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THE TZEDEK BOX:
A CHESHBON HA-NEFESH FOR A MORE JUST WORLD

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

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Date: March 2, 2023
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ABSTRACT

A Tzedek Box (www.tzedekbox.org) is a ritual, a reflective process and a ceremonial object that responds to the Jewish call for justice. This thesis will: (a) document the five-year history of the development of this practice; (b) consider how the concept of *cheshbon ha-nefesh,* as described by a select number of Jewish sources throughout the centuries, can enrich the reflective experience of Tzedek Box users; and (c) explore the role that creative expression of ritual objects can play in enhancing a Jewish practice such as *cheshbon ha-nefesh*, showcasing the work of artists who submitted Tzedek Boxes for the 2023 exhibit at the Heller Museum at Hebrew Union College in New York. The thesis aims to produce applied knowledge that can enhance the overall experience of using the Tzedek Box, as well as to illustrate one attempt at 21st century Jewish ritual innovation.

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DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

עֲשֵׂה לְךָ רַב, וּקְנֵה לְךָ חָבֵר
Make for yourself a teacher, acquire for yourself a friend.
Pirkei Avot 1:6

I dedicate my thesis to Noemi da Silva de Oliveira, who died in February of 2023. Her life reminds me that you do not need a Tzedek Box to be a righteous person. If she had had one, it would have overflowed.

I must thank my supportive thesis advisor, Rabbi Lisa Grant, as well as Rabbis Jan Katzew and Vanessa Ochs for offering valuable feedback on drafts of the manuscript.

More broadly, this project is the result of care and partnership from so many teachers and friends. My *cheshbon* of thanks includes:

- My Teach For America and Strong East Ramapo families for encouraging my decision to become a rabbi and holding me accountable to ensure my focus remains on a just world for all.

- My Wexner colleagues, especially Angie Atkins, Emily Gindi, Ariel Weiner, Jonathan Crystal and Rabba Yaffa Epstein, for helping to incubate the Yom HaTzedek concept from the start.

- All of those who supported the broader project financially: the Be Wise Entrepreneurial Fellowship and its stewards, Dean David Adelson, Rabbi Peter Rubinstein, and Steve Gruber; the Jewish Education Project; Aviva Jacobs and Halli Faulkner at the Schusterman Foundation; Rabbi Shira Koch Epstein and the Center for Rabbinic Innovation; Gary Sugarman; Jonathan and Darcie Crystal.

- The amazing team that has given so much time and energy to this project over the past several years, including Jill Rodde, Jodie Sadowsky, Lisa Gaetjens, Jackie Fishman, Lauren Stock, Miranda Lipton, Rabbi Phoebe Rabinowitsch, Edon Valdman, Darin Yankowitz and Dena Robinson, all of the musicians and guests who have joined us, including Cantor Ellen Dreskin, Kelly Whitehead and Rain Pryor, representatives from HIAS, NCJW, and more.

- All of those who showed up for the Tzedek Box project, including all of those people who came to our design sprints, workshops and Tzedek Circles, as well as all of the synagogues and religious schools who have brought the Tzedek Box into their

communities. I offer a special thanks to Rabbi Menachem Creditor and Ruth Messinger, to classmates and friends Jessica Jacobs, Shirah Kraus, Rachel Hershman, Chelsea Feuchs, Jacob Leizman, Shoshana Nambi, Jordan Goldstein, Kalix Jacobson, Becky Mann, Ze'evi Tovlev, and Hebrew College student Lisa Feld.

- My work family at Central Synagogue: Rabbi Nicole Auerbach, Carolyn Roesler, Rabbis Angela Buchdahl, Hilly Haber, Ari Lorge, Dan Ross, Mo Salth, Cantors Dan Mutlu and Jenna Pearsall, Beth Reinstein, Marcia Caban, Elizabeth Brown, Julia Tecotzky and Lori Dubin. I am also grateful for my work with such a supportive Neighborhood.

- Wonderful partners such as Congregation Rodeph Sholom, Westchester Reform Temple, Temple Emanuel, Tiferet Bet Israel, Orangetown Jewish Center, and more.

- Supportive mentors such as Rabbi David Jaffe, Rabbi Sid Schwarz, Rabbi Paula Mack Drill, Rabbi Amy Perlin, Rabbi Stef Kolin, Sarah Diamant, Abigail Pogrebin, Lisa Messinger, and Rabbi Larry Hoffman.

- Eli Lieberman, the ever-friendly, helpful presence at New York's HUC-JIR library.

- The team at the Bernard Heller Museum, including Jeanie Rosensaft, Nancy Mantell, Susan Picker and Phyllis Freedman, as well as all of the artists who submitted their work for this exhibit. A special thank you to Tobi Kahn and Eli Kaplan Wildmann for wonderful collaborations I hope will continue.

- The teachers throughout my life – from Betty Fishman and Bridget Walsh (z"l), to Dr. Ellie Drago Severson, who guided my dissertation at Teachers College and helped me build the skills to tackle writing projects of this size.

- The family that provides ongoing love and support: my partner Mozart de Oliveira, my parents Eileen and Walter Mandel, my brother and sister-in-law Daniel Mandel and Rebecca Kaufman, my nephews Julian Ezra and Gabriel Shai Mandel, and my Brazilian family of Paula, Aline, Fabricio, Julia, Lucas, Doris and the extended Oliveiras.

- The Eternal Source of all things. *Ilu finu malei shira kayam.*

INTRODUCTION

"If it can indeed be said that there is one, the Jewish impulse in ritual is toward adding, toward finding new ways to fill out the nuances of our awareness of the Sacred, toward trying to concretize the encounter with the Divine in as many ways as we can from our messy, complex, variegated lives."[1]

– Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg

Modern adult learning experts highlight the transformative power of reflective practice on behavior, an insight that Jewish sages have prescribed for over a millennium through the notion of *cheshbon ha-nefesh*, an accounting of the soul.[2] As a future Reform rabbi seeking to stimulate meaningful action in pursuit of a more just world, I have been developing a new Jewish practice – the Tzedek Box and set of ritual experiences around it – as a way to infuse social change work with sacred reflection and accountability. A Tzedek Box is a container in which you put diary entries related to your acts of justice and righteousness all year long. Every time you make an effort to build a better world, you put a written reflection in your box, noting what you did and what you learned. Then, each year on Pesach Sheni – a Biblical holiday in which a group of Israelites lobbied for a change in law so that they could make the Passover pilgrimage and give to the Greater Good – we observe Yom HaTzedek (day of justice): you open your box, take stock of the work you have done all year by reviewing your diary entries, and rededicate yourself to the world you wish to see. A role model of mine, Rabbi David Jaffe, writes: "How do we walk a holy path that integrates deep spiritual awareness and

[1] Ruttenberg, D. (2009). "Heaven and Earth." *Reinventing Ritual: Contemporary Art and Design for Jewish Life*, 74.

[2] For more on adult learning theory, see Brookfield, S. (2005). *The Power of Critical Theory: Liberating adult learning and teaching*; Cranton, P. (2006). *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A guide for educators of adults*; Mezirow, J. (1998). "On Critical Reflection." Adult Education Quarterly, 48(3), 185-198.

righteous actions in the world?"[3] The Tzedek Box is a potential response to this question.

This initiative formally began in the summer of 2018 as a response to a speech contest that asked entrants to invent a new Jewish holiday. This thesis will: (a) document the five-year history of the development of the Tzedek Box; (b) enrich the practice of the Tzedek Box through deliberate study of *cheshbon ha-nefesh* as described by a select number of Jewish sources throughout the centuries; and (c) explore the role that creative expression of ritual objects can play in enhancing a Jewish practice such as *cheshbon ha-nefesh*, showcasing the work of artists who are submitting Tzedek Boxes for a 2023 exhibit at the Heller Museum at Hebrew Union College in New York. My hope is to integrate what I have learned into the explanatory and instructional materials of the Tzedek Box initiative (www.tzedekbox.org).

In the first chapter, I describe the process and learnings from five years of design iteration of the Tzedek Box initiative. What began as a proposal – to establish a new Jewish holiday focused on rededicating oneself to the Jewish call to justice – transformed into the creation of a ritual object that could be used regularly, culminating in an annual event. The journey has involved design thinking workshops, the identification of a suitable date for Yom HaTzedek, the work of defining *tzedek*, and the creation of a volunteer team that in turn recruits partners, trains and supports educators, builds collaboration with artists, engages in social media publicity, and maintains our digital app. The intellectual journey has involved weaving together secular sources – such as the work of adult learning theorists Jack Mezirow and Patricia Cranton – with existing Jewish concepts and rituals, such as the Tzedekah Box, the work

[3] Jaffe, D. (2016). *Changing the World From the Inside Out: A Jewish approach to personal and social change*. Shambhala Publications, 10.

of *tikkun middot* and Pesach Sheini. After describing these elements, I unpack lessons I have learned about stewarding this initiative thus far.

In the second chapter, I seek to discover ways to deepen the Tzedek Box ritual through the exploration of Jewish reflective practices from the past millennium. Specifically, I analyze and glean insights from several key thinkers over the past millennium who write extensively about *cheshbon ha-nefesh*. My exploration moves from the Golden Age of Spain (*Chovot HaLevavot,* "Cheshbon HaNefesh," by Bachya ibn Pakuda, 1040) to eighteenth century Amsterdam (*Mesillat Yesharim*, by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, the Ramchal, 1738) to the Haskalah in Poland (*Cheshbon HaNefesh*, by Menachem Mendel Leffin, 1808, the publication of which Mussar pioneer Israel Salanter encouraged) to the 21st century (*Changing the World From the Inside Out*, David Jaffe, 2018; Rabbi Ira Stone's commentary on the Ramchal; Rabbi Sharon Brous; Yavilah McCoy). I seek to understand the guiding philosophies and theologies of various thinkers, as well as the practical strategies they offer to implement a regular discipline of *cheshbon ha-nefesh*. I then make links between the methods I uncover and the potential application for the Tzedek Box initiative.

In the final chapter, I highlight how a practice like *cheshbon ha-nefesh* can be enhanced through the role of a physical ritual object. I will briefly describe the history of ritual objects such as the Miriam's Cup and the role they have played in advancing Jewish practices and ideas. I then document various artistic contributions from the 2023 exhibit of Tzedek Boxes at the Heller Museum at Hebrew Union College in New York, suggesting how the artistic renderings enhance the meaning, nuance and engagement of the ritual process.

These three chapters reflect three different sources of insight that have informed my ongoing thinking about the ritual, the reflective process and the ritual object: those who have participated in iterations of the ritual, leading thinkers from the Jewish past, and a range of contemporary artists. While Jewish men of a certain level of education have worn the mantle of expertise for centuries, it has been a *tikkun* of its own to learn from male, female and non-binary contemporary ritual innovators, hundreds of participants through our Tzedek Box design process, and dozens of artists from a multiplicity of backgrounds as we seek to build a Jewish practice for the 21st century and beyond. Surely we could not call it a Tzedek Box without breaking down barriers to create it.

CHAPTER ONE:
PARTICIPANTS SHAPE THE PROCESS

How does a new ritual come to be? In this first chapter, I aim to describe my process and learnings from five years of design iteration of the Tzedek Box initiative. What began as a proposal to establish a new Jewish holiday focused on rededicating oneself to the Jewish call to justice transformed into the creation of a ritual object that could be used regularly, culminating in an annual event. I am writing this chapter autobiographically because my own motivations, choices and missteps are important to the telling of this history. In her book, *Inventing Jewish Ritual*, Rabbi Dr. Vanessa Ochs describes how many people assume a new ritual practice comes to be:

> Step one–someone has a need, expresses a belief, or states a need. Step two–she or he designs a liturgy (that is, a text to be said or sung) and a ceremony. Step three: the objects needed–say, a special cup, a tambourine, a ceremonial cloth–are found or made. Step four: with all the elements assembled–the idea, the word, and the props–the new ritual is performed. In a word, spoken liturgies, texts, actions and ritual objects are all developed or collected, and then integrated, to concretize or enact beliefs.[4]

In reality, Ochs notes, "the creation of new ritual is usually far more complex than this orderly, belief-driven scenario." For me, the journey has involved uncovering and seeking to answer a series of philosophical and practical questions through design thinking workshops, iterative experimentation, consultation with experts, the creation of a volunteer team, the recruitment of partners, the involvement of educators, and the collaboration with artists. In this chapter, I will describe how holidays and rituals in Judaism can emerge, the various questions and emerging answers from my own five-year process with Yom HaTzedek, and the lessons I have learned about stewarding this initiative. Fundamentally, it will reveal how the original concept of Yom HaTzedek

[4] Ochs, V. L. (2007). *Inventing Jewish Ritual*. Jewish Publication Society, 89.

has evolved in response to the real-time reactions of participants trying out its iterations, all the while seeking to remain true to its original mission – perhaps a fractal of Judaism itself.

Starting Out

This Jewish story, like most, involved a question: What would it take to increase the extent to which Jews are engaged in frequent and deep social change work? It is a personal question, one that has informed many decisions in my life. I have always been moved by the examples throughout Jewish memory – from Abraham speaking truth to G-d on behalf of the potential innocents of Sodom and Gomorrah; to our Biblical prophets insisting that we unlock the fetters of corruption and injustice; to Maimonides's ladder of tzedakah; to Jewish labor organizers demanding better working conditions; to righteous Gentiles risking their lives on behalf of Jews during the Holocaust.[5] From the Passover observance, I have always taken the lesson to heart that the Exodus is not over until all people are free.[6] It has informed my understanding of self, my world view and my career decisions.

The Pew Research Center's "Jewish Americans in 2020" Study indicated that 59% of Jews see repairing the world as a fundamental aspect of what it means to be Jewish.[7] Yet there is far more that we in Jewish communities can do to address injustice. A growing number of outstanding Jewish organizations issue statements and encourage action related to wrongs in our world, but we have not necessarily seen the Jewish

[5] See Genesis 18:23; Isaiah 58; Mishneh Torah, Aniyim 10:7. Translations for Biblical, Talmudic and post-Talmudic sources derived from sefaria.org, unless otherwise noted.
[6] Heschel, A. J. (1963, January). "Religion and Race." *Speech at the National Conference on Religion and Race,* Chicago.
[7] Pew Research Center (2021). "Jewish Americans in 2020."
https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/jewish-identity-and-belief/

public answer the call *en masse*. When I attended rallies in Manhattan to oppose the Muslim ban and the family separation policies of the Trump administration, events that were organized by Jewish groups like HIAS, I was surprised to see hundreds of people show up; New York City has the potential to turn out tens if not hundreds of thousands of Jews for an important cause. Children being separated from their parents at the border? People being denied access to our country because of their religious background? If these were not important causes, harkening back to our own history, then I do not know what the oft-used phrase "Never Again" means. I am not necessarily focused on trying to activate the 41% of American Jews who do not see repairing the world as a fundamentally Jewish act; what would it look like if we mobilized the full energy and person-power of the 59% who do?

For 18 years, I worked at Teach For America, a national non-profit organization that trains and supports recent college graduates to teach in high-need public schools and become lifelong advocates for equity and justice. I served first as a corps member (a classroom teacher) in South Texas and then got hired by the national office, where I managed a team to design the organization's approach to leadership development for its corps members and alumni. Along the way, one of my annual projects was working with the Schusterman Foundation to create and lead a 10-day values-based leadership development trip to Israel for Teach For America corps members and alumni; our participants were not all Jewish, but we grounded the experience in Jewish concepts, such as the importance of Shabbat as a time for rest and renewal when doing the work of repairing the world. When I originally agreed to get involved with this trip, I asked the philanthropist why she was motivated to create such an experience. What was success? Getting people to light Shabbat candles weekly? Encouraging endogamous

relationships? No, she told me that she wanted Teach For America's corps members to know that serving one's community was an inherently Jewish act. That was moving to me, and part of what motivated me to become a rabbi involved wanting to harness the potential of this claim: if I hoped to live in a world redeemed, how might I work with other Jewish people and activate our historic ethical lodestone to do so?

An Opportunity

I was still contemplating my move to the rabbinate when I enrolled in the Wexner Heritage Program, a two-year adult education program for lay leaders in various cities across North America. At the end of the program, its organizers announced a contest: one of us would be delivering a keynote speech to the rest of the conference we would be attending in Utah. The subject was to invent a new Jewish holiday. I thought this was a curious prompt, given that we in Judaism already have many holidays on the calendar.

On my mind was the low turnout I had witnessed at recent Jewish justice events. I ran through reasons why this might have been: maybe people simply did not know about the events, or found out about them too late to be able to attend. As noted, many people have given a lot of thought to mobilizing Jews for action. This is the mandate of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. It is the aim of dozens of members of the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable. The organization JOIN for Justice trains Jewish organizers. Non-profit infrastructure exists to support large-scale engagement, but what would it take to further activate the masses?

The prompt from the Wexner Foundation made me wonder. Call it naiveté, call it chutzpah, but I thought: if we had a holiday on the calendar where we deliberately concentrated on our advocacy, perhaps there would be less of an excuse to sit on the

sidelines. In speaking with friends who worked at Jewish justice organizations, I learned that there is often a disconnect between those doing the organizing, whose top priority is to mobilize people around an issue, and those running synagogues and other communal institutions who may have closer relationships with their members but also have many different priorities to navigate. The result: in at least the synagogues I attended – all run by socially conscious, even activist leaders – I did not see a significant push to compel people to show up at certain events. No one was declaring that participating in a series of strategic civic actions was just as, if not more important than, attending synagogue. Maybe that would be seen as too pushy to come from an individual person; maybe the concrete expectation needed to be set more broadly than a specific rabbi, but rather from the calendar itself. Ritual helps create energy, expectation and accountability in our lives. We as Jews enshrine what we care about on the calendar. We treat time as sacred.

Perhaps there are new ways for our calendar to help us express our most cherished values. While there are many holidays that can relate to justice themes, we do not take time each year specifically to take stock of what we have done with respect to improving our world and rededicate ourselves to deeper and more consistent action in the future. Some may do so during Yom Kippur, including some synagogues that may use the six couplets on page 89 of *Mishkan HaNefesh* that offer Vidui for issues of societal concern.[8] Some may dedicate their Passover seders to reflecting on their own involvement in social causes. But it is not a systematic practice, and it seemed that adding content to those already ritual-rich holidays would have diminishing returns of attention and focus. I therefore composed a speech proposing a new holiday, a Yom

[8] Central Conference of American Rabbis (2015). *Mishkan ha-nefesh: Yom Kippur*. New York: CCAR Press.

HaTzedek, honoring our prophetic call to justice. Here is an excerpt from what I proposed:

> We have holidays where we pledge to do better in the coming year. We have holidays where we remember great miracles performed on our behalf. But we do not have a holiday where we actively interrupt clear injustices that we witness.
>
> If Abraham can lobby G-d, if Abraham Joshua Heschel prayed with his feet, why do we not have at least one occasion a year where we recommit to the Jewish call for justice, a Yom HaTzedek to reflect on the ways in which we have used our voices to speak truth to power in the past year, and commit to specific actions in the coming year to do so even more powerfully?

I imagined that some might fear that we would be creating another "Mitzvah Day," which already exists (thereby obviating the need for another) – and has been criticized for its supposed implication that there is only one day a year when Jews should perform good deeds together.[9] To them, I wrote:

> Of course, Yom HaTzedek should not be the only time we concentrate on advocacy, just like Tu B'Shevat is not the only time we should appreciate nature, or Yom HaShoah is the only day we should consider the effects of the Holocaust. However, it establishes a clear priority and expectation. It creates mass energy. It sends a signal to children that observing Jewish holidays not only shows reverence for our particular past, but it also helps to build a stronger future for all. On Pesach, we say: "We were slaves in Egypt"; on Yom Ha-Tzedek, we'd say: "We are stewards for justice." Yes, you can say that you're *shomer tzedek*.

I was surprised when I learned I was selected to deliver the speech; the fellowship had attracted a politically diverse group of leaders, and I was not sure how well the focus on advocacy and activism would resonate with the audience. Yet attendees from a variety of religious denominations and political parties told me that this was an idea worth pursuing and asked me what was the next step, when would the holiday be celebrated, and how one could observe the day. I demurred, saying that I was not going

[9] Goren, Seth (2015). "The Limitations and Possibilities of Jewish Service." https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/the-limitations-and-possibilities-of-jewish-service/

to decide these details unilaterally on behalf of the Jewish people. Left to my own devices, I imagined at the time that perhaps the holiday was part of a larger arc: to our Passover seders, we could invite members of other faith communities who are seeking allies for causes important to them. We could then count the Omer by learning bit by bit about the issues, observe Shavuot studying texts that inspire our action, and finally conclude Shavuot by taking mass action. Maybe we'd host public officials to a town hall. Maybe this would be a lobbying trip to a state capital. Maybe we'd co-sponsor a rally. But I did not want my own limited musings to close off possibilities prematurely. I was quite open to different possibilities. Indeed, it turns out that my concept was not the direction we took, as I would learn many times. As I started to have informal conversations with people who had expressed interest in the holiday, several conceptual questions emerged quickly.

Ma Nishtana Ha Lailah Hazeh

Was the tail wagging the dog? The fact that I had begun this project by starting with the premise of a holiday created a bit of a conundrum. On the one hand, there are many strategies one might take to address the question of increasing the frequency and depth of Jewish involvement in social action and justice work. Instead of jumping to the solution rooted in a ritual, one could initiate a strategic analysis of all of the levers and root causes of lack of engagement before conducting data-based research on some of the questions that emerge from that inquiry. This would be a methodical approach. On the other hand, such processes are often time-consuming and can stall before they even reach an action phase. I wanted to have a bias toward prototyping, gathering feedback and iteration so that we could learn quickly and adjust.

As a rabbinical student, I became most interested in the ways that ritual was both a gap in the practice of social justice work – and an opportunity. As far as I had observed and researched, most actions by Jewish organizations were "Jewish" insofar as they were organized and attended by Jewish people, or because a rabbinic figure delivered a speech referencing Jewish texts before the action. In other words, there were multiple opportunities to add what one might call "Jewish thickness" – layers of meaning, symbolism, solemnity and artistry that would signal integrity and significance to Jews – to the work of justice.[10] Rituals can add sanctity to an action, enabling us to mark and celebrate a moment in time. While conscious that I was short-circuiting a pure design process, I decided we would therefore hold the idea of a holiday as our design assumption, recognizing that we would not claim it was necessarily the most efficacious lever one could pull, but that we would seek to maximize its possibilities. In an e-mail exchange, Rabbi Dr. Vanessa Ochs noted to me that this was also a strategy of Jewish feminists. They asked, "Which moments in our lives as human beings (often women's embodied experiences) were not yet marked in Jewish ways?"[11] They developed rituals to fill in the gaps.

Isn't every holiday about justice? Another one of the biggest conceptual hurdles was confronting the justifiable critique that a specific holiday about justice could imply that the rest of the Jewish calendar is somehow separate from this value. Surely Sukkot ought to be observed with hospitality for the stranger in mind, not to mention the issue of housing insecurity. Passover is a holiday recalling the pain of slavery. I had to ensure that the existence of a Yom HaTzedek would not presume to ignore the

[10] Anthropologist Clifford Geertz wrote of "thickness" in his 1973 book, *The Interpretation of Cultures*.
[11] E-mail correspondence with author, January 30, 2023.

justice-infused relevance of these other dates. At the same time, I felt – and feel – conviction that there was no event that spoke more globally to the prophetic commitment to justice and invited participants to rededicate themselves to the actions that reflected their values. One could certainly argue that Yom Kippur should be that moment. However, there are so many tasks on our Day of Atonement – "introspection about our personal qualities and how they impact our closest relationships," asking for forgiveness and granting it, and memorializing loved ones among them – that an emphasis on our actions toward justice in society can easily get short shrift.[12] Therefore, ideally, Yom HaTzedek would envelop the other occasions throughout the year rather than stand alone.

What did one mean by "tzedek"? In addition to justifying a *yom*, there was the question of *tzedek* and my definition thereof. Was this a stand-in for *tikkun olam*, a phrase both beloved and derided as an encapsulation of liberal Jewish do-good-ism?[13] I spent time exploring the term *tzedek* in Tanach and various commentaries; it is contrasted by words of strict "justice" or law, such as *mishpat* or *din*. It is used in situations involving a sensitivity to the other – a creditor who may technically be able to retain a debtor's cloak but ought not do so if it is the person's only garment at night.[14] More broadly, Torah teaches us the Jewish obligation to tend to the needs of the widow, the orphan, the stranger. We learn to leave the corners of our fields for those who are hungry.[15] We learn to engage in debt absolution every seven years[16]. These instructions are not guides for kindliness. These are expectations. They involve setting up systems

[12] Central Conference of American Rabbis (2015). *Mishkan HaNefesh: Yom Kippur,* xi.
[13] Spokoiny, Andres (2018). "Tikkun Olam: A Defense and a Critique," eJewish Philanthropy, October 17, 2018, https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/tikkun-olam-a-defense-and-a-critique/.
[14] Deuteronomy 24: 12-13.
[15] Leviticus 19:9-10.
[16] Deuteronomy 15:1-2.

that ensure that "there shall be no needy."[17] I became moved by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks's explanation about the difference between procedural justice (*mishpat*) and distributive justice (*tzedek*), coming to see that — while Torah and Talmud acknowledge and do not seek to eliminate gaps in wealth — our seminal texts sought to curb inequity.[18] When I refer to *tzedek*, I differentiate it from *chesed*, acts of loving-kindness that might involve temporarily alleviating an individual's pain or need. *Chesed* is carrying someone in a wheelchair when there is no ramp; *tzedek* is insisting on a ramp. Certainly there is a place for both; the Babylonian Talmud sees reason to prefer *chesed* over *tzedakah (*righteous giving*),* equating the former to the gratification of reaping rewards and the latter to the uncertainty of planting seeds.[19] Rabbi Sid Schwarz equates *chesed* with volunteer service work and *tzedek* with advocacy; one seeks to address an immediate need, while one works on long-term systemic solutions.[20] I wanted to lift up *tzedek* because I have observed Jewish communities often quite engaged in *chesed* work and wanted to spur the less frequent conversation about systemic change.

Should it be a day of action? In my own mind, I had envisioned a set time when Jewish communities would collectively take a day off to engage in lobbying. We would not engage in volunteer work; Mitzvah Day already existed, and the critique is that it can serve as a one-off occasion to find chores for privileged people to do that will make them feel like they have helped someone. Linking up with existing advocacy efforts, and lending additional voice to systemic change, felt more substantial. However,

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[17] Deuteronomy 15:4-5.
[18] Sacks, Rabbi Jonathan (2006). "Tzedekah: The Untranslated Virtue," https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/reeh/tzedakah-the-untranslatable-virtue/
[19] BT Sukkah 49b.
[20] Schwarz, Rabbi Sid (November 7, 2010). "Tzedek and Chesed" Re-Thinking the Relationship Between Advocacy and Service," eJewish Philanthropy, https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/tzedek-and-chesed-re-thinking-the-relationship-between-advocacy-and-service/.

this approach felt increasingly fraught as practical questions surfaced: who would determine what issues we would pursue? Aren't the best actions planned as needed, not pre-determined on a ritualistic calendar? Aren't there already lobbying days run by various organizations and movements? Yet I feared not emphasizing action, worried about creating another day of navel-gazing and talking about change, as opposed to helping to enact it. I met with Rabbi Stephanie Kolin, a former organizer with RAC California who became a mentor of mine. She also felt that a day of action would be misguided, particularly because for "newcomers" to justice work who would be well-served by understanding how relationship-building, learning, planning and reflection are all critical building blocks to taking action. She highly recommended focusing on reflection and learning for a Yom HaTzedek. I would just have to be on guard to ensure the holiday would serve as a springboard to action – in the spirit of the Talmudic conclusion that "study leads to action."[21]

How does one proceed in creating a holiday? Several people asked me the question: how will you "make" Yom HaTzedek a holiday? How does one add to the Jewish calendar? There is something incredibly *chutzpadik* about seeking to create a new holiday. Our major Jewish holidays are *mi Sinai*, derived from the Torah itself. They are declarations from G-d, expectations to cease work and instead engage in worship. They are often grounded in the agricultural seasons; while Passover exists in the Torah as a rare holiday intended to enact historical memory, the rabbis later overlaid narrative onto other observances, such as receiving the Torah during Shavuot. Purim is from the Megillat Esther; Chanukah from the Book of Maccabees. Lag B'Omer is rabbinic. The seder is too, with the destruction of the Second Temple necessitating a

[21] BT Kiddushin 40b:8.

broader reorientation away from sacrificial ritual; it was solidified in the medieval period, though it continues to inspire new updates to this day. In some cases, we have infused totally new meaning into existing holidays. Simchat Torah is derived from Shemini Atzeret, but is not mentioned in Torah as the time to restart the cycle of Torah readings. The State of Israel has added elements to its national calendar, some holidays of which have made their way to the Diaspora – most notably, Yom Haatzmaut and Yom Hazikaron. Since 2012, the Israeli government has celebrated *Yom Ha'Ivrit* (Hebrew Language Day) on the 21st of Tevet, the birthday of the widely acknowledged father of modern Hebrew, Eliezer ben Yehuda; the celebration was created to promote the Hebrew language in Israel and around the world. One might call these holidays created "top down."

