Rosh Chodesh: It's a Mom Thing

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Introduction and Curriculum Rationale

Description of Topic

Over the past ten years, Moving Traditions' *Rosh Chodesh: It's a Girl Thing* program has expanded and flourished. Since 2005, Moving Traditions has partnered with 397 institutions of all affiliations across North America to operate *Rosh Chodesh* and *Shevet Achim* (parallel boys programming) groups in 34 states and 5 provinces.[1] Through the five years of Moving Traditions' *Rosh Chodesh: It's a Girl Thin*g curriculum, *Rosh Chodesh* groups help girls navigate the challenges of their pre-adolescent and adolescent years, while teaching them the "power of community, and the ability of Jewish wisdom and practice to foster personal expression and to inspire all people to work for a more just and inclusive world."[2] *It's a Girl Thing's* success in helping girls find their role and their voice amidst our turbulent world is well-observed and well-documented.[3] [4]

Moving Traditions has experienced tremendous success in reaching and impacting teenage girls across North America, and its focus remains on the girls and boys participating in the *Rosh Chodesh* and *Shevet Achim* groups within its partner institutions. Presently, Moving Traditions views parents as important players in the establishment and continuity of their children's *Rosh Chodesh and Shevet Achim* groups. Parents are encouraged to provide feedback to other parents in order to help recruit new members, communicate with group leaders about group

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[1] "Moving Traditions 2013 Annual Report." Moving Traditions. Web. 12/19/13. http://movingtraditions.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Moving-Traditions-Annual-Report-2013-14.pdf

[2] "The Challenge for Girls." Moving Traditions. Web. 12/19/13. http://movingtraditions.org/programs/rosh-hodesh-its-a-girl-thing/the-challenge-for-girls/

[3] "Moving Traditions 2013 Annual Report." Moving Traditions. Web. 12/19/13. http://movingtraditions.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Moving-Traditions-Annual-Report-2013-14.pdf

[4] "Teen Girls Reflect." Moving Traditions. Web. 12/19/13. http://movingtraditions.org/perspectives-from-teens

scheduling, and host meetings in their homes and/or provide food and drinks for each meeting.[5] By focusing on the *It's a Girl Thing* and *Shevet Achim* participants, parents are significant in order for the logistical elements of the process to run smoothly.

This curriculum aims to broaden the focus of *It's A Girl thing* by viewing parents (mothers specifically) as learners themselves while their daughters engage in *Rosh Chodesh* programming – a perspective Moving Traditions has not yet explored. Accordingly, this project intends to provide a parallel learning experience for the mothers whose adolescent daughters are participating in a *Rosh Chodesh: It's a Girl Thing* group. *It's a Mom Thing* mirrors the monthly themes of the *Rosh Chodesh* Year Three (Kol: Voice) curriculum that participants' daughters are exploring in their own *Rosh Chodes*h group, in order to help "bridge the gap" between the daughters' home and outside learning experiences.[6] *It's a Mom Thing* provides mothers with tools and strategies for exploring *Rosh Chodesh* topics and themes with their daughters, thereby deepening and expanding the impact of their daughters' *Rosh Chodesh* experiences. *It's a Mom Thing* uses Jewish wisdom and tradition to explore parenting strategies and perspectives. *It's a Mom Thing* provides mothers a safe and supportive community to discuss the joys and challenges of raising adolescent girls. *It's a Mom Thing* fosters a greater sense of Jewish identity and belonging among mothers themselves, while empowering them to strengthen their relationships with their Jewish teenage daughters.

Setting, Model and Intended Learners

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[5] "Parents: Support A Group." Moving Traditions. Web. 12/19/13. http://movingtraditions.org/parents/support-a-group/

[6] This curricular guide mirrors the "Kol" (Year 3) *It's a Girl Thing* curriculum because I am currently using "Kol" with my 9th grade *It's a Girl Thing* group at Larchmont Temple. However, five years of *It's a Girl Thing* programming exists, warranting the creation of additional *It's a Mom Thing* curricular units. Hopefully this curricular guide will spark the creation of more *It's a Mom Thing* units in future years.

The setting for the trial and implementation of this curriculum is Larchmont Temple (LT) in Larchmont, NY. Presently, LT's 9th grade program incorporates the *Rosh Chodesh: It's a Girl Thing* curriculum. Thus, the intended learners for this curriculum are the mothers of our 9th grade girls. However, this project can be readily implemented at any synagogue/institution where *Rosh Chodesh: It's a Girl Thing* programming exists. This curriculum includes six two hour class sessions, meant to be offered on a monthly basis for a period of six months, beginning with the Hebrew month of *Heshvan* and concluding with the Hebrew month of *Adar II* or *Nisan*.

Rationale Describing Worthiness of Unit

Evidence from Moving Traditions

While this program intends to fill a void in the Moving Traditions *It's a Girl Thing* model, its merit extends far beyond its ability to add an important layer to Moving Traditions' existing platform.

Many adolescent girls today are experiencing a crisis. Our over-sexualized, media driven society transmits overwhelming and confusing messages about what it means to be a woman in today's world. The harmful effects of this reality are clear:

- 50% of 9 and 10-year-old girls have negative feelings about their bodies
- 30% of 9-year-old girls are afraid of being fat
- Close to 20% of 9th grade girls—and 51% of 12th grade girls—are sexually active
- 23% of 9th grade girls binge drink
- Over half of teenage girls use unhealthy weight control behaviors such as skipping meals, fasting, smoking cigarettes, vomiting, and taking laxatives – and they learn these techniques on the growing number of sites like prettythin.com that pretend to be about recovery but are not.[7]

Indeed, *Rosh Chodesh: It's a Girl Thing* provides an important antidote to these alarming trends. By engaging in meaningful conversation about these topics with their peers and with a trusted adult mentor, girls are challenged to think critically

[7] "The Challenge for Girls." Moving Traditions. Web. 12/19/13. http://movingtraditions.org/programs/rosh-hodesh-its-a-girl-thing/the-challenge-for-girls/

about the pressures and stereotypes they experience in the "outside world," and are given tools and strategies to combat the harmful messages society presents. But girls' lives extend well beyond the four walls of their *Rosh Chodesh* meeting spaces. At best, girls gather for their hour and a half long *Rosh Chodesh* meetings on a monthly basis from September-June. This model prompts the following questions:

- Who is intentionally reinforcing the messages of *Rosh Chodesh*, helping the girls practice and solidify what they have learned during their monthly gatherings?
- Who is checking in with the girls on a daily basis, as they confront the perplexities of living as a Jewish teenage girl in American society?

If empowered and supported, mothers can help bridge the critical gaps between their daughters' *Rosh Chodesh* experiences and the rest of their daily lives.

Evidence from Secular Sources

In her groundbreaking book, *The Shelter of Each Other* (2001), Mary Pipher laments our society's "anti-family" way of life, in which "parents are overtaxed, children are unsupervised, and technology is rapidly dictating how we interact."[8] Pipher suggests that it is perilous for us to continue on this path, adding:

> Competent parents serve as antidotes to the junk values all around them and they help their children siphon meaning from their lives. Families serve as shelter for our children and repositories of meaning for all of us. It is in their families that children accrue identity and point of view and develop a sense of their own and the world's possibilities."[9]

Thus, Pipher claims that it is more important than ever to renew and rededicate our commitment to family engagement and family life. As the presence and impact of technology on families has continued to increase over the last decade with no end in sight, Pipher's prescient claims that we need to renew and rededicate our commitment to family engagement and family life are more important than ever.

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[8] Mary Bray Pipher, The Shelter of Each Other: Rebuilding Our Families (New York: Riverhead, 2008) Back Cover.

[9] Pipher, xvi-xvii.

Though we might not be able to change the tides and trends of the American way of life, we can evade their harmful effects by turning to our families for safety and support. If we let them, our families can shelter us from the storms that threaten to weaken our sense of self.

Subsequently, the families of our adolescent students – and their parents, in particular – serve as vital safety nets and support systems. While *It's a Girl Thing* performs an important role in helping girls develop a positive self-identity, as well as a supportive community of peers, those who see and interact with our girls the most – their parents – must become our partners and our allies for the messages of *Rosh Chodesh* to truly infiltrate and impact their daily lives. Increased parental involvement in the Rosh Chodesh program holds tremendous power and potential, as authors and experts agree that the greater the parent-teen connection, the greater a teen's emotional and physical health and well-being. In their book, *Why Do They Act That Way?* (2004) Dr. David Walsh and Nat Bennett write, "Parents need to strategize ways to stay connected…because even though our adolescents think they don't need us anymore, they do. Research consistently shows that the most protective factor for teens is parent connection and involvement."[10] Indeed, as a research study of twelve thousand plus teenagers from around the country concluded, "When teens feel connected to their parents, the chances that they will be involved in risky behaviors from drinking to drugs to violence to unprotected sexual intercourse, all go down."[11] Studies have also demonstrated that teens want to talk to their parents about what matters to them, and that effective parental responses make a tremendous impact. According to a study by the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "Teenagers who said they've talked with their parents frequently about topics such as birth control, HIV, puberty, etc. were more likely to share their parents' values about teenage sexuality than teenagers who had

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[10] David Allen Walsh, Nat Bennett, *Why Do They Act That Way? A Survival Guide to the Adolescent Brain for You and Your Teen*, (New York: Atria, 2004), 236.

[11] Debra Haffner, *Beyond the Big Talk: Every Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Teens,* (New York: Newmarket, 2001), 5.

not talked much to their parents."[12] Empowering parents to strengthen their relationships with their teens and communicate more effectively with their teens has the potential to significantly transform the lives of our adolescent students.

The critical role of parents goes even further. It is especially crucial for mothers and their teenage daughters to foster healthy relationships, as mothers in particular have the power and potential to impact their daughter's emerging identities in potent and formidable ways. In 1992, the Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girls' Development, led by Carol Gilligan, identified mother-daughter relations as a vital tool for nurturing girls' strength and courage during adolescence.[13] Girls' relationships with their mothers, the study showed, were key to their ability to "resist self-negating changes and to thrive."[14] Likewise, "It's difficult to overstate a mother's influence on her daughter," Rachel Simmons declares in her book, *The Curse of the Good Girl* (2010).[15] "Mothers serve as models for daughters of how to talk, how to use language and negotiate relationships and the world."[16] Others agree that girls are highly susceptible to their mothers' behaviors and values. In 2008, a study by the Girl Scouts of America found "a close alliance between a mother's own ambitions and outlook on life with their daughters aspirations and motivations. In the same study, girls cited their mothers as their most important role models."[17] In her book *Your Daughter's Bedroom* (2011),[18] Joyce McFadden chronicles the myriad of subtle ways mothers influence – for better or for worse - their daughter's perceptions of womanhood and sexuality. She writes:

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[12] Haffner, 23.

[13] Elizabeth Debold, Marie Wilson, and Idelisse Malave, *Mother-Daughter Revolution: From Good Girls to Great Women*, (New York: Bantam, 1994), xvi.

[14] Debold, Wilson, and Malave, xvi.

[15] Rachel Simmons, *The Curse of the Good Girl: Raising Authentic Girls with Courage and Confidence,* (New York: Penguin, 2010), 238.

[16] Simmons, 238.

[17] Ibid, ibid.

