

ExploreNYC:  
20s and 30s Engagement  
in New York City

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## INTRODUCTION

### Topic

This capstone will outline a curriculum for a 20s/30s young adults educational program in New York City. I have decided to focus on this topic because I believe that there is a huge gap between the programs that emerging adult (20-40 year old) Jews are searching for and the opportunities that are currently available to them. Research shows that this, 20s/30s, demographic is mostly unaffiliated with religion and that millennials are viewing religion, faith, and spirituality differently than previous generations. As a response to these shifts we, as Jewish educational leaders, must create new innovative programs that will excite, engage, and cater to New York's millennial Jewish population.

I am creating these lessons as an alternative or supplement to the programming that is being offered by New York City synagogues and organizations today. When I speak with individuals in my peer group about my studies in Jewish Education I am often asked if I know of any “cool” or “fun” programs for 20s/30s in New York City. While it is easy to provide a list of synagogue sponsored 20s/30s Shabbat and Schmooze programs it is hard to suggest any options that are outside of a traditional congregation. While the number of liberal programs for Jewish education are growing I believe that for this demographic the market in New York City has the ability to support a program like this one as well as the existing events. I believe that that New York City has so much to offer those who live here and that Jewish events that take place outside of a synagogue have the power to attract participants who would feel more comfortable in a less formal setting. For many individuals in this age cohort they have not entered a synagogue in

many years and inviting them into a traditionally sacred space may not be the best first step.

In order to overcome this obstacle this curriculum will bring Jewish engagement to the participants all over New York City. Rather than pulling them into our religious spaces we will take them to “neutral” locations and provide Jewish community, content, and experiences. A museum or gallery can be far less intimidating than a temple and therefore most of these events will not be in synagogues.

Other Jewish millennials who I have spoken to have noted that they find 20s/30s events socially taxing and sometimes awkward. They are uncomfortable with the idea of mixing and mingling with strangers and without structure. I am creating this curriculum to provide lessons that will help to deliver meaningful Jewish educational experiences that have both social goals and also learning goals. I believe that there is a need for 20s/30s experiential education in New York City and that Millennial Jews will be attracted to this type of programming.

The 20s/30s age group is one that is often underserved by Jewish institutions. As children there are many opportunities to engage Jewishly in day schools, religious schools, youth groups, and camps. On college campuses there are options such as Hillel, Chabad, clubs, and Greek life that provide opportunities for Jews to meet one another, celebrate Jewish holidays together, and participate in charity work and volunteer programs. However, after college there is a huge decline in what is available. When Jewish 20-somethings move to a new city and new community they are looking to find their place in the “real world” and we provide them with little to no Jewish guidance.

This Capstone Project, ExploreNYC, provides young Jews in New York City with a new way to connect to community, to peers, to the city, and to Judaism.

### **This Curriculum**

This Capstone will outline twelve lessons that will take place monthly over a one-year period. The program will look at each experience through one of six frames and each frame will have two lessons dedicated to it throughout the year. The frames will be Cultural, Environmental, Ritual, Political, Spiritual, and Service. By choosing a variety of frames I hope to attract a wide range of participants with different interests. I also would like to show participants the expansive number of ways to “do Jewish and think Jewishly” outside of the synagogue.

Throughout the first year the facilitator will work with interested members of the group to edit and develop the lesson plans. A board or committee of dedicated participants will be created to work on planning, organizing, recruiting, and facilitating programs. These members will stand out within the group for their commitment and engagement. Members will be invited to join the board by the facilitator and will be asked to take on additional responsibilities. After the first year this board along with the facilitator will design fieldtrips for the group that fit the personalities and interests of the group’s members.

### **Identified Setting and Audience**

The setting for this Capstone will vary each month. The location will depend on the frame as well as the content for that month’s session. Some example locations would be parks, museums, synagogues, theaters, concerts, etc. The audience for this

Capstone is Jews living in NYC post-college and pre-family between the ages of 20 and 40. I expect that the group will be closer to 25 to 35.

## RATIONALE

### Why these learners?

**Millennials:** When looking at research about Millennials it is clear that things have changed drastically over the past fifty or even twenty years. Twenty five percent of Millennials say they are unaffiliated with any faith, and many say that religion is unimportant in their lives. Also 18% of adults under the age of 30 say that they were raised in a religion but are now no longer affiliated with it. How can we as Jewish educators respond to this? How can we find a way to make Judaism/Jewish life/Jewishness/Jewry important for individuals in this demographic? In the General Social Survey done in 2000, a quarter of people ages 18-29 described their religion as “none”.<sup>1</sup> This percentage nearly doubled from surveys done in the 1970s and 1980s. Why are young adults leaving religion? Why has there be a shift from affiliation to disaffiliation?

Millennials in large numbers are choosing not to affiliate and not to be involved religiously at all. While this phenomenon cuts across all of American society (all religions are experiencing this trend), the focus of this capstone is how can we as Jewish educators respond? How can we find a way to make Judaism/Jewish life/Jewishness/Jewry, important for people in this demographic? How can we create programs that will encourage these 20-somethings to stay involved? ExploreNYC attempts to connect to these individuals and to provide them with positive and engaging Jewish educational experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> General Social Survey, National Data Program for the Sciences, University of Chicago, Chicago, 2000. Web.

**Jews:** When the 2013 Pew Study of US Jews asked what the essential parts of being Jewish were, only 19% of Jews answered observing Jewish law while 69% answered leading ethical/moral lives, 56% said working for justice and equality, and 49% answered being intellectually curious. What does this say about what today's Jews are looking for? Is there a way for us to reach these Jews who want to connect in ways other than through laws and liturgy? ExploreNYC will focus on Jewish values and social justice through programs that push participants to struggle, question, and evaluate Jewish texts and traditions. The Pew Study also found that 43% of Jews live in the Northeast and 49% reside in urban areas.<sup>2</sup> These numbers lead me to believe that New York City is a great place to create new ways to engage the Jewish population. There are many Jews living here and there is a large pool of participants to recruit from.