Anthropologist Riv-Ellen Prell asks in the Forward to Vanessa Ochs's book *Inventing Jewish Ritual*, "Is there any authority in place, any limit on change? Who has the right to make these changes, and what are the conditions that create them? Why do some stick? Is it all Jewish?"[22] To answer some of these questions, I spent a semester studying Tu B'Shevat, seeing how various thinkers and practitioners leveraged this occasion — first a tax holiday, mentioned in the Mishnah — for a variety of purposes, from Kabbalistic to Zionistic. In the 1970s, the first modern Tu B'Shevat seder was held at Oranim, a teachers' institute northwest of Haifa, affiliated with the kibbutz movement The initial organizer, educator Amnon Yadin, spread the practice through networks of teachers in Israel before it caught wind and traveled to America and other countries. Notably, in examining six diverse contemporary *haggadot*, I found there were fruits consumed, wine poured, and readings shared in all six, but there was nothing truly

[22] Prell in Ochs, x.

consistent about the observance of Tu Bishvat when we look at the specifics in any category. This is in sharp contrast to the Passover Seder, where wide variations still typically stem from a common spine of the *seder*, or order, itself. Rather than standardization during certain festive occasions like Tu Bishevat, we let a thousand fruit trees bloom.

In recent years, both new holidays and Jewish rituals have grown in popularity with different types of origin stories and different degrees of success. In the 1980's, a women's group in Boston had experimented with a variety of rituals organically, and one woman was inspired to create a *kos Miryam* after participating in a meditation that envisioned traveling to Miriam's Well. Originally associated with Sukkot and then Rosh Chodesh, the practice of filling and drinking from a water goblet dedicated to the prophetess grew among women's groups.[23] Spiritual leader Matia Angelou wrote liturgy for a variety of occasions, including Shabbat, Havdalah, and Passover.[24] As Chapter Three will explore, the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion sponsored a museum exhibit in 1997, and the Women of Reform Judaism sponsored a Miriam's Cup Competition five years later. Meanwhile, in the latter part of the 20th century, several feminist groups were developing Women's Seders for the celebration of Passover. The use of Miriam's cup became a companion to Elijah's cup and was enshrined in the Ma'yan Haggadah by the early 2000s.[25] Today, Miriam's Cup is included in most progressive guides to the Passover seder. All told, the concept was borne out of a "bottom-up" approach, from a folk practice to enhance Sukkot and feminist Rosh Chodesh celebrations to its home today on seder tables worldwide.

[23] Boeckler, A. M. (2012). Miriam's cup: the story of a new ritual. *European Judaism*, *45*(2), 147-163.
[24] Women of Reform Judaism (2003). "Visiting Miriam's Well," https://www.wrj.org/sites/default/files/MiriamsWell%20-%20new.pdf
[25] Boeckler, 151.

Some new rituals start from a very different place. When I arrived in Jerusalem for my first-year of rabbinical school, I learned that activist and social entrepreneur Yossi Abramowitz had hatched an idea with a colleague at a Kol Dor leadership conference in 2005: to label Cheshvan, a month without major Jewish holidays, as a Jewish Social Action Month (JSAM) — as "a month where Jews around the world will be encouraged to engage in good works and service to their communities," according to a proclamation that Abramowitz later helped arrange for Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) to introduce to the United States Senate.[26] They partnered with Knesset member Rabbi Michael Melchior in Israel to secure the backing of Government of Israel's Ministry for Israeli Society and World Jewish Community to "declare an annual international celebration dedicated to the Jewish values of *tzedek, chesed* and *areyvut* (justice, kindness, and social responsibility) to be practiced by the entire Jewish people throughout the world." The organizers had rationale for choosing Cheshvan:

> On the High Holy Days we reflect on our past year and commit to improving and doing better in the coming year. Next comes Sukkot, and we leave the shelter of our homes and enter temporary dwellings, reminding ourselves both of the historic Jewish journey through the wilderness and the reality that there are many people in the world today lacking in shelter and basic necessities. The month of Cheshvan, while absent of traditional holidays, is an opportune time to dedicate ourselves to the foundational Jewish value of social justice; a time to take our thoughts and promises from the High Holy Days and implement them, progressing from words to action. Isaiah 1:16-17 says, "Cease to do evil; learn to good. Devote yourself to justice" At this time of year, we reaffirm the historic tradition of the Jewish people to commit ourselves to repairing and advancing the world. As we enter Cheshvan, we now have the opportunity to remove the mar, the bitterness, and replace it with powerful and significant social action.

[26] Congressional Record - Senate (2005). https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CRECB-2005-pt18/pdf/CRECB-2005-pt18-Pg24719-2.pdf. Steve Israel in the House issued his own parallel statement: https://justfacts.votesmart.org/public-statement/137230/announcing-jewish-social-action-month#.XGgciWgzZ6w

With these resolutions in place, the chief rabbis of the United Kingdom, South Africa, Romania and Ireland, as well as the leaders of the Reform movement in the U.S., also voiced their support for the initiative, encouraging participation in the month's events. The United Jewish Communities (UJC) of North America voted to back JSAM as part of a larger strategy of "strengthening Jewish identity and building compelling communities," and JSAM culminated in 2005 with a reception at the President's Residence in Jerusalem.[27] Apparently, all of this happened in less than half a year from conception to endorsements. How do you establish a Jewish custom? Recruit friends in high places!

But a high-profile launch did not guarantee a lasting change. While an Internet search reveals a few references to JSAM after 2006, these references are scant. To understand why, I met with both Yossi Abramowitz and with Rabbi Melchior, separately. In the early 2000s, Abramowitz owned a multimedia publishing company, Jewish Family & Life, and used his publicity engine to promote content about the project. Several prominent Jewish organizations covered the month-long initiative, sometimes earnestly – and sometimes with mild derision over the implication that social action is only relevant one month out of the year.[28] After initial heavy involvement, Abramowitz handed administration of the project over to Kol Dor, which disbanded around 2010. While Abramowitz and Rabbi Melchior worked from a top-down perspective, getting many organizations on board, Abramowitz acknowledged that the project had not sustained the energy among participants that he had wished. Rabbi Melchior told me he now believes more in a single holy day -- with historic or

[27] Berman, Daphna (December 2, 2005). "Jewish Social Action Month Declared a Success," *Haaretz*.
[28] Dorfman, Aaron. "A Social Action Month: Heshvan,"
https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/a-social-action-month-heshvan/

textual resonance -- to recenter people on the Jewish responsibility to pursue social change. A month was ironically too diffuse. As of 2015, the UJA Federation of New York still gave out JSAM grants in honor of the celebratory month, but this may have been the last significant manifestation of the initiative.[29]

While recognizing that Miriam's Cup and JSAM are qualitatively different endeavors and are impossible to compare fully, examining their respective growth processes reflect useful distinctions in the approaches of their proponents (see Table 1).

Table 1

Elements	**Miriam's Cup**	**Jewish Social Action Month**
Purpose	To commemorate the significance of the prophetess Miriam, thereby elevating the status of women in Jewish ritual	To encourage Jewish social action
Narrative	Miriam is a key leader in the Exodus narrative, and her presence is linked to the presence of water for the wandering Israelites.	No specific narrative cited – but rather a range of reasons why social action is a Jewish value.
Rationale for timing	We retell the Exodus narrative during Passover. (Rosh Hodesh, another place where Miriam's Cup has been used, has been long linked as a gift to women for the refusal of Israelite women to contribute to the Golden Calf.)	The month of Cheshvan has no major holidays, so it has room. It also comes right after Yom Kippur in which Isaiah urges Jews to end oppression – and right after Sukkot, a holiday that underscores vulnerability. If Tishrei is about introspection, Cheshvan ought to be about action.
Symbol	The cup	None
Ritual	Filling the cup with water and drinking from it, with suggested blessings	Performing a community service; no known liturgy

[29] Klein, Nathaniel (October 27, 2015). "Strengthening Jewish Identity and Community Through Jewish Social Action Month," https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/strengthening-jewish-identity-and-community-through-jewish-social-action-

Time required for the observance	A moment during the Passover seder	A month
Process for developing the holiday	An iterative, organic process based on folk behavior	Several grasstops leaders generating the idea
Process for spreading the holiday	Word of mouth, through women's organizations, inclusion in Haggadot	Large-scale Jewish organizations providing publicity and/or grants
Number of years in development	1977-present	2005-2010, with some manifestations through 2015

In reviewing these differences, it was striking to me that Jewish Social Action Month was trying to achieve something on the grandest scale – turning a holiday-less time into a month-long festival of action worldwide. While profound in its symbolism, Miriam's Cup essentially asked its users simply to pour a cup of water during an existing holiday. The relative simplicity of the "ask" of the Miriam's Cup ritual likely contributed to its traction. JSAM also lacked "thickness": symbols, liturgical references, or a focused narrative. In his book *Rethinking Modern Judaism,* Arnold Eisen outlined predictive factors for successful "postmodern Jewish ritual performance."[30] He asserted that the ritual must not advance tribalism but rather universal truths, even if the method is particularistic. Simultaneously, we must imagine the ritual is something that our ancestors would have done and were known for doing. Both Miriam's Cup and JSAM convey ideals of broad interest, but it is only Miriam's Cup that builds upon existing customs – namely, the seder table. Moreover, Miriam's Cup emerged through authentic iteration as a folk practice over many years, originally based on the needs and imagination of a group of people looking to give honor to an under-recognized Biblical character. JSAM was the brainchild of a few socially-conscious leaders who had

[30] Eisen, A. (1998). *Rethinking Modern Judaism*. University of Chicago Press, 260.

remarkable connections to draw quick publicity and large institutions to back their concept. If Miriam's Cup is the tortoise and JSAM the hare, then slow and steady won the race.

Seeking Input

I took to heart the differences in these approaches, not only about the distinction between a day and a month, but the top-down versus bottom-up approach. Even if the concept was "right," it would need to pass muster by actual Jews who were excited about doing it. But the approach also had to be rooted in diverse perspectives to give it the best chance to capture the "stickiness" of Miriam's Cup. Months after my 2018 speech at Wexner, I started to assemble a group of influential, diverse, thoughtful Jewish leaders for their input. I both wanted their brilliance on the questions I was posing, and I wanted them to participate at the ground level so that they could help grow the idea as it developed. When I more or less cold-called people whom I admired in the Jewish world, these individuals naturally generated divergent ideas. I needed a mechanism for people to hear each other out, seek to reconcile different opinions, and see which ideas had the most popularity and resonance among the group. I did not want to be in the position of presumptively deciding something on my own, so I realized that a collaborative "design sprint" might be in order. I would invite interested people to gather in makeshift teams and generate their creative ideas about how one might observe a holiday specifically about rededicating ourselves to justice.[31] Those ideas would need to ensure that our approach had the "stickiness" of Miriam's Cup.[32] To add some magic to such a gathering,

[31] The invitation can be found in Appendix A, Artifact 1.
[32] "Stickiness" is a concept explored by Chip and Dan Heath in their 2007 book, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* (Random House).

I decided to announce that I was gathering 36 people – a coalition of "lamed-vavniks" to help brainstorm.[33] Once I received RSVPs from a few prominent leaders, I used those names to ask others to join us. The group included former AJWS president Ruth Messinger, as well as emerging leaders from diverse synagogues, schools and non-profits.

Meanwhile, I decided to create a version in Jerusalem to test out the process and gain insight from a group of my contemporaries. I assembled a group of volunteers studying at both Hebrew Union College and Hebrew College in Jerusalem, and we gathered over pasta in my apartment over several weekends, planning our first design sprint. I gave a talk at the Conservative Yeshiva about the concept. My volunteer team and I chose to hold our design event on the morning of the Israeli elections in 2019, given that students were off from school and that this would be a chance to engage in our own form of being the change we wished to see.

By April 2019, my thinking had shifted sufficiently about the concept such that I described it as a day of reflection as opposed to a day of action. On the morning of the Jerusalem event, my team and I explained that we sought to generate "the wisdom of the crowds" regarding key aspects of the holiday, both conceiving of ideas together but also seeing where the broad group gravitated.[34] After a design thinking exercise, we gave small teams a list of categories of ideas they needed to generate in order to create a holiday that would "inspire bold recommitment to our tradition's call for a just world," starting with a name for the holiday, a date and corresponding narrative. In addition, we offered these as additional considerations:

[33] Jewish folklore teaches that there are 36 anonymous righteous people (*lamed-vavnikim*, in Yiddish) who sustain the world at any given time.
[34] James Surowiecki's 2004 book, *Wisdom of the Crowds* (Doubleday), popularized the idea that decisions made by aggregating the consensus of a group can be more effective than those by an individual.

- What does one do on the holiday (e.g., pray, sing, honor those who have made progress in their activism this year, sign up to support at least one potential causes, sign petitions, make phone calls)?
- Where does the holiday take place (e.g., outside, rain or shine; in a major communal space; in multiple spaces throughout the city; in individual synagogues; at home)?
- What are the key texts referenced or used?
- What are its songs?
- What are the symbols of the holiday?
- What is the key food of the holiday?
- To what extent is this an interfaith occasion?
- How might synagogues participate in the lead-up (e.g. a special Shabbat in preparation for it) or follow-up from the holiday (working with the Religious Action Center)?
- How does the holiday "speak" to children, teens and adults, beginners and long-time activists, secular Jews and traditionally observant Jews, Republicans and Democrats, Ashkenazi and Sephardim, Jews who identify as white and Jews who identify as people of color, Diaspora Jews and Israelis?

Over 30 people attended the event, and the small groups came up with all sorts of ideas, including a proposal to leverage International Human Rights Day, or Rosh Chodesh Elul to prompt the start of a season of *cheshbon ha-nefesh*. One small group suggested a "learners' minyan" to illustrate the connections between liturgy and values of justice. One small group envisioned an opportunities fair for non-profit organizations and advocacy initiatives. One HUC student, Rachel Hershman, suggested a new ritual

object called a Tzedek Box, perhaps to store notes or wishes.[35] After the event, my volunteer team and I sat with the fact that participants in a Yom HaTzedek would need ongoing support throughout the year to fuel their service and advocacy, and we decided to develop a weekly e-mail blast to help people to have consistent access to Jewish justice work. Each week, classmate Jessica Jacobs would compile something newsworthy, something inspirational and some action step to take, shared right after Havdalah as a way to get back to work after experiencing Shabbat and the world as it ought to be. In honor of Havdalah's symbols, we called the e-mail "Juicy, Spicy, Fiery."

Meanwhile, in mid-June, we held our design sprint in New York. I raised funds from my Wexner cohort and rallied a few volunteers – some to help plan, others to staff the event. We hired expert facilitator Maya Bernstein to lead us at the UJA offices in New York. We shared a document ahead of time, laying out some guiding principles and assumptions (see Appendix A, Artifact 2). The 36 participants ballooned to about 50 as the word spread. During the half-day event, after some introductory exercises, Maya – supported by volunteer table facilitators – tasked small groups with developing a Yom HaTzedek ritual. While a few people in the room questioned the assumption that a holiday would be the right way to promote Jewish justice work, most of the groups gamely brainstormed a bit and presented toward the end of our half-day session. A layleader from Congregation Beth Simchat Torah, Harold Levine, suggested a Tzedek Box – just like Rachel Hershman had done in Jerusalem. I asked Harold what a Tzedek Box would do, and he said he wasn't sure – just that, if there's already such a thing as a Tzedekah Box, a "Yom HaTzedek" should have a Tzedek Box. Through conversation, we

[35] Gringauz, Lev (May 11, 2019). "Is The Jewish World Ready for a New Holiday? Day of Justice Backers Think So," *Times of Israel*. https://www.timesofisrael.com/is-the-jewish-world-ready-for-a-new-holiday-day-of-justice-backers-think-so/.

imagined that users could put a journal entry in their box every time they engaged in a meaningful act of justice – and then open the box once a year.

Given that the small groups generated various ideas, my team and I decided to conduct a year-long pilot in which we would try out different methods throughout the year. By paying attention to what concepts attracted our test audiences the most, we realized that the box was the most promising technique for our purposes. Unlike many of the other methods, this ritual would give users the opportunity to stay present with the Jewish call to justice and sacred accountability all year-round. Having a box on your coffee table, staring at you, might remind you to fill it; knowing that you would have to open it at some point might also contribute to a productive feeling of obligation. It also "felt" Jewish because it had a built-in allusion to a familiar piece of Judaica, the Tzedekah Box; some people also recognized saw the journal-writing practice as similar to "mitzvah notes" that some religious school parents write for children who have done good deeds; others saw it as a version of *cheshbon ha-nefesh*. This was a ritual with a Jewish *neshama*.

Moreover, Rabbi Ira Stone makes the distinction between "interruptive" versus "instantiative" *mitzvot;* the former serve to re-capture our attention in the midst of our hectic schedules in order to refocus on our obligation to others, while the latter actually embody the commandment to love our neighbor or the stranger.[36] Some call these "ritual" commandments versus "ethical" commandments, or *bein adam l'makom* versus *bein adam l'havero*, but Stone prefers "interruptive" versus "instantiative" to focus on the difference in purpose. The Tzedek Box is a rare ritual that does both: it causes us to

[36] Luzzatto, M. H., Stone, I. F., & Kaplan, M. M. (2011). *Mesillat Yesharim: the Path of the Upright*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 142.

pause and reflect on our commitment to justice, while encouraging us to act in the world.

Assembling The Box

While it was becoming clear that the box was emerging as the centerpiece of the whole enterprise, as opposed to the holiday, the questions continued:

What "counted" as *tzedek*? Could you put anything in the box? While I had defined *tzedek* narrowly around addressing systems of oppression and indignity, I did not want to create confusion in which people would question whether they should or should not put a reflection in their box. What if they served a meal at a soup kitchen? That wasn't necessarily seeking to end hunger systemically, but was it important for us to hold a strict standard? Even if we wanted to, would it be feasible? We could not look over people's shoulders or control others' decisions. For simplicity's sake, my team and I decided that it would be fine for anyone to put anything they wanted in the boxes, and that we could encourage people to contemplate the long-term pact of their actions when they opened their box on Yom HaTzedek. There remains a long-term question about whether a Tzedek Box ought to have different compartments for *chesed* work as opposed to *tzedek* work, as an educational function. For now, however, we believe it is better to have people recording whatever acts they are pursuing to improve our world, to encourage righteous deeds, to reduce barriers to entry for our ritual, and to help expand people's understanding over time about the ways to make significant impact.

What should you write on your slip? There has been a live debate about the content of the slips for the Tzedek Box. Some have advocated writing *intentions*, in

which case the opening of the box becomes an occasion to remind yourself of your aspirations and evaluate whether you fulfilled them. However, others felt that writing a reflection on past deeds was more purposeful. It would allow people to process emotionally and spiritually what they had just done, record details that they could remember and consider later, and serve as an accountability tool rooted in their own behavioral data. Such a focus would not preclude people from including aspirations or resolutions in their box – imagining a different future can be a form of righteousness work – but it can allow for "appreciative inquiry," an approach that allows one to learn from and build upon successes.[37] Simultaneously, it encourages an honest retrospective on how we have spent our time. The box does not lie.

Starting in the winter of 2019, I started making boxes with various audiences of diverse ages: Hebrew schools, teen groups, Repair the World chapters, college Hillels, adult social action groups, the Jewish Grandparents Network. More than one person expressed some squeamishness about adding slips to their box; they expressed that it felt self-congratulatory and therefore lacking the earnest and selfless attitude befitting an act of righteousness. We had to clarify that the box was not a place to give oneself "credit" for one's service or justice work, but rather a space to record one's frank observations, feelings, learnings and hopes. Adult learning experts such as Patricia Cranton, informed by the transformative learning theory of Jack Mezirow, emphasize that reflection is essential to changing our perspectives, our behaviors and ultimately our world.[38] It slows down our actions and prompts us to crystallize our current beliefs and assumptions. If someone is serving in a soup kitchen, the reflection can be a place to

[37] For more on appreciative inquiry, see Coghlan, A. T., Preskill, H., & Tzavaras Catsambas, T. (2003). An overview of appreciative inquiry in evaluation. *New directions for evaluation*, *2003* (100), 5-22.
[38] Cranton, P. (2006). *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A guide for educators of adults*; Mezirow, J. (1998). "On Critical Reflection." Adult Education Quarterly, 48(3), 185-198.

note the ways that one may have felt moved by an interaction with a client, or conflicted about the long-term efficacy of the soup kitchen to alleviate hunger. It serves as a Jewish justice journal, and we have since provided prompts and even templates on our website (www.tzedekbox.org) to help people determine what they will write down. Otherwise, people are inclined to simply write down a sentence stating what they did, which is better than nothing – but misses out on the opportunity to indicate something that could be useful for future contemplation.

What actions can one take? After several months of experimenting, I heard several people express a different concern: I don't know what I can do to help improve the world. A percentage of our users were not aware of what types of opportunities existed, such that they could easily support causes that mattered to them. The "Juicy, Spicy, Fiery" e-mail list led me to think that it was useful to aggregate the "calls to action" from various organizations affiliated with the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable – from groups like HIAS, the National Council of Jewish Women, Dayenu and the Religious Action Center. All of these organizations sought people to sign petitions, write their members of Congress, attend events and rallies, and more. I realized that an app could be a way to aggregate these opportunities in an accessible fashion, not to mention serve as a digital time capsule for users' Tzedek Box journal entries. The Jewish innovation engine Reboot had seen success with its 10Q website, asking users to answer one question a day from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur and then storing the responses in a "lockbox" until the following year, when users have the chance to review what they had written. A Tzedek Box app could draw on a similar idea, but for justice work over the course of a year. I decided to apply for a grant from the HUC-JIR Be Wise

Entrepreneurial Fellowship.[39] Given several thousand dollars in funds, I was able to hire the partner of a classmate, Edon Valdman, to create a digital app – first on iPhone in 2020 and then on Android in 2021.

Designing an app and all of its very specific details took tremendous time and required me and my team to be extra thoughtful about ensuring that the user experience was positive. Edon was able to create the technical side of the app, while I worked with a separate firm to develop the aesthetic look of the project. Designing a "user map" for the app, it was good that we had already confronted the question of an ideal reflection for our physical box users; we now had to think through the details of an interactive experience. In order to avoid the clinical feeling of filling out a form, we gave people a space to dedicate their action to someone. Instead of a "submit" button, we added an "Amen" after a blessing. We included a "notification" feature so that people could be reminded on a regular basis – such as before candle-lighting on Shabbat, or after Havdalah – to add to their Tzedek Box. After some user testing, we decided to add a special feature called "Tribes" that would enable participants to share their actions with one another, anonymously.

This "Tribes" innovation was a source of some discussion amongst our team. While some pushed for "gamification" of the app, giving people points or recognition for their actions, I have hesitated, wanting to avoid associating the ritual with self-congratulation. Instead, I have been relying on the wisdom of Rambam, who taught that righteousness ought to be anonymous.[40] When users share their actions with their tribe, the other tribe members know that someone just, for example, donated to a

[39] See Appendix A, Artifact 4.
[40] Mishneh Torah, Aniyim, 10:7-14.

community fridge – but they wouldn't know who exactly did it. This allowed the sharing to focus on inspiring and activating others, rather than leading some users to guess whether their peers were doing so in order to get attention or "virtue-signal." We also included the feature of a homepage that shared news and editorials about Jewish justice work, essentially folding our entire "Juicy, Spicy, Fiery" e-mail blast into our app's functionality.

When should the holiday take place? Meanwhile, I was receiving all sorts of suggestions for the placement of Yom HaTzedek on the calendar. "The common way to build a new tradition is to use old materials for new goals," writes historian Idit Pintel-Ginsburg.[41] Yom Kippur and Passover are already crowded with ritual, so it would be difficult to add another component to the festivities. Someone suggested the moment after Yom Kippur is over, as a sign that we had taken the prophet Isaiah's instruction seriously that the fast desired by the Eternal One was related to our commitment to societal uplift; this was beautiful symbolically, but my team and I doubted whether anyone would care about a Tzedek Box as they made their way to the bagels of the breakfast. Someone suggested Flag Day, which had a certain logic of bringing meaning to a largely under-used secular holiday related to democracy and freedom, but it lacked sufficient resonance to Jews – and was not an international reference point. There was a contingent that suggested Shavuot as a potential ritual, indicating that it is a relatively under-developed ritual; however, more traditionally observant Jews begged to differ, citing their two-day *chag* in synagogue as a plate already full of ritual. There was a Goldilocks quality to the selection process: too Jewish, not Jewish enough. I was

[41] Pintel-Ginsberg, I. (2006). Narrating the Past—"New Year of the Trees." Celebrations in Modern Israel. *Israel Studies*, 191.

interested in the end of Passover, reinvigorating a little-celebrated Tikkun Leil Shivi'i Shel Pesach, since Pesach begins with a bang (two seders) and then peters out. What if the break-fast when the holiday ends served as a communal occasion to dedicate our freedom to recommitting ourselves to the idea that the Exodus is not over until we are all free? But it seemed inappropriate to co-opt the existence of Mamouna, the Moroccan festival. The weekend of Parashat Vayera in Cheshvan was promising; the Torah describes Abraham advocating to the Almighty himself on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, feeling that an injustice is about to happen that he must intervene and address. The Shabbat of Dr. King's holiday was also an option, though that weekend is already focused, quite appropriately, on the civil rights hero's legacy in particular.

At one point, someone suggested Pesach Sheini (Second Passover). I confess that I had not heard of this as a holiday. I learned that, in Numbers 9, Israelites who had touched a dead body were not disappointed that they were not permitted to participate in the Passover sacrifice because of their impurity. They had, after all, been performing a public service, so why should they miss out on giving to the Greater Good? They lobbied their representative, Moses, who in turn consulted with G-d, who approved an amendment: these Israelites could make their sacrifice a month after the Passover festival, in what became Pesach Sheini. Since the destruction of the Temple, this occasion has become largely moot, although there are some sects of Judaism who choose to observe this as a holiday of second chances. It had a compelling and largely untapped Jewish narrative, and it fell in the spring, making it a meaningful endpoint for the work of any school community to culminate their year by reviewing their deeds. As we shared the concept with others, it received reactions from intrigue to delight.

What would the Yom HaTzedek ritual look like? In 2020, one of my fellow rabbinical students, Shirah Kraus, and I drafted a ritual centered around reflecting on the past and rededicating oneself to the future. We built the event around a "Tiftach," an opening of the boxes and a private review of its contents. We surrounded this central act with song and the recitation of text; honoring people who demonstrated extraordinary effort in the past year, who might serve as inspiration to others; inviting certain individuals to model the type of reflection that others might pursue; providing processing time for participants to make sense of the conclusions they are drawing; inviting people to take their first new act of another cycle of Tzedek Box by imagining the world differently and rededicating themselves. We also drew upon some of the elements of Passover seder given the connection to Pesach Sheini – such as four questions and a "Maggid" section to tell the story of the past year.[42] Shirah wrote a piece of liturgy for this occasion of opening boxes that contained many liturgical references to "opening":

> We open our eyes to the truth of injustice, *pote'ach ivrim*,[43]
> We open these tzedek boxes
> We open our hands in gratitude and generosity, *pote'ach et yadecha*,[44]
> We open these tzedek boxes
> We open our lips to prayer and words of kindness, *Adonai s'fatai tiftach*,[45]
> We open these tzedek boxes
> We open our hearts to wisdom and love, *p'tach libi*,[46]
> We open these tzedek boxess
> Let us open the gates of righteousness, *pitchu li shaarei tzedek,*[47]
> Let us open these tzedek boxes

[42] See Appendix A, Artifact 3 for more.
[43] Taken from "Nisim B'chol Yom" morning blessings.
[44] Taken from Ashrei prayer.
[45] Opening prayer for the Amidah.
[46] Berakhot 17a:4.
[47] Psalm 118:19.

Given the pandemic, we held a virtual Yom HaTzedek event in 2021, hosted by rabbinical student Kelly Whitehead and comedian and social activist Rain Pryor; as part of that event, we pre-recorded and then screened a video of Tzedek Box users reflecting on what they learned from reviewing their boxes' contents. In May of 2022, also on Zoom, we included an award segment of the ritual, honoring the Jewish Youth Climate Movement and asking two of their representatives to share lessons learned from their year of advocacy. In this iteration of the event, we also gave participants the chance to either talk in small groups or do some private reflection, and we asked everyone to complete a survey – which included qualitative questions such as, "What felt most meaningful and impactful about your work this year? What was most eye-opening or surprising to you about reviewing your tzedek work? What do you want to do differently in your tzedek work this coming year? What, if anything, do you need in order to do more or deeper work in the future?" The most common reply to these surveys was that respondents were both pleasantly surprised by how many actions they had taken – but also that there was so much more they could be doing. These two reactions – pride and humility – were exactly the emotions that we had hoped to see from our participants, a good sign for us. In May 2023, we will be observing and broadcasting our first in-person Yom HaTzedek event, a partnership between Central Synagogue and Congregation Rodeph Sholom in New York.