[18] Joyce T. McFadden, *Your Daughter's Bedroom: Insights for Raising Confident Women*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

> After more than two decades of practice, I know full well that it's what we learn in the homes we grow up in that most strongly determines the development of our personalities and our perspectives. And as mothers we need to understand that its there, in those seemingly mundane interactions with our daughters while we're getting dressed, or taking plates down from the cupboard, that their views of themselves and the world are shaped. We need to be mindful that our influence on our daughters comes not only from the things we say directly to them, but also from conversations or remarks our daughters overhear, like "I was good today, I skipped lunch."[19]

McFadden concludes, "the more we observe about our mothers, the more we develop an understanding of them as women."[20] Through their significant ability to influence and impact, mothers have the tremendous opportunity to permanently impart positive and constructive messages about womanhood and sexuality, thereby shaping and transforming their daughters' views, for the better:

> If mothers change the message and strengthen themselves to be role models valued for their hearts, minds, and bodies, no matter the shape or size – as women who have the freedom to fully embrace their sexuality, then daughters will feel more grounded, confident and connected, making them less susceptible to suffering and damaging behaviors as well as more inclined to reenact positive behaviors with their own daughters when the time comes.[21]

Mothers might do this, McFadden concludes, by being mindful of three important ways girls learn to be women: 1) Through what their mothers say to them 2) Through what they observe in their mothers 3) Through what they observe in their mothers' interactions with other women.[22] Dr. Nancy L. Snyderman agrees in her book, *Girl in the Mirror: Mothers and Daughters in the Years of Adolescence* (2002).[23] "Forcing ourselves (mothers) to become aware of the messages we send our daughters – about our womanhood, our looks, our bodies, and what we find meaningful and important in life," she writes, "is the first step toward helping our

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[19] Joyce T. McFadden, *Your Daughter's Bedroom: Insights for Raising Confident Women*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 17.

[20] McFadden, 29.

[21] McFadden, 18.

[22] Ibid, 171.

[23] Nancy L. Snyderman, *Girl in the Mirror: Mothers and Daughters in the Years of Adolescence,* (New York: By the Bay, 2002), 21.

daughters become healthy adolescents who will grow into fulfilled and secure women."[24] Through group discussions designed to explore how mothers can reflect and reinforce the messages and values their daughters are exploring in *It's a Girl Thing, It's a Mom Thing* emphasizes and elevates these principles. By connecting with their daughters around relevant issues, mothers can deepen and strengthen their relationships with their daughters; an outcome that McFadden asserts should not be underestimated. "As our daughters learn that they can trust us to be supportive and straightforward with them (about sexuality), they'll gradually internalize this confidence and transform it into a deepening ability to understand and trust themselves. And that is exactly what they'll need to make (sexually) healthy choices."[25]

Evidence from Jewish Tradition

In addition to the array of secular literature describing the significance of the mother-daughter relationship, Jewish tradition offers equally compelling wisdom on the power of a mother's active involvement within her daughter's life. Instances in which biblical mother figures are present for their daughters, compared to instances in which they are noticeably absent, suggest that a mother's absence leads to violence and degradation, while her presence fosters agency and love. When viewed through the lens of mother-daughter relationships, a striking similarity emerges amongst the tragic biblical tales in which daughters are victims of rape and violence. Significantly, no mother figure is active or present surrounding the rape of Dinah in Genesis 34 or the rape of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13. In her essay, "The Invisible Relationship Made Visible: Biblical Mothers and Daughters" (1999), Leila Leah Bronner observes,

> Dinah is the last of Leah's children – the only girl and the only one of Leah's children whose name is not given an etiology. The next incident in Dinah's life recorded in the Bible is her rape by Shechem…Leah participates neither in protesting nor in revenging Dinah's rape. Today the story of the rape of a daughter might well include the mother's reaction, but this is not the case in

[24] Snyderman, 21.

[25] McFadden, 24.

> the Bible. The mother participates indirectly and in only one way – she has produced the sons, Simeon and Levi, who negotiate with their sister's rapist and ensure that he does not go unpunished.[26]

Leah's silence within her daughter's narrative – both before and after her rape occurs – does not go unnoticed. A similar trope appears in Tamar's story. "Neither the rabbis nor the Biblical narrator bring the mother into the narrative to comfort Tamar, as we might expect today," Bronner writes. "Her brother Absalom is the first and the only one to speak to her."[27] Furthermore, Tamar's mother, Ma'acah, is mentioned only once, several chapters earlier, in reference to the birth of her son, Absalom (see 2 Samuel 3:3). Ma'acah is never referenced in connection to her daughter Tamar, as the text introduces Tamar as the sister of Absalom, son of David (see 2 Samuel 13:1), thus making Tamar's estrangement from her mother abundantly clear. Recognizing the absence of significant mother figures for Dinah and Tamar causes us to wonder if our biblical authors sought to demonstrate that a mother's absence leads to tragic ramifications for her daughter. Within stories in which mothers are absent, daughters become passive victims of violence and tragedy - yet within stories in which mothers play prominent roles, daughters are confident women who achieve agency and enjoy intimate love.

The Book of Ruth arguably contains the Bible's most detailed and concrete example of a mother-daughter relationship. The connection between Naomi and her daughter-in-law, Ruth, reflects a bond that is unparalleled against the rest of the Bible. As Bronner writes, "Embedded [in Ruth] is the story of a particular relationship between individuals, specifically the cross-generational relationship between two women – which closes with the strongest articulation of the love of a daughter for her mother and of a mother for her daughter that appears in the Bible."[28] Thus, although Ruth begins with tragedy, the book's mother-daughter

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[26] Leilah Leah Bronner, "The Invisible Relationship Made Visible: Biblical Mothers and Daughters," in Athalya Brenner, ed., *A Feminist Companion to the Bible: Ruth and Esther* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 178.

[27] Bronner, 181.

[28] Bronner, 185.

relationship fosters love, joy, hope and redemption. Love and connection between mother and daughter, as Bronner explains, is the book's "agent of transformation"[29] that drives that narrative and enables rewarding events to transpire. Naomi's concern for Ruth, and her involvement in her daughter-in-law's life, prompts Ruth's eventual marriage to Boaz; a marriage that "provides the lineage of King David and shapes the hope of the nation of Israel."[30] Moreover, Ruth develops into an active, confident woman, who resolves to provide food for herself and Naomi - a result of her loving commitment to her mother-in-law.

Love and female agency emerge within two other biblical narratives containing noteworthy mother-daughter bonds. Twice within the Song of Songs the assertive female narrator expresses her desire to bring her lover to "her mother's house" (see Song of Songs 8:2). For Bronner, this indicates a strong connection between mother and daughter: "The language surrounding the term (mother's house) indicates that the daughter regards her mother's house as a place where love can and does reside, and that she believes she is honoring that familial love by bringing him home. Clearly, she expects acceptance from her mother."[31] If this close mother-daughter bond does indeed exist, as Bronner suggests, then it is coupled with the daughter's ability to attain intimacy, love and joy. Perhaps her mother has inspired her to seek real love and intimacy. Perhaps her mother's involvement in her life has helped foster her present confidence and happiness.

Rebecca's courtship story in Genesis 24 also suggests a link between a mother's involvement and her daughter's experience of love and agency. After meeting Abraham's servant at the well, Rebecca "ran and told her mother's household" (see Genesis 24:28). Later in the narrative, her unnamed mother and brother agree to her marriage with Isaac, but then express reluctance to let Rebecca go. They allow

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[29] Ibid, ibid.

[30] Ibid, ibid.

[31] Ibid, 187-188.

Rebecca to make the choice for herself, and she chooses to leave home – a noteworthy instance of female agency in a cannon in which women are often denigrated. Before Rebecca's departure, her mother and brother bless her. With memories of her mother's love, Rebecca leaves her childhood home and finds herself once again surrounded by love: the love of her husband, Isaac (see Genesis 24:54-67). It is perhaps a result of her mother's involvement and her mother's willingness to let her make own choice that Rebecca finds the courage and the confidence to express her desires, become an active agent over her own destiny, and attain intimate and fulfilling marital love.

It is difficult to ignore the striking differences between the narratives that do not demonstrate a significant mother-daughter relationship, and the narratives that do. Bronner believes that these differences are more than coincidental. "The stories of Dinah and Tamar are tragic ones, and this is, in part, because the mothers are missing," she writes. "For both, there is no voice of loving kindness, for both, there is no refuge in the mother's house."[32] From this perspective, our tradition aligns with our contemporary, secular conclusions about mothers and daughters. According to our Biblical texts, it is crucial for mothers to assume active roles with their daughters' lives, as ramifications emerge when mothers are passive, absent, or silent. While daughters without mother figures are not necessarily destined to experience tragedy akin to Dinah and Tamar, the Bible's pairing of mother-daughter relationships with love, agency, and redemption, and the absence (or direct inversion) of such notions when mothers are silent, sends a valuable message: daughters with involved mothers or mother figures are more likely thrive and flourish into assertive women who experience fulfilling love and intimacy.

These conclusions drawn from Jewish tradition, combined with the secular perspectives outlined above, clearly demonstrate the importance of a "moms only" group through which mothers can strengthen their involvement in their daughters'

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[32] Bronner, 187.

lives. Both Jewish and secular sources point to tremendous rewards when a mother is physical and emotionally present and attuned to her daughter's reality. Our task then, as Jewish educators, is to involve mothers in our girls-only programming as more then logistical participants. Upon sharing and exploring with mothers the important messages we are sending their teenage daughters, we enable them to strengthen their participation within their daughters' Jewish and adolescent journeys.

Evidence from Intended Participants

I have also obtained validation for an *It's a Mom Thing* group through conversations with the intended learners. After conducting focus group sessions with four mothers of the current 9th grade *It's a Girl Thing* participants at Larchmont Temple, it became clear that these mothers are seeking the type of experience that *Rosh Chodesh: It's a Mom Thing* aims to provide. The mothers I interviewed represent diversity in terms of personal background, mother-daughter relationship, and religious affiliation. One mother is a Jewish Russian immigrant whose daughter is the first generation of her family to be born in America; one mother is a practicing Christian from a "very English" background; one mother has daughter with unique social needs, a reality that has deepened and strengthened their relationship; one mother - as well as her partner and children - are highly involved in synagogue life. Although I spoke with a small portion of the intended learners, the four mothers I interviewed represent an important cross section of my target audience, and for this reason, their perspectives will help guide and direct the unit.

Although the mothers - and the mother-daughter relationships they described - differ in important ways, it is significant that all four coalesced around the prospect of creating a safe, supportive environment in which they could network with other moms and share strategies and tools for raising teenage daughters. One mother spoke explicitly about wanting advice regarding how to best prepare her daughter for the issues she will face during high school and beyond: "I would like to know how to prepare my daughter," she remarked, "for the things she will be exposed to. I

would like to prepare her on how to handle herself. For instance – how do I respond when she comes to me with body image issues?"[33] Other moms spoke of wanting a forum to address teen issues together, to gain more insight and perspective into what's "really going on" in their daughters' lives, and to realize that their daughters' behaviors are perhaps more "normal" than they thought. One mother asked, "What are other parents hearing about what is going on in their teens' lives?"[34] Another observed, "It is so important for parents to talk to each other, so we have a better sense of what is really going on."[35] One mother added,

> I'm looking for an open forum to realize how our daughters are all alike, even though they are different people…just talking about what we're all going through, communicating with other moms about the behaviors I'm seeing…can help me understand that what I am going through with my daughter is normal.[36]

Another mother voiced her agreement on the importance of a mothers' group: "We're all going through similar things, so it would be great to have our own space. It's also important for our daughters to see that we, as the moms, have a connection too."[37]

The mothers were also quick to observe just how important this type of group is, at this stage in their daughters' lives. As one observed, "when the kids were in elementary school, because of all the play-dates, I knew everyone who my kid was friends with, and all their parents, too. Now, I am so out of the loop. Who are these kids my kid is hanging out with, and who are their parents?"[38] Clearly, both the experts and the mothers themselves agree that a program enabling mothers to gather and strategize, so that they might deepen their relationships with their teenage daughters, is highly worthwhile.

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[33] Interview with author, 11/26/13

[34] Ibid.