**Jewish Millennials:** The 2013 Pew Study of US Jews found that 20% of the Jewish population is 18-29 and another 28% are 30-49. This means that a large percentage of the population falls under the 20s and 30s umbrella. When asked how important being Jewish is in their lives 33% of Jews aged 18-29 answered VERY. Every other age group had a percentage over 45%. What is being Jewish not a priority for this demographic? The study also found that 68% of Jewish Millennials are Jews by religion and 32% described themselves as Jews of no religion. These Jews of no religion identify as Jewish based on ancestry, ethnicity and culture. Jews of no religion are not only less religious but are also less connected to Jewish organizations and are less likely to raise Jewish

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<sup>2</sup> "A Portrait of Jewish Americans." *Pew Research Centers Religion Public Life Project RSS*. Pew Research Center, 30 Sept. 2013. Web. Nov. 2015.



children. If we want Jewish continuity, we are going to need to find ways to reach these Jews and provide opportunities for them to see Judaism as relevant to their lives today. We will need to design programming that shows them the gifts they gain from being an active part of Jewish community and culture.

When asked if they are proud to be Jewish 96% of Jews ages 18-29 said “YES”. This is higher than the percentage of any other age group answering this question. How do we turn this pride into action? How do we turn this pride into engagement? Can we create opportunities for these proud Jews to become affiliated and involved Jews? I believe it is our responsibility to develop such programs. When looking at involvement it is clear that this age group is the least Jewishly active. For Jews 18-49 only 27% are members of a synagogue and when looking at 18-29 that percentage drops to 24%. Millennial Jews are not joining synagogues. My assumption is that this is because they are not finding that synagogues fit their needs. They are not joining because they do not feel that affiliation is a necessary part of their Jewish lives. Most American Jews who join synagogues do not do so until after they get married and have children. This pattern has been consistent over the last three generations. When it is time for a lifecycle event Jews turn to synagogues for support, guidance, and assistance. What is different now is that the millennial generation is getting married later and having children later in life. This change lengthens the gap between B’nei Mitzvah and marriage and in doing so also expands the gap between synagogue membership and participation. Only 24% belong to synagogues and 16% of Millennial Jews ages 18-49

describe themselves as members of another Jewish organization. This means that the majority of Jewish young adults are not formally connecting to Jewish institutions at all.

**New York Jews:** In 2011 the UJA Federation of New York conducted a study on Jews in the New York area. New York has the greatest concentration of Jews of any metropolitan area in the United States. Between 2002 and 2011 the population of Jews living in New York City and its suburbs grew significantly. There are currently more than 1 million Jews living in NYC. New York Jews are engaged in a variety of ways and many are finding Jewish meaning outside of the synagogue. One third of Jewish households in the New York area identify as non-denominational Jews or Jews of no religion. The 2011 UJA study found that 19% of the Jewish population in this area is between the ages of 18 and 34 (293,000 people).<sup>3</sup>

When asked about Judaism as a religion many responded that they do not necessarily identify being Jewish with Judaism. Many said they had no religion but would still characterize themselves as Jews. The study also commented on the forms of engagement that Jews are participating in. Twenty three percent of Jews said they attend services monthly or more; 52% responded that their closest friends are mostly Jewish, 49% responded that they visited a museum or attended a Jewish cultural event in the past year, and 43% responded that they regularly talk about Jewish topics. What does this say about the choices today's Jews are making? What does this say about the types of programs and experiences Jews are looking for?

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<sup>3</sup> Cohen, Steven M., PhD, Jacob B. Ukeles, PhD, and Ron Miller, PhD. *Jewish Community Study of New York*. Rep. New York: UJA-Federation of New York, June 2012. Print.

**Jewish Education:** There is a well-documented gap in Jewish education and participation in organized Jewish life that occurs post-college and pre-children. It is easy to find programming for early childhood, school age, high school, college, and adult learning but what about those in the 20s/30s demographic? Chanie Stone, the founder of a young Jewish professionals group in Connecticut, described the need for 20s 30s programs that help guide these young adults on their “Jewish journey.” She explained that it is not so much about affiliation and membership but rather about connection and personal growth. <sup>4</sup> ExploreNYC attempts to help this population reach those goals.

### **Why this way?**

Over the past few months I have done a variety of in-person, as well as phone interviews with people working in the field with 20s/30s groups. In New York City, I spoke to organizing members of Tribe, a 20s/30s program for members of Congregation Rodeph Shalom on the Upper West Side and Temple B’nai Jeshurun in Short Hills, New Jersey. Jackie August explained that while the congregations first organized the group, a lay leader committee was quickly established that took over many of the responsibilities of the organization. This committee plans, hosts, and recruits for events and programs. The events travel around New York City and while classes and Torah study programs are developing, the most popular events they hold are Friday night services and a happy hour. This model combines the Shabbat and Schmooze with locations outside of synagogue walls.

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<sup>4</sup> Mindell, Cindy. "The Next Generation." *Connecticut Jewish Ledger* (2014): n. pag. May 2014. Web.

I also met with Rabbi Rachel Ain at Sutton Place Synagogue. She prides herself in creating a program that reaches many Jews both inside and outside of her congregation. She also explained that non-Jewish friends and spouses are also encouraged to attend her events. This was something unique that I had not heard from any other organization. Rabbi Ain is creating a interfaith cohort of 20s/30s with Jewish content.

Sammy Kanter is responsible for 20s/30s events at the Manhattan JCC. While he explained that he is relatively new to his position, he outlined the way programming is developed and implemented. All programming for the JCC are top down, there is no committee or organizing group of members that helps to make decisions. They host Shabbat dinners and holiday celebrations at the JCC but rarely have events that leave their space. Mr. Kanter explained that most events are held on site because of the wonderful space at the JCC facility. I believe that a board or committee of dedicated participants is a pivotal part of the ExloreNYC process. In order to create buy-in and ownership I believe that input from members is priceless.