Starting to Scale

With the core ritual in place, with multiple ways to participate, the question became one of growing the concept. By 2021, the initial crew of rabbinical students who had helped get our first year off the ground had petered out, and I did a big push to

identify new volunteers who could help get the "Tzedek Box" off the ground. I recruited different friends and their friends to serve as volunteers in different capacities: Jill Rodde, to lead our strategy and operations; Lisa Gaetjens to work with our educators; Jodie Sadowsky for marketing and publicity; Miranda Lipton to develop our app content; Jackie Fishman, who wrote grants and eventually supported the sale of Tzedek Boxes; Lauren Stock, who helped run our first year of monthly Tzedek Circles, a virtual gathering of Tzedek Box users to reflect, recharge and get activated featuring a musical guest and representatives of various Jewish organizations focused on justice. I also recruited Dena Robinson, a civil rights attorney, and Darin Lim Yankowitz, a non-profit leader and educator, to serve as lay leader hosts for those gatherings. Lisa and I posted on several educator listservs and recruited a number of Hebrew schools and teen groups involved; I authored a skeleton curriculum that schools could use in conjunction with their boxes (see Appendix A, Artifact 5). As is common with volunteers, some other people were also involved, but did not remain active for long.

In addition to building team infrastructure, a big part of the work has been spreading the word. In addition to developing and working through a list of 300 potential contacts and leads of clergy and education leaders, I wrote multiple pieces for the Union for Reform Judaism website, appeared on several podcasts, gave a workshop at a virtual Limmud conference and presented to a Zoom gathering of Jewish Council of Public Affairs professionals from around the country. I traveled to Charlotte, NC and delivered the keynote address at a NAASE conference for executive directors of Conservative synagogues. I worked with the Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia to arrange for a virtual workshop on making Tzedek Boxes. There is so much more outreach to do, but we have received a few unsolicited requests to

collaborate with us, and Tzedek Box has appeared in multiple publications where we did not do any outreach, such as an article in the Jewish Press of Tampa, Texas Jewish Post and TC Jewfolk.[48]

In order to elevate the Tzedek Box's role as a respected object of Judaica, I was hoping to find a Jewish artist who might create a museum-quality piece that might appear in a respected cultural organization. A friend introduced me to Tobi Kahn, a prominent American artist who has devoted part of his career to Jewish ceremonial objects, including a very well-regarded Omer Counter. Kahn was enthusiastic about the Tzedek Box from the start and immediately agreed to work on a series. After many months of work, generous donors Jonathan and Darcie Crystal enabled the Jewish Museum in New York to acquire the piece. A second donor bought a second Tobi Kahn Tzedek Box for the Skirball Museum in Los Angeles. There will be more on Tobi's piece, along with other artists' visions, in Chapter Three of this thesis, but Tobi's partnership has been a source of uplift and confidence during this process.

Having all sorts of irons in the fire, the operating assumption was to "spread the word," a kind-of Field of Dreams, "if you build it, they will come." But, as we started to look at the data of app usage, I realized that we were trying to socialize not simply a new tool for an old practice, but instigate a new practice all together; people are not accustomed to reflect in writing on their service or justice work. This led to two hurdles. One is that we could not simply assume that having a box, or access to an app, would lead them to adopt the ongoing ritual. The second problem is that people involved in

[48] Eglinton, Rabbi Jean (February 1, 2021). "Be a Blessing," *Jewish Press Tampa,* https://www.jewishpresstampa.com/articles/be-a-blessing/; Seymour, Laura (January 2021). "Do Good Works with Tzedek Box App," Texas Jewish Post, https://tjpnews.com/do-good-works-with-tzedek-box-app; Khabie, Tobias (January 2022), "Jew Review: Tzedek Box," https://tcjewfolk.com/jew-review-tzedek -box-app/

volunteering or social justice work are not used to writing about their experiences. We realized that we needed to partner with communities in which trusted leaders could do the necessary reinforcement – as well as demonstrate how a reflection could be quite raw and emotional. (In Chapter Two, I will share more of my more recent realizations about reflections, informed by rabbinic perspectives from across the ages.)

I was fortunate for a place to figure out what to do instead. During the 2021-22 school year, I entered a fellowship sponsored by the Center for Rabbinic Innovation, which emphasizes a methodology of building community over time and perfecting a signature strategy. I used the Tzedek Circle as a community structure and testbed for experimentation. How might we make that an event that people would want to come back to attend each month? I solicited feedback. Dena, Darin, Lauren and I made adjustments each month and reassessed our approaches. We took a gamble and moved our sessions from Saturday night, which we had chosen to correspond with Havdalah, to Sunday night, which some people told us would be more convenient. We watched our numbers each month; we started to retain more participants and grow our audience. We made other adjustments to the balance between action and reflection, expanding our event to an hour and adding a breakout room segment to the occasion, even though we feared that people might leave. To our surprise, we retained most of our audience.

This experience helped solidify for me the belief that our work would be best driven in community, and I was receiving requests from a few institutions about whether we might have a physical box that they could distribute to their members – as opposed to making boxes or using an app. After some conversations with trusted contacts, I identified Israeli artist Eli Kaplan Wildmann, an ingenious, creative person who had experience making engaging ritual objects. In fact, he had completed multiple

projects for Central Synagogue, one of the institutions interested in moving forward with the initiative for all of its members. With the help of Central Synagogue Rabbi Nicole Auerbach, I recruited multiple synagogues such that we could meet the 6,000-box threshold in order to make a production run affordable at the per-unit level, including the Conservative synagogues of Temple Emanuel of the Pascack Valley in Bergen County, NJ and Temple Bet Tiferet outside Philadelphia. We sold the boxes at bulk for $14 per box – and ended up selling 8,300 of them in time for distribution during the 5783 High Holy Day season. I created a Playbook to help synagogue partners think through the implementation of the initiative.[49] These institutions are generating their own rituals, including the act of inviting an honoree to insert a reflection slip inside the synagogue's collective Tzedek Box during Friday night candle-lighting. The project has begun to have a life of its own.

Taking Stock

The past five years have suggested several high-level themes that help explain the current state of the Tzedek Box ritual. Among the most important factors to consider when establishing a ritual aimed at wide-spread adoption by contemporary Jewish communities has been anticipating or responding to the needs and perspectives of potential users. If users did not demonstrate interest, it would have been a no-go. Part of the appeal of a new ritual for Jewish audiences is its connection with traditions of the past, or at least its recognizability for older customs. The proposed holiday likely would not have worked if it did not reflect core Jewish principles or involve identifiable Jewish rituals – such as if the purpose was to celebrate the act of stealing, or if it involved

[49] See Appendix A, Artifact 6.

decorating a small tree with shiny, colored balls. Given the importance of justice and equality for contemporary Jewish audiences, as well as the wide-spread familiarity with a Tzedekah Box and the concept of repentance if not explicit written reflection, Yom HaTzedek and the Tzedek Box have not felt wholly foreign.

Building on the idea that one's audience matters, this project has adopted a participatory, iterative, open design process with a bias toward action and failing forward. While the original concept centered around the creation of a new holiday, the organization and its website are called Tzedek Box, prioritizing the more frequent ritual over the annual one. While I began by making boxes with various audiences, I spent 90 percent of my energy building a digital app. It has turned once again to promoting the physical box. While at one point the strategy was to spread the practice through word of mouth, and attracting users through mass media appearances, now I focus on recruiting institutions through building relationships. Everything from concept to strategy has been subject to learning and changing. That evolutionary process was largely a response to the needs and interests of users. Developing a ritual is not and should not necessarily be a popularity contest; however, like the rabbis who tried unsuccessfully to shelve the Kol Nidre prayer, the perspectives of the Jewish people themselves ultimately determine whether a ritual has staying power or not. "*Puk hazei mai amma davar*," the Talmudists wrote when seeking to determine certain halacha regarding blessings over water. "Look and see what the people are doing. [Then determine the law]."[50]

I have also taken the long-view when it comes to achieving my hope that this ritual will inspire greater impact and reach. Not everyone is immediately going to reflect meaningfully. Not everyone is going to engage in significant acts of justice. It may be the

[50] BT Berachot 45a.

case that some people simply have a Tzedek Box on their shelf and do not use it, reflecting their value of *tzedek* even if they do not use the box for its intended purpose or even if they do not engage in active *tzedek* work. I understand that we need to start where we are. At the same time, this also requires discipline in not trying to rush to scale. We could, for example, partner with museum stores to carry versions of the Eli Kaplan Wildmann Tzedek Box, but that would mean distributing the ritual object without a community of practice with which to guide or accompany the ritual.

To return to Vanessa Ochs's point from the beginning of this chapter, the history of this ritual did not flow neatly from concept to liturgy to object. Once we hit upon the idea that there was going to be a Tzedek Box, we then thought about the purpose it would serve – the reflection and, ultimately, sacred accountability it offered. I have since emphasized these elements as fundamental when planning the liturgy and other elements of the observance. While some might say we thought outside of the box to create this ritual, I might reply that we had to think outside of the holiday to come up with the box.

CHAPTER TWO:
RABBIS INFORM THE REFLECTIONS

The previous chapter detailed the creative process that led to the development of the Tzedek Box and Yom HaTzedek, including multiple iterations based on the perspectives of early adopters. Yet a Jewish ritual focused on reflection and self-improvement must not only take cues from current users, but also learn from generations of sages who have developed and refined practices of self-improvement. This chapter explores the work of multiple rabbis over the centuries who have contributed considerably to the field of Mussar, the Jewish movement for personal character development, and specifically had unique perspectives on the practice of *cheshbon ha-nefesh*, the accounting of the soul: Bahya ibn Paquda (1050-1120, Andalucia), Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (the Ramchal) of 18th century Amsterdam, 19th century Haskalah thinker Menachem Mendl Leffin of Poland. It then describes the more contemporary work of American leaders who have brought *cheshbon ha-nefesh* to the 21st century in different ways, including IKAR Rabbi Sharon Brous, Jewish diversity advocate Yavilah McCoy, author Rabbi David Jaffe and Ramchal interpreter Rabbi Ira Stone. Their respective insights serve as sources of additional depth to inform the future practice of the Tzedek Box. Given that the work of writing down one's deeds and then reviewing the contents of one's Tzedek Box are forms of *cheshbon ha-nefesh*, this chapter will zero in on the unique lessons that one might draw about the work of creating a spiritual inventory from each of these rabbis' writings.

Bahya ibn Paquda: Recognize Your Obligations

Bahya ibn Paquda (circa 1050-1120), one of the pre-eminent Jewish philosophers and rabbis of the Iberian Peninsula in the Middle Ages, wrote what is widely considered the first text devoted exclusively to Jewish ethical behavior, *Duties of the Heart*. Influenced by both Saadia Gaon and Islamic thinkers in al-Andalus, Bahya believed that a focus on fulfilling *mitzvot* neglected a critical aspect of devotion to G-d: the inner motivations and attitudes that fuel all of our behaviors. While much of Judaism is about the "obligation of the limbs," he felt previous sages had ignored what he termed *chobot ha-lebabot,* or duties of the heart.[51] It became his mission to illuminate proper internal feelings and mindsets, helping his readers eliminate worldly and self-interested motives that prevent true connection and focus on G-d. Using citations from both Tanach and Talmud, Bahya taught that pure intentions – when fulfilling behavioral commandments, but also when living life generally – are essential to experiencing peace and wholeness with G-d. To illustrate his point, Bahya used the meta-example of vacillating before writing *Duties of the Heart.* He recognized that laziness and selfish pursuits of pleasure often lead people to stray from the path of righteousness, and that he had to overpower these feelings within himself in order to author the book that taught people about it!

In a logical approach that befits Bahya's embrace of rationalism, his book outlines a series of "gates" that serve as a journey to the essence of loving G-d by moving methodically from one premise to another. In this internal odyssey, the book links a recognition of G-d's unity with an appreciation of G-d's creation and therefore a responsibility to be devoted to G-d. Bahya reasoned that if we recognize that G-d is the ultimate source, and if we are able to see all that G-d has created, then we should feel a

[51] Bahya Ibn Pakuda (2017). *Duties of the Heart*, translated by Yosef Sebag. (Original work published in 1080). Dafyomireview.com. Introduction: 48.

sense of responsibility to serve G-d above all else with a sense of trust, devotion and submission. Such submission helps fuel a recognition of our smallness and our fallibility, which in turn compels us to pursue repentance when we inevitably stumble. The work of repentance requires regular practice of self-accounting to assess whether we are indeed operating with full devotion to G-d. This process of evaluating one's actions can lead one to understand the need for abstinence, for relinquishing that which is not in service of G-d. Empty of those distractions, we can be prepared to fully explore love of G-d and G-d's will. This is the essential journey that Bahya outlined.

The work of self-accounting, articulated as *cheshbon im ha-nefesh*, is central to this journey and will be the focus of this analysis. Citing David as a role model of repentance, Bahya drew on the Psalms as a touchstone for his chapter on *cheshbon:* "I considered my ways and returned my feet to your testimonies."[52] Such a verse speaks to the fundamental educability of the human spirit, the recognition that we can use our intellect to make changes, and the spiritual possibility of transforming from sin to goodness through conscious reconsideration.

Bahya built on rabbinic tradition when choosing to use the word *cheshbon*. Talmudic authors saw a *cheshbon* as a sum associated with *mitzvot*. While Kohelet 7:27-29 discounts the idea of humans being held accountable for their actions, Sotah 8b:17 draws on these verses to imagine the reverse: that each deed does add up in a *cheshbon gadol*, a great accounting. Bava Batra 9b:1 echoes this idea by interpreting Isaiah 59:17 to mean that, just like each small metal loop combines to create a large chainmail, so too does each act of *tzedek* combine for a *cheshbon gadol*. Taking the concept to a communal level, Avodah Zarah 4a:8 suggests that, even if the Jewish people

[52] Psalm 119:59.

perform scant acts of goodness individually, G-d will amass those deeds into a *cheshbon gadol.* It is foolhardy, even evil, not to take time to analyze one's actions. Bava Batra 78b:13-14 sees Cheshbon in Numbers 21:27-28 not as a place, but as an activity of taking action of calculating one's deeds; a fire is extinguished for those who conduct this accounting, while those who do not are consumed. These citations reflect a broad belief of G-d as a just magistrate, using facts as opposed to whims when passing divine judgment. They also suggest it is both wise and virtuous to be conscious of the facts of one's own case.

In *Duties of the Heart*, *cheshbon* is more than a sum; it is a balance sheet that requires meticulousness on several levels.[53] It involves checking the alignment between our spiritual values and our personal behaviors.[54] It is unacceptable to perform "duties of the limbs" mindlessly, technically heeding commandments while lacking fervent intent – or, all the more so, harboring sinful thoughts. To perform this internal audit, humans must recognize that we are different from other beings; we have brains that enable us to reflect. This fact leads to a series of logical conclusions: our consciousness should enable us to recognize that we have received many gifts from G-d. Indeed, part of the regular *cheshbon* includes remaining cognizant of the many different reasons why human beings ought to feel grateful, including for creation itself, for one's body, for one's intellect, for the Torah, and for G-d's ongoing stewardship of the natural world.[55] Bahya posits that it is only logical to understand that we owe G-d based on those gifts -- and to further comprehend that we will never fully settle our debt to G-d. Yet our obligation to the debt remains, and the best we can do is conduct calculations to

[53] Bahya, Introduction: 99.
[54] Ibid., Eighth Treatise: 1.1.
[55] Ibid., Eighth Treatise: 3.2, 3.5, 3.7, 3.9. 3:179.

determine whether our exertions are matching our capabilities. Apt to use parables, Bahya asked his readers to imagine receiving money from a king for a certain purpose. The king would expect a report at the end of the month to make sure the recipient hadn't spent it on any other purpose.[56] The language of *cheshbon* helps to center the questions of duty and our ability to discern that duty. Bahya emphasized the importance of recognizing and attempting to reciprocate G-d's goodness.

Underlying Bahya's argument is a multi-faceted theology rooted in accountability, to a point. His motives for perfecting one's behavior began by taking stock of G-d's goodness to us and our ancestors and we owe in return loyalty and gratitude. However, Bahya also urged his readers to recognize that we are being viewed by G-d at all times, that we should fear the wrath of G-d, and that we should be prepared for a great day of accounting and the world to come.[57] Bahya marveled that human beings are inclined to be deferential to wealthy or powerful people on Earth, but ironically fail to calibrate their devotion to G-d, whose greatness dwarfs anything else in both time and space. If we would dress up in finery in order to greet a king, surely we should ensure that our insides are also pristine given that the King of Kings can see every aspect of who we are![58] That said, he also cited Avot 1:3, that we should not serve G-d in order to receive a reward.[59] Indeed, he quoted an unnamed *hassid* that, if one were to take strict accounting of one's needs, one would not merit a place in the World to Come. Therefore, while G-d represents justice, G-d's kindness tips the scales in the human being's favor.[60]

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[56] Bahya, Eighth Treatise: 3.88.
[57] Eighth Treatise: 2.5, 3.79.
[58] Eighth Treatise: 3.77.
[59] Eighth Treatise: 3.40.
[60] Fourth Treatise: 4.115.

Bahya made the concept of accountability manifest by referencing the divine tool of a concrete book of records. Every accountant needs a ledger. Early in *Duties of the Heart*, Bahya wrote that each person is assigned two counselors – Wisdom (*sechel)* and Desire (*taavah*), who are in turn each assigned a scribe.[61] Wisdom's scribe writes down one's good deeds, whether public or private, and Desire's scribe does the same for one's "evil" deeds.[62] Bahya then noted that, on one's deathbed, one is shown the accounting records of one's actions and thoughts.[63] Like with *cheshbon,* the notion of such a book does not originate with Bahya. In Mishnah Avot, we read: "The eye sees, the ear hears, and all of your actions are written in a book."[64] In the same tractate, the concept continues; Akabyah ben Mahalalel further taught that we must know "from where you came, to where you are going, and to whom you will give an account."[65] Moreover, the idea of a grand accounting is expanded in the Talmudic tractate Taanit, where a person's deeds are enumerated, and the deceased needs to sign a statement attesting to the accuracy of the ledger; such painstaking documentation validates and embodies the justice that G-d enacts upon each person.[66] Bolstered by these ideas of the Mishnah and Talmud, Bahya stated in his chapter on *cheshbon* that "your days are like scrolls, so write on them what you want to be remembered."[67]

While Bahya did not describe what it looks like to conduct the accounting beyond thinking about the 30 different topics of reflection that he outlined, he recommended certain methods. The accounting is not simply about your own behaviors or intentions,

[61] Third Treatise: 9.17-18.
[62] Third Treatise: 9.18.
[63] Third Treatise: 9.31.
[64] BT Pirkei Avot 2:1.
[65] BT Pirkei Avot 3:1.
[66] BT Taanit 11a:13.
[67] Bahya, Eighth Treatise: 3.90.

but also what you owe G-d for what G-d has done; he wrote about this mindset of "owing" again and again.[68] He recommended performing a *cheshbon* regularly because he noted that you would not want to be in anguish during Yom HaHeshbon HaGadol, which is presumably the day of your death.[69] In seeking to pay your debts to G-d, he emphasized that no deposit in the account book is too small.[70] Bahya indicated that such efforts would have immediate, not only long-term, effects. In addition to being prepared for a day of judgment, you can achieve an Earthly peace from sadness and calm your heart.[71]

All told, Bahya used *cheshbon* as a metaphor, rooted in Jewish tradition, to assert a mindset of accountability and emphasize human rationality. You received a gift of existence. You now owe. What you owe, in both thought and deed, is limitless. You should understand this because you received a special gift that other animals did not: *sechel*. Use your *sechel* to determine your capabilities against your exertions. Recognize which of your thoughts or actions are problematic, abstain from them, so that you can concentrate on serving G-d. The role of *cheshbon* is to cultivate recognition of your obligations.

Ramchal: Life Is a Battlefield

Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (1707-1746), also known by the acronym of his name, the Ramchal, was born in Padua and quickly established himself as a prodigy, reporting mystical encounters at a young age. Forbidden from teaching the Zohar, Luzzatto moved

[68] Bayha, Introduction: 97; Second Treatise: 5.29; Third Treatise: 4.38; 5.9; 6.13; Fifth Treatise: 5.122; Eighth Treatise, 3.103; among others.
[69] Eighth Treatise: 2.5. I believe Bahya originated this term. I cannot find any earlier reference to Yom HaCheshbon HaGadol on sefaria.org.
[70] Fifth Treatise: 6.5.
[71] Eighth Treatise: 3.82.

to Amsterdam, continued his studies of Kabbalah, but put his literary energies into his masterwork on ethical instruction, *Mesillat Yesharim*. He viewed the essence of existence as fulfilling commandments and overcoming trials in order to draw closer to G-d.[72] He stated that his aim in writing his book was to help his readers do what they already knew to be righteous. In that respect, he paid indirect homage to Bahya, upon whose philosophy he drew heavily. Yet whereas Bahya established his exploration of human purpose through the creation of a series of "gates" in *Duties of the Heart,* the Ramchal in *Mesillat Yesharim* drew on a progression outlined in a Talmudic teaching to describe a path to a redeemed world.[73] Your character traits, known as *middot* from the word meaning "measure," can be calculated and calibrated. If the base of Jewish life is Torah, then the first step after Torah is *zehirut*, watchfulness that one is indeed fulfilling the *mitzvot*. In the Ramchal's formulation, that watchfulness involves *cheshbon ha-nefesh*.

While both Bahya and the Ramchal focused on the importance of ethical behavior, they differed in emphasis when it came to the purpose of *cheshbon*. Bahya wrote at length about the extent to which human beings ought to take stock of what they owe G-d, whereas the Ramchal's writings on *cheshbon* concentrated squarely on the work of taking an inventory of one's own behavior. Like his counterpart from al-Andalus, the Ramchal alluded to the image in Pirkei Avot of a book that lists all of our actions in the world.[74] They also both urged their readers to concern themselves with *olam ha-ba*, the world to come. Rather than indulge our bodies in the temporary world of physicality, the Ramchal noted plainly that we are to prepare our souls for the world

[72] Luzzatto, M. H., Stone, I. F., & Kaplan, M. M. (2011). *Mesillat yesharim: the path of the upright*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1.26-1.28.
[73] Avodah Zara 20b.
[74] Luzzatto, 25:5.

of infinity.[75] Since human beings can only complete good deeds while alive, this should be the focus before death. Yet as opposed to Bahya, who leaned on the metaphor of accounting in order to emphasize how humans owe G-d for the gifts of being alive, healthy, sentient, intelligent and availed of the Torah, the Ramchal focused on accounting in order for human beings to take careful inventory of their actions.

This may be related to the extent to which Luzzatto viewed existence as a struggle. Whereas Bahya did discuss the unbridled impulses of the *yetzer* in *Duties of the Heart*, the Ramchal doubled-down on describing life as a battlefield in which humans need to overcome the *yetzer*, powerful inclinations and lusts. He went into detail about the *yetzer* as a formidable adversary, intentionally withholding from people the time to reflect on their actions.[76] As a result, the Ramchal lamented that most people walk through life following unexamined habits and lose track of what is being recorded without intentional diligence.[77] Referencing Jeremiah 8:6, he noted that many people rush to action like horses, failing to use the gift of their human intellect. He considered such ignorance of one's behavior dangerous, like a blind man walking on the side of a river.[78] [79] If people spent the time to deliberate about their actions, he notes, they would be far more cautious and operate far less rashly and irresponsibly.[80] Therefore, the Ramchal emphasized the importance of using one's *haskel* (reason) and to engage in *hitbonenut*, which connotes self-scrutiny and self-improvement.[81]

[75] Luzzatto, 1:15.
[76] Luzzatto, 2:8.
[77] Luzzatto, 2:1.
[78] Luzzatto, 2:4.
[79] Luzzatto, 2:6.
[80] Luzzatto, 2:9.
[81] Luzzatto, 2:1-2.

In response to the wily nature of the *yetzer*, the Ramchal believed we must cultivate the ability to see ourselves clearly and that multiple stages of scrutiny help to illuminate the true reality of one's actions. Viewing the *mitzvot* like jewels – fitting that Luzzatto was a diamond-cutter by profession – the Ramchal indicated that one's behavior requires the careful accounting of a banker.[82] As opposed to waiting for divine judgment, a human being must proactively use the "balance scales" as a method for weighing one's actions regularly.[83] In order to engage in *cheshbon ha-nefesh,* the Ramchal cited BT Eruvin 13 in proposing a two-part strategy: first *pishpush* and later *mashmesh.*[84] The former is to look at one's actions generally and consider whether a potential action is aligned with commanded *mitzvot:* is doing X in line with the Torah? The latter is to look at one's completion of *mitzvot* with extra scrutiny: did I do this in a way that requires correction in the future? (This process has found echoes in the work of 20th century learning theorist Donald Schon, who distinguished between "reflection-in-action," which involves thinking in the moment, and "reflection-on-action," which involves a retrospective analysis.[85]) The Ramchal also used the analogy of checking a garment to determine if the fabric is good and strong or weak and frayed.[86] Noting that humans often live in the metaphorical darkness regarding our own behavior, we are prone to mistake what we've done for something else.[87] Therefore, he emphasized the importance of objectivity and honesty as core principles to avoid self-deception.

[82] Luzzatto, 1:25.
[83] Luzzatto, 3:5-6.
[84] Luzzatto, 3:7-3:9.
[85] Schön, D. A. (1983). The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action. New York: Basic Books.
[86] Luzzatto, 3:10.
[87] Luzzatto, 3:18-21.

Whereas Bahya spent much of his writing on *cheshbon* focused on the content of reflection, the Ramchal offered additional, concrete strategies for the process of doing so. He advised setting definite times for reflection so that the self-examination would not be haphazard.[88] He suggested that his readers pay attention to the *mitzvot* that excite them, since zeal builds momentum.[89] He believed that the Torah was the antidote to an unbridled *yetzer ha-ra*, so he emphasized the importance of studying Jewish text and their commentators as source material for reflection on ideal behavior.[90] He also employed the image of a labyrinth in which there are many false paths; one method to overcome the mystery of the maze is to reach a watchtower, from which one would have the perspective to see the way of righteousness plainly.[91] Therefore, he noted that others should trust those who have reached the tower; people who have done the hard work of spiritual accounting merit stature and attention.[92] He recommended seclusion in one's chamber, reading psalms and studying the stories of potential pious role models.[93] The Ramchal's methods were not spelled-out in great detail, but they offered a level of concreteness previously unarticulated.

Menachem Mendel Leffin: Meticulous Methodology

Menachem Mendel Leffin (1749-1826), born in Poland, was an early author in the *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment) movement who sought to combine Jewish thought with European Enlightenment ideas in an attempt to wean his fellow Jews off what he viewed were the excesses of Hassidism. His ideas were later adopted by Israel Salanter,

[88] Luzzatto, 3:12.
[89] Luzzatto, 6:1.
[90] Luzzatto, 4:2.
[91] Luzzatto, 3:27.
[92] Luzzatto, 3:29.
[93] Luzzatto, 21:3.

considered the father of the modern Mussar movement, and his book, *Cheshbon Ha-Nefesh*, reflects a bridge between Jewish tradition and 19th century scientific understanding. Leffin framed one's spiritual work as the intellect taming the animal instinct; rather than focus on a *yetzer*, he references a *nefesh ha-behamit*. Human beings, Leffin noted, are animals, but we also have a mind that can direct our behaviors productively. We have free choice. The question is: how do we maneuver ourselves with both intellect and an animal spirit? It is not a question he believes that previous authors have fully answered.

Early in *Cheshbon Ha-Nefesh,* Leffin described a history of how Jews have handled this quest over time, which he finds wanting on a number of levels. He first noted that, in the earliest generations, Jews were able to stop bad behaviors quickly because they summoned the fear of G-d.[94] (Given the notorious misbehavior of the Israelites of Tanach, it is not quite clear whom Leffin was referencing.) He then indicated that sages of the Mishnah and Talmud recognized the relative weakness of their own contemporaries and therefore offered aphorisms – for example, "be careful of three things" – to reinforce certain character traits that could help one stand up against sin.[95] Behavior has only devolved since, Leffin argued. He alluded to Bahya explicitly when lamenting that *Duties of the Heart* provided little concrete instruction for character development; he indicates that he would have liked a record of the life of these rabbis, to provide some concrete illustration of the methods they employed.[96]

Writing that "mussar without advice is not sufficient at all," Leffin chronicled how the practical applications of *cheshbon ha-nefesh* have evolved over time.[97] In

[94] Mendel, M. (1996). Cheshbon Hanefesh. Israel: Feldheim Publishers, paragraph 12.
[95] Mendel, paragraph 13.
[96] Mendel, paragraph 19.
[97] Mendel, paragraph 49.

general, he saw high value in taking a systematic approach to noticing your specific daily behaviors; doing so reminds people of their sins and reinforces their remorse, making it less likely they will continue in the future.[98] Yet, in Leffin's view, implementing this method has varied from too vague to too all-consuming. In the past, Leffin reported that the practice of *cheshbon* first involved making internal observations and taking mental notes; however, more recently, the process morphed to include recording one's sins explicitly. Yet, he writes, this act of note-taking in real-time became so consuming that it prevented people from actually serving G-d.[99] This became a practice in constant flux, shaped by its efficacy with adherents.