[35] Interview with author, 12/6/13

[36] Interview with author, 12/6/13

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

Program Logistics

The question of whether to create a learning experience just for mothers or an experience for mothers and daughters together arose multiple times throughout the process of conceiving this curriculum. I chose to focus on just the mothers for several reasons. First, the mothers voiced a desire to meet separately from their daughters. The experience they are looking for – a space to network, share and strategize – seemed best achieved by meeting apart from their daughters. Discussing intimate aspects of their mother-daughter relationships did not seem feasible, safe or appropriate for them if their daughters were in the room. Just as teens are often more likely to open up about parent-child matters when they are away from their parents, so too do mothers appreciate the opportunity to discuss parenting issues apart from their children. My interviews also suggested that these mothers do, in fact, find time to spend with their daughters; these do not seem to be mothers searching for moments or opportunities to connect with their daughters. Rather, it seems that what these mothers would most benefit from are conversations on how to meaningfully fill and process the mother-daughter moments they do experience. *It's a Mom Thing* is designed to provide mothers with various communication styles, tools and techniques, prompting them to think more critically about how to effectively communicate with their daughters.

In addition, I chose to avoid a mother-daughter experience because a few programs of this nature already exist, or are in the process of being created. For instance, Mayyim Hayyim, the progressive, community mikvah in the Boston suburbs, runs a series called, "Beneath the Surface;" a program in which mothers and their daughters connect around the experience of the daughter becoming Bat Mitzvah.[39] Mayyim Hayyim is also in the process of creating an experience for the mothers and their teenage daughters who are alumni of the program.[40] In addition, the Union for

[39] "Beneath the Surface: A Program for Bat Mitzvah Girls and Their Mothers." Mayyim Hayyim. Web. 4/12/14. http://www.mayyimhayyim.org/Events-Classes/Beneath-the-Surface-Mother-Daughter-Program

[40] Conversation with Lisa Berman, Education Center Director at Mayyim Hayyim. 11/5/13.

Reform Judaism's *Sacred Choices* curriculum includes learning experiences for both teens and their parents, on issues such as sexuality and effective parent-teen communication.[41] Finally, as experts affirm, mothers must first explore and establish their own values and identities as mothers, before they can effectively transmit their values to their daughters. As Rachel Simmons (2010) writes,

> Flight attendants tell us to don oxygen masks before helping a child, and with good reason. If you're not ok, you can't help the person who needs you. Your daughter's empowerment begins with you.[42]
>
> The best thing a mother can do for her daughter is be herself, with all the challenges that being real entails. Being real means taking up space and having needs…Any kind of authenticity begins with self-awareness: to be yourself you have to know who that is. At the end of the day, the best gift a mother can give is to take – that is, to take time to find herself.[43]

Dr. Nancy Snyderman agrees. "To help our daughters find their true selves, we must first be sure to know who we are," she affirms.[44] By gathering as a community of mothers, *It's a Mom Thing* participants are able to explore motherhood and their identity as mothers, on their own terms. Separation from their daughters enables them to challenge, explore and clarify their own values, so that they might make parenting decisions with increased intentionality and thoughtfulness.

Nonetheless, creating a group exclusively for mothers does pose some questions and challenges regarding the program's overall goals and intentions. Namely, is the group intended to help Jewish mothers deepen and develop their own identities, both as mothers and as individuals? Or, is the ultimate objective to impact the daughters, by providing mothers with tools and resources help their daughters deepen and expand their emerging identities as young Jewish women? The answer to these questions is yes. I have created this curriculum with both goals in mind, believing that the latter goal is not achievable without the former. In order for mothers to enhance their involvement and their impact upon their daughters'

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[41] *Sacred Choices: Adolescent Relationships and Sexual Ethics*, (New York: URJ Press, 2008).

[42] Simmons, 131.

[43] Simmons, 123-124.

[44] Snyderman, 25.

Jewish and female identities, they must embark on their own personal explorations of Jewish womanhood and Jewish motherhood. As Snyderman affirms, "to help our daughters find their true selves, we must first be sure to know who we are."[45] Accordingly, *It's a Mom Thing* weaves together explorations of Jewish/female self with explorations of what it means to raise a Jewish teenage daughter. Participants first relate to program content as Jewish women and Jewish daughters, before exploring the content vis-à-vis their role as mothers within the lives of their daughters. By doing so, mothers discover how their personal narratives inform their identities as Jewish mothers and influence their relationships with their daughters. Through this process, mothers discover and affirm their own identities, in order to help their daughters discover and affirm the identities of their own.

An important question that naturally arises with this type of programming is, what about girls who don't have mothers? Indeed, the family structures within our institutions are highly varied and diverse, and we must pay attention to this reality. Presently, all the girls in our 9th grade *Rosh Chodesh* program at LT live with their biological mothers. However, it is important to devise strategies for the future, to ensure that any *It's a Girl Thing* participants who do not have mothers do not feel "left out" when they hear that the mothers of their *It's a Girl Thing* peers are invited to participate in a special "moms" group. Therefore, I believe that it is imperative that It's a Mom Thing include and embrace any and all "mother figures" in the lives of our *It's a Girl Thing* participants who do not have mothers. "Mother figures" could be grandmothers, aunts, older sisters, or close female friends. In this way, girls without mothers can still benefit from the *It's a Mom Thing* program. Through their participation in the program, significant "mother figures" will (just like the other biological mothers) gain tools and strategies for strengthening their connections with their teenage "daughters." I believe this is possible without any major curricular modifications or adjustments.

[45] Snyderman, 25.

It is likely that *It's a Girl Thing* participants will have non-Jewish mothers who would like to join the *It's a Mom Thing* experience. The non-Jewish affiliation of one of my four focus group participants is indicative of the wider interfaith trend throughout our communities. A mom or mother figure's non-Jewish status should not inhibit her participation in *It's a Mom Thing.* While *It's a Mom Thing* does draw upon Jewish texts and wisdom to guide discussions and explorations, the intention is for this to be done in a safe, supportive and introductory manner. At no point will Jewish texts be viewed as "prescriptive." Rather, they will be used to provide insight and examples, and participants will be encouraged to challenge their messages. In addition, relevant introductory and background information will be provided for all Jewish texts and perspectives, which all mothers, regardless of religious affiliation, will benefit from. Further, the voices of our non-Jewish mothers will add important perspectives, which will deepen and enrich the *It's a Mom Thing* experience for everyone involved.

Many have asked me how *It's a Mom Thing* might include families headed by two fathers. While our communities strive to accept and embrace all types of families, I suggest that addressing this type of family composition is beyond the realm of this curriculum. Based on how this curriculum addresses aspect of female sexuality, an *It's a Girl Thing* participant with two dads should seek a "mother figure" identifying as female in order to participate in *It's a Mom Thing.* Ultimately, *It's a Mom Thing* is a female experience, exploring issues and topics specifically relating to girlhood, womanhood and femininity. Although it is possible for a father to be considered a girl's "mother figure," his gender nonetheless colors his perception of the world. One who experiences the world as a male cannot fully relate to issues of womanhood and femininity; thus, a father's gender would inhibit his ability to fully engage in the *It's a Mom Thing* experience, and may also potentially hinder other women from fully disclosing and discussing intimate material. It is also important to keep in mind that *It's a Mom Thing* is, by and large, a program for mothers. We are fortunate that today's Jewish institutions are able to offer diverse arrays of programs and initiatives for all ages, genders, and family structures. Such a variety allows us to

form niche communities, such as *It's a Mom Thing*, designed to reach specific types of individuals. I am confident that those for whom *It' s a Mom Thing* is not appropriate can find other outlets for Jewish communal engagement. Clearly, the variety of familial structures in existence today warrants the creation of additional *Rosh Chodesh* initiatives, such as "Rosh Chodesh: It's a Dad Thing." Perhaps the successful creation and implementation of *It's a Mom Thing* will inspire future variations of this important program.

On April 1, 2014, I conducted an *It's a Mom Thing* pilot session with my four focus group participants plus one additional mother of a current *It's a Girl Thing* participant. A representative from Moving Traditions also attended. The pilot session drew upon material from the opening lesson ("Legacies of Continuity and Change"). Several important conclusions emerged from the session. In particular, the session affirmed the value of an *It's a Mom Thing* program. The session helped one mother identify her core values and inspired her to rededicate herself and her family to abandoned practices. As she wrote in an email reflection,

> One of the things that inspired me was the whole idea of writing. When the kids were little, I started a journal about each of them and I have let it go. I am going to pull them out again and start writing my thoughts because I feel that history is so important. Another thing that I took away from last night was the importance of Shabbat. When the kids were younger, we used to light the candles on Friday nights, but we haven't in awhile. I think with working full time and having three kids, I get overwhelmed and I let things go, but I think that is something that the kids will remember.[46]

Overall, the mothers spoke freely and openly about family, tradition, and Jewish ritual. They discussed the lesson's opening question at length ("Describe an object that depicts one or more values that your mother modeled and passed down to you"), a powerful connecting conversation that took most of the session. As the Moving Traditions representative commented, "The conversation that launched from this opening was rich and engaged and people really connected with each other, which was especially poignant given some very different experiences brought

[46] Email to author, April 2, 2014

to the table."[47] The extent to which the mothers engaged with this opening question suggests that the *It's a Mom Thing* curriculum should be treated as a rough guide for future groups. Each lesson contains much more material than a single *It's a Mom Thing* session can (and should) bear, and group leaders should use their discretion to pick and choose discussion points and activities that are most appropriate for their group's members and dynamics. I suspect that, like my pilot group, other groups of moms will express deep engagement over single discussion points. Thus, *It's a Mom Thing* leaders should value discussion over activity, and should primarily use the curriculum as a tool for generating rich and impactful conversations.

Guide for Educator

The educator for this program should have a strong interest in working with teens and their families. Background experience in Jewish youth and family education is also highly preferable. As this curriculum is designed for mothers of teenage daughters - and program material is highly gender specific - the educator should be female, as a female facilitator is most able to relate to the issues of female sexuality, body image, etc. that will be addressed and discussed. These are often sensitive topics for women, and thus, it is likely that participants will feel more comfortable with a female facilitator. The educator should be able to approach these topics delicately, with the awareness that a safe, supportive environment will enable participants to speak more freely and openly. The educator should also have a strong cultural literacy on current teen and parenting issues, in order to be able to infuse learning experiences with the most current, up-to date topics. She should establish a strong network of resources connecting her to the fields of Jewish and secular parenting, in order to continually bolster her knowledge and expertise of learning material. While having the same educator for the girls and for the moms would guarantee a "mirror effect" between the two groups, this decision might generate confidentiality concerns among the girls, in particular. The success of *It's a Girl Thing* hinges upon a group leader's ability to establish trusting relationships

[47] Email to author, April 17, 2014

with her participants. Fear of a comment or opinion getting back to her mother might prevent an *It's a Girl Thing* member from expressing her truest self. Thus, I recommend that the educator chosen to work with the mothers is not the same educator who works with their daughters. However, all *It's a Mom Thing* leaders should have deep familiarity with the *It's a Girl Thing* program and its curricular content, and it is preferable that they are experienced *It's a Girl Thing* group leaders.

Outcomes

Organizational Mission/Vision

Larchmont Temple is a welcoming community, allowing for many gates of entry through the three pillars of our Covenant of membership: Torah, Avodah, and G'milut Hasadim. We offer a wide range of learning opportunities, celebrate Shabbat on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings and take great care to offer High Holy Day and festival services that meet the spiritual needs of all our congregational families. Our clergy is particularly sensitive and loving when it comes to performing life cycle events. Larchmont Temple is a Reform organization, and as such its Social Action committee is involved in tikkun olam (repairing the world) through initiatives that support our local communities and those in the world at large.