I also spoke with Rabbi Jessy Gross who runs 20s/30s programming in Baltimore and has created a community of engaged and active members. Rabbi Gross hosts many events throughout the year, many of which fall on holidays and Friday nights. She believes that her success has been due to two main factors. First, she has a network of friends and connections in Baltimore that helped her recruit participants and have enabled her to host large events. Secondly she noted the important power of having partners. She had developed partnerships with other other Jewish organizations in

Baltimore, as well as with local business (mainly breweries and food vendors). This allows her to make her events community events as well as Jewish events.

Another non-institutional approach that has been incredibly successful is OneTable. OneTable provides a stipend so that individuals can host Shabbat dinners for their friends. The goal is simple- they want Jews to be eating together on Friday night. OneTable currently uses a platform called Feastly (however they are in the process of developing a new system). On this platform hosts post invitations to dinner for their friends and fifteen dollars of food credit (on a supermarket delivery website or on a food delivery website) is given per guest that RSVPs. The meals do not need to be kosher and the host is not required to do any traditional prayers however a Shabbat Coach is provided to assist the host in planning and infusing the meal with Jewishness if desired. The staff at OneTable recently increased to include City Managers for New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. Currently only available in these three cities OneTable hopes to expand across the United States in the coming years.

In May 2014 Cindy Mindell wrote in the Connecticut Jewish Ledger about engaging the next generation. In this article she discussed the need for our Jewish communities to engage 20s/30s in new ways. Mindell quotes a number of Jewish professionals who are reaching out to this age group and trying to help them form connections and build community for themselves. Each of these professionals is using informal settings and alternative Jewish programming to engage the young adults in their cities.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Mindell.

One of the individuals Mindell interviews is Sarah Chandler, the director of Earth Based Spiritual Practice at Hazon. Chandler explains “The way young adults structure their lives is not like folks in their 50s; they’re transient and trying new things to discover themselves, and we want to support them as they move around in that process...if someone moves to New York or Chicago or Boston to get a job, I want them to know about the Jewish opportunities there.”<sup>6</sup> I want to create ExploreNYC for Jews in New York to help them navigate this process and to connect them to one another.

Mindell also spoke with Jennifer Gelband of the JCC of Greater New Haven who expressed that in her community there are a lot of newcomers, “who aren’t affiliated with any college or synagogue and don’t have any family (here) so they don’t have connections to the community. We want to reach out to them and provide fun, educational social programs in which people feel welcome and can connect with each other and find Jewish friendships. We’re trying to build and support a community.”<sup>7</sup>

Mindell continues, “Just because young adults may not be visible within the walls of our traditional Jewish institutions doesn’t mean that they’re not living rich Jewish lives. It’s just that those same institutions, and the Jewish community at large, must evolve to be more creative when addressing needs of 20s and 30s.” I believe that this means creating new innovative programs that cater specifically to this age group and this generation.

In April 2011, Synagogue 3000 published a report by Steven M. Cohen and Lawrence Hoffman entitled “Different Growth for Different Folks: The ND Pilot Sites in

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<sup>6</sup> Mindell.

<sup>7</sup> Mindell.

Action”. This report looked at the success of four pilot programs working on 20s/30s engagement. Each program was different because of the city, organizer, and affiliated institutions and this review compared their practices. I am going to discuss the findings of three out of four of the groups because the fourth group developed into a program that catered to adults outside of the 20s/30s age bracket.

The first program, Next Dor DC, found that many of its participants had a high level of Jewish reading literacy but a low level of Jewish ritual observance. This created a group “who are searching for, or open to, forms of Jewish engagement that do not necessarily require high levels of Jewish ritual and ethnic competence.” The Next Dor St. Louis community was described very differently. The participants in that program were younger, mostly under 30 and had a high level of ritual engagement. In St. Louis the participants took on more leadership in the project. They were motivated on their own and wanted to create a physical space to meet and provide programming similar to a Hillel or youth group. Tribe, a group located in Miami, found that many of its members had high levels of Jewish engagement throughout their youth but were long longer affiliated. The organizers found that participants in this program were attracted to Jewish service work and community projects over other types of activities. I have provided an overview of each of these initiatives to show that while 20s/30s programs and organizations can be planning with certain ideas and outcomes in mind it is important to be flexible and conscious of the group that forms. Jewish learning is not one size fits all and it cannot be expected that Jewish 20s/30s programming will be one size fits all either.

I created a survey that asked 20s/30s Jews living in New York City to answer a number of questions about their current Jewish engagement. The survey, which received approximately 200 responses only further, validated my beliefs that this population is being underserved and is looking for more. The survey showed that many are more comfortable with the idea of attending events outside of a synagogue, that they are proud of their Jewish identity, and they are interested in engaging Jewishly but do not know how to.

After extensive research and a variety of interviews I believe that the best way to engage young adults is outside of the synagogue walls, finding things they are interested in, and focusing on those activities will help in the development of programs that fit their needs and wants. We need to provide meaningful experiences that are grounded in Jewish values, ideas, and texts. Jewish engagement needs to move away from “Shabbat and Schmooze” model of 20s/30s programming because these opportunities do not fit the needs of this demographic.

### **Why this content?**

This program will explore Judaism through six different frames and twelve events throughout the year (two from each frame). The frames will be Cultural, Environmental, Ritual, Political, Spiritual, and Service. These are all topics that I believe are of interest and relevant to adults in their 20s and 30s. Each event will have an experience piece, a study piece, and a relevance piece. Here are a few examples of possible programs and the Jewish values and ideas that they will explore:

Cultural: Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust  
Explore the Museum:



What is the Jewish Story? What is our story? How do these stories interact with one another?

Where are we and where are we going?

Relevance:

20s and 30s is a time of personal growth and exploration. How can we connect to something bigger? How can we see ourselves as storytellers and story bearers?