Highlighting a "new strategy," Leffin describes an approach to behavior modification quite similar to methods previously published by American autodidact Benjamin Franklin.[100] (The extent to which Leffin borrowed from Franklin explicitly is the source of scholarly discussion; the Pole does not cite the Philadelphian.[101]) The process involves a very specific methodology.[102] In a regimented fashion, a practitioner cultivates one of thirteen different character traits (*middot)* by reading mussar literature on the trait, summarizing the literature with short statements and then with a single codeword that gets repeated like a mantra. Each morning, the student recites the codeword and pauses to consider how it can be implemented that day. Then, there is practice to put the trait into action. There is a nightly review in which there is a physical chart on which to tally one's actions, as well as any notable events that may have contributed to one's progress or lapse. The student reviews the chart weekly and a

[98] Mendel, paragraph 13.
[99] Mendel, paragraph 13.
[100] Mendel, paragraph 20.
[101] Afsai, S. (2019). Benjamin Franklin's Influence on Mussar Thought and Practice: a Chronicle of Misapprehension. *Review of Rabbinic Judaism*, *22*(2), 228-276.
[102] Mendel, paragraphs 22-27.

summation annually. Generation-wise, Leffin falls in between Swedish botanist Carl Linneaus and Austrian naturalist Gregor Mendl, and this deliberate approach to categorizing and tracking human behavior feels at home with broader scientific trends of the day.

Notably, Leffin's focus was on incrementally removing impediments to progress. A person is to make notations for "violations."[103] "Days of progress" are when violations are diminishing. Anticipate varied rates of progress and periods of regression, he instructed. If you continue to struggle, investigate the source of the impediment.[104] He encouraged students to investigate the reasons behind failure to improve – such as poorly-chosen friends, or improvements or setbacks in business – in order to correct behavior. Rather than focusing on celebrating success, our attention should be directed toward *tikkun*, repair.[105] The highly regimented approach, then adopted by Israel Salanter and the Mussar movement he grew in Eastern Europe in the 19th century, took the seeds planted by Bahya ibn Paquda and turned them into a well-ordered garden, weeds plucked every day.

Mussar in the Present Day: Searching Inward and Outward

Contemporary Mussar expert Alan Morinis has continued to refine the method that Leffin outlined, popularizing the focus on improving one *middah* at a time – though seeing more value in a freestyle journal approach than a quantitative "scorecard."[106] Yet while organizations like the Mussar Institute have contributed to a Mussar revival in the past several decades, particularly as a practice in Elul in advance of the High Holy Days,

[103] Mendel, paragraph 27.
[104] Mendel, paragraph 29.
[105] Mendel, paragraph 30.
[106] Morinis, Alan. (2007). *Everyday Holiness*. Boulder: Trumpeter Press, 272.

a growing number of rabbis have been particularly explicit about tying the work not only to personal betterment, but also to world improvement. In certain ways, this development brings the evolution of Mussar full circle; as one of several steps in his *cheshbon* instructions, Bahya ibn Pakuda encouraged his readers to perform an accounting of their "*tikknot ha-olam*," of their commitment to shared needs in society, as a way to love your neighbor as yourself.[107] Rabbi Amy J. Sapowith, Rabbi Miriam Margles, educator Yavilah McCoy, Rabbi Sharon Brous, Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz, Rabbi David Jaffe, and Rabbi Ira Stone represent a few diverse contemporary examples of linking self and society through Mussar.

In recent years, particularly as issues of racial justice have gained renewed public attention, some congregational rabbis have applied the concept of *cheshbon ha-nefesh* on the High Holy Days to name communal attitudes, systems and policies that oppress marginalized groups of people. In her Kol Nidre Sermon on the legacy of slavery in 2019, Rabbi Amy J. Sapowith told her congregation in Loudon County, Virginia: "This is the time for *cheshbon hanefesh*, a full accounting of ourselves. To the extent that we have wittingly or unwittingly perpetuated racism; to the extent that we have wittingly or unwittingly failed to dismantle racism, we can atone."[108] She then offered suggestions of readings, volunteer opportunities and advocacy that her congregants could pursue for multiracial justice. In 2020, the year George Floyd's murder by police sparked ongoing protests in American streets, Rabbi Miriam Margles of Toronto's Danforth Jewish Circle told her congregation that their *cheshbon ha-nefesh* work during the High Holy Days was both personal and communal: "Jewishly, this is a particularly potent time to discern

[107] Bahya, Eighth Treatise: 3.171.
[108] Sapowith, Amy (2019). Kol Nidre 5780. https://images.shulcloud.com/763/uploads/YKEve5780.pdf

what our community's anti-racism work can and should look for the long road of transformation ahead. What is the process of teshuva that we need internally, within the DJC, and what can be our outward-facing commitments and actions?"[109] She then noted that several members of the congregation were involved in a group addressing anti-hate in a local neighborhood. That same year, Yavilah McCoy, a speaker and educator who supports Jewish communities in diversity and equity efforts, wrote a powerful communal *al cheit* "for the sins of racism," used by a number of congregations across the country during Yom Kippur.[110] The Jewish Emergent Network then partnered with McCoy to develop a multi-step self-guided curriculum to support anti-racist attitudes and actions.[111] In each of these cases, leaders sought to use the marquee of the High Holy Days as a signpost for the ongoing road of reflection and action for social change.

Different communities are experimenting with different ways to support behavioral change with a justice aim. Rabbi Sharon Brous of Los Angeles-based congregation IKAR has described the work of the High Holy Days as a journey of traveling through concentric circles of increased scope. In 2007, she told Krista Tippett from OnBeing:

> I don't start off by when people come in on Erev Rosh Hashanah, you know, the first night of Rosh Hashanah, I don't start off by saying, you know, 'Look at you. What are you doing about the mess of the world?' You know? We start off by saying, because I see this journey that sort of takes us from, as I call it, you know, as I understand it, it's really journey from Heshbon HaNefesh, which is an accounting of the soul of the individual to Heshbon Nefesh HaMishpaha to, sort of, looking at the way that we are in our family's accounting of the soul of our families. Heshbon Nefesh HaAm, this is by the time we get to Yom Kippur, an

[109] Margles, Miriam (August 4, 2020). "Miriam's Cup: Anti-Racism and Teshuvah," https://djctoronto.com/miriams-cup-anti-racism-and-teshuva/
[110] McCoy, Yavilah (2020). "Al Chet," https://www.jewishemergentnetwork.org/al-chet
[111] McCoy, Yavilah, Dimensions Educational Consulting and the Jewish Emergent Network (2020). "Confessions of the Heart," https://www.jewishemergentnetwork.org/confessions-of-the-heart

> accounting of the soul of the Jewish people. And ultimately, Heshbon Nefesh HaOlam, an accounting of the soul of the whole world.[112]

Brous's experience has taught her that it is overwhelming for people to take their own measure of responsibility for the injustices of the world without first considering whether you are the parent or friend you want to be first. Then, Brous argues, you can ask yourself: "Are you the American you want to be? Are you the human being you want to be in the world?"[113]

The confessional nature of the High Holy Days encourages an examination of past negative behavior, but Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz offers additional uses for the work of *cheshbon hanefesh*. This activist, author and founder of the Orthodox social justice organization Uri L'Tzedek uses the term to describe a deliberate process of considering the intersection of the needs of society with one's strengths and interests. He argues that doing so can provide the fuel and stamina for investing oneself in long-term change work. "To make the greatest possible contribution to the world, each of us must take a *cheshbon hanefesh* (self-accounting) of our spheres of influence and personal callings," Yanklowitz writes. "When we act to address issues that we are passionate about and contribute where we have the greatest potential, we ensure maximum sustainability and impact."[114] There is not necessarily an established process to help people implement Yanklowitz's recommendations for reorienting one's life path, but his conception of *cheshbon* opens up the possibility that an inventory is not limited to one's deficiencies, but also one's assets.

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[112] Tippett, Krista (September 6, 2007). "Sharon Brous: Days of Awe" on "On Being," https://onbeing.org/programs/sharon-brous-days-of-awe/
[113] Ibid.
[114] Yanklowitz, S. (2016). "Jewish Approaches to Social Change." In: Ben-Avie, M., Ives, Y., Loewenthal, K. (eds) *Applied Jewish Values in Social Sciences and Psychology*. Springer.

As a different method of using *cheshbon* to guide one's work as a change agent in society, Rabbi David Jaffe uses the methodical process of improving *middot* in his book *Changing the World From the Inside Out*. While drawing on Alan Morinis's approach (as adapted from Leffin's model, as adapted from Benjamin Franklin), Jaffe emphasizes that the work of *tikkun middot* is a way to contribute to *tikkun olam*, that clarifying and living in sync with your values everyday is the pathway for making your unique contribution on Earth. By doing the work of improving your character traits, he posits, you are cultivating your best self to offer to the world.[115] To make these links explicit, Jaffe offers unique anecdotes that apply directly to the work of activism, advocacy and direct service when providing instruction about various *middot*, such as humility or patience. Students of this method pursue an ongoing commitment to identifying blockages to their intended behavior, including regular journaling. Like his book title indicates, Jaffe seeks to go beyond the personal implications for Mussar work, instead seeing careful scrutiny of one's behavior as an instigator for social change.

Jaffe is serious about the *nefesh* part of *cheshbon ha-nefesh* and points to an interplay between the spiritual health of individuals and communities. He writes, "We make a *Cheshbon ha-nefesh* by taking an honest look at ourselves and the state of our being. How do our beliefs and patterns of behavior impact the state of our soul? How do external systems and oppression impact our soul? *Cheshbon ha-nefesh* requires that we are curious about and care for our souls."[116] Jaffe asserts that, as the key to one's ability to perceive and connect with G-d's oneness, the soul requires protection. Through regular attention, we can remove blockages that prevent our souls' light from shining

[115] Jaffe, D. (2016), 32-35.
[116] Jaffe, D. (2019). "A Spiritual Practice for Black History Month," https://www.rabbidavidjaffe.com/a-spiritual-practice-for-black-history-month/

forth. He therefore invites his readers to look to many sources for investigation: one's intentions, one's long-held beliefs, one's behaviors, as well as factors like the effects of racism, other forms of oppression and violence. This allows us to recognize the ways in which paternalism, saviorism, or a need for attention are subverting our efforts. Rather than simply finding fault with the individual, this approach acknowledges the role that society and its influences, prejudices and deep indignities may play on one's soul and therefore on one's actions. Such a rich exploration can invite the person reflecting to consider how they must participate in the civic arena in order to counter the forces that cause harm to themselves and others.

Rabbi Ira Stone complements this work by engaging in a modern interpretation or revisioning of the Ramchal's theology. Progressive Jews largely do not consider *mitzvot* to be binding and may struggle to conceptualize a relationship with the G-d of the Torah. Therefore, Stone conceptualizes the seminal milestones of the *chumash* – Creation, Revelation and Redemption – to be ongoing experiences in our own lives today. Drawing on the work of 20th century Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, he teaches that our selves are essentially created when we are seen by another; we become ourselves when others acknowledge our existence. We experience revelation when we recognize the obligation we owe to the Other for seeing us into existence. Finally, we fulfill redemption when we carry the burden of the Other upon realizing the obligation we owe. Therefore, the experience of living Torah means operating with care toward an increasing number of others – stretching our embrace as far as possible to reach the "Infinite Beloved." In other words, rather than feeling responsible to G-d directly, Stone suggests that we direct our sense of reciprocity to G-d's agents on Earth – the Other.[117]

[117] Stone, I. (2013). *A responsible life: The spiritual path of Mussar*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Similarly, Stone re-conceives the *yetzer ha-ra* as inclination to work for the self and find pleasure, whereas the *yetzer ha-tov* is about focusing on others and supporting their joy.[118] Practically, that may mean that we are called to shift the focus of reflection on our behavior from "how did this make me feel?" to "how did this experience affect another person?"[119] Such an orientation – centering our minds on our commitment to one another as a contemporary enactment of our ancient narrative – may feel more theologically satisfying to those less inclined to take Torah literally.

Moreover, in Stone's conception, *olam ha-zeh* and *olam ha-ba* are not "temporal or geographic realities but rather dimensions of reality that human beings experience."[120] When we indulge in the *yetzer ha-ra* and dwell only in self-absorption, we remain in *olam ha-zeh*. When we tap into the *yetzer ha-tov* and also serve the needs and joys of others, we help manifest *olam ha-ba*. Like others, Stone acknowledges the value of the *yetzer ha-ra* in the creative energies it fuels; he writes that we must bear the burden of the Other "to the point of suppressing self-interest but not to the point of self-erasure" and seek to "act out of the *yetzer ha-tov* as completely as possible without denying the necessity of the *yetzer ha-ra*, which ensures our continuation in life."[121] Yet, rather than requiring individuals to subscribe to the notion of a postmortem "world to come," Stone's approach allows his adherents to focus fully on life on Earth while maintaining a relationship with older teachings. Such a theological orientation honors the impulse to care deeply about improving today's world for its sake, rather than performing deeds that will preserve the soul after death.

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[118] Luzzatto, M. H., Stone, I. F., & Kaplan, M. M. (2011). *Mesillat yesharim: the path of the upright*. Jewish Publication Society, xviii.
[119] Ibid, xix.
[120] Ibid, xx.
[121] Ibid, 219.

In Summary

The thinkers discussed in this chapter all drew upon pages from Tanach, the Talmud and the siddur as inspiration for the idea that our deeds matter, our behavior need not be fixed, and we can apply effort in order to observe and change our ways. Over the centuries, however, rabbis took these ideas in different directions, shaped by the context in which they lived. Is the world a gift that obligates its recipients to gratitude, or a battlefield where we must gird ourselves with armor? For Bahya, the role of the *cheshbon* was an accountability tool, helping humans recognize and take stock of G-d's goodness and determine whether their actions reflect compensation for the gifts of existence. For the Ramchal, the *cheshbon* was a defensive mechanism against the *yetzer ha-ra*, the inclinations that prioritize rash action over thoughtful consideration; such a battle requires double protection, and the Ramchal saw value in *pishpush* and *mashmesh,* reflecting both in the moment and after the fact about the virtue of one's behavior. In the 19th century, Menachem Mendel Leffin believed that, in order for Mussar to be useful, it needed to be concrete, and he helped spread a systematic approach to behavior modification. He also opposed a philosophy that emphasized reward and punishment; as an Enlightenment thinker, he believed that devotion to G-d should be offered voluntarily and out of love.[122]

Two centuries later, rabbis and educators are now experimenting with different forms of *cheshbon ha-nefesh* to link personal and societal transformation. Using the platform of the High Holy Days to take account not simply of interpersonal failings, but societal ones, rabbis and educators such as Rabbi Amy Sapowith, Yavilah McCoy and Rabbi Sharon Brous delivered sermons, wrote original "Al Cheit" liturgy and planned

[122] Mendel, paragraph 18.

intentional arcs of learning focused on addressing racism and other social causes. Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz went outside the High Holy Day framework to describe a *cheshbon* that aligns one's strengths and passions with society's needs, and Rabbi David Jaffe has outlined how a regular practice of *tikkun middot* can be relevant to improve the world today. Rabbi Ira Stone has reconceptualized the major Biblical milestones – Creation, Revelation and Redemption – for a modern sensibility; he invites his readers to see their chief task as bearing the burden of another in order to create an *olam ha-ba* now.

There is also a throughline in the tradition: using reason to pursue justice. The Talmud asserts that our actions are counted, an idea rooted in justice in that G-d makes divine judgments based on facts. Bahya believed that we could use our reason to become aware of our obligations and focus our intentions on fulfilling them. The Ramchal doubled-down on rational thinking to validate the virtue of our actions through careful observation and revisiting of intentions. Leffin invited his followers to track their actions to become even more precise. Through the scientific method, by noting the impact of the practices and adjusting them to increase efficacy, the process continues to be refined to this day. The metaphorical book of life has become a book of entries that we write with our own hands, and contemporary rabbis are now urging us to ensure the text extends from our own homes to the communities and societies we inhabit.

Implications and Conclusions

The Tzedek Box, drawing on contemporary rabbis' calls to link personal with the political, is the next step in this evolution. As a 21st century incarnation of *cheshbon ha-nefesh,* how might the Tzedek Box ritual best learn from and incorporate the insights of its predecessors?

Users of the Tzedek Box would add meaning and depth to their practice by internalizing the orientation of accountability championed by Bahya ibn Paquda. Bahya taught that a *cheshbon* is necessary in part because we as humans easily take for granted the gifts we receive from G-d. Much of his chapter on watchfulness invites us to take stock of the many ways in which we benefit from G-d's goodness. This invites us therefore, to be in an "owing" mindset. Bahya's philosophy that holds us to account for each moment of our lives creates a higher bar of engagement and intensity than the current approach to the Tzedek Box. When people make deposits into the Tzedek Box, are they thinking about their slips of paper in some ways as recompense for the opportunity to exist? How might that affect their orientation toward the ritual? Using this approach, the Tzedek Box might not only be a place to put one's actions related to righteousness. It could be a place to indicate how we are spending our time generally. What are we doing with our lives if we are not seeking to improve the world?

Moreover, Bahya asks a highly individualized question: Are our efforts commensurate with our capabilities? If accountability is rooted in our personal strengths and gifts, we are called to consider what resources we have and the extent to which we are leveraging them fully. Right now, the Tzedek Box ritual does not invite participants to consider whether they are offering their unique gifts in service of the world, a practice encouraged by Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz today. Therefore, one's blessings – both as a living being and as an individual – could be a topic of reflection for the Tzedek Box ritual or Yom HaTzedek.

In addition to providing important ways for users to conceive of themselves, the Ramchal offers an insight that could shape the *process* for reflection: the pace of human nature obscures self-awareness. He therefore encourages double-analysis – *pishpush*

and *mashmesh*. This is consistent with the Tzedek Box practice of reflecting immediately after making an effort to improve the world – and then reflecting again on Yom HaTzedek. That second occasion serves as a "watchtower," a moment to use some distance in order to evaluate more fully whether such an action was indeed as meaningful as intended. But this may be an area to emphasize more fully with Tzedek Box users: What was my motivation? Did we set up that "Mitzvah Day" experience for families in our synagogue to feel like they were helping, even though their work did not have a material effect on the cause they were supposedly supporting? What was the real impact? Did the soup kitchen where we pour time and resources fail to address the real needs of its clients, who still lack the clothing and skills to interview for a steady job and provide for themselves? The Ramchal indicates that the truly pious do not perform good deeds out of various forms of self-interest, and he therefore urges us to notice and root out self-glorification from the actions we take.[123] Yom HaTzedek could take a more deliberate focus on intentions and motivations.

The Ramchal's insights can also apply as we reflect on who surrounds us as we do our work. Luzzatto first references the importance of self-seclusion, and we need to ensure that people do not feel pressure or urge to share their good deeds with others as a way to gain attention or affirmation. Yet we also need people in our lives who can help us see ourselves honestly. We ought to continue to ask the question: What does an authentic reflection look like, and who might we invite into our inner circle not to brag but to consider honestly? Our monthly Tzedek Circles online might be ripe opportunities to create this space.

[123] Luzzatto, 19:110-118.

Menachem Mendel Leffin encourages us to be even more intentional in choosing methods that allow us to track our behaviors. We might be more deliberate about opening our boxes more regularly to assess our progress. Furthermore, Leffin's focus on reducing negative habits differs from the approach used by the Tzedek Box; perhaps, in order to compare our efforts to improve the world around us to the time we have spent focused on matters more selfish, trivial or superficial, we complete a slip of paper every day with multiple columns: actions I took for myself, actions I took for people I know, actions I took for the broader world. Or would every week be sufficient? This is an area to test.

Rabbi Ira Stone's framing of theology allows us to reconsider our conception of the divine that may otherwise feel foreign and distancing. He asserts that our entire reason for being is to bear the load of the other. Therefore, the Ramchal's instruction to be deliberate about our behavior can be placed in this context; to what extent are we thinking about our relationship to G-d as defined by our commitment to operating with care and responsibility toward others? Might a large part of an entire relationship with G-d be defined by what we put in our Tzedek Box?

Relatedly, Rabbi David Jaffe's re-focus on the soul provides additional spiritual language and meaning to the work of *cheshbon ha-nefesh*. Jaffe asserts that we can focus our energy on our purpose here on Earth and ensure that we are as centered as possible to build a world affirming the Oneness of creation. By recognizing that one's psychic energy may be affected by the external world, Jaffe demonstrates how our inner life is in relationship with the conditions of society – and it is upon us to take responsibility alongside others for the repair of both. Jaffe, as well as Rabbi Amy Sapowith and Yavilah McCoy, also emphasizes the importance of reflecting on issues of

equity, diversity and inclusion. When I was working at the soup kitchen, did I feel awkward or was I comfortable? Did I know, or ask, anyone's name? Was I warm and welcoming, or was I shy and standoffish? Do I choose to make food rather than distribute it because I don't know how to interact with people who are different from me? Do I avoid certain people because I harbor some bias? Our *cheshbon* must create space to reflect on the biases and assumptions that color our willingness to pursue social change work, lest we allow paternalism or ego-gratification to trump our holier intentions.

The Tzedek Box ritual builds on the past by asserting that Elul need not be the only time to engage deeply in *cheshbon ha-nefesh,* that people do not have to rely on their memories to recount their deeds, and that reflection need not focus solely on what one has failed to do. Yet the chain of tradition offers both spiritual and practical implications for the users of the Tzedek Box (see Chart 2 for a summary). When approaching the act of reflecting on one's deeds, are we sufficiently taking stock of our intentions and motivations in an effort to focus on the needs of others rather than fulfilling our own need for attention or ego-satisfaction? When reviewing one's slips of paper on Yom HaTzedek, might we ask ourselves whether our efforts are commensurate with our capabilities as a way to push ourselves to give more that is in our power? Might more frequent or consistent entries into the box – every week, for example, regardless of whether one made an effort to improve the world – yield more powerful insights about one's commitment to social change? Might doing so also symbolize a different relationship to G-d, one in which we both focus on repaying the gifts of existence and manifesting the world to come when we shoulder the burden of others? Could we engage in this conversation with others who can support and challenge us to live out the best of

who we wish to be? The answers may help us to find deeper partnership between the synagogue and the street, between the prayerful and the prophetic.

Chart 2: Summary of Implications

Occasion	**Additional steps to take**
When inaugurating one's box	● Consider your theological orientation to the box. How do you view your contribution – as recompense for the opportunity to exist, as a fulfillment of your commitment to operating with care and responsibility toward others, or another belief? ● Consider when you will add to your box – perhaps once a week, regardless of whether you have completed a new task, or even once a day?
When adding to one's box	● Consider completing a slip of paper with multiple columns: actions I took for myself, actions I took for people I know, actions I took for the broader world. ● As part of the reflective process, consider your motivation for doing the deed you just completed. ● Describe in detail the honest discomfort or dilemmas you may have felt during the task you completed.
On Yom HaTzedek	● Consider additional occasions to open the box beyond once a year for more frequent "reflection-on-action." ● Ask yourself to what extent your efforts have been commensurate with your capabilities. ● Ensure that reflections include a deliberate focus on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion. ● Identify a meaningful partner with whom to share your discoveries and new intentions.

Chapter Two has focused on the ways in which rabbis for a millennium have used the notion of a *cheshbon* to reveal both philosophical and practical ideas for self-improvement, including recent efforts to apply these methods to the realm of social change. Chapter Three will widen the aperture to a range of other metaphors, offered by contemporary artists in response to a call for their own Tzedek Box creations.

CHAPTER THREE:
ARTISTS SHAPE THE OBJECTS

The previous chapter detailed insights from past centuries of rabbinic work on reflection and self-improvement, as explored by Bahya ibn Paquda, Moshe Luzzatto and Menachem Mendel of Levin. As newer generations built upon the creations of their intellectual ancestors, and as the Enlightenment only magnified the commitment to the rational, the work of Mussar became much more concrete and codified into a curriculum that students could practice and seek to master. But while these rabbis developed various rituals outside of traditional liturgy to routinize their teachings, they did not consider how ritual objects could symbolize, sacralize or facilitate the work of Mussar. This chapter explores the power and possibility of creating ritual objects that reflect, ceremonialize and support the work of self- and societal transformation. After exploring the role of beautiful Jewish ceremonial objects generally and in recent years, the chapter catalogs the work of contemporary creators of Tzedek Boxes. As described in Chapter One, the conception of "Yom HaTzedek" did not originally begin with an object; the box only came about because certain early users and advisors expressed concern that an annual holiday would be too easy to devolve into ineffectual symbolism without more frequent engagement, and an object could help facilitate regular, concrete interaction. The artists featured in this chapter demonstrate how *hiddur mitzvah*, the beautification of our obligations, can not only add aesthetic style to our practices but also can offer substantial commentary that dramatically shapes the meaning of the endeavor.

Role of Ceremonial Objects

How essential is an object to a ritual? Rabbi Vanessa Ochs, author of *Inventing Jewish Ritual,* asserts that ritual objects play a powerful role in shaping the felt

experience of their users. She states, "Serving as spiritual agents, they produce a sense of religious identity, prompt holy and ethical actions, and forge connections between the individual and the Jewish community."[124] This has certainly been the case for the Tzedek Box. The box aims to stoke one's religious identity by making the implicit link between civic-mindedness and Jewishness explicit, encourage compassion and righteousness by its very nature, and create a sense of unity among Jews both because it is a ritual that other households perform and that people may enact together.

Typically, rituals are repeated occurrences following an established pattern, so a new ritual begins at an inherent disadvantage, never having been done before. Therefore, Ochs asserts that ceremonial objects are particularly valuable because they advertise a practice and provide storytelling that helps normalize something that is otherwise new. The Tzedek Box in its materiality helps prompt its acceptance; it exists. Objects "provoke questions that necessitate retelling the traditional sacred narratives and coining and telling new ones" and "raise questions leading to discussions of rules and guidelines."[125]

For Tzedek Box, the simple question of "when do you open it?" leads to both a Biblical discussion of Pesach Sheini and several practical questions about the ceremony involved, which draws in participants who may be assessing the seeming integrity of the ritual or seeking to internalize its rules. The box prompts a level of detail and curiosity unattainable from a mere abstract concept. Furthermore, "the new objects make the rituals accessible, performable, concrete, repeatable and transmittable from one generation to another."[126] The object makes it clear how you mark the occasion being

[124] Ochs, V. L. (2007). *Inventing Jewish Ritual*. New York: Jewish Publication Society, 87.
[125] Ochs, 108-109.
[126] Ochs, 109.

celebrated. Ochs notes that there is also a subversive element to a physical tool. She writes, "Objects disguise the novelty of a ritual by bundling it within some familiar object, something that looks and feels 'traditionally' or 'authentically' Jewish. They disguise the radical nature of a new ritual by 'housing' it in an object so mundane and so innocuous that it feels nonthreatening."[127] Indeed, a Tzedek Box – easily confused for a Tzedekah Box – leads people to feel that they are very familiar with the ritual, even to the point of misidentifying it. An object serves an outsized role in legitimizing new practices.

Hiddur Mitzvah

Do the aesthetics of the object matter? Certainly, any box could technically qualify as a potential Tzedek Box. While a discarded shoe box, recycled Kleenex box or upcycled cardboard box could work "in a pinch," and while "prettifying" a box may register as ornamental or superficial to some, there is a long-standing tradition of imbuing Jewish ritual objects with a sense of artistry. The Babylonian Talmud (Shabbat 133b) elevates the idea of performing mitzvot with beauty. Drawing on Exodus 15:2, the rabbis discuss that the way to glorify the Eternal One is to fulfill commandments with beautiful ritual objects. A sukkah, a lulav, a shofar, a Torah scroll written on fine parchment, with high-quality ink, wrapped in a silk fabric – these are all opportunities to procure well-crafted materials in order to convey deference and honor to G-d. In the Biblical tradition of Bezalel, Jewish communities have long employed expert artisans, used precious metals, and drawn on other techniques to enhance the aesthetic experience of a ritual tool.[128] Sociologically, doing so may have also attested to the

[127] Ibid.
[128] Exodus 31.

wealth of the patron, but the purpose served primarily to elevate the status and stature of the act itself, whether it was lighting candles or storing an etrog.

Profiat Duran, author of the 15th century Ma'aseh Efod, believed that *hiddur mitzvah* had practical benefits as well. Using beautiful copies of the Torah, as well as other Jewish texts, improves our own learning, our love of learning, and the health of our soul. He wrote: "Memory will also improve since contemplation and study occur amidst beautifully developed forms and beautiful drawings, with the result that the soul will expand and be encouraged and strengthen its powers."[129] It is through aesthetic means that one gains cognitive and spiritual value.

Furthermore, contemporary Rabbi Ira Stone conveys how *hiddur mitzvah* can serve to reinforce our own devotional capacities. Stone writes about mitzvot that are either "interruptive" (pausing from one's activities to, for example, say a blessing) or "instantitative" (achieved through the act itself, such as visiting the sick), and he says that *hiddur* affects each one differently. He argues that, for an "interruptive" mitzvah, adding beauty to an expression of gratitude enhances our satisfaction in interrupting our own self-absorption; for example, singing the Birkat Hamazon allows us to direct all of our energy and joy toward the Eternal in a way that merely reciting the liturgy mechanically would not do. For an "instantiative" mitzvah, we may elevate the joy or pride we feel in serving others when we bring artistry to it; by reading a poem to a sick friend in the hospital, we create a heightened experience that redoubles the value of the mitzvah we have performed through our visit.[130] By adding beauty externally, we experience it internally and thereby increase our own commitment to serving others.

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[129] As cited in the Brandeis University Tumen Collection website (https://www.brandeis.edu/library/archives/essays/special-collections/tumen-collection.html).
[130] Luzzatto, 205.