Larchmont Temple is a warm and welcoming place, providing opportunities to support one another and the larger community in which we live. Our Covenant Curriculum at Larchmont Temple asserts that Jewish learning is essential to our search for life meaning. Larchmont Temple Youth Education strives to engage youth and their families in covenantal Jewish learning and living.[48]

Selected Priority Goals

- To provide an opportunity to support one another as we confront life's joys and challenges
- To provide Jewish learning to support our search for life meaning
- To engage youth and their families in covenantal Jewish learning and living

Enduring Understandings

- Who I am as a person influences how I parent my Jewish teenage daughter
- My ability to reflect on my own life experiences helps me strengthen my relationship with my daughter
- Caring for my daughter necessitates caring for myself
- Jewish tradition and my Jewish community can help me navigate the joys and challenges of raising a teenage daughter

Essential Questions

- What are my hopes and dreams for my Jewish teenage daughter?
- What challenges do I face as a mother of a Jewish teenage daughter?
- How do my own experiences influence my daughter's emerging Jewish identity?
- How does my participation in this program strengthen my daughter's Jewish identity and my own sense of Jewish communal belonging?

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[48] "Covenant of Membership." Larchmont Temple. Web 4/12/14. http://www.larchmonttemple.org/About/Covenant_of_Membership

Learner Outcomes

KNOW
Mothers will know…

- The core Jewish values that guide their parenting;
- The topics and issues their daughters are exploring in their *Rosh Chodesh: It's a Girl Thing* group;
- The tools, strategies and insights other mothers are using to help their daughters navigate these issues;
- The Jewish tools and perspectives that can help them navigate these issues with their daughters.

DO:
Mothers will…

- Have conversations with their daughters relevant to the topics/themes their they are exploring in *Rosh Chodesh: It's a Girl Thing*;
- Brainstorm Jewish parenting tools and strategies;
- Create a time capsule for their daughters containing artifacts that explore and embody their core beliefs and values.

BELIEVE:
Mothers will…

- Explore how their Jewish community and Jewish tradition are significant resources and support systems as they raise their teenage daughters;
- Explore how they can deepen the impact of their daughters' *Rosh Chodesh* experiences;
- Explore and express the benefits and challenges of applying the strategies learned class and gaining parenting advice from Jewish tradition and from other women;
- Express and reflect on the values they incorporate into their time capsules.

BELONG:
Mothers will…

- Be in conversation with one another around shared challenges of parenting;
- Be in conversation with their daughters about the topics they are discussing in their *Rosh Chodesh: It's a Girl Thing* group;

Acceptable evidence for learning: processes to be used to engage learners in determining outcomes, tools and prompts for data collection

- **Ongoing Time Capsule Creation:** During each session, mothers will create "artifacts" to put into a time capsule for their daughters. Each mother will choose when she wants to give her daughter the time capsule. Possible choices are: at the end of the year, when her daughter leaves for college, when her daughter gets married, or when her daughter has children of her own.

- **"Offline" Mother-Daughter Conversations:** At the conclusion of each session, mothers will take home 1 or 2 session related "prompts" to discuss with their daughters before their next "It's a Mom Thing" meeting. At the start of each meeting, mothers will share their experiences of discussing the assigned prompts/topics with their daughters. Mothers will also keep a reflective journal to capture their conversations and the comments, questions and growth that emerge from the experience.

- **Program Evaluation:** At the end of the year, mothers will complete a formal program evaluation, to determine the extent to which stated program goals were accomplished. Data will be used to adapt the program for future cohorts.

Lesson Outline

Session/Month	Relevant *It's a Girl Thing* Monthly Theme (Year 3)	*It's a Mom Thing* Core Concepts
Session 1: Heshvan	**Legacies of Continuity and Change**	• Effectively communicating our values, hopes and dreams for our children involves a variety of communication strategies, tools and techniques; • My hopes and dreams for my daughter impact and inform our relationship; • My hopes and dreams for my daughter may not always align with her hopes and dreams for herself.
Session 2: Kislev	**Deeper than Skin Deep**	• My ideas about what it means to be healthy can influence my daughter's ideas about what it means to be healthy; • I can support my daughter through processes of discovering what really matters in life; • My daughter's struggles with body image are normal; • Judaism provides paradigms that can help mothers and daughters combat the beauty industry's destructive messages.
Session 3: Tevet	**Taking Care of Ourselves: Managing Stress**	• Physical and emotional self-care is a sacred responsibility; • The standards and expectations we place on ourselves can result in physical and emotional stress; • Taking care of myself helps my daughter learn safe and effective techniques for managing stress; • The family and the home can provide a support system and a safe haven as we confront the stressors of everyday life.

Lesson Outline Continued

Session/Month	Relevant *It's a Girl Thing* Monthly Theme (Year 3)	*It's a Mom Thing* Core Concepts
Session 4: Shevat	**Holy Selves, Wholeness in Relationships**	•.My past and present relational experiences inform how I approach and relate to my daughter's processes of relationship building; •.Helping my daughter view herself as whole and holy will help her to enter into positive relationships; •.I can use Jewish wisdom to help my daughter identify the qualities she strives for in her relationships, both friendly and intimate.
Session 5: Adar	**Understanding Relationships**	•.Parents can take an active role in helping to prevent teen dating violence; •.Modeling self-worth and effective communication techniques can help my daughter understand what constitutes a healthy relationship; •.I can help keep my daughter safe by familiarizing myself with the signs of unhealthy teen relationships.
Session 6: Nisan	**Making Change Happen**	•.My *It's a Mom Thing* experience can help me initiate change within my family; •.Mothers and daughters can work together to initiate change within the family and within the broader community; •.Mothers and daughters can help each other recognize their own potential as agents of change.

Lesson 1 (Heshvan): From Generation to Generation: Legacies of Continuity and Change

Relevant *It's a Girl Thing* Core Concepts:
In Heshvan Kol, we recognize the precious legacies preserved and handed down by our ancestors – legacies of both continuity and change. We share ritual practices that we find meaningful, both old new, and create a personalized hamsa.[49]

Relevant Unit Enduring Understandings:

- Who I am as a person influences how I parent my Jewish teenage daughter
- My ability to reflect on my own life experiences helps me strengthen my relationship with my daughter

Relevant Unit Essential Questions

- What are my hopes and dreams for my teenage daughter?
- What challenges do I face as a mother of a Jewish daughter?

Relevant unit KDBB:

- Mothers will know the core Jewish values that guide their parenting
- Mothers will create a time capsule for their daughters containing artifacts that explore and embody their core beliefs and values
- Mothers will explore how their Jewish community and Jewish tradition are significant resources and support systems as they raise their teenage daughters
- Mothers will express and reflect on the values they incorporate into their time capsules

Lesson Core Concepts:

- Effectively communicating our values, hopes and dreams for our children involves a variety of communication strategies, tools and techniques;
- My hopes and dreams for my daughter impact and inform our relationship;
- My hopes and dreams for my daughter may not always align with her hopes and dreams for herself.

Evidence of Understanding

- Mothers will use personal artifacts to explore and share the values that their own mothers modeled and passed on to them
- Mothers will brainstorm and write "ethical letters" to express their hopes and dreams for their daughters
- Before the next session, mothers will pick a time to discuss with their daughters one or more of the following prompts, and then reflect on the experience in their journals. Possible Prompts:

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[49] "Heshvan: At A Glance," in *Heshvan*, Rosh Chodesh *It's a Girl Thing.* Year 3 *(Kol)* Curriculum.

- My hopes and dreams for my daughter, her hopes and dreams for herself, and how they are similar or different.
- What are my core values, and can my daughter identify them in action?
- What are the legacies and values my daughter wishes to pass on to her own children someday?

Materials Needed:

- Rosh Chodesh candle and matches
- Jewish values texts
- Post-it notes and poster paper
- Excerpts from ethical wills and letters (see Lesson Appendix)
- Pens and paper
- Time capsule containers (such as paper boxes, plastic containers, large manila envelopes, etc. Could also ask participants to supply their own time capsule containers. Ask participants to bring a medium sized paper box, or plastic container to the first meeting)
- Mother-Daughter discussion prompt questions (on half slips of paper, or on stickers)
- One journal for each participant
- One taper candle or tea light candle/participant

I. Gathering Plan and Set Induction

<u>The Legacies of Our Mothers</u>

Before the session, ask participants to bring an artifact that depicts one or more values that their own mothers (or significant "mother figures") modeled and passed on to them. Possible artifacts include a book, a tzedakah box, a pen, etc. Encourage participants to be creative and thoughtful.

Lead the group in singing or reciting either the creative or the traditional "prayer for the new month" as a participant lights the Rosh Chodesh candle.

Ask each participant to introduce herself and share her artifact. Use the following questions to generate a broader discussion with the group about the ways in which their mothers' values have shaped/impacted their identities:

- How did your mother communicate her values? By modeling? Conversation? Argument? To what extent were these communication styles effective?
- Think of a time when there was a conflict of values between you and your mother. How did it play out, and what might have worked better?
- How did your mother's values impact or inform the relationship you shared?

- How have your mother's values, and the ways in which she expressed those values, informed how you want to transmit your own values to your daughter?

II. What Are My Hopes and Dreams For My Daughter? What Do I Hope To Pass On To Her?

<u>Group Brainstorming</u>

Facilitator's Intro: *This month in their Rosh Chodesh group, your daughters are exploring the value of legacies and rituals that are passed down from generation to generation. Our session will focus on the legacies you hope to pass on to your daughters. We will look at "legacies" through the lens of the "hopes and dreams" we have for our daughters, which may or may not resemble the hopes and dreams your mother had for you, and may or may not align with your daughter's hopes and dreams for herself. However, as we will discuss, the hopes and dreams mothers have for daughters do impact the mother-daughter relationship, even if they are not spoken out loud. We will begin with a group brainstorming process of the hopes and dreams you have for your daughters.*

Hand out post-it notes to participants. Ask participants to (anonymously) write one hope/dream they have for their daughters per post-it note. They can write as many hopes/dreams as they like. As participants write, collect post-it notes and stick them on one of two large pieces of poster paper, delineating between "Jewish hopes and dreams" and "secular hopes and dreams" (although this should not yet be made explicit to participants). *Note: It may not be so easy to differentiate between "Jewish" and "secular" hopes and dreams, which is part of the point of the activity. Post-its that are ambiguous can be placed in the "middle."*

For example: *"Jewish hopes and dreams" might include:*
- *I hope my daughter is proud of her heritage*
- *I hope my daughter finds spiritual peace and happiness*
- *I hope my daughter establishes a home for herself that is imbued with Jewish tradition/Jewish values*

For example: *"Secular hopes and dreams" might include:*
- *I hope my daughter finds meaningful work/career*
- *I hope my daughter succeeds in college*

Once all post-its have bee collected and stuck to one of the two posters, discuss:

- What delineates/distinguishes these two groups of hopes and dreams?
- What do you observe about the two groups? *(Possible answer: there are more "Jewish hopes and dreams" than "universal hopes and dreams;" or "many of us expressed similar values")* How might you explain these observations?

- What are the challenges of formulating and communicating our "Jewish" hopes and dreams to our daughters?
- What are the challenges of formulating and communicating our "secular" hopes and dreams to our daughters?
- What makes a hope/dream "Jewish" or "secular?"
- Why might it be difficult to distinguish our "Jewish" hopes and dreams from our "secular" hopes and dreams? *(much of what we value, hope and believe is, in fact, Jewish – we just may not be aware of it!)*

Hand out the following texts, and read together:

When a Jewish baby is born, the prayer offered expresses the hope that the child will be able to respond affirmatively to the first three questions: May the parents rear this child to adulthood imbued with the love of Torah and the performance of good deeds, and may they escort him/her to the wedding canopy.[50]

The Talmud (Kiddushin 29a) enumerates three specific requirements for what parents must teach their children: the Torah, how to make a living, and how to swim.