Environmental: Urban Farm

Visit and Learn about the Farm:

<http://www.justfood.org/>

Texts on Sustainable Environment:

Hazon curriculum:

[http://hazon.org/wpcontent/uploads/2012/08/Judaism\\_and\\_Sustainability.pdf](http://hazon.org/wpcontent/uploads/2012/08/Judaism_and_Sustainability.pdf)

<http://hazon.org/jewish-food-movement/jewish-food-movement-educational-materials/>

Other Resources:

<http://www.haaretz.com/jewish/the-jewish-thinker/green-judaism-balancing-sustainability-and-tradition-1.383959>

<http://www.greenfaith.org/religious-teachings/jewish-statements-on-the-environment/judaism-and-sustainability-rabbi-lawrence-troster-1>

Relevance:

Why does what we eat matter? What role do Urban Farms play in today's food world? How can we make better food choices? What can we learn from this about ourselves?

Spiritual: Jewish Meditation Center of Brooklyn or Manhattan JCC

Attend a Meditation Session:

<http://jmcbrooklyn.org/> or <http://www.jccmanhattan.org/health-wellness/meditation-and-mindfulness/drop-in-meditation/>

Text on Self-Reflection:

<http://forward.com/culture/3652/judaism-meditation-and-the-b-word/>

Meditation in Torah:

Genesis Chapter 32: Jacob (and Commentaries)

Exodus Chapter 3: Moses (and Commentaries)

Relevance:

How does it feel to take the time to stop and reflect? In our busy lives how do we make time to just sit? Are there things we can do to make mindfulness a bigger part of our daily schedule?

Ritual: Sukkot

Build a Sukkah at an old age home:

<http://jewishhome.org/locations/manhattan/>

Text on welcoming the other:

Genesis 18- Abraham

Genesis 24 - Rebecca

Relevance:

How can we be open to the stranger? Who is the other? How do we treat the other? What does inclusion look like in our community?

## **FACILITATOR**

### **Who?**

I believe that the best facilitator for this curriculum is someone who is knowledgeable about Jewish values, traditions, and texts. I also think that the person organizing the program should have a deep connection to Jewish peoplehood. This will provide the facilitator with the ability to fully buy into the mission and vision of the program. I envision a facilitator who is in the peer group of the participants or slightly older. I think for the social aspect of the group to function the facilitator must “fit-in” with the participants. The facilitator must also be flexible and collaborative. She or he should be open to suggestions from the group and provide opportunities for group member to lead discussions and suggest additional programs and events. I also believe that the group would benefit from relationships with other Jewish organizations and therefore feel that the facilitator must be open to working with synagogues, charity organizations, and the federation.

### **Note to Facilitator**

Dear Facilitator,

I am so happy that you have decided to ExploreNYC and 20s/30s Engagement. For this curriculum to be successful it is important that you make these lessons and resources your own. While activities have been outlined for you it is important that you teach in a way that is authentic and meaningful to you. The group should see you as a facilitator, guide, teacher, peer, and friend. While it is not necessary that the facilitator be in the 20s/30s cohort, I feel it may help to make them relatable. As outlined by this Capstone the Millennial generation is very different from those that came before it and

a facilitator in this age group would have a deep understanding of the feelings and ideas of the participants as it relates to their place in the world.

While an understanding of Jewish beliefs and traditions is important I believe it is more important that you understand and connect to the Jewish values and ideas that are outlined in each session. While this is a Jewish group it is mainly focused on Jewishness and Jewry and less on Judaism. Some of the lessons contain Jewish history and texts and I hope that you will review these in advance of each session in order to better discuss the texts with the group (if you do not have significant background knowledge).

In order to make the fieldtrips successful the facilitator must coordinate with the locations and therefore must be organized and a good communicator. It is important to build relationships with organizations throughout the city so that we will be able to continue to visit them and take part in their programs. These relationships are key to the success of this curriculum.

This Capstone will attract participants from a variety of backgrounds and it is important that the facilitator be open to the ideas and beliefs of everyone in the group. Creating a sense of community is a necessary component of this group. In order to develop a group that feels safe and brave to share themselves the facilitator must be caring, welcoming, and warm.

As the group develops I believe that it would be helpful to create a board or committee of active members who would like to take part in the planning and organizing of events. I hope that the facilitator will be able to identify key members of

the group and help to develop their leadership abilities. After the initial year this board or committee could and should plan sessions with the help of the facilitator. In order to help make this a reality after the 5<sup>th</sup> session interested members should meet with the facilitator to talk about a more elevated leadership role in the group. By fostering the talents of participants the facilitator will be able to take a step back and the participants will be able to create their own experiences.

The goals of the curricula are to:

- Guide participants on their journey of applying Jewish values to daily life.
- Help participants develop an ongoing relationship with one another and create their own Jewish community.
- Empower participants to direct their own Jewish journey.

The facilitator must believe in these goals and see the importance of providing 20s/30s participants experiences that help them to reach these goals. I hope that this curriculum will guide you in the development of a meaningful and powerful program.

Good luck on this new journey.

## **DESIRED RESULTS**

### **Priority Goals:**

- Participants will be on a journey of applying Jewish values to daily life.
- Participants will develop an ongoing relationship with one another and create their own Jewish community.
- Participants will feel empowered to direct their own Jewish journey.

### **Enduring Understandings:**

- There are a wide variety of ways for 20s and 30s to engage Jewishly
- Community and belonging are essential to Judaism. Together we have the ability to support one another, celebrate together, and help to better our world.

### **Essential Questions:**

- How do we create community and a sense of belonging?
- How do 20s 30s Jews connect to Judaism, Jewishness, and Jewry today?
- How can Judaism fit into the life of 20s and 30s Jews in NYC?

### **Expressive Outcomes:**

- Participants will have the opportunity to become a part of a Jewish peer group
- Participants will have the opportunity to explore NYC through a Jewish lens.
- Participants will have the opportunity to partake in a variety of experiences that may help them to discover Jewish connections to daily life.