More than Beautiful: Miriam's Cup

Beauty itself is but one of the tasks of an artist. Contemporary artist Tobi Kahn has written that all of his ceremonial art is designed to exemplify three key features: beauty, functionality and meaning.[131] When new Jewish customs emerge, the inclusion of a ritual object provides not only an opportunity to make the underlying intention concrete, but the specific artistry of the object provides an occasion to shape a specific message about the meaning and significance of the act.

Miriam's Cup is a ritual from the late 20th century that has achieved prominence during Passover, placed on the Seder table with similar stature to Elijah's cup. The inclusion of a cup for water serves to ensure that Miriam, and women more broadly, receive recognition and honor at the seder, both given Miriam's role throughout the Passover story and her status as a prophetess in Jewish tradition. Granted, Miriam as a guardian of water is not part of the exact narrative recounted during Passover – Miriam is associated with the well that follows the Israelites after their escape of Egypt – but one might also note that Elijah has no specific role in the Passover story itself either! Water is also a broader theme in Miriam's life; she carefully watches baby Moses float down the river in his *teva*, and she leads the women through the Sea of Reeds during the Exodus. Therefore, a vessel of water is a natural homage to Miriam during Passover and an important corrective for centuries of neglecting the contributions of women.

Using Kahn's rubric, the artists who create distinctive Miriam's Cups need to create visually appealing objects that functionally work as vessels and symbolically convey a message. A Miriam's Cup Competition from 2003, celebrating the 90th anniversary of Women of Reform Judaism, generated a number of submissions with

[131] Kahn, Tobi (2022). Artist statement, https://launch.tzedekbox.org/a-physical-box/tobi-kahn.

different symbolic foci. Susan Fullenbaum's design featured the outline of other women dancing to underscore the movement of many individuals that Miriam's actions sparked. Perhaps those using this cup felt a special sense of momentum and togetherness as a result of this design. Meanwhile, Irene Helitzer crafted a fluted tea cup with a holder for flower stems; Helitzer saw meaning in switching out the formal act of drinking from a goblet with the ritual of taking tea, an act in which groups of women may have historically found social connection and even moral authority and political power in times of temperance. Meanwhile, Corey Rubin designed a Miriam's Cup with the rim of the glass leaning forward so as to invite its users into the experience of the miracle of water; the artist also depicted a row of bricks climbing up the glass, with each brick representing a different woman's efforts. However, the winning design of the Miriam's Cup Competition by Linda Gissen features Miriam herself mid-movement, leading the way in dance and celebration. One of the figure's arms holds the actual water vessel aloft. The other arm carries Miriam's tambourine, the instrument of joy at the moment of Exodus – and, in honor of the anniversary, "women of Reform Judaism dancing and singing in celebration lead the way to the future."[132] Gissen's design prioritizes Miriam herself with the two symbols we most associate with her and see as signs of her strength: her timbrels and the water. If the purpose of the object was to add Miriam to the canon, the award committee may have felt that depicting her explicitly best served that aim.

[132] Women of Reform Judaism (2003). "Visiting Miriam's Well: A Study Guide," https://www.wrj.org/sites/default/files/MiriamsWell%20-%20new.pdf.

The Art of the Tzedek Box

What are the unique design challenges and opportunities in creating a Tzedek Box, and what do different artists' choices mean for the experience of the ritual? More than two dozen artists responded to an invitation by the Bernard Heller Museum at Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City to create Tzedek Boxes for an exhibition from January to May of 2023. In the spirit of New York's Sukkah City project in 2010, as well as the regular invitational exhibitions by Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco, artists received a description of the Tzedek Box ritual, created original pieces, and submitted their designs to the curatorial team for selection.[133] The contributions serve as an opportunity to consider the myriad decisions that artists must navigate when crafting an object of this kind – and a kaleidoscope of different experiential opportunities for users engaging with their boxes.

Symbolically

Among all the considerations of the artist, perhaps the most fundamental choice is the concept. What does the artist wish to express? There are so many ways in which justice might be expressed in artistic form; whatever the choice of the designer, it will create a mood, a point of view, a frame of mind for the work of the box's user. Every time the user sees or engages with the box, it is another chance for the imagery chosen by the artist to influence the user's conception or impression of the work of *tzedek*. If the box depicted a child begging, as opposed to an American flag, the user would necessarily interact in some way with feelings of sympathy, as opposed to issues related to patriotism, evoked by the box. It is therefore a fundamental statement of the artist's own

[133] Sukkah City, https://sukkahcity.com/; 2015 Dorothy Saxe Invitational at the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco, https://www.thecjm.org/exhibitions/49.

understandings or feelings about the work of justice and righteousness, or what they believe might motivate, provoke, or resonate with their potential audience, and a significant decision as a result. Both because these artists set a particular tone for their users' experience, and because users keep coming back to their boxes all year, one might say that the artists have the opportunity to "re-mind" their users of what *tzedek* is all about.

There are a multitude of ways to frame a conversation about *tzedek,* but it appears the artists of the HUC-JIR exhibition chose to answer one of four questions as they pursued their work: (1) What does justice mean to Jews? (2) How ought we operate as we seek to pursue change in the world? (3) To whom do we dedicate our work? (4) What are the issues that deserve our attention? The sections below will explore these different approaches and the unique strengths and challenges they bring.

Jewish Allusions for Justice

Several artists chose to connect their objects to Jewish allusions from Tanach or later rabbinic teachings. It is notable that the Jewish canon has such a varied trove of images from which to draw, speaking to the many shades of meaning and possibility for the concepts of justice and righteousness. The artist's decision to draw on an explicitly Jewish reference may help the user to answer the question, "What does justice mean to Jews?"

Judith Brown's "Gifts of Justice, Sparks of Awe" is a glass vessel, drawing on the Kabbalistic teaching that shards of glass containing divine light have been scattered through the world, and it is humanity's job to gather those sparks.[134] Each time a user

[134] The Exhibition's pieces can be found in Appendix B, organized alphabetically by the artist's last name.

places another reflection in Brown's Tzedek Box, the vessel lights up, conveying the spark. This ingenious object evokes the Divine light of creation and the sacred partnership forged by participating in illumination. This joyful interactive feature creates an extra incentive to contribute, and it reinforces the theological notion that we are G-d's partners in *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world.

Marisa Baggett harnesses the power of a rushing current described in an oft-quoted passage from the prophet Amos. In fact, she draws on multiple Biblical references to water in her artist's statement:

> Divine justice is often expressed as a flow, and to do what is right is to be aligned with that flow. When the covenant is upheld, the rains fall in their season and the land enjoys blessing (Deuteronomy 11). When the people do justice, then they are "watered" like a garden (Isaiah 58). In a verse from the book of Amos made famous by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the prophet challenges the people: "Let justice well up like water, and righteousness like a flowing stream" (Amos 5:24). Water is both nourishing and powerful. It can create canyons and sweep away cities, or irrigate fields and gardens. As a metaphor for God's power, the biblical authors used water imagery to convey the notion of justice as a natural part of the universe, similar to gravity. It is something which we humans can either block by our unjust actions, or channel in positive ways.

When contributing to Baggett's box, one might feel a sense of being an additional bucket in a brigade of hope and righteousness amidst the conflagration of oppression in our midst. One might feel the imminent, overwhelming wave of truth and justice. Given how common it is to associate the "let justice well up like water" passage to Dr. King, it is possible that those engaging with a Tzedek Box like this may feel a sense of connection to the Civil Rights Movement, in addition to or even more strongly than a connection to the Jewish prophetic tradition. Regardless, the use of the allusion links a sense of the collective, for some invoking the Creator alongside humanity, as the joint actors in building a redeemed world.

Holly Markhoff's "Justice Knows No Other" provides a writing table for a scroll, which evokes Bahya ibn Pakuda's instruction that "our days are like scrolls; write upon them what you wish to be remembered."[135] Hanging from the writing table are fragments from a prayerbook; next to the open scroll, they beg the question, "Will the memories we record at this table be for a blessing?" Markhoff therefore may be suggesting that the essence of *tzedek* for Jews is considering the legacy we wish to leave.

There is no mistaking the reference in Ellen Alt and Lawrence Conley's "Pursuing Justice." It is a poster with the Biblical injunction from Deuteronomy 16, "Justice, Justice You Shall Pursue," in both Hebrew and English. This box, which users must assemble themselves, asserts itself onto its owner, making it clear what it expects. Justice in Judaism is an obligation, a commandment, and the box states it boldly and plainly.

If *tikkun olam*, Amos 5:24, and Deuteronomy 16:20 are three of the well-known Jewish references to justice, other pieces drew on more esoteric symbols within the Jewish canon because of their metaphorical possibility. Mark Meiches's design, "Burdens and Blessings," resembles a camel, that "beast of burden" who carried humans through the desert; the Hebrew word for camel, *gamal*, also conveys acts of goodness. With this choice, Meiches makes clear that he sees the work of justice tied to the idea of carrying the load of others. Before creating her "Pomegranates," Diana Kurz found multiple references to the fruit in Jewish literature: adorning the robes of the high priest in Torah, a sign of righteousness containing as many seeds as there are mitzvot. Here, *tzedek* is associated with sweet abundance and with the sacred work of the priestly class. Meanwhile, Maxwell Bauman's "The Dove" centers the bird with an olive branch

[135] Bahya, Eighth Treatise: 3.90.

between its teeth as is described in Genesis.[136] In his artist statement, Bauman writes that his creation brings hope to those lost in a flood of their own sorrow. In Parashat "Vayakhel/and he assembled," Mar Martinez draws on the building of the *mishkan*. "We [create] the Mishkan through acts of kindness and holiness, and through acts of righteousness, justice and care for our community, we are able to achieve unity," Martinez writes in her artist statement. When artists choose images as allusions, they are both evoking the universal significance that their objects represent, but they are also conjuring the specific references from the source material – perhaps the camels for which Rebecca provided water in Genesis, which evokes Rebecca's kind-heartedness – that have their own associative depth of meaning.

This decision to ground one's box in a textual allusion often seizes upon a distinctive moment in Jewish memory. This choice necessarily conceives of *tzedek* in a particular light – such as peace, or as carrying the burdens of others – that may help the box's users develop some Jewish vocabulary for thinking about social change work. Moreover, the choice to use a textual allusion also might help users draw meaningful connections between the actions that they place in their boxes and the Jewish nature of their decisions, assuming the user is able to see the connection between the artist's decision and its Jewish source. Of course, what these professional artists drew upon is just the beginning of what is possible to convey. We read in Psalm 36:7, "Your *tzedaka* is like mighty mountains, Your *mishpat* is [like] the great deep." In Psalm 89:15, "*tzedek* and *mishpat* are the base of Your throne." In Isaiah 28:17, we read of a day in which G-d "will make *mishpat* the ruler and *tzedaka* the level." These are just three of so many more potential images from the Jewish canon that might inspire future artists.

[136] Genesis 8:8-12.

Universal Symbols of How to Make Change

Some artists opted to choose a universal symbol rather than one linked explicitly with Judaism. While camels and pomegranates could bear a generalized meaning that proves inspirational or significant to users of a Tzedek Box, these images may feel more esoteric and only have a deeper meaning to those with Jewish literacy. In contrast, universal symbols avoid the limitations of a particularist message and have the potential to speak to a broader audience. I also believe that these symbols can start to answer a different question than those using Jewish allusions. Just as "tikkun olam" and "justice like water" describe how Jews *conceive* of social action and social justice work, so too can the universal symbols inspire how we might *operate* when we are seeking to make change.

Frann Addison's piece, "Time to Give," incorporating vintage clock and watch parts, evokes the urgency and temporality of doing justice work. In her artist statement, Addison writes, "We give of our time to fight injustice…it is always time to give, to work to heal, and to make a difference." This object raises questions of how we use our time on Earth and perhaps even to whom our time belongs. How are we using each moment? The image of a clock might also connect us to the past, history, memory and legacy. Given the power of time in the Jewish calendar, traditionally marking segments of the day for prayer, sections of the week for rest and work, and seasons of the year for particular rituals and festivals, the incorporation of a clock in a Tzedek Box evokes an enduring spiritual motif that could bear layers of meaning, depending on the users' background. Ultimately, Addison's piece instructs us to use our time purposefully.

Susan Dessel, in her work "Ha Lamaot" (the Whys), depicts an open heart and – superimposed on it – an open brain, conveying that intellect and compassion work in

tandem to create social change. When using this box, a user might consider whether they have placed adequate focus on the rational or strategic aspects of *tzedek* work — namely, whether they have made purposeful choices about the focus or prioritization of their actions; alternatively, they may ask themselves if they are sufficiently accessing their emotional side, whether they are connecting with other human beings, attending to the relational components of the work, or otherwise building community as they pursue social change. Or they might simply consider how the actions that they are taking are satisfying whatever aspect of their being is most naturally engaged by their activities. For example, seeing the open heart might remind or reinforce for the user how they feel a sense of empathy with others when engaged in volunteering or advocacy. In essence, Dessel's piece is asking us to pursue *tzedek* with all of our faculties activated.

Beth Haber's "Honeycomb" leverages the shape of the hexagon, which she notes is "the basis for all organic chemistry on a molecular level, here referencing the collaborative construction by bees visible in nature to human sight and delight." The artist has considered how the notes are added to the container; the "bee guardians on the box top will slide aside and will mimic the gesture of a honey frame as it is lifted for the harvest." This may have particular appeal for people who see themselves as team players, as environmentalists, or those who otherwise consider themselves as part of the natural order. The metaphor of bees suggests that our labors ultimately produce something sweet, a positive and hopeful message. Above all, Haber's piece conveys the value of working interdependently when engaged in improving the world.

Beth Grossman's "A Seat at the Table" is intended to focus specifically on food insecurity as a justice issue, though her piece may reflect a difference between an artist's intent and the user's experience. During the COVID pandemic, Grossman missed

hosting meals in her home – and also gained a new appreciation for the inequalities in our society. She has made a philanthropic commitment to support organizations that address hunger and aims to use her box to record her actions in this area; through the design of her box, she is conceptually inviting those in need of food to sit at her table. For those unaware of Grossman's intent, a box shaped like a table can also lead a user to consider who is included at various decision-making forums, whose voice is considered legitimate, and who feels welcomed. A table is a valuable image with which to emphasize dynamics of diversity and equity, and Grossman's piece would remind its user to operate with inclusion in mind.

Israel Dahan chose to base his Tzedek Box, "Scales of Justice," on the iconic image of a balanced weight scale. However, this particular object offers two very different experiences. When closed, the object is an upright darkly-mottled disk with a small circular hole for inserting one's reflections. The user may simply view the piece as an intriguing vessel without attributing any meaning to its unornamented surface. It might convey a moon obscured, or a world gone dark. Notably, when one is performing the acts of justice, the artist's full intent and messaging is hidden from view. It is an utterly private act, with no real hint to the outside observer about the purpose of the vessel.

When fully opened, Dahan's piece becomes something else entirely: a scale. While a clearer symbol, this manifestation's meaning is also up for interpretation. Perhaps here we finally come to associate the actions we've been adding to the container with the meaning of the scale, our work to ensure that justice is calibrated equally in society. Or perhaps we are to use the scale as a source of self-reflection, in which we imagine G-d weighing the actions of the user. We might consider which of the actions

we have performed have indeed contributed to justice, as opposed to maintaining the status quo. Or we might ask ourselves which actions were done for their own sake, and which were done for self-aggrandizement or out of pity for others. In every instance, the opportunity to use the vessel as either a symbol of one's work toward justice, or to use the symbol as a goad for further reflection, is a matter of choice for the user. Perhaps the consistent message is to treat one's actions with gravity.

Universal symbols are each rich in potential meaning but also tend to represent a focused message. Does the artist intend to emphasize urgency or collaboration, inclusion or making measured decisions? Therefore, artists must think carefully about the lasting idea they wish to convey, as well as whether their chosen image will reflect that idea successfully to the user, all the while understanding that users will draw their own interpretations regardless. That is part of the value of viewing the works together; collectively, they describe a set of habits for righteousness. We must be urgent *and* collaborative, inclusive *and* measured, to be effective in our social change work.

To Whom Do We Dedicate Our Work?

Memory was another theme that inspired the design of some Tzedek Boxes; who from the past goads us to act today? Notably, two artists created pieces in honor of their mothers. Beth Krensky's "A House For Doris" is a wooden box shaped like a house that serves as an homage to her mother, who grew up in poverty between the two World Wars. Krensky indicated that she used the box as a repository for artifacts and memorabilia from everything she did to honor her mother's life of *tikkun olam*. Similarly, Reva Solomon created "Mommy's Justice," recognizing the legacy of her first-generation American mother who practiced the ethical obligation of caring for

others throughout her life and passed away in January 2018. The artist notes that she explicitly chose a simple and feminine design resembling a jewelry box, small in size to remind users that "small acts of kindness, charity and justice can help to change the world." The decorative touches, including silver embellishments, have personal significance to the artist's mother as well. Of course, the full power of these objects are most relevant to their creators; my own use of someone else's memory box may conjure feelings of closeness between me and my own relatives, but it may be impossible for a third party to appreciate the emotional depth of a piece that speaks so directly to particular individuals.

Sometimes artists tap into collective, rather than individual or personal, memory. Tina Marcus's "The Collection Box" is an assemblage of found objects, including a rusted wire bed frame, that evokes the one semblance of personal space in a concentration camp, representing will, hope and dreams of justice. The artist writes, "The Collection Box is about perseverance, endurance, integrity and hope that although there is injustice in our world, this box symbolically reminds us there is still more work to be done." In "This Way…" artist Jana Zimmer nearly terrifies the user with images of S.S. guards, also using the Holocaust as an anchoring theme that shouts "Never Again!" These artists are taking a risk when associating their Tzedek Box with the horrors of genocide, but they may be connecting deeply with those for whom the legacy of fighting against antisemitism and other forms of hate has no more powerful catalyst.

By focusing on memory, these artists avoid isolating singular habits of righteousness and therefore leaving others out. Instead, they focus the user's emotional energy of acting in honor of others, using the example, the sacrifice and the legacy of the past to fuel future action.

A World of Issues

Rather than leveraging a metaphor to express how we ought to behave, or invoking memory as a source of motivation, several of the artists focused on depicting a singular source of inspiration – or concern – for *tzedek* work, namely the Earth. By centering images of nature or the globe itself, these vessels create a setting, a context, and a literal world in which the work of righteousness must be done. Unlike the many boxes that do not specify the content of a user's reflections, several of these creations zero in specifically on ecological consciousness – and reinforce this message through the form of their objects as well.

Arlene Sokolow's "D.R.E.A.M." takes its commitment to the environment seriously from a material standpoint, as well as a philosophical one; Sokolow has pledged to produce work solely based on recycled or reused materials from previously made pieces in her studio, so her Tzedek Box is made from deconstructed monotypes from her collection. Yona Werner's work, "Foedraal" (Dutch for "vessel"), is shaped like a globe and intends to allude to the Jewish call to repair the world. In her artist statement, she expresses a particular concern for the dumping of millions of tons of non-biodegradable plastics in the ocean, and her creation of a pristine planet is an attempt to celebrate the beauty of our biosphere. Rachel Kanter's wall-hanging "For The Trees" illustrates a forest near her childhood home, and its size and verticality mirrors its subject matter. She writes, "When I think about the brokenness of the earth and all the pain and suffering in my immediate community, the country and the world, it is climate change and ecological destruction that scares me the most." Her piece features 12 pockets to hold a year's worth of notes, which she intends will document acts of justice done for the Earth.

Not every box that draws upon global themes is solely focused on the environment, however. Eli Kaplan Wildmann's "Pop-Up Tzedek Box" is spherical, and the artist does cite the planet as one of several sources of inspiration (along with time and cycles), but his evocation of the world is not intended to be a directive. His creation is ultimately about inviting users to make their experience personal; there are interactive elements on each of the boxes four lateral slides, including a place to indicate the issues that matter most to the box's owner and a place to insert a photograph inside a frame as a dedication or designation of an inspiring person. Tobi Kahn's "ZAHRYZ" is global on two levels, representing all of humanity and the physical world we inhabit. He writes, "This box is comprised of 70 pieces, representing the 70 nations of the world, a Biblical allusion to all of humanity. It is sculpted from wood and suggests a cityscape. I then added multiple layers of paint, whose colors suggest sky, water, and the greening earth, with glazes that form a translucent surface to signify the importance of protecting our fragile planet."

Of course, any artistic choice never symbolizes only one idea. The world can symbolize the environment, and it can represent the full universe of options, infinity and the fullness of Creation. Ironically, some artists who depict the Earth might be intending to narrow the work of their box to a specific focus of environmentalism, while others might be employing the idea of the planet to encapsulate the fullness of *tzedek* work. Therefore, choosing the world may continue to be a popular choice among artists for its specificity, as well as its expansiveness.

Aesthetically

To complement or accentuate their general concept, artists need to decide what materials to use, what shape to construct, what colors to employ, and what level of refinement to apply. Mark Meiches's "Burdens and Blessings" features a camel, but one could have imagined something much more literal than the whimsical design he constructed. Once the viewer learns that Meiches's use of a crank and a found box form a camel, they immediately feel a playfulness that would not have been present with a realistic depiction. In another example of form meeting function, Ellen Alt and Lawrence Conley chose bright, eye-catching colors and a big black font, presumably to draw attention to a box dedicated to taking bold, unsubtle action. Mar Martinez indicated that she intentionally paired the contemporary method of laser-cutting "with archaic materials (gold leaf) to reference the ways ritual is significant and can be implemented in modernity," according to her artist statement.

Notably, only about half of the artists in the HUC-JIR exhibit opted to make what would be described as a box; in addition to Martinez's piece, there's a wall hanging ("For The Tree"), several spheres, and a Lego construction ("The Dove"). These are highly deliberate choices. The medium of Lego blocks, for example, conveys the accessibility of the work of social change; it is built brick by brick and can be performed by people of any age. Of the boxes, only a handful might be confused for a Tzedekah box; only one chose metal, and none chose the blue and white color pattern that many identify with the Jewish National Fund. The artists of this exhibition evidently viewed this as an opportunity to distinguish a Tzedek Box from its predecessors.

Not content to draw on images, a few boxes use words – sometimes to offer a textual allusion, but also at times awaken the user out of a state of apathy or inaction.

Most notably, Deborah Ugoretz's piece, "Why Not Do More," lists a litany of issues facing society – from animal extinction to drug addiction – in a tiny font and then asks a series of bold questions in large, all-capital letters: WHY DIDN'T I DO MORE? WHAT MORE CAN I DO? WHY NOT DO MORE? Ugoretz wrote in her artist statement that she was in dialogue with the overwhelming needs of society and the response of ambivalence or frozenness that we as society often offer. A modern-day Jeremiah, Ugoretz may be speaking to herself when she offers these piercing inquiries about her behavior, but her words project onto the reader and may elicit feelings of guilt, inadequacy, regret or urgency. First looking retrospectively ("why didn't I do more?"), the questions move toward the expansive ("what more can I do?") and even the insistent ("why not do more?").

The visual contrast between Ugoretz's arresting words and Bauman's Lego dove could not be more stark, and yet they each serve an important purpose. They strike distinctive moods that may be important for different audiences. Some may want a joyful, friendly or serene invitation to join in on service work with others. Others may prefer a stern and sobering assessment of the profound needs that exist in society measured against the insufficiency of our individual and collective responses. Similarly, Israel Dahan's golden scales bespeak the majesty and awe of judgment and justice, while there is something poignant about the craft-like nature of Reva Solomon's jewelry box dedicated to her mother; a sleeker design would have lacked the personal touch befitting a daughter's love. For a ceremonial object, aesthetic choices must serve the broader aim of the piece.

Practically

In addition to symbolic and aesthetic decisions, the artist must simultaneously be taking into account practical considerations. These questions include:

- Is the box for individual or communal use? How large will the box be, and how much space is allotted for the slips?
- Will the user be involved in creating the box, or will it be fully constructed?
- In what shape will the user need to fold their slip? Must it be round, like a little scroll? Must it be folded multiple times?
- Will the slot to insert slips be on the top of the box, like a traditional Tzedekah box, or will there be a different point of entry?
- When the user is depositing slips in the box, will those slips be visible to the observer or hidden from view? If the former, how will the presence of slips integrate with the rest of the design?
- How will the user retrieve the slips? Will the box change shape when it is opened?

The artists in the HUC-JIR exhibit have taken a wide range of stances toward these and other practicality questions – and most answers end up having an effect on the symbolic or aesthetic experience. For example, Eli Kaplan Wildmann's box is intended for mass distribution, so it packs flat for maximum portability and then "pops" open into three dimensions. Therefore, the user is involved in the assembly of the box, which may serve as an initial metaphor for the type of work that users must do continuously alongside the Creator. Israel Dahan's "Scales of Justice" is closed most of the time so that it may serve as a vessel – which means that users do not experience its manifestation as scales until it is opened; that "reveal" may serve as a dramatic moment

in which the users suddenly feel they have reached a moment of true evaluation of their efforts. "Vayakhel" may have prioritized its artistic vision over its utilitarian value; it does not have a significant place to put slips of paper. Holly Markoff's choice to invite users to write on a continuous scroll in "Justice Knows No Other" means that users will review their actions chronologically on Yom HaTzedek, rather than on separate slips of paper that users might rearrange to make meaning in different ways. Those are all tradeoffs; every choice has an impact.

Conclusions

In Judaism, we mark what matters to us in time and in object. We enact our values. Arthur Hertzberg writes, "Judaism is a way of life that endeavors to transform virtually every human action into a means of community with G-d."[137] We are a people of practices and behaviors, and the Tzedek Box serves as a container for actions aligned to one of our most preciously-held self-understandings: we are people who act toward a world redeemed. Incorporating a ritual object for this purpose plays a critical function; such a vessel concretizes and dramatizes how the ritual should function, narrates stories around the ritual, and even prompts feelings that might activate users.

Professional artists have dramatically elevated the level of possibility and significance to the Tzedek Box ritual. Prior to involving Tobi Kahn and then the artists who submitted their work for the HUC-JIR exhibition, amateurs made Tzedek Boxes out of inexpensive, recycled containers and simple media such as markers. There continues to be value in making a folk art box, particularly in terms of the ownership that a user may feel for their creation; some users have created beautiful and thoughtful

[137] Hertzberg, Arthur. (1961). *Judaism*. New York: Braziller, 73-74.

images and messages that motivate them to fill their boxes. However, in addition to shifting reluctant participants away from seeing the Tzedek Box as fundamentally an "arts and crafts" project, the existence of professional boxes has demonstrated the remarkable diversity of symbols, images and interpretations available for those interested in exploring issues of, and motivating action around, justice and righteousness.

The Tzedek Boxes also reflect the sophistication required of a skillful artist, taking so many different considerations into account at once. Perhaps more than most ceremonial objects, the artist of a Tzedek Box wields tremendous power, given that their choices help "re-mind" users about the nature of *tzedek*. Given many options, a user will presumably choose a box based on the alignment between the imagery and the user's beliefs or style. But for organizations or institutions that choose a single style for their members' boxes, this exploration of the many different questions and implications of the design should give any decision-maker pause. It is not simply what goes inside the box that matters. We must also think outside the box.