- Which of these texts represents a hope or a dream that you have for your daughter?
- How do you express/communicate the hopes and dreams you have for your daughter? *(For example: Do you model your values, hopes and dreams through your actions? Do you use dialogue? Do you think about timing or setting? Do you and your partner decide which is the best parent to bring up certain topics?)*

Using Ethical Letters to Communicate our Hopes and Dreams

Facilitator's Intro: *The last question we discussed prompted you to ponder how to best communicate to your daughters what's important to you. Our next activity presents writing as anther tool you might use to communicate your values.*

Our tradition has a long history of "ethical wills," "ethical letters" and "testament literature" in which parents give detailed descriptions of the hopes and dreams they have for their children. As Rabbi Jack Riemer writes,

> *There is a lovely Jewish custom, one that is unfortunately not sufficiently known in our time, of writing what is called an ethical will. Parents would write a letter to their children in which they would try to sum up all that they had learned in life, and in which they would try to express what they wanted most for and from their children. They would leave these letters behind because they believed that the wisdom they had acquired was just as much a part of the*

[50] Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, *Jewish Wisdom*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1994), 4.

legacy they wanted to leave their children, as were all the material possessions.

The first ethical wills are found in the Bible. Jacob gathers his children around his bedside and tries to tell them the way in which they should live after he is gone. And Moses makes a farewell address, chastising, prophesying, and instructing his people before he dies. David prepares Solomon before he goes to his eternal rest by warning him whom to be wary of when he becomes king, and by asking him to complete the task he had begun and was unable to complete. The Apocrypha, the Talmud, medieval and modern Hebrew literature all contain examples of ethical wills parents left their children.[51]

The hopes and dreams we just assembled will help you write our own ethical letters for our daughters – as will an exploration of some "ethical wills" and "ethical letters" from our tradition and from our "American milieu."

Possible "ethical wills" and "ethical letters" to read together/in small groups:
(See Appendix A):

- Excerpts from Ramban's Letter to his Oldest Son
- Excerpts from Sholom Aleichem's Ethical Will to His Children
- Excerpts from the ethical will of Judah ibn Tibbon, France,
- Excerpts from the testament of Eleazar of Mayence, Germany,
- Lyrics from "Teach Your Children Well" by Crosby, Stills and Nash
- Barack Obama's "Letter To His Daughters"

Divide participants into groups of two. Assign two texts to each pair:

- With your partner, read through the 2 texts you were assigned. You may want to do this out loud. Sometimes we hear things differently than we read them.
- As you read, underline the items that relate to your hopes and dreams. Likewise, note in the margin one of your hopes or dreams for your daughter that was not expressed in these texts.
- Share with your partner what you underlined and noted. Ask enough questions of each other so you can explain his/her wishes when the full group reconvenes.[52]

Reconvene and Discuss:

- What is striking to you about this form of "hopes and dreams" expression?

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[51] "Writing and Reading Ethical Wills: On the Jewish Custom of Leaving a Written Spiritual Legacy for One's Children." By Rabbi Jack Reimer. Web. 1/17/14. http://www.myjewishlearning.com/life/Life_Events/Death_and_Mourning/Dying/Ethical_Wills.shtml

[52] From LOMED: Sample Script for Connecting Conversations

- What are some values that you discovered in these texts? To what extent are they "Jewish" or "secular?"
- What resonated with you in the letters you read?
- How do the "hopes and dreams" of these letters compare and contrast with the "hopes and dreams" we gathered in the last activity?

Facilitator's Intro: *You now have the opportunity to write your own "ethical letters" to your daughters. Your letters will be placed in a "time capsule," an ongoing project that you will work on over the course of our time together. Each week, you will create a different artifact (related to the month's topic/theme) to place in your time capsule. Each of you should decide when you feel ready to give your time capsule to your daughter – perhaps at the end of this year, perhaps before she leaves for college, perhaps when she has children of her own, etc.*

(Note: Facilitator may want to give mothers the option of expressing their hopes and dreams in other ways – such as through drawing, music, poetry, etc.)

Pass out pens and paper, and allow mothers time to work on their letters. Mothers can also work on their letters outside the group session.

Questions for Discussion:

- What was this letter writing process like for you?
- How is this mode of communication different from having conversation in person, over the phone, modeling through action, etc.? What mode of communication do you find most effective? How does the value you want to express inform how you choose to communicate?
- In addition to this "ethical letter," what else might you do that would lead your daughters to know your priorities/values, hopes and dreams for her?
- To what extent have you already communicated these hopes and dreams to your daughter?
- To what extent do these hopes and dreams pervade your family/home life?
- In what ways do your hopes and dreams for your daughter affect your relationship with her?
- To what extent do you think your hopes and dreams for your daughter align with your daughter's hopes and dreams for herself?

Have mothers place their letters in their time capsules. Leave time capsules in a safe place at the temple.

<u>Mother-Daughter Conversation</u>

Facilitator's Intro: *One goal of "It's a Mom Thing" is to align our topics with those that daughters are exploring in "It's a Girl Thing," to bring moms and daughters into discussion around shared issues. At the conclusion of each session, you will be given a bit of "homework:" a prompt question to discuss with you daughter, based on the*

month's topic, so that together, you and your daughter can deepen your exploration of Rosh Chodesh topics and themes.

Before our next session, pick a time to discuss with your daughters one or more of the following prompts, and then reflect on the experience in your journals (distribute journals). Possible Prompts: (distribute)

- My hopes and dreams for my daughter, her hopes and dreams for herself, and how they are similar or different.
- What are my core Jewish values, and can my daughter identify them in action?
- What are the legacies and values my daughter wishes to pass on to her own children someday?

Closing Ritual

Ask participants to stand and form a circle. Give each participant a taper candle or a tea light candle. Ask one participant to begin by lighting her candle and sharing one ***hope or dream she has for her daughter for the coming month****. After she has shared, she should use her lit candle to light the next participant's candle, who will then share a hope or a dream she has for her daughter for the coming month, and so on. Once all participants have shared, wish each other a "hodesh tov" (a good month) and blow out the candles together.*

Lesson Two (Kislev): Deeper Than Skin Deep

Relevant *It's a Girl Thing* Core Concepts:
In Kislev Kol, we expand the girls' concepts of beauty and attractiveness to characteristics below the surface. The girls examine the destructive messages of the "beauty industry" advertising and develop strategies and affirmations to inoculate themselves against negative body image messages.[53]

Relevant Unit Enduring Understandings:

- My ability to reflect on my own life experiences helps me strengthen my relationship with my daughter
- Jewish tradition and my Jewish community can help me navigate the joys and challenges of raising a teenage daughter.

Relevant Unit Essential Questions

- What challenges do I face as a mother of a Jewish daughter?
- How do my own experiences as a Jewish woman influence my daughter's emerging identity?

Relevant unit KDBB

- Mothers will know the topics and issues their daughters are exploring in their *Rosh Chodesh: It's a Girl Thing group*
- Mothers will brainstorm Jewish parenting tools and strategies
- Mothers will explore how their Jewish community and Jewish tradition are significant resources and support systems as they raise their teenage daughters
- Mothers will be in conversation with one another around shared challenges of parenting
- Mothers will create a time capsule for their daughters containing artifacts that explore and embody their core beliefs and values

Lesson Core Concepts:

- My ideas about what it means to be healthy can influence my daughter's ideas about what it means to be healthy;
- I can support my daughter through processes of discovering what really matters in life;
- My daughter's struggles with body image are normal;
- Judaism provides paradigms that can help mothers and daughters combat the beauty industry's destructive messages.

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[53] "Kislev: At A Glance," in *Kislev*, Rosh Chodesh *It's a Girl Thing.* Year 3 *(Kol)* Curriculum.

Evidence of Understanding

- Mothers will share reflections and insights from their mother-daughter conversations on the previous month's theme ("Legacy")
- Mothers will use images to reflect on their own experiences with body image
- Mothers will create living Talmud pages to brainstorm together how they might nurture their daughters' inner "Women of Valor"
- Mothers will create artifacts for their time capsule reflecting on what it means to be a "Woman of Valor"

Materials

- Rosh Chodesh candle and matches
- Photographs/images of various objects and scenes
- Film clips and AV equipment for viewing them
- Copies of "Eshet Chayil" text (see Lesson Appendix)
- Copes of "The New Woman of Valor" (see Lesson Appendix)
- Large posters containing verses from "The New Woman of Valor" hung around the room
- Markers
- Supplies for artifact creation (paper, pens, colored pencils, magazines, scissors, glue, etc.)
- Copies of mother-daughter conversation prompts for this month
- One taper candle or tea light candle/participant

I. Gathering Plan and Set Induction

<u>Prayer for the New Month</u>

Ask one participant to light the Rosh Chodesh candle and lead the group in reciting the prayer for the new month.

<u>Reflections From "Legacy" Conversations</u>

As participants to share any reflections they have from their mother-daughter conversations on the previous month's theme. Use the following questions to guide the discussion:

- Where and when did the conversation take place? What about your surroundings was conducive, or not conducive, to the conversation?
- What was surprising to you about the conversation you had with you daughter?
- What was difficult or challenging about having this conversation? If you were to have the conversation again, what would you do differently?
- How did you feel during the conversation? How do you think your daughter felt?

- What new insights do you now have about your relationship with your daughter or your role as a mother? What new questions do you have?

Are you Happy with Your Selfie?

To ease participants into a discussion about body image, begin with a clip from the February 24, 2014 episode of the "Today Show," in which the anchors discuss their experiences with body image in honor of "No Make-up Monday:"

http://www.today.com/video/today/54497137/#54497137

Place a collection of random photos/images before the group. Ask each participant to choose a photo that best describes the relationship she had with her body when she was fourteen.

Questions for Discussion:

- As a teenager, who or what impacted how you felt about your body?
- What have you learned, since you were fourteen, about what it means to be healthy and happy with the way you are? What do you still struggle with?
- How have your past and/or present experiences with health and body image impacted how you connect with your daughter around these issues?

II. Raising and Nurturing Happy and Healthy Jewish Daughters

The Onslaught

Facilitator's Intro: *This month in their Rosh Chodesh group your daughters are exploring concepts of beauty and attractiveness and are examining ways to combat the negative and destructive messages of the beauty industry. There are a variety of short film clips, movies and magazine articles they are using to unearth the harmful messages and think critically about what they are seeing in the media. We are going to watch a brief film on this topic that is uniquely directed towards parents.*

In 2004, the company that makes Dove products decided to embark on a campaign that showed women with a variety of more realistic body types than one typically finds in advertising or in fashion magazines. We are going to watch their short (2 minute) film, "Onslaught" as a jumping off point for a conversation about the beauty industry through a parents' lens. "Onslaught" can be found at: http://vimeo.com/4097693

Questions for Discussion:

- What was going through your mind as you watched this film?
- To what extent does this "onslaught" affect your daughter's actions and behaviors? To what extent does it affect your actions and behaviors?