**KDBB:**

- **Knowing:** Participants will see the power of community. Participants will identify how many different experiences outside of the synagogue can be viewed through a Jewish lens. Jewish texts will be an important part of the learning experiences and Jewish orientations will be used to create meaning.
- **Doing:** Participants will notice the presence of Jewish ideas and values in their daily lives. Participants will connect with one another outside of the planned group activities. Participants will explore NYC and connect Jewish ideas and ideals to their experiences.
- **Believing/Valuing:** Participants will express a sense of belonging. Participants will value the community they create. Participants will value Jewish frames and their power in “secular” settings.
- **Belonging:** Participants will feel a connection to one another. Participants will build friendships and relationships with one another. Participants will see the power of exploring and experiencing NYC with Jewish peers.

## **ACCEPTABLE EVIDENCE**

### **Evidence for Learning:**

Participants will understand the power of community. They will notice the presence of Jewish ideas and values in their daily lives. They will participate in discussions during each session. They will create meaningful friendships and relationships. They will express a sense of belonging by creating a community within the group. They will recognize Jewish sources and feel comfortable when faced with an unfamiliar Jewish text. Participants will appreciate the power of exploring and experiencing NYC with Jewish peers.

### **Suggested Tools to Collect Evidence of Understanding:**

Journaling

Survey

One-on-One Interviews

Comment Cards

### **Process for Determining Evidence:**

Following each session a randomly selected group of participants will be asked to complete a survey, journaling activity or fill out a quick comment card by email.



## **OVERVIEW OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES**

The activities will range widely and will take place in a variety of different locations. The museum visit will consist of a tour followed by a discussion. The sukkah building will be a more physical activity and will be followed by a panel discussion. The urban farm visit will be outside while the political speaker will be inside. The concert experience will be loud and social, while the yoga meditation will be quiet and personal. Each lesson will hopefully fit the interests of a number of participants and participants will be encouraged to go to the events that initially interest them, but also to those they have never tried or experienced before. In order to be inclusive to diverse learners there is a range of activities offered throughout the year and individual learners will be able to pick sessions based on interest, accessibility, and preference. Most of the lessons are not at all limited by developmental or movement issues. For the more physical activities such as yoga there is no expectation that everyone will be at the same level so I feel that there will not be a problem with inclusion.

## **SUGGESTED LEARNING EXPERIENCES**

### **Outline of all 12 Sessions-**

#### **Cultural Lesson Plan 1:**

Museum Visit (Jewish Story)

Core Concept:

All Jews are a part of a master Jewish story and we can each add to that story.

We are not only storytellers but also story bearers.

#### **Cultural Lesson Plan 2:**

Art (Creation)

Core Concept:

As Jews we have a relationship with creation.

Self-expression is important in the development of self-understanding.

#### **Ritual Lesson Plan 1:**

Sukkah Building at Jewish Elderly Home: Haknassat Orkhim

Core Concept:

We as Jews have a responsibility to take care of others and to welcome the stranger.

#### **Ritual Lesson Plan 2:**

Shavuot

Core Concept:

As Jews we are connected to a rich tradition of texts and of study.

#### **Environmental Lesson Plan 1:**

Urban Farm (Sustainability)

Core Concept:

God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden and commanded him to “tend and till” the land.

Urban Farms can help us change the way we look at what we eat and how we get our food.

#### **Environmental Lesson Plan 2:**

Soup Kitchen/Food Drive (Food to Poor)

Core Concept:

Leviticus 19: You shall leave the corners of your field and the fallen fruits the poor.

Feeding the hungry is a Jewish value.

#### **Spiritual Lesson Plan 1:**

Games of Self (Caring for One Another/Support)

Core Concept:

We can better understand the world around us when we understand ourselves.

Judaism values thoughtful acts and thoughtful practice.

Spiritual Lesson Plan 2:

Yoga/Meditation

Core Concept:

Meditation provides the opportunity for self-reflection.

A practice of introspection helps create life balance and allows us to prioritize our beliefs and values.

Social Lesson Plan 1:

Concert

Core Concept:

Music can play a large role in our ability to relate to one another and to Judaism.

Jewish music is an important part of prayer and religious practice.

Social Lesson Plan 2:

Bar Crawl

Core Concept:

Spending time together in social settings helps to build relationships.

Unstructured time together allows for individual relationships to grow and for organic conversations to take place.

Political Lesson Plan 1:

TV and Judaism

Core Concept:

Jews are portrayed in many ways on TV and in film.

Jewish traditions can be explored through the way the media presents them.

Political Lesson Plan 2:

Israel Speaker

Core Concept:

As Jews we have the responsibility to be politically knowledgeable.

A relationship with Israel is an important part of Jewish life.

## LESSON 1

### Cultural Lesson Plan 1:

### The Museum of Jewish Heritage a Living Memorial to the Holocaust (Story)

#### Enduring Understandings:

- Jewish education is not “one size fits all” There are a wide variety of ways to experience Judaism.
- Community and belonging are essential to Judaism. Together we have the ability to support one another, celebrate together, and help to better our world.

#### Core Concepts:

- All Jews are a part of a master Jewish story and we can each add to that story.
- We are not only storytellers but also story bearers.

#### 12:00-12:45 Introduction:

Welcome (in downstairs classroom) and Bagels

Round Tables with 8 chairs each

Each seat will have a placemat with a quote in the center and questions that surround it- The hope is that these questions will prompt those sitting at the table to interact with one another organically. They will be provided with these questions but not instructed to use them. There will also be markers or crayons on the tables to encourage participants to color or doodle.

The Facilitator will begin by welcoming the group (maybe including a prayer for a new beginning). They will then share the topic for the day, which is Stories.

The group will be asked to think about the following questions:

Think of a story that your family tells all the time. Or a family vacation from years ago.. or of old Uncle Morty who always...that time the dog ate something off the counter.

