting the diverse needs and goals that adult Jewish learners bring with them into the classroom. Not only do Schuster and Grant give a thoughtful and thorough introduction and overview of adult learning and adult development, the annotated bibliography provides teachers with the resources necessary to further hone their skills at adult Jewish education.

Isa Aron and Diane Tickton Schuster. "Extending the Chain of Tradition: Reflections on the Goals of Adult Text Study." *Journal of Jewish Education* 1-2 (1998). Pp. 44-56.

Aron and Schuster, in their paper, encourage teachers of Jewish adults not only to reflect upon their learners' goals for Jewish study, but also to evaluate their own. The authors lay out five goals for teaching new Jewish adult learners in a liberal setting, explaining why each goal is important for the adult Jewish learner and ways in which the goals could be met by a learning experience and facilitator. Goals include:

- 1) Making Text study comfortable and enjoyable.
- 2) Helping adults find personal meaning in the text.
- 3) Stimulating adults to think about the role of Torah in their lives
- 4) Promoting textual literacy and familiarity with multiple interpretive lenses.
- 5) Encouraging participation in communities of learners.

qualities also create an environment where leaders and teachers can personalize the experience for the individual participant. When a new interest in Jewish learning marks a quest for a new identity, the *havurah* provides an immediate peer group to support this new identity.

Diane Tickton Schuster and Lisa D. Grant. "Adult Jewish Learning: What Do We Know? What Do We Need to Know? *Journal of Jewish Education*. 70, 2 (2005). Pp. 179-200.

In their article, Schuster and Grant evaluate what we know about contemporary adult learning in America through the few surveys that address this matter. From their research, they observed the adult Jewish learner is similar to the portrayal of adult learners in the secular world found in secular studies. The authors highlight that adult learners approach learning with different 'orientations': goal-oriented, activity oriented, and learning oriented (Cyril Houle). They also propose that some Jewish learners also approach Jewish learning with a 'spiritual orientation.' Surveys have addressed who Jewish learners are and why and how they learn. At the same time, organizations and programs that offer adult Jewish learning have articulated their own goals for programs. However, institutions have not sought serious and meaningful assessment of their achievement in reaching their goals. Schuster and Grant argue that this is a critical component in the success of adult Jewish learning, adult Jewish learning programs, and subsequently the strength of the American Jewish community.

Chaim I. Waxman. "Religious and Ethnic Patterns of American Jewish Baby Boomers." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 33, 1 (1994). Pp. 74-80.

In his article, Waxman presents data found on Jewish baby boomers from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey. At the time this article was written, baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, were between the ages of 26 to 44. Waxman found from the survey that 85% of boomers consider Judaism to be an important aspect of their identity. However, only about a quarter of the population is involved in Jewish organizational life, including the synagogue. Waxman notes that at the time the survey was taken, despite the fact that boomers were more likely than the generation above them to have small children, their synagogue affiliation rate was lower. This is notable because synagogue affiliation is usually higher when people have children living at home.