- If you were to "talk to your daughter before the beauty industry does," what would you say to her? To what extent is this even possible?
- What can we say to our daughters amidst the beauty industry's "onslaught?"
- What messages/images can we find in our society, and/or our tradition, about being healthy and happy with the way we are? *(This question can be used as a trigger into the "Woman of Valor" activity)*

Optional Short Film and Discussion: "Selfie"

Facilitator's Intro*: As part of their "Campaign for Real Beauty," Dove has also created a short film, directed by Academy Award-winning filmmaker Cynthia Wade, titled "Selfie," which shows mothers and their teen daughters in conversation about the harmful effects of selfies, and how the trend of meticulously edited self-portraiture is giving young women a warped sense of beauty, with which they inevitably compare themselves. While the film doesn't make an explicit connection between social media behavior and the inheritance of self-esteem from mothers, it demonstrates that external pressures are not limited to an Internet generation, and all women need to take back their beauty. By using selfies as means to redefine beauty, the tools are already "right at our fingertips."*[54]

"Selfie" can be found at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/21/dove-selfie-campaign-real-beauty_n_4637844.html?utm_hp_ref=fb&src=sp&comm_ref=false

Questions for Discussion:

- What about this film resonated with you? What might you challenge?
- To what extent could you see yourself having a conversation with your daughter that is similar to the mother-daughter conversations shown in the film?
- The film suggests that all women need to "take back their beauty." What does this mean, and else how might we do this?
- How might "taking back your beauty" affect your daughter's understandings of beauty?
- What other messages/images can we find in our society, and/or our tradition, that we can use to help ourselves - and our daughters - be healthy and happy with the way we are? *(This question can be used as a trigger into the "Woman of Valor" activity)*

(Note: If mothers are interested, it might also be appropriate to show the movies/images that the girls are viewing in their group. The It's a Girl Thing Year 3 Kislev Lesson lists the following as possible options for group leaders to choose from:

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[54] "How Moms and Selfies Can Change the Course of Social Media's 'Beauty Story.'" The Huffington Post. Web 4/13/14. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/21/dove-selfie-campaign-real beauty_n_4637844.html?utm_hp_ref=fb&src=sp&comm_ref=false

- *The short clip called "Evolution" at www.campaignforrealbeauty*
- *Web site: www.about-face.org promotes positive self-esteem in girls by combating negative and distorted images of women in the media, with a special emphasis on advertising*
- *The 34-minute film "Killing Us Softly 3" is a filmed lecture/slide show examining the impact of contemporary advertising on women's body images, violence against women and relationships*
- *The 2014 film "Miss Representation," which challenges media's limited and often disparaging portrayals of women and girls. The film includes stories from teenage girls and boys, as well as interviews with notable politicians, actors, and activists. http://film.missrepresentation.org*

Deeper than Skin Deep: Our own "Women of Valor"

Facilitator's Intro: *Judaism expresses concepts about womanhood that can help us combat the other destructive messages we receive on a daily basis. According to our tradition, being an "ideal woman" does not mean being beautiful and sexy; rather, it means living a life of compassion, strength and righteousness. The ultimate paradigm of the "ideal Jewish woman" can be found in Proverbs 31:10-31, a poem known as "Eshet Chayil" or "Woman of Valor." On Friday evenings before sitting down to the Shabbat meal, men customarily recite this poem as homage to their wives. (See Lesson Appendix for "Eshet Chayil" text) Pass out "Eshet Chayil" text and read together.*

Questions for Discussion:

- Who is the "ideal" woman, according to this text? What are the praiseworthy qualities in a woman?
- Which qualities resonate with you? Which surprise you? Are there any you would change or add?
- How does this "ideal woman" compare and contrast to the "ideal woman" of today's media?

Share with participants "Today's Woman of Valor" by Kohenet Ahava Lilith EverShine (see Appendix B). This piece was submitted to www.ritualwell.org, a resource for finding, sharing, and creating Jewish rituals of all kind. "Today's Woman of Valor" creatively reframes and revitalizes the ancient language of "Eshet Chayil," helping us better understand and appreciate its content.

Questions for Discussion:

- What are your initial thoughts and reactions to this piece?
- What about this "Woman of Valor" resonates with you?
- What characteristics of this "Woman of Valor" do you strive to embody?
- What characteristics of this "Woman of Valor" do you wish for your daughter to embody?
- How might you nurture your daughter's internal "Woman of Valor?" *(use this question to segue into the next activity)*

Facilitator's Intro: *Each page of Talmud (rabbinic commentary passed down throughout the ages) contains layers and layers of conversation, all in response to a central text or question, positioned in the middle of the page. (Might be helpful to show an example). We are going to emulate this custom, and create our own "Talmud pages" in response to the "Today's Woman of Valor" piece. Our commentary will focus on ways in which we might nurture "woman of valor" qualities within our daughters. Positioned around the room are posters, each containing one verse of "Today's Woman of Valor" (one verse = one line of the original Eshet Chayil text + Kohenet's accompanying commentary). In this way, we will brainstorm together thoughts, insights and strategies on how we might help our daughters grow into "women of valor."*

Give each participant a marker. Ask participants to mill around the room, writing their (anonymous) thoughts/questions/ideas/suggestions/strategies on each poster.

For example - on one poster:
She seeks out wool and linen, and her hands work willingly.
Today's woman of valor gives herself the time and space for creative expression, whether she does so by expressing herself through her work or through extracurricular activities.

- *"I might let my daughter choose the creative outlets and extracurricular activities that appeal to her, rather than the ones that appeal to me"*
- *"I might help my daughter distinguish between activities she is genuinely interested in, versus those that are appealing only because her friends are involved"*
- *"I might model this value for my daughter by making time for my own creative expressions"*
- *"How can I help my daughter find the time and space for her own creative expression, amidst all the homework she has to do?"*

Once participants have gotten to all or most of the poster, collect them, reconvene, and read all the comments aloud.

Questions for Discussion:

- What was this process like for you?
- What was it like to read and hear comments and suggestions from your peers?
- What are some strategies/insights/comments or questions you might take away from this session?

<u>Creation of Time Capsule Artifact</u>

Possibilities for this month's time capsule artifact:

- *Through writing, or visual representation, express one or more of your daughter's "inner qualities" that you admire*

- *What does it mean to be a "woman of valor?" Illustrate through drawings, collages, poetry or prose*
- *Tell your daughter about a "woman of valor" who has helped you find your own "inner beauty" and/or has been influential in your life*

Allow participants time to work on their artifacts. If there is time and if participants are willing, ask them to share their pieces with the group.

Mother-Daughter Conversations

Distribute possible prompts for this month's mother-daughter conversations:

- *Identify and discuss positive female role models, either women you know or women in the media. What qualities do these women possess? What is admirable about them?*
- *Ask your daughter to identify her positive inner qualities, and share the things that you see within her that are admirable.*

Closing Ritual

Ask participants to stand and form a circle. Give each participant a taper candle or a tea light candle. Ask one participant to begin by lighting her candle and naming ***one way she will try to nurture her daughter's inner beauty in the coming month.*** *After she has shared, she should use her lit candle to light the next participant's candle, who will then share, and so on. Once all participants have shared, wish each other a "hodesh tov" (a good month) and blow out the candles together.*

Lesson Three (Tevet): Taking Care of Ourselves – Managing Stress

Relevant *It's a Girl Thing* Core Concepts:
In Tevet, we explore physical and emotional stress in teenagers' lives – the causes, effects, and potential antidotes. We highlight physical and emotional self-care as a sacred responsibility, and present several simple tools that teens can use in their daily lives to take care of their bodies, hearts and minds.[55]

Relevant Unit Enduring Understandings:
- Caring for my daughter necessities caring for myself
- Jewish tradition and my Jewish community can help me navigate the joys and challenges of raising a teenage daughter

Relevant Unit Essential Questions
- What challenges do I face as a mother of a Jewish teenage daughter?
- How do my own experiences impact my daughter's emerging Jewish identity?

Relevant unit KDBB
- Mothers will know the topics and issues their daughters are exploring in their *Rosh Chodesh: It's a Girl Thing* group
- Mothers will create a time capsule for their daughters containing artifacts that explore and embody their core beliefs and values
- Mothers will explore how they can deepen the impact of their daughters' *Rosh Chodesh* experiences
- Mothers will be in conversation with one another around shared challenges of parenting

Lesson Core Concepts
- Physical and emotional self-care is a sacred responsibility
- The standards and expectations we place upon ourselves can result in physical and emotional stress
- Taking care of myself helps my daughter learn safe and effective techniques for managing stress
- The family and the home can provide a support system and a safe haven as we confront the stressors of everyday life.

Evidence of Understanding
- Mothers will share reflections and insights from their mother-daughter conversations on the previous month's theme ("Inner Beauty")
- Mothers will complete a chart to explore their own stressors and the ways in which they might manage stress more effectively in the future

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[55] "Tevet: At A Glance," in *Tevet*, Rosh Chodesh *It's a Girl Thing.* Year 3 *(Kol)* Curriculum.

- Mothers will bring in an item that helps them relax to place into their time capsules, and will write a corresponding message to their daughters describing some ways in which they have learned to manage stress.

Materials

- Rosh Chodesh candle and matches
- Copies of mother-daughter conversation prompts for this month
- One taper candle or tea light candle/participant
- Paper and pens
- Copies of text selections for "Judaism and Caring for the Body" discussion
- Blank charts for "Perfect Mother" activity (see Lesson Appendix)
- Copies of "Eshet Chayil"
- Copies of Biblical selections about Sarah
- Copies of CNN article "SOS for Stressed Out Teens"[56]
- "The Blessing of Staying up Late: Making Time for Rest and Fun," in The Blessing of a B Minus, by Wendy Mogel[57]

I. Gathering Plan and Set Induction

Before the gathering, ask each mother to bring an object or item that helps her relax, such as a scented candle, a bottle of lotion, a bag of bath salts, a CD of her favorite music, etc. Tell mothers that their items will go into their time capsules.

Optional: Before the gathering, distribute Chapter 7, The Blessing of Staying up Late: Making Time for Rest and Fun, from The Blessing of a B Minus *by Wendy Mogel. Ask participants to read this chapter in advance of the gathering.*

Prayer for the New Month

Ask one participant to light the Rosh Chodesh candle and lead the group in reciting the prayer for the new month.

Reflections From "Inner Beauty" Conversations

As participants to share any reflections they have from their mother-daughter conversations on the previous month's theme. Use the following questions to guide the discussion:

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[56] Kelly Wallace, "SOS for Stressed Out Teens." CNN. Web. 4/23/2014. http://www.cnn.com/2013/12/05/living/teen-stress-overscheduled-parents

[57] Wendy Mogul, *The Blessing of a B Minus: Using Jewish Teachings to Raise Resilient Teenagers*, (New York: Scribner, 2010).

- Where and when did the conversation take place? What about your surroundings was conducive, or not conducive, to the conversation?
- What was surprising to you about the conversation you had with you daughter?
- What was difficult or challenging about having this conversation? If you were to have the conversation again, what would you do differently?
- How did you feel during the conversation? How do you think your daughter felt?
- What new insights do you now have about your relationship with your daughter or your role as a mother? What new questions do you have?
- What are you noticing about these conversations with your daughter from month to month? To what extent are they conversations changing or getting easier?

II. Judaism and Caring for the Body

Facilitator's Intro: *Last month in It's a Girl Thing and It's a Mom Thing, we explored how the beauty industry affects our relationships with our bodies. This month in their Rosh Chodesh group, your daughters are discussing stress and how to lessen it in their lives.*

In previous years, the girls learned the Jewish value that "the body is the temple of the soul." They've discussed that just as the Temple "housed" God, so too does your body house your soul, and that our bodies are sacred, and, thus, we need to treat them with respect.[58]

Kislev and Tevet share the eight days of Chanukah, when we celebrate the rededication of the Temple; thus, it is appropriate to examine our relationships with our bodies in both months. In these months, just as we celebrate the rededication of the Temple, we rededicate ourselves to taking care of our bodies.

To further explore our sacred responsibility to care for our bodies, hand out one or more of the following texts and read together:

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato (17th century scholar and mystic) taught that caring for the body helps ensure that the mission of the soul can be accomplished.

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (founder of the 19th century Mussar movement that emphasized ethics and self-improvement) taught that the mitzvah of caring for one's health is, in a certain sense, greater than all the other mitzvot because if it is ignored, one cannot do all the others.

[58] "Explore" in *Tevet*, Rosh Chodesh *It's a Girl Thing.* Year 3 *(Kol)* Curriculum.