Think about how this story became part of your family's narrative.

What is it that made that moment historic that made that day something you will never forget?

Now once you have thought of one...turn to someone at your table and share that story.

How does it feel to tell that story? What feelings or emotions does it bring up?

How is it that a story can take us back to another place and time? As we talk about it we can see the faces and hear the voices ... a story comes to life when we tell it.

As Jews we are eternal storytellers. Each year we cycle through our sacred texts telling the same stories again and again, but each time reading and hearing them differently. Each time relating to a new character or focusing on a new word.

What are the stories that we tell about ourselves and about our people? Is our story part of a greater Jewish story?

A participant will then be asked to read the quote in the center of the placemat:

“There’s a story behind everything. How a picture got on a wall. How a scar got on your face. Sometimes the stories are simple, and sometimes they are hard and heartbreaking. But behind all your stories is always your mother’s story, because hers is where yours begin.” Mitch Albom

12:45-2:00 Tour:

Facilitator will invite the group upstairs to the first floor to begin a self-guided tour of the museum.

Participants will focus on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor. (the second floor is Holocaust)

During this hour participants will be asked to look at personal narratives throughout the museum. They will be asked as they walk through to choose one person, artifact, or story from the 1<sup>st</sup> floor that they feel a connection to (a city they recognize, an artifact that looks like something they have, a name that reminds them of their own).

The museum is made up of artifacts and beside each object there is a description of what it is and usually to whom it belonged. This format allows the viewer to not only learn about facts and events but also to see the people behind the story. As they walk through Jewish traditions and Jewish history they also get a sneak peek into the lives of the individuals.

[The second floor is about the Holocaust. Participants will walk through this floor, however they will not be asked about it directly. I believe it would be a disservice to ignore that part of the museum and of our story but this is not a fieldtrip dedicated to the Holocaust.]

2:00-3:00 Share:

When participants arrive on the third floor they will be directed left past the elevators and will go to the big room on the end that overlooks the water.

This room provides headphones that play the stories of different people and their journeys to America. The stories give the listener the opportunity to really understand and appreciate the life and story of each person.

Participants will spend 30 minutes in this room listening to the stories—this will allow time for the group to come back together and for each participant to listen

to a number of stories. (If this feels too long feel free to cut it to 20 minutes)  
There will then be 30 minutes to discuss and share. (If they would like to remain in this space to listen to more stories after the program that will be an option.)

The facilitator will begin by talking about the importance of diverse narratives and encouraging participants to think about their place in the group, in the Jewish people, and in the world. [Look around the room each of us has a unique story and each of us is on a unique journey. Look around the room this moment will never happen again this group will never be in the same place at the same time again. No one has your perspective but you.]

Participants will be given five minutes to write their narrative and to create their story.. Each participant will be given a journal. Glued into the first page of the journal will be a work sheet with Once Upon a Time at the beginning and space for them to fill in moments that stand out throughout their lives. This moments can be anything from learning a new skill, meeting someone who helped to shape who they are, travel...The list should include more than college graduation getting a job, moving to a new place. I want them to think about the interactions, the people, and the places, that shape their story.

After they have some time to write participants will be asked to go around the group and for everyone to share one event from their story that stands out. They will then be asked to think about:  
Where they are from and where they are going? What do they think is important from the stories of the past that shape how their One Upon a Time is written, read, and told?

A participant will be asked to read a quote: "Every Jew who maintains a connection with Judaism becomes a link in the chain of Jewish tradition."- Naomi Pasachoff

We are storytellers but also story bearers we carry with us thousands of years of Jewish history but we are also in the act of constantly creating a story of our own. What does it mean to be a link? What does it mean to have a role in the process? This is your story. This is our story.

## LESSON 6

### **Spiritual Lesson Plan 2: Meditation Manhattan JCC (Self-Reflection)**

#### Enduring Understandings:

- Jewish education is not “one size fits all” There are a wide variety of ways to experience Judaism.
- Community and belonging are essential to Judaism. Together we have the ability to support one another, celebrate together, and help to better our world.

#### Core Concepts:

- Meditation provides the opportunity for self-reflection.
- A practice of introspection helps create life balance and allows us to prioritize our beliefs and values.

#### Pre-Session Information/Preparation:

This session will begin with the yoga/meditation experience and therefore participants will receive information about the session by email before the session.

Where to go/What to wear/What the physical expectations will be  
They will also receive Chapter 2 Mindfulness, Torah, and Commandment from Rabbi Jonathan Slater’s book Mindful Jewish Living.

#### 5:45-6:45 Meditation:

This hour will be led by Rabbi Jonathan Slater at the Manhattan JCC.

#### 6:45-7:00 Journal:

Participants will be asked to silently journal about their experience.

#### 7:00-7:15 Share:

Participants will be asked to share about the experience. How did they feel? How do they feel?

#### 7:15-7:45 Text:

The group will divide in two smaller groups (each led by a member of the “board”) In these small groups they will look at meditation in Torah. They will examine two examples:

Genesis Chapter 32: Jacob (and Commentaries)

Exodus Chapter 3: Moses (and Commentaries)

The group leaders will facilitate a discussion with their group about connections between reflective practice and Judaism.

#### 7:15-7:30 Closing:

Have a participant read: "Prayer can be taking that contemplative moment before a meal or a board meeting. We can say to ourselves, 'I'm going to take a moment and center myself-what am I about to do and why?' In this moment we are locating a self often buried under the mundane. Prayer gets us in touch with that deeper self." -Rabbi Shawn Zevit

Some people create this time with a prayer practice? Traditionally Jews stop three times a day to pray. This practice creates a permanent schedule of self-reflection that is built into their day-to-day. While we may not choose to pray daily we can still find ways to create a time and space for connecting to self.