LOOKING FORWARD

Jewish tradition teaches that, since the inception of the world, we have been taught to account for our actions. In the beginning, G-d created light. Then G-d conducted a *cheshbon*, determining that G-d's creation was good.[138] When G-d's final creation was "not good," when man was alone, G-d made adjustments.[139] As beings that walk in G-d's ways, we too must participate in creating a world of good, assess our creations along the way, and change course when necessary.[140] The Tzedek Box is the latest "spiritual technology" to help us to do so. The three chapters of this thesis have mined learnings from years of feedback about the evolving ritual, from rabbis through the centuries who have engaged with the concept of *cheshbon ha-nefesh*, and from artists who have given their attention to an object embodying and enveloping *tzedek*. This exploration has led to a number of concluding themes:

The need for openness in ritual development. Developing the Tzedek Box ritual has been the story of openness to change – not only the willingness to create new tradition, but the desire to integrate the wisdom of the past, the needs and interests of this historical moment, the ingenuity and creativity of artists, and the preferences and behaviors of our test-users. Given the variety of perspectives and visions about the meaning of justice, the relative power of holidays and the role of objects, the project needed enough fluidity and dynamism to enable flexible interpretations – while also requiring enough shape to be clear about its intention and direction. I felt a bit like a Yo-Yo at times – initially self-conscious that I was asserting a vision for a new Jewish ritual and wanting to involve many others in a large design process, then feeling

[138] Genesis 1: 2-3.
[139] Genesis 2:18.
[140] Soloveitchik, Y.B., as quoted by Alan Morinis, https://mussarinstitute.org/cheshbon-hanefesh/

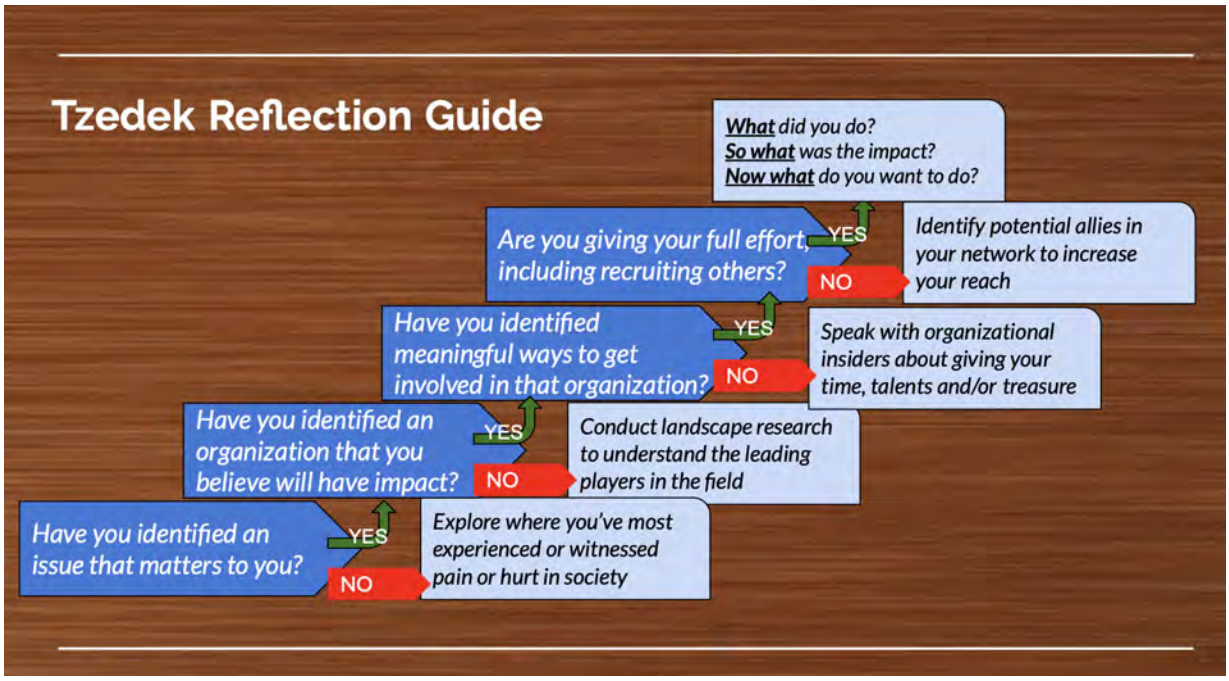
self-imposed pressure to "nail down" the ritual so that we could start practicing it. After five years of study, listening and experimentation, this thesis has revealed further places in which I want to refine the model of practice, despite its relative solidity today.

Moreover, ritual founders need to accept what parents must accept about their children: their projects will have lives of their own. Some users have called for communal boxes. Some artists have created boxes that focus on future intentions, versus past actions. I may balk at such choices since neither of these approaches support an individual in reflecting on a record of their own behavior, but Pandora learned many moons ago that you cannot close an open box.

A natural outgrowth, with a twist. Writing Chapter Two of this thesis convinced me even more fully that the Tzedek Box is a true successor of the *cheshbon ha-nefesh* of the past, particularly as contemporary Jewish leaders are seeking more ways to integrate reflection, ritual and justice work meaningfully. However, the practice as conceived does require many Jews to unlearn a number of habits. Through *teshuvah* and standard *tikkun middot*, we are accustomed to focusing on correcting negative behavior, not recording our positive deeds. Even though celebration is important, we must remind ourselves that the purpose of recording our actions is not for self-congratulation – but ultimately for self-improvement. In addition, many who engage in *cheshbon hanefesh* are used to associating it with the month of Elul, rather than all year long. This limits our ability to take stock of the fullness of our actual behavior, an essential piece of making change. We must continue to encourage mini-rituals with bite-sized opportunities to record our actions.

Layers of depth. This thesis has revealed different levels of reflection that users may choose to plumb. Stewards of the Tzedek Box practice will need to be sensitive and

responsive to the needs of the individual. Those who struggle to find meaningful opportunities for action may benefit from their own reflection guide (*below*). Others may already be taking regular action but need incisive questions to sharpen their approach. Creating differentiated tools is an area of opportunity for this initiative.



One piece of a puzzle and ecosystem. The Tzedek Box does not profess to be a cure-all. It is true that organizations focused on social change are typically so action-oriented that pause, reflection and evaluation often get short shrift, such that the Tzedek Box serves an important function. However, self-reflection supported by the Tzedek Box must be one piece of a larger puzzle, very much in line with the work of David Jaffe and others who seek to integrate spiritual teachings and practices with the actual work of making change. Individuals and institutions must build relationships across racial, socio-economic and religious lines to build shared empathy and solidarity. The work of community organizing, championed by organizations like the Religious Action Center, is central to growing and using political power. A Tzedek Box is no more

and no less than a catalyst and container for reflection. Its users need to be part of a community and a culture of ongoing action and learning.

Unexplored possibilities for art. If you are going to make a ritual, I have learned that you must involve artists. Doing so not only brings increased attention and legitimacy to the project, but it inspires others to think more expansively about how to make the ritual their own. In addition to encouraging ongoing box-making workshops at synagogues and other institutions, I hope to enlist other artistic organizations to create Tzedek Box invitationals in order to continue to stoke the creativity I witnessed through the Heller Museum show. I could imagine exhibitions of youth creations as a sub-genre of this work.

What scaling might look like. The initiative will continue to grow and evolve as we seek additional partners. In addition to reaching synagogues and religious schools of various denominations, I have my eye on summer camps and youth groups, service and justice organizations like Repair the World and Mitzvah Day UK, networks that engage unaffiliated Jews such as Honeymoon Israel and OneTable, as well as delivery channels like PJ Library and Ritual Well. To stoke ongoing interest and layers of sophistication to the initiative, we may decide to provide a different "theme" or focus each year: different middot, different art pieces serving as inspiration, different guiding questions. We have received some grant funding from the Schusterman Foundation to hire some part-time staff to help grow our recruitment process.

A personal note. As I peek into my own box, I am reminded that I too am a work in progress. While I have written many entries, I am dissatisfied with my own personal justice practice because it is quite diffuse. There are many issues that matter to me – immigration, criminal justice, climate, LGBTQ+ rights and democracy, among

them – and yet my efforts have been wide rather than deep. I see that I am drawn to causes in the moment when there are immediate opportunities to contribute, but I have not participated in sustained efforts recently. This is something I hope to change in the year to come.

One slip of paper jumps out at me – the one I wrote after leading Rosh Hashanah services inside a prison auditorium on Rikers Island. It brings me right back to the people I met that day, several of whom shared a real quest for spiritual connection amidst their isolation. Yet instead of a welcoming holiday message, my congregants for the day were strip-searched before they could enter our makeshift prayer space. I was pained by the constant deafening noise of airplanes taking off at LaGuardia Airport a thousand feet away. Not only was it nearly impossible to lead a service, or enjoy a contemplative space for reflection and repentance, but also the airplanes themselves seemed to mock the confinement of the detainees at Rikers. My Tzedek Box entry reminds me that I had asked to learn about other opportunities to lead services. I realize now that I never heard anything – and I never followed up. I can correct that now. It is not too late for a *tikkun*.

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APPENDIX A: ARTIFACTS

ARTIFACT 1

Greetings from Jerusalem,

I am writing with an update about Yom HaTzedek -- and an invitation for you to get involved on June 17!

You may recall from the summer a question I posed: what would it look to inspire and challenge even more Jews across denominations to recommit to the Jewish call for justice? What role could a new holiday -- Yom HaTzedek -- play in making this notion sacred? As one of many aspects of fulfilling our tradition's prophetic mandate to use our voices to improve society, Yom HaTzedek would aim to serve as an annual marker and an affirmation of Jewish efforts towards tzedek, as well as a prompt to redouble those efforts in the year to come. Not another mitzvah day, but a day where we gather to reflect on what Judaism demands of us, celebrate the ways that we have used our voices on behalf of the common good over the past year, consider the work that still needs to be done, and make commitments for upcoming advocacy and action. The vision is for each city - across congregations, across denominations - to observe this holiday together.

Since Utah, I have been talking with everyone who will listen about this possibility -- both in Israel and in the States. What's become obvious is that there are a ton of ideas about the possibilities -- so much so that my team and I are taking a page from the "design thinking" workshop we took at Wexner and are running a major design event. On the morning (8:30 a.m.-1 p.m.) of June 17 at the UJA in Manhattan, we're gathering a number of clergy, lay leaders, program thinkers, artists, activists, students, and funders to prototype and iterate on deep and inspiring ways to observe this new holiday, with the aim of piloting in 2020 the idea that garners the most support in the room. An amazing facilitator, Maya Bernstein, who is on the faculty of Yeshivat Maharat and Georgetown, is leading the day, and we have a great list of 36 folks participating (including Ruth Messinger from the JCC, Rabbi Menachem Creditor from UJA, Rabbi Salem Pearce from Truah, Rabbi David Adelson from HUC, Jeannie Appleman from JOIN for Justice, Rabba Yaffa Epstein from Pardes and the Wexner Foundation, Abby Levine from the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable, Rabbi Rachel Timoner from Congregation Beth Elohim in Brooklyn, Rabbi Georgette Kennebrae from West End Synagogue, and many more).

I'd love to invite you to be part of our Livestream Response Team, which will be joining us online from 11:30-1 Eastern on June 17 in order to provide real-time reactions and feedback to the designs generated. It's an easy and fun way for you to share your opinions and shape this new project with us. If you are interested, just fill out this simple form, and we'll get you more info.

Please reach out if you have questions -- and very much looking forward to seeing some of you there.

Warmly,
Andrew Mandel

ARTIFACT 2

Our tradition mandates that we work actively on behalf of a just society.[141]

- Our **Torah** begins by asserting that all people are created in G-d's image, a radical notion that teaches us the holiness of each living being. We then learn in Genesis 18:19 that G-d has singled out Abraham so "that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is just and right (*tzedek u'mishpat*)." In Genesis 18:25, Abraham uses this very mandate to advocate for Sodom: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" Throughout the rest of the *Chumash* (e.g., Exodus 23, Deuteronomy 10), we are taught to construct a system that prioritizes human dignity and treats the stranger lovingly, recounting our own history as strangers in the land of Egypt.
- Many of our **Prophets,** from Isaiah to Micah, are well-known for advocating on behalf of the most vulnerable. In a haftarah portion paired with *Parashat Tzav,* Jeremiah declares that G-d does not want sacrifices (7:22); G-d delights in *hesed, tzedek u'mishpat* (9:23).
- **Modern Jewish leaders**, from Rabbi Joachim Prinz and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel during the Civil Rights Era to present-day leaders such as Ruth Messinger and Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, have boldly carried this mantle. At Yad Vashem, we honor Righteous Gentiles who stood up on our behalf during the *Shoah*; our heroes are often those who refused to accept the status quo and took action for a greater good.
- We imagine the day when every Jew sees it as fundamental to our identity that we speak up against injustice in our world -- and acts on that belief.

There is room for us to grow in our advocacy for justice.

- 73 percent of Jews in the 2013 Pew Study said that remembering the Holocaust is an essential part of Judaism, whereas 56 percent of Jews said the same about working for justice and equality. This represents one gap to fill; we also can't quantify the chasm between those who *speak* of the role of justice in Judaism and those who *live* it. Major Jewish rallies for social causes in the past few years have attracted hundreds, not thousands.
- There are those who feel disconnected from most Jewish institutions and rituals, but are *seeking meaning and purpose in their lives connected to their identity*.
- There are those who are involved Jewishly, but see advocacy as the job of the rabbi or a fringe social action committee. They seek *Jewish sources--not just slogans--about justice, guidance about concrete actions to take, and clarity about why their voice matters.*
- There are those who engage in justice-oriented work, but not necessarily in a Jewish context, and they would like *greater spiritual nourishment to fuel persistence and long-term perspective* in the arc toward justice.

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[141] These are just a few of the sources that do a beautiful job of mining and analyzing the many citations of our Jewish tradition of ethics and advocacy: Seth Limmer and Jonah Pesner's *Moral Resistance and Spiritual Authority* (2019), Judith Schindler and Judy Seldin-Cohen's *Recharging Judaism* (2017), Shmuly Yanklowitz's *The Soul of Jewish Social Justice* (2014), Jill Jacobs' *There Shall Be No Needy* (2009), and Sid Schwarz's *Judaism and Justice* (2006).

- Still others pursue advocacy in ways that mine the richness that Judaism can offer them, but they could *use a way to reflect on the efficacy and meaning of what they've done -- and hope to expand the numbers* of people who are joining them.

One piece of a larger puzzle to address this gap is a new annual holiday.

- In generations and ages past, Jewish communities have removed and added holidays to the calendar -- from *Tu B'Shevat* to *Yom HaShoah* -- to signal our values as a moment in time (see *Megillat Ta'anit*). We have reached a historic moment of unprecedented Jewish agency and opportunity that leads us to want to affirm that fighting for universal justice, imbued with our particularist perspective, is essential to honoring our history and our identity.
- *Deuteronomy* 16:1-17 tells us to establish our three pilgrimage festivals. The very next verse says: "You shall appoint magistrates and officials for your tribes, in all the settlements that the LORD your God is giving you, and they shall govern the people with due justice." In the same breath when we establish three major holidays, we are also told to ensure that officials are using their power properly." We can do so by making this, too, an annual holiday.
- Our day aims to create a grand, annual marker of our commitment to justice, in complement to the daily (*Amidah, Aleinu*), weekly (*Havdalah*), seasonal (*Sukkot*, Dr. King's holiday, Human Rights Shabbat) rituals that some Jewish communities have adopted. As opposed to a "mitzvah day" or "the one day during the year when we engage in justice work," this holiday aims to help us look back at what we've done all year, mark our progress and reflect on lessons learned, and educate and recharge us for renewed efforts in the year to come.[142]
- The phrase "tikkun olam" can operate as a rallying cry--and a cliche. The holiday gives us an opportunity to go "beyond the bumper sticker" of the Jewish call for justice, infusing text, history, ritual and spiritual nourishment into our commitment to advocacy work.

This holiday is non-partisan, but focuses on systemic barriers to dignity for all.

- This holiday is not for "left-wing" Jews, nor intended for everyone to agree on policy solutions for every issue -- but rather for each person to ask themselves how they can redouble their efforts to growing a more just society for all in the coming year.
- Jewish organizations have done great work fostering and supporting volunteerism. Yom HaTzedek aims to target *systemic causes* to the problems being addressed by direct service, encouraging individuals to find their voices in working toward lasting social change. We are inspired by the highest level of Maimonides' famous ladder of *tzedakah*, which seeks to eliminate the need for giving.

Our design event should get us a big step closer to actualizing this holiday.

- **Process**: This is an initiative that requires many voices. After a great design event in Jerusalem in April, our second event on June 17 in New York, run by a professional facilitator, involves over 40 top leaders in activism, clergy, non-profits, and arts.[143] Dozens

[142] Prominent Orthodox Rabbi Michael Melchior, who partnered with Yossi Abramowitz 15 years ago to secure recognition of Cheshvan as "Jewish Social Action Month" by the Knesset, told us he now believes more in a single holy *day* -- with historic or textual resonance -- to recenter people on the Jewish responsibility to pursue social change.

[143] Our New York design sprint was made financially possible by the alumni of the 2016 New York Wexner Heritage Program. Rabbi Miriam Wajnberg and the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan was a key design partner, and we are hosted by UJA-New York.

more internationally are joining via livestream. We will learn from this process and apply its lessons to future design events in other cities.

- **Prototypes**: We are not making decisions on June 17 but rather using the occasion to gain great ideas (about date, core narrative, liturgy, rituals, symbols, food) and see what the "wisdom of the crowds" reveals about any emerging consensus.
- **Partners**. Those participating are under no future obligation; among our attendees, we are hoping to identify enthusiastic partners to contribute or lead future efforts in recruitment, development, ritual planning, or operations in New York or around the world. After June 17, based on surveys you complete, we will gauge the interest of our participants and convene future working groups with the aim of piloting the holiday in 2020.

Question behind it all

What would it look to inspire and activate more Jews across denominations to recommit to the Jewish call for justice? What role could a new ritual play in making this notion expected, sacred and transformative?

ARTIFACT 3

Yom HaTzedek Pesach Sheni Guide

First, Note:

This Pesach Sheni Guide is meant to offer many **suggestions** for your ritual. We recommend that you adapt it and make it your own. You choose what to prioritize, which options to pick, or if you want to bring in something completely different. For more general information on Yom HaTzedek and our year of testing, check out this document. Enjoy!

> As always, we have included several potential options for each section of the ritual. If you are looking for one cohesive suggestion for how to proceed, **follow the text highlighted in red throughout**.

> At the same time, there may be even more you want to try, leveraging the seder theme. You could be inventive with the "four children," or a seder plate, or "four cups of wine," adding relevant meaning and symbolism for the occasion. We welcome **innovation**!

> Given coronavirus, you may be wondering if you can do this ritual at all. While we know that doing this in person would be preferable, we have designed these elements so that **you *can* lead this ritual online.**

Main Goal:

Our central aim for this test is to create a sacred moment to help participants reflect upon their past justice work so as to inform and inspire future action.

Explanation and Background:

Tzedek Box:

The idea of a Tzedek Box emerged independently in both our New York and Jerusalem design sprints. As a reframing of the traditional tzedakah box, people use a Tzedek Box throughout the year to deposit slips of paper on which they've written the latest act of justice that they have completed ("I called my senator," "I attended this protest," "I hosted a screening of the documentary "13th" to raise awareness). On Yom HaTzedek, they open the box -- and reflect on the work that they did all year long to improve our society through their advocacy and activism. During Pesach Sheni, participants will open their boxes and reflect collectively on the work they've done and the work still to do.

Pesach Sheni:

Pesach Sheni or "Second Passover" is a Biblical[144] holiday. Some Israelites were unable to perform the Passover pilgrimage due to being in an impure state, often understood to mean they were handling corpses. These members of society successfully lobbied Moses to institute a second chance to make their pilgrimage one month later (14 Iyyar). Most commonly observed today in Chasidic communities, Pesach Sheni is now seen as a day for everyone to come together for a celebration of second chances. Indeed, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (1880-1950), the 6th Lubavitcher Rebbe, taught that the true significance of the holiday is to teach us that **it is never too late to rectify a past failing**. This is why we are embracing Pesach Sheni for Yom HaTzedek -- because: (1) we see such beautiful symmetry between this Biblical occasion to ensure *everyone* could sacrifice for the Eternal, and Yom HaTzedek is an opportunity for Jews all around the world to give of themselves for the Greater Good, (2) we see the holiday as

[144] Numbers 9:1-14

enabling us to build from the redemptive message of Passover and serve as a "second chance" moment to affirm that the Exodus is not over until all of us are free (note that no other festival holiday has a "second chance," emphasizing the special role that Passover and our liberation story plays in our history), (3) we appreciate that the holiday reminds us to think about those who have been left out and who deserve a seat at the table, which *tzedek* work seeks to rectify, (4) we love that Pesach Sheni was also a holiday that "bubbled up" through popular demand -- and could use a modern renaissance that we can all help spark. One additional fun fact: tradition teaches us that Iyar 14 is when the matzah carried by the Israelites in the desert ran out, and manna began to fall from the sky, which is both why matzah is often eaten on Pesach Sheni and why we can now reflect on the post-matzah world in which we want to live. For more information on Pesach Sheni as it has been observed traditionally, see here.

What We Are All Testing:
While testers will adopt and adapt this guide to their audiences and their own instincts, please make sure to include the opening of a tzedek box, so we can compare across tests.

Proposed Arc:

The Proposed Arc for this ritual is to conduct a Pesach Sheni Seder. Make sure to include an intentional opening and closing with both collective and private experiences in the middle. Of course, ritualize the opening of your boxes!

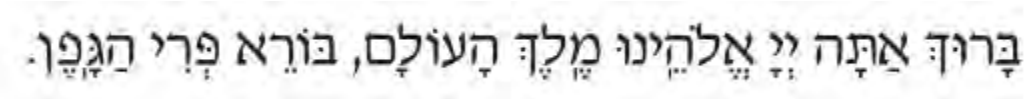
1. Make Holy
2. Maggid
3. Meal
4. Music
5. Make it Last

Suggestions for Ritual Observance:

1. **Make Holy:** Begin with a **sanctification** that establishes the sacredness of the occasion and a spiritual concern for the welfare of society.

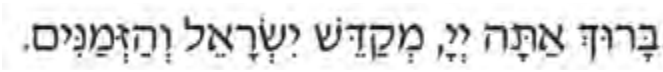
    a. You may choose to bring the ritual to a start with a niggun (wordless melody), song, prayer, or reading. Consider something that will set the tone and bring everyone in (suggestions below).
    b. If participants do not know each other, leaders and participants can introduce themselves either before or after the ritual sanctification.
    c. Begin with a call to order and explanation of the ritual:
        i. We created boxes months ago, committing to live out the Jewish mandate to create a just world.
        ii. Since then, we have taken action in a variety of ways and recorded our work.
        iii. Today, on the Biblical holiday of Pesach Sheni -- when in ancient times people who had not yet made their Passover sacrifice had a second chance to do so -- we examine our record of action. On an occasion that teaches us it isn't too late to rectify a past failing, we take a look at the modern sacrifices we have made -- and recommit to giving of ourselves in the year to come.
    d. Create a ritual moment with sanctification of this occasion with one or more of the following options:

Option 1: Kiddush
Say these blessings over some wine or grape juice.



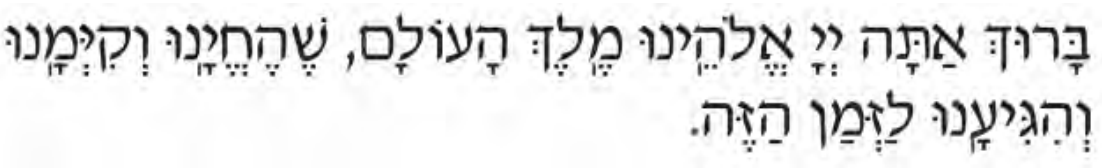
Baruch
atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, borei p'ri hagafen.
Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the world, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

Optional Addition:



Baruch atah, Adonai m'kadeish Yisrael v'hazmanim.
Blessed are You, Adonai, who sanctifies Israel and the Festivals.

Option 2: Shehecheyanu



Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, shehecheyanu, v'kiy'manu, v'higiyanu laz'man hazeh.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.

Option 3: "Open" By Judith Silver
Music for this song can be found here.

Open my eyes to truth
Open my hands to give freely
Open my lips to good words, to pure words
Open my heart to love

Option 4: Psalm 118:19-20 Pitchu Li

פִּתְחוּ־לִי שַׁעֲרֵי־צֶדֶק אָבֹא־בָם אוֹדֶה יָהּ׃
זֶה־הַשַּׁעַר לַיהוָה צַדִּיקִים יָבֹאוּ בוֹ׃

Pitchu li sha'rei tzedek avovam odeh ya.
Zeh ha'sha'ar ladonai tzadikim yavo'u vo.

Open for me the gates of righteousness that I may enter them and give thanks to the Eternal.
This is the gate to the Eternal One, the righteous will enter it.

(Note: you can sing verses set to music)

2. **Maggid:** What stories do our boxes tell? What is the story we hope to tell together?
    a. In a traditional seder, we tell the story of our people's redemption from slavery in Egypt. In this seder, through the memories inside our Tzedek Boxes, we will be recounting the story of injustice today--and the liberation we hope for and work to create together.
    b. We begin here by eating **matzah**, the bread of affliction, to remind us of the pain and suffering that is in the world. Remind participants to really taste the brittle dryness of the matzah. Distribute matzah and recite both the blessings for Motzi and for Matzah:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ	Baruch ata Adonoy,
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם	Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
הַמּוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.	ha-motzi lechem min ha-aretz.

Blessed are you God, King of the Universe,
Who brings forth bread from the earth.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו,
וְצִוָּנוּ עַל אֲכִילַת מָצָה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu al achilat matzah.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us regarding the eating of Matzah.

    c. Recite a prayer for opening the tzedek box. Your prayer might look something like this:

We open our eyes to the truth of injustice, *pote'ach ivrim,*[145]
We open these tzedek boxes
We open our hands in gratitude and generosity, *pote'ach et yadecha,*[146]
We open these tzedek boxes

[145] Taken from "Nisim B'chol Yom" morning blessings
[146] Taken from Ashrei prayer

We open our lips to prayer and words of kindness, *Adonai s'fatai tiftach,*[147]
We open these tzedek boxes
We open our hearts to wisdom and love, *p'tach libi,*[148]
We open these tzedek boxes
Let us open the gates of righteousness[149]
Let us open these tzedek boxes

d. Then open your box and go through the contents either on your own, with a partner, or in small groups (depending on if your box is personal or communal). Simply read through each contribution. Sit with this for a moment. Perhaps do some meditation or journaling.
e. In a traditional seder, we ask four questions. In this seder, we also ask four questions, but they are a little bit different. Pick out one or two actions that **resonate** with, **challenge**, or **stand out** to you. Then engage the following questions (see more guidance below):
    i. **WHAT:** What action did you pick? Describe the action. This action may seem small, but what larger challenge or systemic issue does it aim to address?
    ii. **WHO:** Who do you think was impacted by this action? Were you impacted by this action? How so?
    iii. **WHY:** Why did you pick this action? Why was this action important, meaningful or challenging?
    iv. **HOW:** How easy or difficult was it to take this action, and what does this tell you about the work ahead? How do you plan to follow up and/or continue similar actions?
f. How to engage these questions? Choose from some combination of the options below, or innovate your own!
    i. One or two people can demonstrate for the group
    ii. Participants can journal privately
    iii. Participants can discuss with partners or in small groups
    iv. Provide visual handout of these questions
g. Closing Maggid Options:
    i. Add a word or phrase to the outside of your box, based on the storytelling we just did. A prompt to consider: what word of encouragement or reflection do you want to hold with you during the next year of using your tzedek box?
    ii. Add a knotted ribbon to your tzedek box to mark the "tying together" or marking of a "round" of using your tzedek box.

3. **Motzi**: Blessing Over the Bread of Abundance
    a. Distribute challah, and explain that one of the significances of Pesach Sheni is that it is traditionally known as the day in which the Israelites transitioned from matzah to manna. This bread, so much more sumptuous than the matzah of our affliction, represents the abundance we hope to see for all in the year to come. Encourage people, after the blessing, to really taste the bread they consume.

[147] Opening prayer for the Amidah
[148] Berakhot 17a:4 (Talmud Bavli)
[149] Psalm 118:19

b. You may choose to use bagels or another bread-like round food which are like the world, round, but with a hole in it (incomplete, imperfect)
c. Next, recite the motzi before eating.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ	Baruch ata Adonoy,
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם	Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
הַמּוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.	ha-motzi lechem min ha-aretz.

Blessed are you God, King of the Universe,
Who brings forth bread from the earth.

4. Music: Internalizing Our Values, Anchoring the Moment, and Building Community
   a. In a traditional seder, we sing after the meal and praise God, *Hallel*. This day is a bit different-- we want to acknowledge the pain and suffering that is in the world, as well as the joy and opportunity we have to take part in repairing it. Though we may not be as exuberant as on other festive days, we retain the joy of being able to be of service in this world. Here are some songs and poetry, but feel free to add in your own favorite tunes!
   b. Some Options:

Option 1: "We Cannot Pray To You"

We cannot merely pray to you, O God, to end war;
For we know that You have made the world in a way
That man must find his own path to peace.
Within himself and with his neighbor.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end starvation;
For You have already given us the resources
With which to feed the entire world,
If we would only use them wisely.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to root out prejudice;
For You have already given us eyes
With which to see the good in all men,
If we would only use them rightly.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end despair,
For You have already given us the power
To clear away slums and to give hope,
If we would only use our power justly.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end disease;
For You have already given us great minds
With which to search out cures and healing,
If we would only use them constructively.

Therefore we pray to You instead, O God,
For strength, determination and will power,
To do instead of just pray,

To become instead of merely to wish." - Rabbi Jack Riemer

(https://reformjudaism.org/practice/prayers-blessings/we-cannot-pray-you)

Option 2: For an extended prayer, consider this Prayer for Our Country:

Our God and God of our ancestors, bless this country and all who dwell within it.
Help us to experience the blessings of our lives and circumstances
To be vigilant, compassionate, and brave
Strengthen us when we are afraid
Help us to channel our anger
So that it motivates us to action
Help us to feel our fear
So that we do not become numb
Help us to be generous with others
So that we raise each other up
Help us to be humble in our fear, knowing that as vulnerable as we feel there are those at greater risk,
And that it is our holy work to stand with them
Help us to taste the sweetness of liberty
To not take for granted the freedoms won in generations past or in recent days
To heal and nourish our democracy, that it may be like a tree planted by the water whose roots reach down to the stream
It need not fear drought when it comes, its leaves are always green
-- *Rabbi Ayelet Cohen* (https://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/prayer-our-country)

Option 3: Olam Chesed Yibaneh עולם חסד יבנה, Rabbi Menachem Creditor

I will build this world from love... yai dai dai
And you must build this world from love... yai dai dai
And if we build this world from love... yai dai dai
Then God will build this world from love... yai dai dai

5. Make it Last: Looking Toward the Future
    a. In a traditional seder, we close with "bashana haba'ah biy'rushalyim," Next Year in Jerusalem. Today/tonight we compose our own wishes and visions for a more just future. Alone, in pairs or in small groups, complete this prayer: Next Year May... B'Shana Haba'ah...
    b. After everyone has had some time to compose their prayer, go around the room and share one at a time. Everyone may say "Ken y'hi ratzon" (may it be so) after each person.
    c. Option: Put these prayers in your box. Or find a partner and exchange prayers, each person writing one for each other.
    d. Option: Take a picture of these prayers and put them together for a follow up blog post, email, or art piece!
    e. Say together the statement shared at the conclusion of reading a book of Torah: "hazak hazak v'nitchazek" ("Be strong, be strong and let us strengthen one another").