According **Midrash Bereishit Rabba**, the body corresponds to the Mishkan, the portable temple where the Israelites worshipped in the wilderness. Our bodies can thus be a dwelling place for God just as the Mishkan was:

> You find in the Mishkan that the beams were fixed into the sockets, and in the body the ribs are fixed into the vertebrae. In the Mishkan the beams were covered with gold, in the body the ribs are covered with flesh…In the Mishkan there were bolts in the beams to keep them upright, and in the body limbs and sinews are dram to keep man upright…in the Mishkan the veil divided between the holy-place and the holy-of-holies, and in the body the diaphragm divides the heart from the stomach.[59]

***(Optional**: See lesson appendix for poems that can be used to delve deeper into the theme of women's' bodies as sacred vessels).*

Questions for Discussion:

- What are your reactions to these texts?
- In what ways do women's bodies, in particular, function as "holy vessels?"
- To what extent have you viewed your body as a "holy vessel?"
- What prevents you (or has prevented you in the past) from treating and regarding your body as if it is a "holy vessel?"
- In what ways does motherhood and womanhood, in particular, generate stress upon your bodies and souls?
- What are the expectations associated with motherhood and womanhood that cause stress? Where do these expectations come from?

III. Motherhood and Stress

Facilitator's Intro: *In her book The Curse of the Good Girl, Rachel Simmons outlines the following activity, which she has used with mothers in workshops. The purpose of the activity is to identify stressors unique to mothers, and the ways in which mothers might model healthy and effective methods of managing stress. In this way, mothers explore how to identify and model the qualities they want to instill in their daughters.*[60]

As a group, list all the traits/characteristics/images of what our culture and society deems as the "Perfect Mother." Examples might include:

- Organized
- Cooks dinner
- Multi-tasker
- Raises perfect children
- Patient

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[59] Tamar Frankiel and Judy Greenfeld. *Minding the Temple of the Soul: Balancing Body, Mind and Spirit through Traditional Jewish Prayer, Movement and Meditation*, (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1997). 83.

[60] Rachel Simmons, The Curse of the Good Girl, (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 238-241.

- Successful work/life balance
- "Has it all"
- Doesn't yell

Questions for discussion:

- How does the cultural pressure to be a "perfect mother" affect the kind of person you are at home?
- How does it affect your parenting?
- What kind of an example might it set for your daughter?

To explore these themes further, have each mother choose one to three of the "perfect mother" characteristics from the list that they often feel the most pressure to exemplify. Have mothers explore their chosen "perfect mother" traits using following questions - this can be done in chart form (see Rachel Simmons' example below and see blank chart in Lesson Appendix):

- How does this "perfect mother" trait affect the kind of person I am at home?
- What might my daughter learn from this?
- What might I do differently?
- When, where, and how will I do it?

"Perfect Mother" Trait	**How does this affect the kind of person I am at home?**	**What might my daughter learn from this?**	**What might I do differently?**	**When, where, and how will I do it?**
Organized, Cleans House, Put-Together	Compulsive need to strengthen up the house constantly	To be overly concerned with this image and how she appears, instead of her own internal state or need	Let a mess accumulate for a longer period; delegate some responsibilities to the rest of the family	Stop fluffing the couch pillows every time someone gets up. Schedule a family meeting to talk about chores.
Patient, doesn't yell	Try to keep people from fighting or being angry in the house	Anger and conflict are bad	Make room for anger	Let my daughter be angry for a half hour longer than I usually do. Try not to shut down fights between my kids but instead re-direct them into more respectful conflict

Sarah: The "Perfect Mother?"

Facilitator's Intro*: Last month, we looked at the Jewish poem "Eshet Chayil" as a representation of the "ideal" woman according to Jewish tradition. On the one hand, Eshet Chayil is a relief from the unrealistic pressures and expectations women receive from the media as it emphasizes inner qualities over physical beauty. On the other hand, "Eshet Chayil" may not seem like such a relief, as the woman described in the*

poem is an exemplar of every possible admirable quality - thus suggesting just one more unattainable image for women to live up to. The woman described in "Eshet Chayil" can arguably be viewed as the "perfect Jewish mother." (If needed, pass out "Eshet Chayil" for review).

However, according to a midrash, Eshet Chayil was the eulogy that Abraham gave for his wife Sarah. But was Sarah the "perfect wife" and the "perfect mother?" Together, read one or more of the following excerpts from Sarah's biblical narratives:

Now Abram's wife Sarai, who had not borne him a child, had an Egyptian slave named Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, "Seeing as God has kept me from bearing a child, have intercourse with my slave: maybe I will have a son through her. Abram heeded Sara's voice. Ten years after Abram had settled in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took her slave Hagar the Egyptian and gave her to her husband Abram as wife. He came to Hagar and she became pregnant; and when she saw that she had become pregnant, her mistress became for her an object of scorn. Sarai them said to Abram, "My wrong is on your head! I put my slave in your arms, no sooner did she see that she was pregnant, I became for her an object of scorn. Let God judge between us!" So Abram said to Sarai, "Look, your slave is in your hands, do to her as you please." Sarai then so afflicted her that she ran away, and an angel of God found her at a spring of water in the wilderness, at the spring on the road to Shur." (Genesis 16:1-7)

God appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre as he was sitting at the entrance of his tent. Looking up, Abraham saw: lo – three men standing opposite him! …They then said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" "There, in the tent," he replied. One of them then said, "Rest assured that I will return to you at this time next year, and your wife Sarah shall have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent, behind him. Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in years; the way of women had ceased for Sarah – so Sarah laughed inwardly, thinking: "Now that I am withered, will I have pleasure, with my lord so old!" But God said to Abraham, "Why is Sarah laughing so, thinking: 'Am I really going to bear a child, when I have grown so old?' Is any wonder too difficult for God? At this fixed time next year, I will return to you, and Sarah shall have a son." Sarah then denied it, for she was afraid, and said, "I did not laugh;" but God said, "Ah, but you did laugh!" (Genesis 18:1-15)

- How is Sarah portrayed in these narratives? What characteristics does she embody?
- How do these portrayals of Sarah differ from her portrayal in "Eshet Chayil?" How might you account for these discrepancies?
- In the second text, how did God change Sarah's words when relaying to Abraham her reaction? Why did God purposely change her words?
- Sarah wasn't perfect by any means, but she still regarded and remembered through "Eshet Chayil" as the ideal Jewish woman, as one of our primary Jewish female role models. Why? What does this teach us about idealism and

perfectionism? What messages does this send about the stresses and expectations associated with womanhood and motherhood?
- In what ways does our society's emphasis on perfection cause stress and anxiety for your daughter?
- How might you help your daughter manage the stress associated with trying to achieve perfection in our overly perfectionist and competitive world? What lessons have you learned that you might pass along to her?

IV. Teens and Stress

Read the following CNN article together: "SOS for Stressed-Out Teens"
http://www.cnn.com/2013/12/05/living/teen-stress-overscheduled-parents/
Article highlights: Nearly 40% of parents say their kids are stressed from school, according to a new poll. Growing up with social media means today's teens have less time to truly unplug. Parents contribute to kids' stress by not knowing how to cope with their own, experts say. Mindfulness activities such as "quiet time" are helping students lower their stress at school.[61]

- To what extent do you identify with the causes and effects of teen stress presented in the article? What causes and effects would you add?
- What do you think of the strategies presented in the article for lowering teen stress?
- What strategies have you tried? What's worked, and what hasn't?
- How else might the family and the home be a support system and a safe haven for our over-worked, stressed out teens?

*If mothers read **The Blessing of a B Minus** chapter in advance, turn now to the following discussion questions associated with the chapter. If not all participants had a chance to read, ask one or two participants to summarize the main points. Another option is to take time during the meeting to read all or sections of the chapter, together or independently.*

Questions for Discussion on "The Blessing of Staying up Late: Making Time for Rest and Fun:"[62]

- Did you celebrate Shabbat or a day of rest when your child was smaller? Do you now? What are the ways you can draw the spirit of Shabbat into your week?
- Does your teen have enough time for sleep and relaxation?

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[61] Kelly Wallace, "SOS For Stressed out Teens," *CNN*, Thursday, Feb. 27, 2014. http://www.cnn.com/2013/12/05/living/teen-stress-overscheduled-parents/

[62] "The Blessing of a B Minus: Parenting Group Discussion Guide," in The Blessing of a B Minus by Wendy Mogul, (New York: Scribner 2010), 204.

- How do you feel about stepping in when an overworked, overtired teenager insists that she "likes being busy" or that he "doesn't need much sleep?"
- Where do you draw the line between letting a teen learn the downside of overscheduling and protecting him from the pressure of our overly competitive culture?
- What is your daughter's preferred method of chilling out? Does it offend, frighten or annoy you?
- Many parents of teens say they feel both left out and depleted. Mogul suggests that engaging in activities that generate "flow" are key to lessening stress and fostering happiness. What "pathways to flow" have you tried? How have you expanded your social world? What's working? What isn't?

Creation of Time Capsule Artifact

Ask participants to share the objects they brought in that help them relax. Ask participants to write a corresponding message to their daughters describing some of the tips/techniques they have learned over the years to help manage stress. Have participants place their items and their messages in their time capsules.

Mother-Daughter Conversation

Distribute prompts for this month's mother-daughter conversations. Possible prompts:

- What stresses us both out, and what are some things we each do to help alleviate our stress?
- What are some things we can do together (either just mother/daughter or as a family) to help alleviate stress? Can we make this into a weekly routine?
- How can we let each other know when we are stressed? Can we make up a funny word, signal, or phrase?
- When I am feeling stressed, it would be helpful if you….

Closing Ritual

Ask participants to stand and form a circle. Give each participant a taper candle or a tea light candle. Ask one participant to begin by lighting her candle and naming ***one way she will try to help her daughter manage stress in the coming month.*** *After she has shared, she should use her lit candle to light the next participant's candle, who will then share, and so on. Once all participants have shared, wish each other a "hodesh tov" (a good month) and blow out the candles together.*

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Moving Traditions: 2009. www.movingtraditions.org

"Beneath the Surface:" a three part series for mothers and daughters to connect around the experience of Bat Mitzvah. Mayyim Hayyim, Newton, MA. Contact: Lisa Berman, Education Director. http://www.mayyimhayyim.org/Events-Classes/Beneath-the-Surface-Mother-Daughter-Program

"Parenting Through a Jewish Lens:" a program for parents of Jewish teens. Hebrew College, Newton, MA. Contact: Bernice Lerner, Director of Adult Learning. http://www.hebrewcollege.edu/parenting

Sacred Choices: Adolescent Relationships and Sexual Ethics. New York: URJ Press, 2008. http://urj.org/learning/teacheducate/adolescents/sacredchoices/highschool

"Jewish Women and the Feminist Revolution:" a program for mothers and daughters. Jewish Women's Archive. "Reading Series Guides." (Viewed on December 16, 2013) http://jwa.org/350years/readingseries

APPENDIX B: Lesson One Materials

Iggeret HaRamban: Excerpts from Ramban's Letter to his Eldest Son

Rabbi Moses ben Nachmanides *(Nachmanides, Ramban) was born in Gerona, Catalonia, in the kingdom of Aragon in northern Spain in 1194 CE. One of the giants of medieval Jewish leadership and creativity - and whose expertise included law, medicine, and mysticism - Ramban is best known for his monumental* Commentary on the Torah*.*

"Listen, my child, to the instruction of your father, and do not forget the teaching of your mother" (Proverbs 1:8). Speak with kindness to all people always. This will save you from anger, the major cause of misdeed...Always be humble; regard every person as greater than yourself...Study Torah regularly so that you can fulfill its commandments. When you finish your studies, think carefully about what you have learned; try to translate your learning into action...When you pray, do not think about worldly matters, think only of God...Read this letter once a week, and be regular in carrying out its requirements. By doing so you will always walk in the path of God and you will be worthy of all of the good that is due to the righteous.

A FATHER'S ADMONITION: The Ethical Will of Judah ibn Tibbon

Many medieval Jews were in the habit of writing wills, through which they imparted instruction of an ethical and religious nature to their children and to their descendants. Such ethical testaments were not uncommon among Muslims and Christians at this time. Many of these Jewish ethical wills, such as A Father's Admonition (which follows), are valuable for the insight they give us into the cultural and social life of the individual Jew of some particular land, and of some specific period.