Ask participants to write in their journals –  
How does it feel to take the time to stop and reflect?  
In our busy lives how do we make time to just sit and be?  
Are there things we can do to make mindfulness a bigger part of our daily schedule?  
Brainstorm some ways...

7:30-8:30 Dinner:

After the session there will be an optional vegetarian meal hosted at a local restaurant.



## LESSON 9

### Environmental Lesson Plan 2: Donation Drive & Soup Kitchen

#### Enduring Understandings:

- Jewish education is not “one size fits all” There are a wide variety of ways to experience Judaism.
- Community and belonging are essential to Judaism. Together we have the ability to support one another, celebrate together, and help to better our world.

#### Core Concepts:

- Leviticus 19: You shall leave the corners of your field and the fallen fruits for the poor.
- Feeding the hungry is a Jewish value.

For this session participants will be asked to bring food/clothes/toiletries to donate to the soup kitchen. Depending on the needs of the location, the facilitator will let the group know what to bring. (ex. The Village Temple runs a Saturday Soup Kitchen./Hebrew Union College hosts a Soup Kitchen on Monday afternoon./Shaaray Tefila provide lunch on Wednesday.) The below session is based on the serving time at The Village Temple but could be easily augmented for any Soup Kitchen location.

While most of the sessions will have a meal component this session will not. The money that would regularly be spent on the meal will be donated to the soup kitchen instead.

If the ExploreNYC group is too large the group may need to be split in half for this session. (This can be done with two session different weeks, two different locations on the same day, or with two options during the same month. The facilitator will need to decide the best way to organize and divide the group if necessary.)

#### 1:30-1:40 Introduction:

Today we are going to be discussing the importance of taking care of those less fortunate than ourselves. Each of you has been asked to bring donations for the Clothing Closet and later today we will be serving meals in the Village Temple Soup Kitchen.

There are many Jewish texts that focus on this topic and for our discussion today we will be taking part in a four station text study. You will be broken up into groups and you will rotate from one station to the next. Each station will have its own text sheet and will be led by a member of the ExploreNYC board.

1:40-2:40 Text: Four 15 Minute Rotations  
(Suggested Texts and Discussion Questions chosen from the Religious Action Committee Hunger and Poverty Text Study-  
<http://www.rac.org/sites/default/files/Hunger%20Text%20Study%20alternate%20version.pdf>)

Rotation 1-

Suggested Biblical Texts

- a. When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger; I am Adonai your God. Leviticus 19:9-10
- b. When you have set aside in full the tenth of your yield – in the third year, the year of the tithe – and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat their fill in your settlements, you shall declare before the Eternal your God: “I have cleared out the consecrated portion from the house; and I have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, just as You commanded me; I have neither transgressed nor neglected any of Your commandments.” Deuteronomy 26:12-13
- c. Share your bread with the hungry, and take the wretched poor into your home. When you see the naked, clothe him, and do not ignore your own kin. Isaiah 58:7
- d. If there is among you a poor person, one of your kin, in any of your towns within your land which God gives you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against them, but you shall open your hand to them, and lend them sufficient for their needs, whatever they may be. Deuteronomy 15: 7-8

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. When discussing issues of hunger, we often use these biblical sources to site our tradition’s concern for fighting hunger. However, we no longer live in an agricultural society, and the laws of reaping and tithing no longer apply. How do we make these texts relevant today? What can we do in our modern lives to realize the principles that underlie these laws?
2. The Torah recognizes certain categories of people: the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, the widow, etc. who are particularly vulnerable. What categories of people today require special assistance and our focused attention?

## Rotation 2-

### Suggested Rabbinic Texts

- a. God says to Israel, “My Children, whenever you give sustenance to the poor, I impute it to you as though you gave sustenance to Me.” Does God then eat and drink? No, but whenever you give food to the poor, God accounts it to you as if you gave food to God. Midrash Tannaim on Deuteronomy 15:10, citing Numbers 28:2
- b. When you are asked in the world to come, “What was your work?” and you answer: “I fed the hungry,” you will be told: “This is the gate of the Lord, enter into it, you who have fed the hungry.” Midrash Psalms 118:17
- c. HaLachma Anya, di achalu avahatana b’ar’a d’mitzrayim. “This is the bread of affliction our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat; let all who are in need come share our Passover meal.” Haggadah shel Pesach (Beginning of our Passover Liturgy)
- d. R. Abba said in the name of R. Simeon ben Lakish: the person who lends money [to a poor person] is greater than the person who gives charity; and the one who throws money into a common purse [to form a partnership with the poor person] is greater than either. Talmud, Shabbat 63b
- e. There is nothing in the world more grievous than poverty—the most terrible of sufferings. Our teachers said: All the troubles of the world are assembled on one side and poverty is on the other. Midrash Rabbah Exodus 31:12

### Suggested Discussion Questions

1. How is our relationship with God impacted when we collect food for the poor? Do you feel that you are building that relationship and, “doing God’s work” as you provide sustenance for the hungry?
2. Today when we open the door at our Pesach seder to invite in all those who are hungry it is often a symbolic gesture. We do NOT expect that anyone will actually walk in off of the street. How can we use the holidays as a time to really reach out to those in need?
3. Why is it more desirable to lend money than to provide charity?

4. Our early rabbis believed that poverty was the worst form of suffering. Do you agree? Why or why not?

#### Rotation 3-

##### Suggested Medieval Texts

- a. If a poor man requests money from you and you have nothing to give him, speak to him consolingly. It is forbidden to upbraid a poor person or to shout at him because his heart is broken and contrite...for it is written, "To revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite." Isaiah 57:15; Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, "Gifts to the Poor," 10:5
- b. When you give food to a hungry person, give your best and sweetest food. Hilchot Issurei Mizbayach 7:11
- c. If a community lacked a synagogue and a shelter for the poor, it was first obligated to build a shelter for the poor. Sefer Chasidim
- d. The highest form of charity is to step in with help to prevent a person from becoming poor. This includes offering a loan or employment, investing in a business, or any other form of assistance that will avoid poverty. The basis for this principle is the commandment in our passage: you shall strengthen the poor. Maimonides' commentary to Leviticus 25:35-38

##### Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Do you agree with the ruling found in Hilchot Issurei Mizbayach that you should "give your best and sweetest food" to the hungry?
2. Here we see that there were many who believed that action was more important than prayer. Is the same true today?
3. Do our Jewish communities still place an emphasis on providing shelter for the homeless? What are some ways we can do better?
4. Maimonides focuses on the feelings of the poor person. Do our current modes of giving consider the emotions and dignity of the poor?