Artifact 4

Be Wise Fellowship in Jewish Entrepreneurialism: The Tzedek Box

Name(s): Andrew K. Mandel
Program and year: Rabbinical Program, 2023
Contact Info: andrew.mandel@huc.edu, 646-483-8660

Executive Summary: Combine Jewish social justice with the popular runner's app, "MapMyRun," and you'll have the Tzedek Box, a social media tool to fuel Jewish activism. The Tzedek Box enables users to easily become aware of social justice efforts they can join, seamlessly sign on to causes they support, get inspired about news of positive social change, and share their efforts with their networks in order to grow their impact, all inflected with Jewish wisdom and inspiration. It is one piece of a broader effort to ritualize social justice more deeply in the Jewish world.

Environment: We face a plethora of social, economic, environmental and political problems in our world today -- problems that require an active citizenry willing to demand systems-level change. In the 2013 Pew Study, 56 percent of American Jews indicated that working for justice and equality is an essential part of Judaism. Yet only a fraction of these individuals are regularly engaged in acts of advocacy and activism. While there are incredible American Jewish organizations that aim to activate Jews in activism and advocacy to address these causes, including the Religious Action Center and Bend the Arc, major Jewish rallies for social causes have attracted thousands, not millions that High Holidays attract; 32,000 people signed Bend the Arc's most popular petition -- an impressive number, but with real room to grow.

Goals/objectives: In the spirit of our Biblical injunctions to treat all human beings with divine dignity and to love the stranger, my vision is to reach the day in which every Jew sees it as fundamental to our identity that we speak up against injustice in our world -- and acts on that belief. The aims of the Tzedek Box in particular are to:

- Ensure users can connect with advocacy opportunities that speak to their values and passions
- Cultivate users' habits to engage regularly in social justice advocacy and activism from a Jewish perspective

It is part of a larger effort to:

- Grow the number of Jews actively engaged in advocacy and activism
- Grow the extent to which Jews use their voice to improve society

Clear statement of the need or problem you intend to address and what you hope to achieve: There are many reasons why people do not participate in activism or advocacy, including that they may not know of the action steps they can take for the issues they care about, they may not believe their voice will matter, they may not see acting toward justice as a fundamental aspect of who they are, and they may not have figured out how to integrate advocacy into their busy schedules. Any effort seeking to grow civic engagement must contend with all of these issues.

There are many robust efforts to mobilize liberal American Jews' civic voice. However, "calls to action" can appear abruptly and unpredictably in people's inboxes, can easily get lost in piles of e-mail, or are buried on subpages of advocacy's organizations' websites. Often social justice efforts operate independently from one another -- criminal justice reform and universal pre-K and LGBT rights organizations can unintentionally compete for attention -- such that their messages often get fragmented from the user's perspective. A very well-organized synagogue can integrate these various items for their congregants, but it is the rare synagogue that does so, leaving out both the rest of the affiliated and all of the unaffiliated Jews without leadership to provide direction. The result is a very undisciplined, *irreligious* approach to Jewish activism.

What would it look like to elevate justice to a religious practice, to a religious discipline? Our approach is to *ritualize* justice work, to set aside regular time to engage in it.[150] After Havdalah each week, as we Jews traditionally move from the world as it could be during Shabbat to the world as it is during the rest of the week, we can supply new ways to act toward justice in the world: signing on to a petition related to curbing gun violence, following up with a politician about their position on immigration, attending a rally on climate change. Then, every year, there will be a chance to reflect on our actions through the holiday of Yom HaTzedek, recommitting to the Jewish call for justice. This requires an infrastructure: (a) a well-organized, predictable, weekly supply of potential opportunities to act, and (b) a container to record all of the actions we took, so that we can reflect on our participation as we recommit to action in the coming year. All of this can be delivered in technology suited to a discipline -- not a website that you visit, but rather an app that prompts people to easily see what might be done and fulfill their commitment.

Implementation: This project is part of a larger effort begun a year ago, aimed at ways to ritualize the work of justice in the Jewish world. A focus of that effort has been to imagine a new Jewish holiday in which we rededicate ourselves each year to the Jewish call for justice. Through an ongoing design process that has engaged over 100 Jewish leaders from around the world, one of the concepts that has emerged is the idea of a physical Tzedek Box, a ritual object that would enable people to regularly deposit slips of paper on which they've written acts of justice they've just completed; the box would be opened on a particular day each year, Yom HaTzedek, to serve as a moment of sacred accountability, celebration, reflection and recommitment for justice work. My amazing team (including HUC students from Los Angeles and Cincinnati) and I are currently field-testing several poignant dates with groups around the world in order to determine the occasion with the most potency.

The "Be Wise" grant would help build out a digital version of the Tzedek Box: the app that can help inform participants' actions, given that our tests have revealed that some segment of our audience finds it a barrier to know where or how to engage in advocacy, as well as to serve as a record of one's activism work during the year. I will take responsibility for iterating on the construction of the app, and my volunteer "rodfei tzedek" in various cities -- who are already testing our various versions of the holiday -- have access to the people who can help test it during its development phase.

Collaboration: Will the campus community or other communal organizations be involved? If so, how? This project is ripe for partnership opportunities. Dozens of communal organizations have been involved in brainstorming possibilities for the observance of Yom HaTzedek; Central Synagogue, Repair the World and the Academy of Jewish Religion have been among our testers for the holiday and will be tapped for testing of the Tzedek Box. We will hold a Yom HaTzedek event on HUC's campus to involve students and faculty, so that they can help with testing and recruiting. The Religious Action Center and Bend the Arc will be key partners in supplying content for the action steps on the app.

Resources: What will you need to carry out the project, including time and budget?

A. OCT. 2019 (~15 hours): Finalize research and cost-comparison for app development services and potential technical consultation
B. NOV. 2019 (~10 hours): Recruit group of test users through "Yom HaTzedek" gatherings
C. NOV./DEC. 2019 (~50 hours): Work with a group of test users to iterate on a prototype app using a do-it-yourself app tool, which would:
    - Prompt people to take an action step after Havdalah (e.g., a "push" notification to let people know that new opportunities are up)

[150] Holidays emphasize what our tradition expects of us. We are expected to remember the escape from Egypt, and we celebrate Passover. We are expected to atone for our sins, and we observe Yom Kippur. We are expected to rest, and we celebrate Shabbat. These are occasions that enable us to fulfill our Jewish expectations.

- Sacralizes the occasion of engaging in advocacy or activism (e.g., an opening screen that supplies the blessing as one pursues justice)
- Provide people with a simple list of opportunities, organized by categories
- Enable people to participate in these opportunities as easily as possible
- Record the completed actions people have taken, creating a running list of a user's activism and advocacy
- Enable people to share their actions on social media so others could participate

D. DEC. 2019-JUNE 2020 (~1 hour/week): Regularly populate app with opportunities
E. DEC. 2019-JUNE 2020 (~5 hours/week): Engage with users and make adjustments to the app
F. JUNE 2020: Identify partners for potential scaling, marketing, distribution (TBD)

Evaluation: Success in this phase of the project is to create a working prototype that has been refined in response to user feedback. Here are specific ways we will determine whether we are indeed "refining":

Evaluation question	**Metric**
Are we able to recruit subscribers?	# of app subscribers
Are we able to sustain visitation?	% of app subscribers who visit occasionally (at least once a month) and/or regularly (at least once a week)
Are we able to inspire advocacy?	% of app participants who complete action items
Are we able to gather valued opportunities?	% of opportunities adopted by the app's user base
Are people inspired to share their advocacy/activism with their networks?	% of participants who use the app's "share" function to recruit others to activism

Rabbi Wise's Legacy: As a forefather and exemplar of social justice in the Reform Movement, Rabbi Stephen Wise and his legacy are at the very heart of this project. Rabbi Wise, who fought for child labor laws, workers' rights, women's suffrage and civil rights, ardently believed in applying Jewish values, Jewish history and Jewish teachings to the work of repairing the world. He challenged the Reform Movement to live up to the social justice tenets of the Pittsburgh Platform, and he advocated for a strong participatory democracy. If Melvin Urofsky's biography of Rabbi Wise is titled "A Voice That Spoke For Justice," the Tzedek Box seeks to bring that voice to the 21st century and grow it into a chorus.

ARTIFACT 5

CURRICULUM FORMAT
Each month has a theme based on one area where social justice work is needed. Every month follows the same six step process -- outlined below -- with new materials, activities, and suggested tzedek actions relevant to the month's theme.

The lesson plan for each month is a template, not a script. Teachers have different groups and different time allocations, so you should choose the materials that work best for your students, as well as decide to excerpt articles by highlighting sections that are most relevant. We do recommend that our six step process -- outlined below -- serve as a guide, regardless of the materials you use.

Our process	**Our sources**
*0. We are clear why we as **Jews are focused on the needs of our broader community**.*	A quote, brief activity, or discussion prompt to engage students in thinking about the "why" of tzedek work.
*1. We begin with **human beings**, connecting with the needs and interests of our neighbors.*	Links to articles, videos or other sources that introduce students to people directly affected by the issue. If possible, educators should consider local ways for students to actually meet and empathize with individuals who can share their experiences.
*2. We then zoom out to see the **scope of the problem** -- and understand its causes.*	Materials to teach about the month's theme. Includes materials about the scope and causes of the issue, as well as work being done to address it.
*3. We look to our **tradition** for guidance.*	Materials to help students deepen their answer to the question: What is our responsibility and our role as Jews in addressing the issue?
*4. We engage in meaningful **action**.*	Suggested actions that students can take to address the issue. Types of suggested actions include: direct service, raising awareness, and advocacy. Where possible, we suggest actions that students can take as a class, individually, or with their families.
*5. We **reflect** on what we have done.*	Once you have completed your action, take a private moment to write a reflection about your experience for your physical Tzedek Box, or the app. What did you do? What did you feel? What did you learn? In May, on Yom HaTzedek (May 14-15), students will have the opportunity to open up their Tzedek Boxes and reflect on the entire year.

SEPTEMBER
HOUSING INSECURITY

Our process[151]	**Our sources**
*0. We are clear why we as **Jews are focused on the needs of our broader community**.*	*Before beginning, ask students to make the case for why we in a Jewish space would spend our time focused on issues of economic and social equality and justice.* *Potential answers:* * Our Torah teaches that we are all created in G-d's image. * We believe that the Exodus is not over until all people are free. * We are partners with G-d to repair the world; we are the ones with the hands and mouths and feet to make change here and now. * We have learned throughout our history that what affects one group in our society affects us all.
*1. We begin with **human beings**, connecting with the needs and interests of our neighbors.*	*We are now going to delve into our topic of this month -- housing insecurity -- by meeting people directly affected by the issue.* * Watch this short video about children discussing their experiences with homelessness. As a group, share your reactions to the interviews. What is most surprising, or most striking, about the perspectives of the young people? * Read this article of the situations families are facing in Orlando. What did you not know before, and how do you feel about what you are learning? * Or partner with a local organization so that students can meet individuals experiencing homelessness, hear their stories, and ask questions.
*2. We then zoom out to see the **scope of the problem** -- and understand its causes.*	* Take a quick thumbs-up, thumbs-down quiz (found at the end of this document) to determine how much everyone already knows about homelessness. Discuss your answers. * Read this article, or invite a speaker (from the Florida Coalition to End Homelessness, for example) to share with students: What progress has been made in your local area related to the issue of homelessness? What remains the problem today, and what do experts seem to agree is a root cause to address?

[151] *This is a template, not a script. Teachers have different groups and different time allocations, so you should choose the materials that work best for your students, as well as decide to excerpt articles by highlighting sections that are most relevant. We do recommend that our process -- on the left-hand side of the page -- serve as a guide, regardless of the materials you use.*

*3. We look to our **tradition** for guidance.*	* According to this article, what is our responsibility and our role as Jews in addressing the issue of housing security? In what ways does a sukkah specifically serve as a symbol for this issue?
*4. We engage in meaningful **action**.*	While we as one group in one month will not solve the issue of homelessness, one famous Jewish teaching, from Pirkei Avot, reminds us: "You are not required to finish the work, yet neither are you permitted to desist from it." There are a variety of ways we can get involved: * Groups may decide to pursue **direct service** -- volunteering at a homeless shelter; creating "care kits" of hygiene products, granola bars and water bottles that people can donate, or keep in their cars or backpacks to distribute when they encounter a person who is experiencing homelessness; or building homes with Habitat for Humanity. * Groups may want to **raise awareness** about the issue. One teen group in Florida decided to create a video project, helping to elevate the stories of those experiencing homelessness in their community. * Groups may decide to **raise money** to support a local housing initiative. * Groups may want to get involved in **advocacy**, joining local efforts to change policies to create more transitional or affordable housing. * Groups may want to **learn more** about a gap-year program called Tivnu, in which students after high school spend a year living with peers and completing internships such as creating small homes.
*5. We **reflect** on what we have done.*	Once you have completed your action, take a private moment to write a reflection about your experience for your physical Tzedek Box, or the app. What did you do? What did you feel? What did you learn?

ARTIFACT 6

PLAYBOOK (2022-23)

Dear Colleague: Welcome to the Tzedek Box Playbook, which can help you successfully implement the Tzedek Box ritual into your community. We thank you for your partnership in working toward a more just world. We hope you will add to this guide over time with your own best practices.

– Andrew Kaplan Mandel (andrew@tzedekbox.org)
Founder, Tzedek Box

VISION, MISSION AND THEORY OF CHANGE

Our vision is a world of dignity and wholeness for all. Our mission at Tzedek Box is to increase the frequency and depth with which Jews are working in service of this vision. We believe that the regularized ritual of owning and then using a Tzedek Box helps hold us accountable to our commitment to tzedek, and that reflection helps to fuel a more thoughtful consideration of the actions we are taking. By writing down our actions and reflections in journal entries, we become more mindful about our own acts of seeking to improve the world – and associate those actions with our positive Jewish identity. Whether one puts a little or a lot in one's Tzedek Box, the act of opening the box will be a source of discovery and motivation, as we seek to align our actions with our values.

GOALS AND BENCHMARKS

Planning with the end in mind, our concrete goal is for a meaningful proportion of your congregation to attend Yom HaTzedek on May 4-5, 2023 with multiple journal entries in their boxes, such that they can take stock of their past actions – and rededicate themselves to their communities, our society and our planet in the year to come. What "meaningful proportion" means is up to each congregation, but we encourage you to be aspirational when you fill in the blank of how many congregants will reach each benchmark below on the road to Yom HaTzedek.

- In September: X% of congregants register their Tzedek Box on tzedekbox.org
- In September: X% of congregants create their first entry and put it in their boxes.
- Throughout the year: X% create subsequent entries, monthly on average.
- May 4-5, 2023: X% open their box and reflect on its contents.

As a national Tzedek Box community, we will also be measuring the participation and retention in our Tzedek Circle events, the racial and gender diversity of representation we have recruited for our events (our participants, our musical guests and our special guests),as well as the impact that participants believe that Tzedek Box has had on their service and justice work.

LAUNCHING THE BOX **(REGISTER IT + FIRST ENTRY)**

If you have ordered boxes for your community, it will come beautifully packaged and accompanied with clear instructions on its use. However, in order to promote use of the Tzedek Box for the first time, participants need to *internalize* its purpose and feel *compelled* to commit to the practice. Here are some steps you as a community leader can take to encourage this process:

- **Anticipating the delivery.** Before the box arrives, you may wish to share with your community that it is coming in synagogue communications so that they can anticipate it and feel extra-excited when it arrives in the mail.
- **Using trusted messengers.** Whether during a well-attended service or through a video, it is powerful to hear from clergy articulating what tzedek is, explaining why the congregation has made this investment, and demonstrating how they are using the box. The Tzedek Box also makes an excellent "call to action" for one of the High Holiday sermons.
- **Use or write a piece of liturgy.** The moment of inaugurating one's box deserves a Shehecheyanu, and it also may be a beautiful moment to use a prayer such as Rabbi Jack Riemer's "We Cannot Merely Pray to You," or James Conlon's "I Know," or to write your own about the possibilities of this soon-to-be-filled box.
- **Tap into the why.** Different Jews have different entry points when it comes to their commitment to justice. For some, it is about upholding a longstanding family value, or a conviction to "love the stranger, for we were strangers in Egypt," or a belief of "Never Again" after the Holocaust, or a philosophical alignment with the teachings of Biblical prophets, or a theological stance about being G-d's partner, or a pursuit of self-protection. Engage people about why they care about *tzedek* work, and be prepared to speak to these different sensibilities. For one example activity, consider this discussion guide, or ask people to stand near whichever of these statements is most compelling and share why.
- **Encourage conversation.** Have participants share what they will need to fulfill the commitment of using the box to prompt action. Discuss the difference between a "Tzedakah Box" and a "Tzedek Box." What does "tzedek" look like as distinct from "tzedekah"?
- **Leverage the different sides of the box.** The box is designed to be interactive in order to become a personal object, a symbol of one's own values and priorities. Each side of the box answers a different question, which could each lend itself to special programming that could help people develop a sense of connection to the ritual. "To whom do I dedicate my tzedek work?" "What are the issues that matter to me?" "How am I going to help make change?" Whether through a writing exercise, a panel discussion, a storytelling evening, a networking event, or an opportunities fair, one could imagine different ways to help people deepen their answers to these questions.
- **Invite the creators.** Your congregation may find the ritual fascinating on a "meta"-level: how did it come to be, and what was the artist's inspiration? If you would like to have a public session with Tzedek Box founder Andrew Kaplan Mandel and/or box designer Eli Kaplan Wildmann, we can make that possible.

- **Emphasize registering the box.** Having people register their box on tzedekbox.org, helps you know what percentage of your community has taken the first commitment step in using the boxes, and it allows them to receive periodic announcements of action opportunities that they could take and then add to their box throughout the year.
- **Encourage all ages to participate.** Tzedek Box users range in age from five to 105. Some may believe that children are too young to understand what justice is, except children are the first to tell us when something is fair or not. Others may wonder if this ritual is just for families. It is for everyone.
- **Add your first journal entry together.** Build momentum early on by giving your members a clear opportunity to engage in tzedek together and build the muscle of adding to the box. With the High Holidays beginning toward the end of September, there are opportunities earlier in the month to host a service event (e.g., postcard-writing), or to bring canned foods to the synagogue during the *chagim*. Alternatively, one could imagine noting at the end of the Erev Rosh Hashanah service that "teshuvah, tefilah, and tzedakah" are the three major commitments we make during the holiday, and the tzedakah that one gives during this time of year would be a wonderful first entry in one's Tzedek Box. Why did they choose the organization(s) they chose, and what do they hope the money will be used for? Create a moment when everyone is writing their slips of paper at the same time so that participants feel part of a larger tzedek community. Use the blessing "*...vitzivanu lirdof tzedek*" upon adding the entry to the box.

USING THE BOX THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

In order for most people to use the Tzedek Box throughout the year, it must become habituated through role-modeling, repeated exposure, step-by-step support, and a community of peers. This does not necessarily require a ton of extra hours, but just creative thinking about how to leverage existing events strategically.

- **The last five minutes.** You can use the last five minutes of any event related to improving our world – whether it's a service project, an advocacy event, or a learning experience such as a relevant guest speaker – for a moment to pause, invite people to think about what they HEARD, what they FELT, what they LEARNED. One of our favorite prompts that help people go deeper than a simple report of what they did is: "What?" (What did you just experience?) "So What?" (What is the significance or meaning of it?) "Now What?" (What does it make you want to do next?). Consider setting up a prominent display station with slips of paper and pencils that allow for people to memorialize their reflection at the event, and bring the slips home to their Tzedek Boxes.
- **Establish a regular ritual.** Encourage your people to maintain a regular (weekly) cadence for adding an entry to their Tzedek Box, such as before lighting candles on Friday night, or during Havdalah. People sometimes struggle to connect their deeds to their Jewish identity, so it's useful to remind them that their donations, their volunteer work, their petition-signing, their voice-raising – not just toward Washington, but in their own backyards as well – are all relevant for the Tzedek Box. You might support this regular ritual through:

    - *Have a Tzedek Box display*, or slips of paper and golf pencils at the entrance to the sanctuary, inviting people to take a moment to write their journal entry from the week.
    - *Take a moment during the Friday night service*, during candle-lighting, for a member of the clergy or a congregant to publicly put a journal entry in a collective box
    - *Schedule a separate pre-Shabbat or once-a-month Havdalah* event to enable people to share with one another what they've been doing and what it's making them think
    - *Profile different volunteer work or advocacy efforts* of your members in the "Tzedek Box" section of a website or newsletter
- **Consider programming along the set of themes, leveraging the Jewish calendar.** Whether as a complement to your existing holiday programming, or as distinct, you can leverage the different moments of the Jewish calendar to shine a spotlight on various causes, offer hands-on opportunities for learning, service or advocacy, and create spaces for reflection on a variety of topics.

MONTH	ISSUE + JEWISH ORG	REFLECTION QUESTION
September - Shofar 9/18	Voting Rights (the RAC's "Your Voice, Your Vote")	How do you use your voice so that others can hear?
October - Sukkot and Ecclesiastes - 10/23	Housing Justice and Food Insecurity (Tivnu and Mazon)	What are the roles of empathy versus sympathy when pursuing change?
November - Lech Lecha / Vayera - 11/13	Immigration Justice (HIAS)	How do you navigate the inevitable ups and downs on the road to equity and justice?
December - Chanukah - 12/11	Hate-based violence (ADL)	How do we address the needs of Jewish communities relative to other needs?
January - MLK and Rabbi Heschel's yahrzeit - 1/15	Mass Incarceration (JCPA)	How do you respond to calls for moderation while working to make urgent change?
February - Tu Bishevat - 2/5	Climate Justice (Dayenu and Hazon)	How do you balance simplicity and nuance when pursuing complex issues?
March - Purim - 3/5	Gender Equity (NCJW)	How do you speak the truth to people who benefit from

		obscuring it?
April - Passover - 4/2	Workers' Rights (Truah)	How do you take responsibility for your part in a systemic problem?

In 2021-22, based on the request of several partners, we developed a teen curriculum based on a set of monthly themes. You are welcome to adapt the materials or ideas from that guide for your congregation.

MONTHLY EVENTS

We at Tzedek Box will host monthly virtual events that you and your congregants can attend. But if you want to create your own in-person gatherings, consider the following hour-long format, fueled by action steps that can come from national Jewish organizations. Our experience at Tzedek Box is that communities require (a) structured space for individuals to share their feelings and experiences aloud and (b) direction and focus in order to stimulate action.

Timing	Content
5 min	Musical opening that invites us into sacred reflection
10 min	Looking backwards: Facilitated space or breakout rooms for participants to share what happened in this month of justice work that has encouraged, provoked, upset or moved them, and/or lessons learned from the actions they've taken and questions that they are holding; offer the reflection question from our thematic chart as an option for discussion
20 min	Living in the present: invite a member of the community, or a special guest, to present a link between the time of the Jewish year and the justice theme
15 min	Action: Provide attendees with the time, space and instructions to take immediate actions related to the theme (such as calling representatives on an issue of importance to the attendees)
5 min	Musical closing that calls us to future action; encouraging people to use this time to write their reflections in their Tzedek Box, including what resonates with them, what new understandings they have, and what questions linger.

YOM HATZEDEK

The occasion of Yom HaTzedek (Thursday evening, May 4, 2023) is the moment to open one's box, take stock of the year, and rededicate oneself to improving our world. The holiday falls on Pesach Sheini, the "second Passover" referenced in Numbers 9 when a group of Israelites were unable to participate in the Pascal sacrifice because of having touched a dead body. Insisting on inclusion, these Israelites lobbied their representative, Moses, requesting a change to this policy. The Eternal One decided to create a second occasion, Pesach Sheini, so that these

people could also participate and contribute. We recognize this advocacy day that resulted in a new Jewish holiday as our Yom HaTzedek.

- **Set it on your calendar now.** Make sure that you have reserved the time and space within your institution and advertise it often.
- **Consider a musical guest and/or exciting keynote speaker.** What would make this occasion extra special and encourage attendance?
- **Consider hosting a "share fair" of opportunities.** After reflecting on their actions from the past year, participants may be particularly ripe to commit more deeply to a specific cause or set of actions. Inviting initiatives that need volunteers or advocates may be a great way to meet this need.
- **See here for a sample ceremony.** An effective Yom HaTzedek both models what effective reflection looks like – in the form of whole-group speakers who demonstrate humility and learning – and also gives participants the opportunity to do so meaningfully themselves. Your event should include both of these elements.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Here are questions you may receive from your congregants, along with some sample replies.

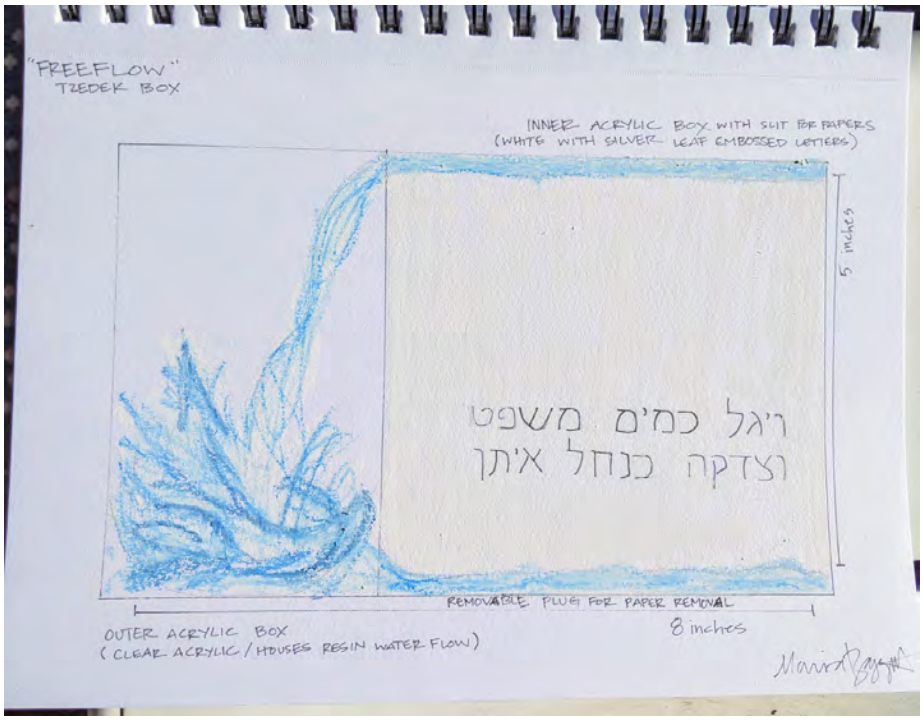
- **What do I write on my slip of paper?** Your journal entry is a chance for you to remember what you did – but also to consider your thoughts and feelings, as well as what you learned from the experience. Why did you just take the action you took, and who were you with? Your honesty about conclusions you're drawing (e.g. "I'm not sure that writing postcards really matters") will be very useful when you reflect weeks or months later on Yom HaTzedek. Push yourself to address not only "what" you did, but "so what" (why did it matter to you or to others?) and "now what" (what it's leading you to think about the future). This content will all be useful on Yom HaTzedek when we consider what more you want to do and how you might do it differently in the future.
- **Is the point to pat ourselves on the back?** It is important to feel a sense of pride and efficacy about your work, and that may be an outcome of this ritual, but it is not the goal. The goal is to create the opportunity for reflection about our impact so that we can rededicate ourselves to action in the future.
- **What actions "count" to be placed inside the box?** No one is looking over your shoulder as you write in your box, so whatever actions you have taken that you believe have contributed to a world of justice and righteousness are relevant. Voting on Election Day is absolutely valid. Calling out someone in the supermarket line for disrespecting someone else is appropriate. Telling your institution to install a ramp for wheelchairs is relevant.
- **Is this work "political"?** We like to think of our work as fulfilling our moral responsibilities, and this can take many forms. Some people have less comfort and experience in advocating for causes by protesting or lobbying representatives. It's okay if your main avenue for *tikkun olam* is philanthropy or volunteering. These are critical methods for improving the world. At the same time, perhaps you will grow in your repertoire of methods over time through reflection and ritual. Also, one can be a member of a variety of political parties with that orientation. Your box is your own, so put in it what you believe is contributing to a world of *chesed*, *tzedek* and *shalom*.

- **Is it the goal to have as many actions as possible?** The goal is to increase the frequency and depth of our actions. Taking many, many scattershot actions may be less strategic and meaningful than fewer, more intentional choices. Ask yourself about the impact you are having and how you might grow that impact.