#### Rotation 4-

##### Suggested Contemporary Texts

- a. Hunger is isolating; it may not and cannot be experienced vicariously. He who never felt hunger can never know its real effects, both

tangible and intangible. Hunger defies imagination; it even defies memory. Hunger is felt only in the present. Elie Wiesel

- b. There is no word in the Hebrew vocabulary for “charity” in the modern sense. The word used is tzedakah, which literally means “righteousness.” Tzedakah is not an act of condescension by the affluent toward the needy; it is the fulfillment of a moral obligation. Injustice to humanity is desecration of God. Refusal to give charity is considered by Jewish tradition to be idolatry. Albert Vorspan and David Saperstein, *Jewish Dimensions of Social Justice*, UAH Press, New York, NY, p. 93.
- c. In Jewish law and in its implementation during the 1,500 years of the self-governing Jewish community, the government and the public sector played a central role in achieving social justice. By Talmudic times, at least four communal funds (food, clothing, burial, and money funds), plus communal schools for all children, were required in every sizeable community. These programs were aimed at ensuring that the society as a whole fulfilled its moral responsibility to help every needy person. By the Middle Ages, these had grown into a broad network of social welfare institutions, serving children, the sick, the elderly, the hungry, the refugee—a social welfare system rivaling our own today, with extensive communal regulation of the environment, consumer rights, and worker’s rights. Statement by Rabbi David Saperstein, Director, Religious Action of Reform Judaism, on Welfare Reform Reauthorization Proposals to the Human Resources Subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means, April 11, 2001

#### Suggested Discussion Questions

- 1. What is Wiesel trying to impart to his reader? Do you think that an inability to truly understand the pain of hunger should impact your response to it?
- 2. How is the word ‘idolatry’ being used here? Is it an appropriate usage of the word?
- 3. Why is there no Hebrew word for “charity”? What does it say about our religion that we are commanded to give tzedakah and not just when asked?
- 4. What are some ways that we can ensure we always act “righteously,” both as individuals and as a community?

#### 2:40-4:00 Soup Kitchen Serving

Assist the temple volunteers with the serving process. This will consist of a variety of different roles and responsibilities. (Depending on the size of the group this may take longer to accomplish or shorter. Edit timing as needed.)

#### 4:00-4:15 Journal:

Participants will be asked to write in their journals about one moment from the day that stands out to them as being particularly meaningful and one moment from the day that stands out as being particularly challenging or difficult.

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### 1. Interviews

The most important resource that I used in researching and writing this curriculum were the people that I spoke with about their programs and organizations. It was incredibly helpful to hear about the ways in which other 20s/30s groups were created and the ways in which they have continued to evolve. By collecting a variety of traditional and alternative models I believe I was able to develop a program that meets the needs of 20s/30s participants and solves many of the problems that existing programs are dealing with. Some aspects of my design came directly from these conversations including hosting programs outside of synagogues, providing food, establishing a board, and infusing Jewish values in a simple way.

### 2. Jewish Community Study of New York

This curriculum is designed to be used in New York and therefore I did a variety of research on Jews in New York. This research allowed me to identify trends and needs in the New York Jewish population. While many of these trends are universal or nationwide there are definitely cultural, social, and emotional components to life in New York that differ from life in other places. In order to develop a program for Jews in New York City it was important to take into account the way that these particular Jews are relating to Judaism and to one another.

### 3. "A Portrait of Jewish Americans." *Pew Research Centers Religion Public Life Project*

The Pew Research Center is a think tank organization. They strive to provide information on a variety of topics including social issues and public opinion. They are based in Washington D.C. This particular Pew Study looked at the Jewish population in America. The study hoped to examine the ideas and beliefs as well as cultural shifts that are occurring in the Jewish community. This information was pivotal to the design of this curriculum. The information from the study showed that Jews are proud to be Jewish but are not affiliating. It also showed the 20s/30s age group has the lowest involvement in Jewish life. These statistics along with dozens of other facts and figures for the study guided the creation of this program.

### 4. *Young Jewish Adults in the United States Today*

The American Jewish Committee celebrated its one hundredth anniversary and decided to conduct a study on patterns and trends in the Jewish community today. The hope was to help leaders in our communities find ways to address the challenges and issues that come with these new changes. This text examined the finding of the study and discussed the differences with the current generation from previous generations. They noted that there are 1.46 million American Jews between the ages of 18 and 39, which makes up almost a third of the American Jewish population. This is the population that this curriculum is hoping to cater to.

#### 5. American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us

This book looks at religion in America. It comments on the religious differences of the people that make up the country and the way in which they relate to one another. The book notes the trend that religious conservatives and secular liberals are moving further away from one another on the spectrum of religiosity. However it also discusses the increase in interfaith programs and organizations and how these are affecting the way in which religion is being practiced in America today.

#### 6. Tough Questions Jews Ask

This book looks at the questions that young people are asking. The author notes that young Jews are full of questions but they find themselves with no one to ask or no one around them who can help them to answer them. Judaism teaches the importance of asking questions and discusses how we as Jews need to struggle and wrestle with answering difficult questions for ourselves. I believe that for a 20s/30s program to work we must be able to dive into these deep questions and create a brave and safe space for participants to explore the answers to them. This curriculum will provide a variety of discussions, journaling opportunities, and reflection experiences that will allow participants to think about these big questions.



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