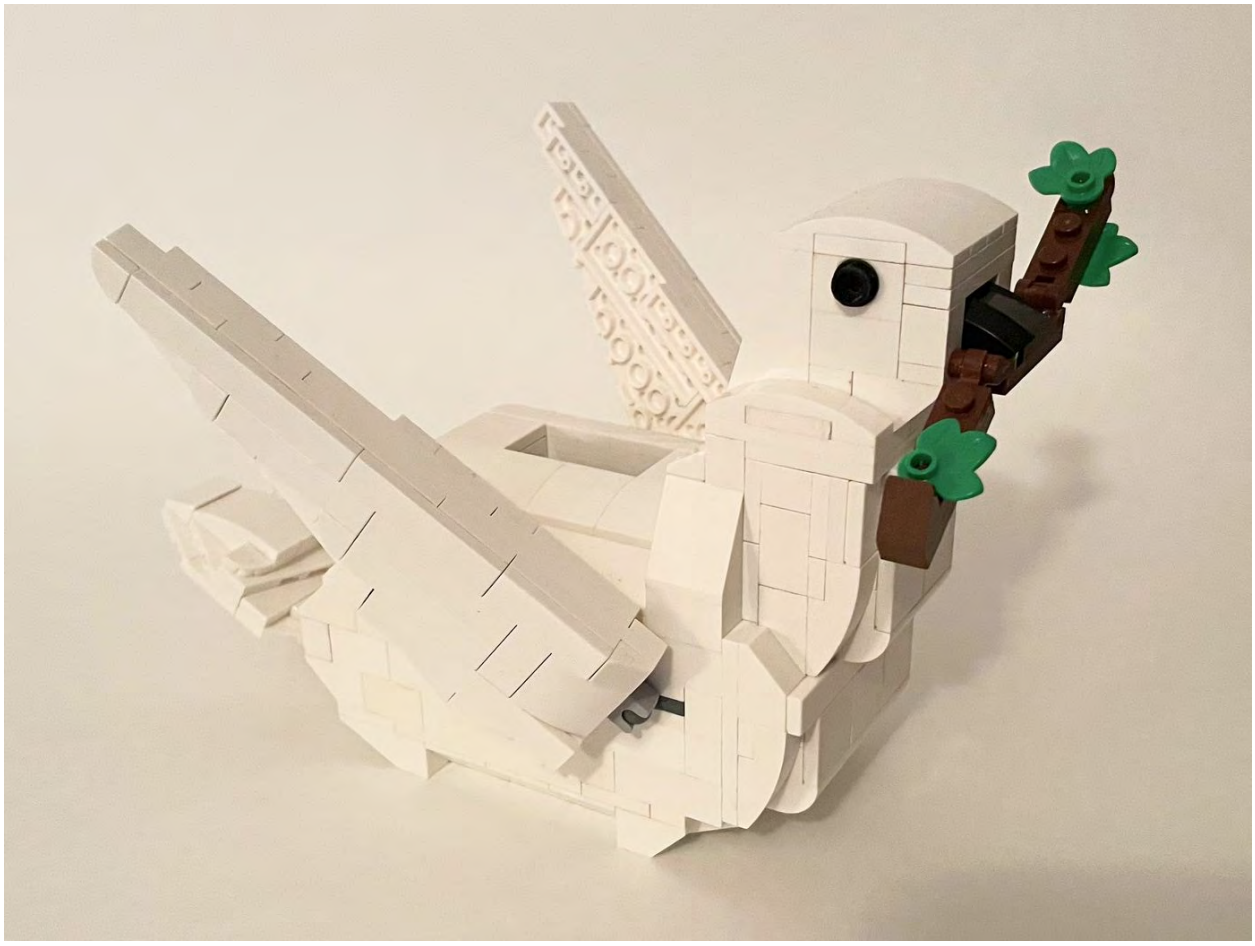
APPENDIX B:
IMAGES FROM THE HELLER MUSEUM "TZEDEK BOX" EXHIBITION

Frann Addison (Acton, MA), "Time to Give," metal with vintage clock and watch parts, 5.5" x 4" x 2.75".

Ellen Alt and Lawrence Conley (New York, NY), “Pursuing Justice,” poster, 24” x 36”.

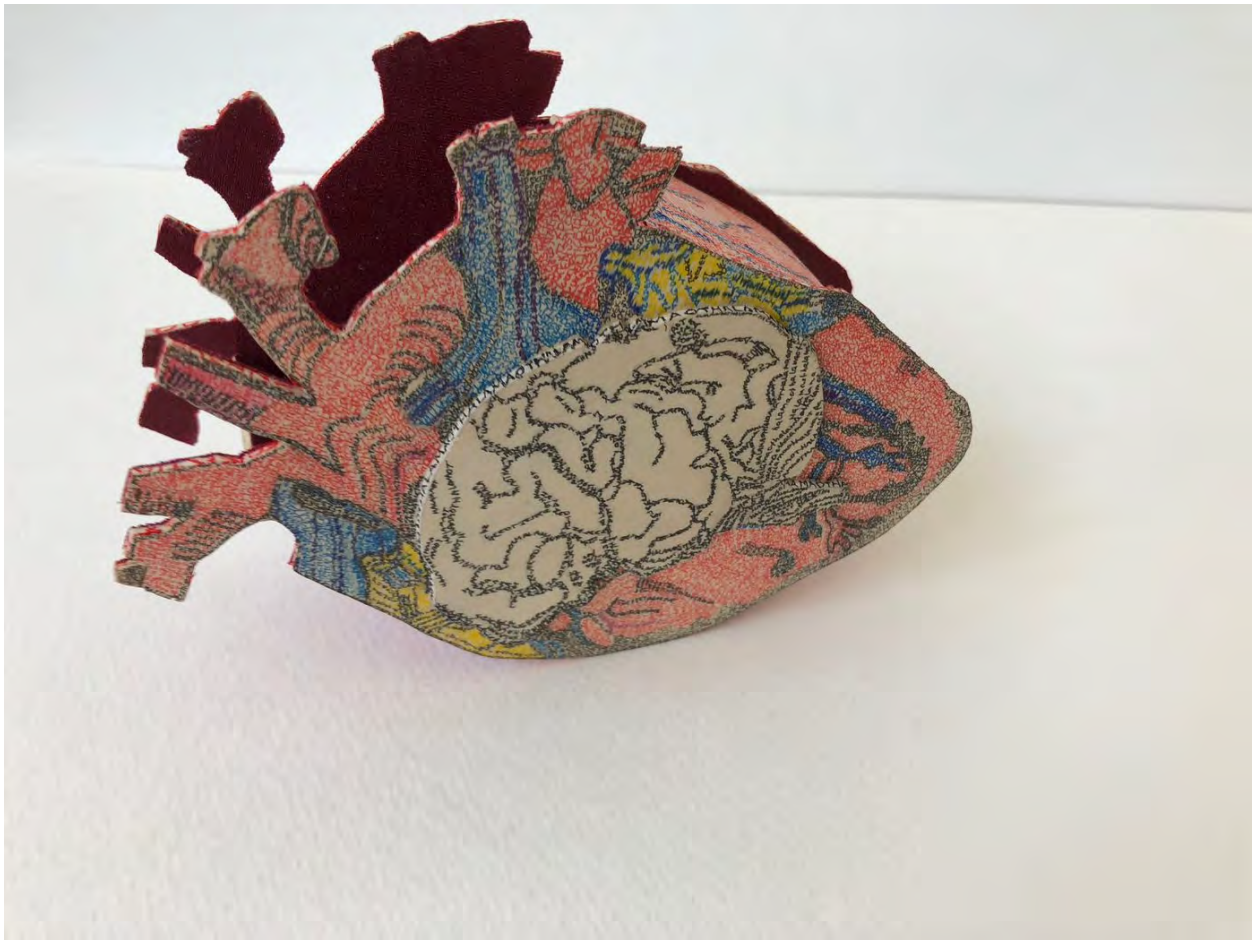


Marisa Baggett (Memphis, TN), "Let Justice Well Up Like Water," acrylic and resin, silver left, 5" x 8" x 5".



Maxwell Bauman (Brooklyn, NY), “The Dove,” LEGO and glue, 5” x 6.5” x 6.25”

Israel Dahan (Jerusalem, Israel), “Scales of Justice,” brass, 20 cm x 45 cm x 8 cm (open)



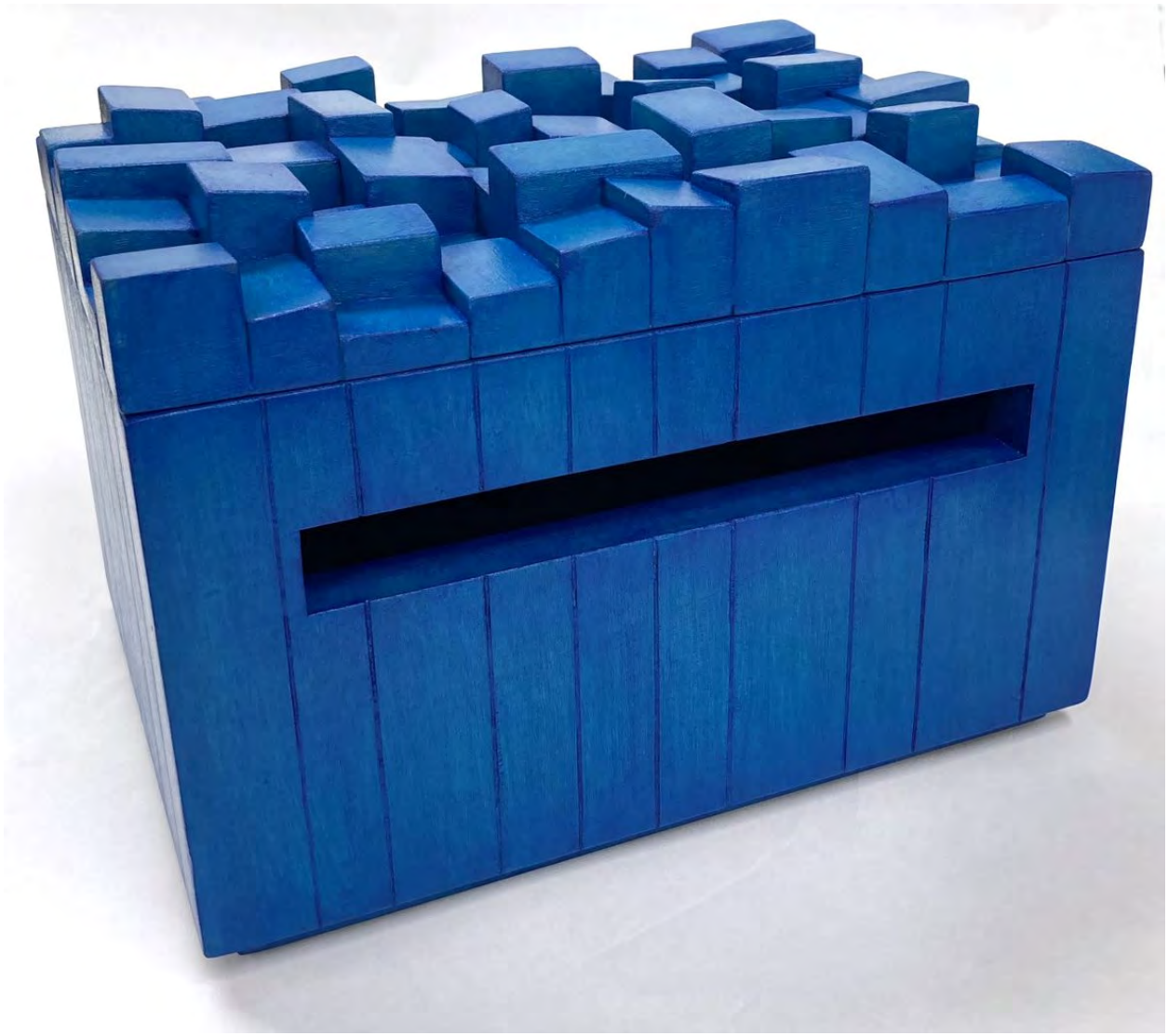
Susan Dessel (New York, NY), “Ha Lamaot,” micrography on linen and wood, 4” x 6.23” x 2”

Beth Grossman (Brisbane, CA), “A Seat at the Table,” mixed media on wood box, 10” x 6” x 5”

Judith Brown (Portland, OR), “Gifts of Justice, Sparks of Awe,” art glass with sparks, wood, 9 ¾” x 6” x 5”

Beth Haber (Poughkeepsie, NY), “Honeycomb,” wood and mixed media, 9” x 7” x 4”

Maxine Hess and Steve Samuels (Woodstock, GA), Mitzvot Garden, mixed media on wood box, 9” x 8” x 7”



Tobi Kahn (New York, NY), “ZAHRYZ III,” acrylic on wood, 8.5” x 12” x 9”

Rachel Kanter (New Jersey), “For The Trees,” hand dyed cotton with silk embroidery, 36” x 24”.

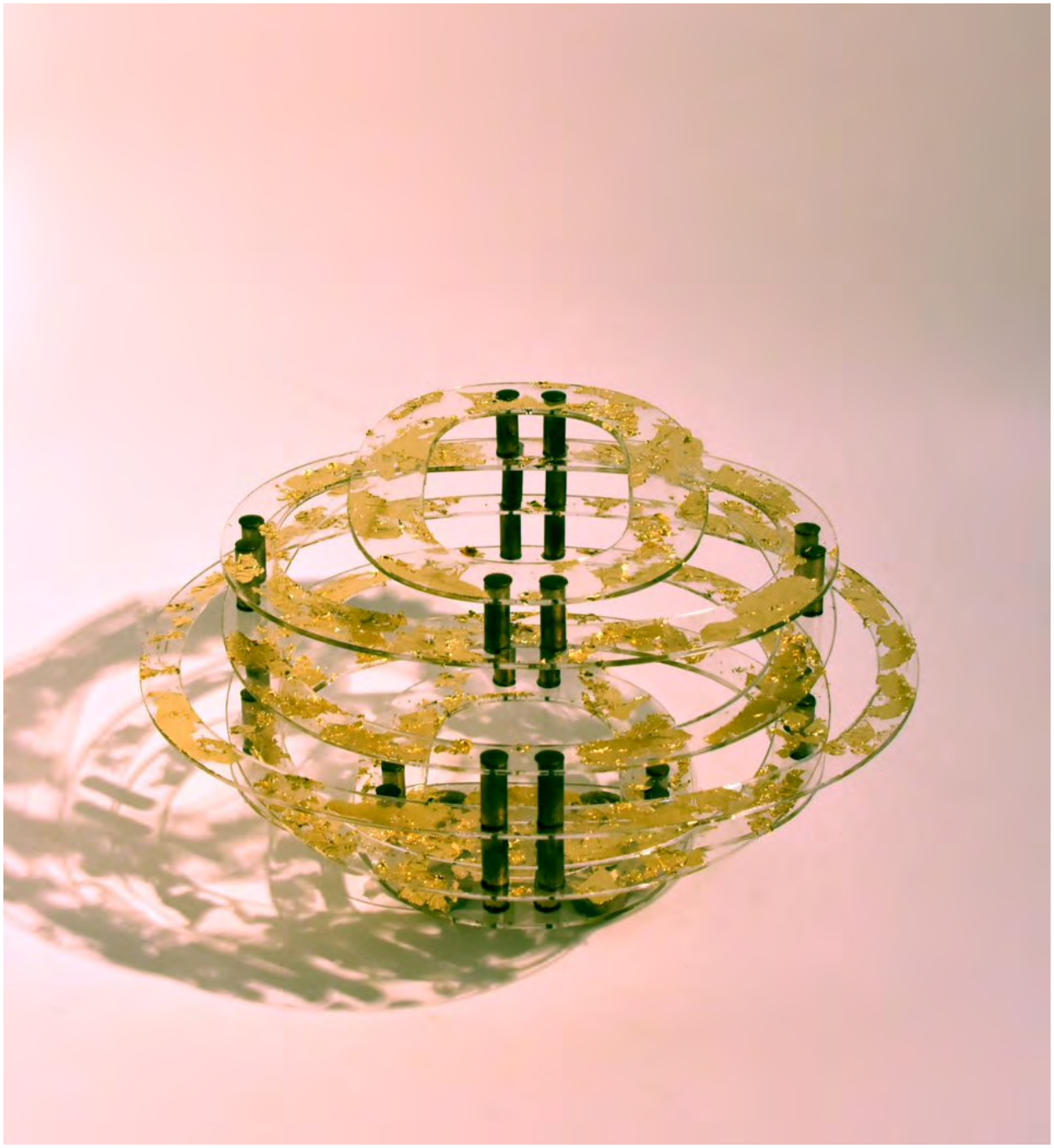
Cindy Lutz Kornet (Longmeadow, MA), "A Beacon of Light," mixed media on wood box, 7" x 7" x 7".

Beth Krensky (Salt Lake City, UT), “A House for Doris,” mixed media on wood box, 13.5” x 7” x 5.5”.

Diana Kurz (New York, NY), “The Pomegranates,” wood and mixed media, 4” x 3.25” x 3.25”

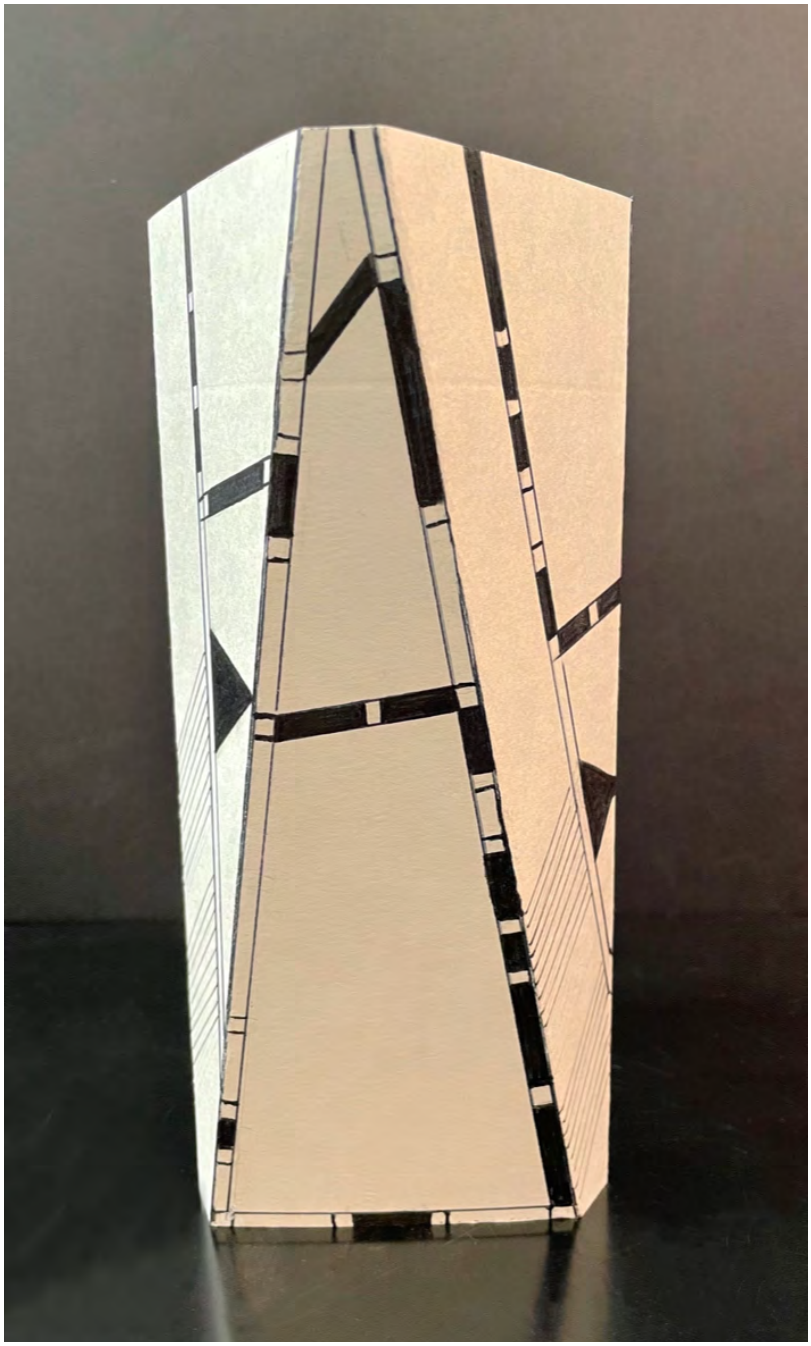
Tina Marcus (Raleigh, NC), “The Collection Box,” found object assemblage, 30” x 17” x 22”

Holly Markhoff (Richmond, VA), “Justice Knows No Other,” wooden box, paper, gold paint, 11.5” x 10.5” x 8.5”



Mar Martinez (Winter Garden, FL), “vayakhel/and he assembled,” gold leaf and transparent acrylic, mixed media, 15” x 15” x 8”

Mark Meiches (Dallas, TX), “Burdens and Blessings,” found and repurposed wood and metal tools, 15” x 15” x 6”

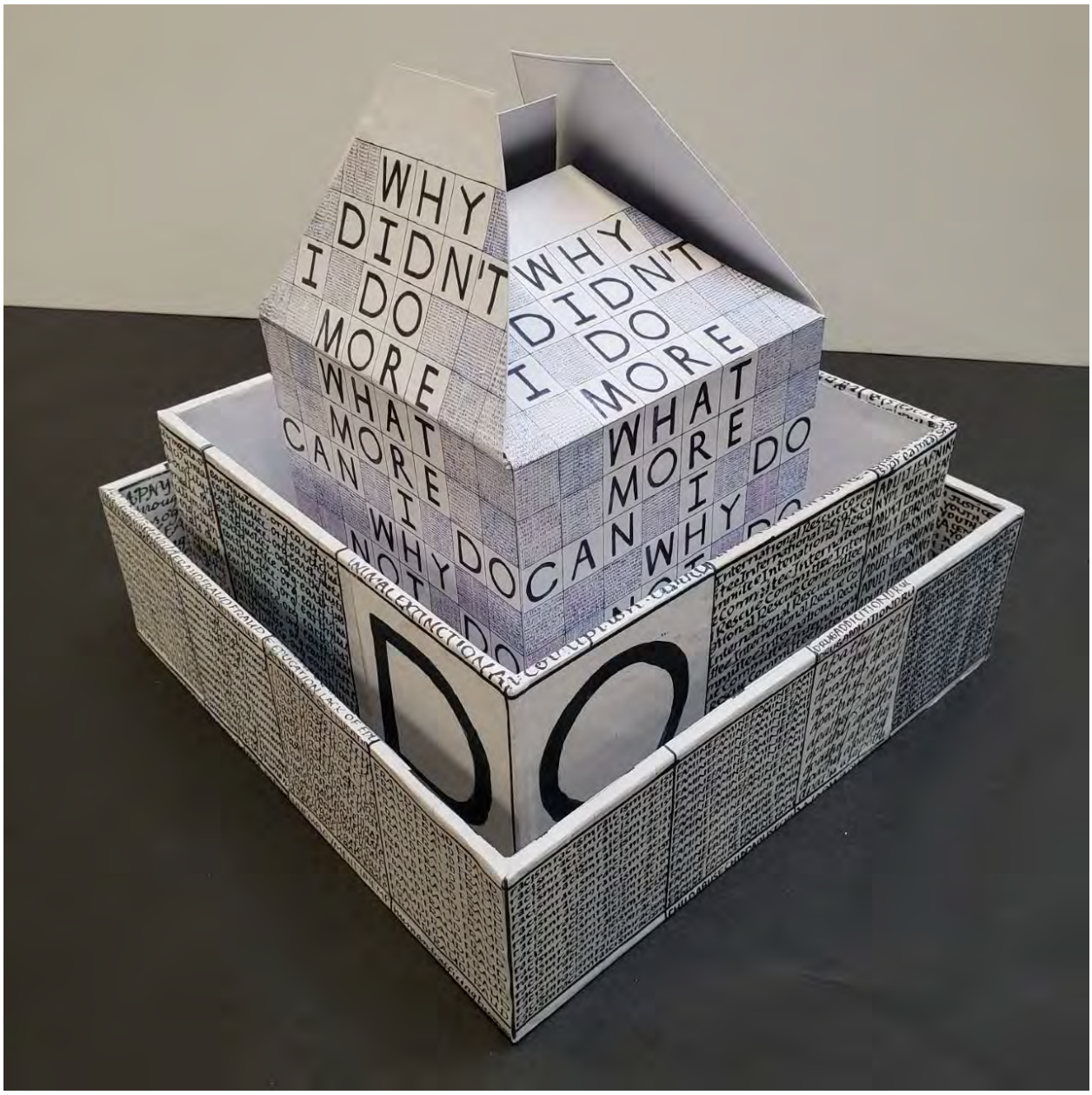


Suzanne Horwitz (Highland Park, IL), “On Three Things,” foam core, 36” x 9” x 12”

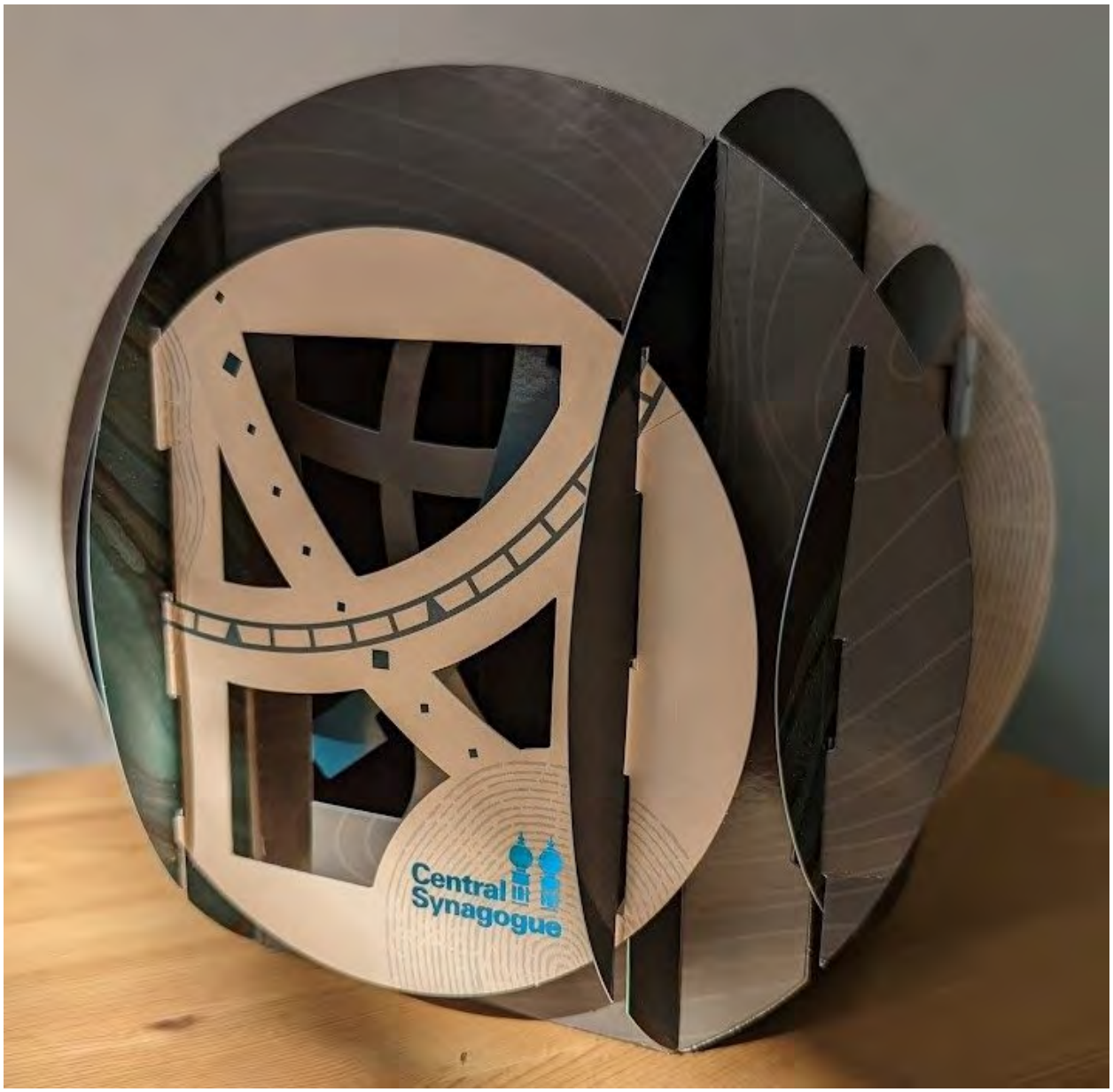
Arlene Sokolow (Bergenfield, NJ), “D.R.E.A.M.,” multimedia, 8” x 8” x 8”

Reva Solomon (New York, NY), “Mommy’s Justice,” mixed media on wood box, 3” x 8” x 3”

Yona Werver (New York, NY), “Foedraal,” Venetian plaster and acrylic paint on aluminum, 8” x 8”



Deborah Ugoretz (Brooklyn, NY), “Why Not Do More,” foamcore, inkjet prints, 12” x 12” x 12”



Eli Kaplan Wildmann (Jerusalem), “Pop-Up Tzedek Box,” printed paper, 7.75” x 7.75” x 7.19”

Jana Zimmer (Santa Barbara, CA), “This Way…”, collage/assemblage, 3.5” x 2.25” x 2.5”