The Admonition of Judah ibn Tibbon *(1120-1190) is particularly important because it sheds light on the intellectual interests of a cultured Spanish Jew. Judah ibn Tibbon was born in Granada; he migrated to Lunel, in enlightened southern France. He was the "father of translators" from Arabic into Hebrew. His son, Samuel ibn Tibbon, for whom this letter was written, succeeded in becoming an even greater translator than his father. Samuel's most valuable piece of work is the translation from Arabic into Hebrew of Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed.*[63]

My son, listen to my precepts, neglect none of my injunctions. Set my admonition before your eyes; thus shall you prosper and prolong your days in pleasantness! ....

You know, my son, how I swaddled you and brought you up, how I led you in the paths of wisdom and virtue. I fed and clothed your; I spent myself educating and protecting you. I sacrificed my sleep to make you wise beyond your fellows and to raise you to the highest degree of science and morals. These twelve years I have denied myself the usual pleasures and relaxations of men for your sake, and I still toil for your inheritance.

I have honored you by providing an extensive library for your use, and have thus relieved you of the necessity to borrow books. Most students must bustle about to seek books, often without finding them. But you, thanks be to God, lend and borrow not. Many books, indeed, you own two or three copies. I have made for you books on all sciences, hoping that your hand might find them all as a nest…

Therefore, my son! Devote yourself to the study of the Torah and to the science of medicine. But chiefly occupy yourself with the Torah, for you have a wise and understanding heart, and all that is needful on your part is ambition and application. I know that you wilt repent of the past, as many have repented before you of their youthful indolence. . .

Let your countenance shine upon the sons of men; tend to their sick and may your advice cure them. Though you take fees from the rich, heal the poor gratuitously; the Lord will requite you. Thereby shall you find favor and good understanding in the

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[63] "Medieval Sourcebook: Jewish Ethical Wills, 12th & 14th Centuries." Fordham University. Web. 1/17/14. http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/jewish-wills.asp

sight of God and man.....

My son! Examine regularly, once a week, your drugs and medicinal herbs, and do not employ an ingredient whose properties are unknown to you. I have often impressed this on you in vain....

My son! I command you to honor your wife to your utmost capacity. She is intelligent and modest, a daughter of a distinguished and educated family. She is a good housewife and mother, and no spendthrift. Her tastes are simple, whether in food or dress…If you would acquire my love, honor her with all your might; do not exercise too severe an authority over her; our Sages [Gittin 6b] have expressly warned men against this. If you give orders or reprove, let your words be gentle. Enough is it if your displeasure is visible in your look; let it not be vented in actual rage....

Examine your Hebrew books at every New Moon, the Arabic volumes once in two months, and the bound codices once every quarter. Arrange your library in fair orders so as to avoid wearying yourself in searching for the book you need. Always know the case and the chest where the book should be. A good plan would be to set in each compartment a written list of the books therein contained…these fragments contain very important matters which I collected and copied out. Do not destroy any writing or letter of all that I have left. And cast your eve frequently over the catalogue so as to remember what books are in your library.

Never refuse to lend books to anyone who has not the means to purchase books for himself, but only act thus to those who can be trusted to return the volumes…and take particular care of your books. Cover the bookcases with rugs of fine quality, and preserve them from damp and mice, and from all manner of injury, for your books are your good treasure.

I enjoin on you, my son, to read this, my testament, once daily, at morn or at eve. Apply your heart to the fulfillment of its behests, and to the performance of all therein written. Then wilt you make your ways prosperous, then shall you have good success.

THE TESTAMENT OF ELEAZAR OF MAYENCE

The Testament of Eleazar of Mayence *is the work of the simple and frank German Jew, Eleazar ben Samuel Ha-Levi of Mayence [Mainz], who died in 1357.*[64]

These are the things that my sons and daughters shall do at my request. They shall go to the house of prayer morning and evening, and shall pay special regard to the tefillah [the "Eighteen Benedictions"] and the shema [Deuteronomy 6:4]. So soon as the service is over, they shall occupy themselves a little with the Torah [the Pentateuch], the Psalms, or with works of charity. Their business must be conducted honestly, in their dealings both with Jew and Gentile. They must be gentle in their manners and prompt to accede to every honorable request. They must not talk more than is necessary; by this will they be saved from slander, falsehood, and frivolity. They shall give an exact tithe of all their possessions: they shall never turn away a poor man empty-handed, but must give him what they can, be it much or little. If he beg a lodging over night, and they know him not, let them provide him with the wherewithal to pay an innkeeper. Thus shall they satisfy the needs of the poor in every possible way....

If they can by any means contrive it, my sons and daughters should live in communities, and not isolated from other Jews, so that their sons and daughters may learn the ways of Judaism. Even if compelled to solicit from others the money to pay a teacher, they must not let the young of both sexes go without instruction in the Torah. Marry your children, O my sons and daughters, as soon as their age is ripe, to members of respectable families…

I earnestly beg my children to be tolerant and humble to all, as I was throughout my life. Should cause for dissension present itself, be slow to accept the quarrel; seek peace and pursue it with all the vigor at your command. Even if you suffer loss thereby, forbear and forgive, for God has many ways of feeding and sustaining His creatures. To the slanderer do not retaliate with counterattack; and though it be proper to rebut false accusations, yet is it most desirable to set an example of reticence. You yourselves must avoid uttering any slander, for so will you win affection. In trade be true, never grasping at what belongs to another.

Be very particular to keep your houses clean and tidy. I was always scrupulous on this point, for every injurious condition and sickness and poverty are to be found in foul dwellings. Be careful over the benedictions; accept no divine gift without paying back the Giver's part; and His part is man's grateful acknowledgment.

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[64] "Medieval Sourcebook: Jewish Ethical Wills, 12th & 14th Centuries." Fordham University. Web. 1/17/14. http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/jewish-wills.asp

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Excerpts from Sholom Aleichem's Ethical Will to His Children

Solomon Naumovich Rabinovich *(Sholem Aleichem) was born in 1859 in Pereyaslav, Ukraine. A popular author and humorist noted for his many Yiddish stories of life in the shtetl, he is regarded as one of the founding fathers of modern Yiddish literature.*

My last wish for my successors and my prayer to my children: Take good care of your mother, beautify her old age, sweeten her bitter life, heal her broken heart. Do not weep for me -- on the contrary, remember me with joy. And the main thing: live together in peace, bear no hatred for each other, help one another in bad times, think on occasion of other members of the family, pity the poor, and when circumstances permit, pay my debts, if there be any. Children, bear with honor my hard-earned Jewish name and may God in Heaven sustain you forever, Amen.

"Teach Your Children Well"
Crosby Stills, Nash and Young, 1970

You who are on the road
Must have a code that you can live by
And so, become yourself
Because the past is just a goodbye
Teach your children well
Their father's hell did slowly go by
And feed them on your dreams
The one they picked,
They one you'll know by.
Don't you ever ask them why,
If they told you, they would cry.
So just look at them and sigh
And know they love you.
And you, of tender years,
Can't know the fears that your elders grew by
And so please help them with your youth
They seek the truth before they can die.

Excerpts Barack Obama's Letter to His Daughters (January, 18, 2009)

Dear Malia and Sasha,

I know how much I've missed these past two years, and today I want to tell you a little more about why I decided to take our family on this journey.

When I was a young man, I thought life was all about me—about how I'd make my way in the world, become successful, and get the things I want. But then the two of you came into my world with all your curiosity and mischief and those smiles that never fail to fill my heart and light up my day. And suddenly, all my big plans for myself didn't seem so important anymore. I soon found that the greatest joy in my life was the joy I saw in yours. And I realized that my own life wouldn't count for much unless I was able to ensure that you had every opportunity for happiness and fulfillment in yours. In the end, girls, that's why I ran for President: because of what I want for you and for every child in this nation.

I want every child to understand the great privilege of being a citizen of this nation comes great responsibility. That was the lesson your grandmother tried to teach me when I was your age. She helped me understand that America is great not because it is perfect but because it can always be made better—and that the unfinished work of perfecting our union falls to each of us.

I hope both of you will take up that work, righting the wrongs that you see and working to give others the chances you've had. Not just because you have an obligation to give something back to this country that has given our family so much—although you do have that obligation. But because you have an obligation to yourself. Because it is only when you hitch your wagon to something larger than yourself that you will realize your true potential.

I am so proud of both of you. I love you more than you can ever know. And I am grateful every day for your patience, poise, grace, and humor as we prepare to start our new life together in the White House.

Love, Dad

APPENDIX C: Lesson Two Materials

Eshet Chayil
Proverbs 31:10-31

A woman of valor, seek her out;
She is to be valued above rubies.
She opens her hand to those in need
And extends her help to the poor.
Adorned with strength and dignity,
She faces the future cheerfully.
Her speech is wise; the law of kindness on her lips.
Those who love her rise up with praise and call her blessed:
"Many have done well, but you surpass them all."
Charm is deceptive and beauty is short lived;
But a woman loyal to God has truly earned praised.
Honor her for all her offerings;
Her life proclaims her praise.

(Translation from Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur)

Today's Woman of Valor[65]
Shared on www.ritualwell.com by Kohenet Ahava Lilith EverShine

A woman of valor, who can find? Far beyond pearls is her worth.
Today's woman of valor, she and she alone, determines her own worth.

Her husband's heart trusts in her and he shall lack no fortune.
Today's woman of valor trusts in herSelf, and her fortune is found in the size of her heart and how she wishes to share it; whether or not she shares it with a partner, spouse or lover.

She repays his good, but never his harm, all the days of her life.
Today's woman of valor surrounds herSelf with things that are good for her and recognizes those that may do her harm. She focuses on how these things affect her before trying to change things outside of herSelf.

She seeks out wool and linen, and her hands work willingly.
Today's woman of valor gives herSelf the time and space for creative expression, whether she does so by expressing herSelf through her work or through extracurricular activities.

She is like a merchant's ships; from afar she brings her sustenance.
Today's woman of valor knows that she needs to sustain her spiritual being as well as her physical being, her intellectual self as well as her emotional self.

She rises while it is still nighttime, and gives food to her household and a ration to her maidens.
Today's woman of valor seeks a balance between work, rest and play; between the things she does and who she is.

She considers a field and buys it; from the fruit of her handiwork she plants a vineyard.
Today's woman of valor dares to plant her own dreams and tend the garden of her soul.

She girds her loins with might and strengthens her arms.
Today's woman of valor is comfortable with and confident in her sexuality and finds strength in her womanhood.

She senses that her venture is good, so her lamp is not extinguished at night.
Today's woman of valor seeks adventure in her life and can light her way down any path she chooses.

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[65] "Today's Woman of Valor." Ritualwell. Web. 4/12/14. http://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/todays-woman-valor

She puts her hand to the distaff, and her palms support the spindle.
Today's woman of valor seeks to do things, whether work or play, that fulfill her in all aspects of herSelf; the maiden, mother, and maven/the child, adult, and wise one within.

She spreads out her palm to the poor and extends her hands to the destitute.
Today's woman of valor is generous of heart and spirit. She shares every facet of her prosperity with others.

She fears not snow for her household, for her entire household is clothed with scarlet wool.
Today's woman of valor defines her own personal space and determines her own boundaries, honoring them as she chooses. She seeks to make her home a sanctuary; a place where she can be replenished and share time and space with those whom she loves.

Fine carpets she makes herself; linen and purple wool are her clothing.
Today's woman of valor crafts her life to meet her needs, as well as her desires in every possible way. The way she speaks and moves, dresses and carries herSelf expresses who she is and how she feels about herSelf.

Well-known at the gates is her husband as he sits with the elders of the land.
Today's woman of valor acknowledges and honors her experiences and the wisdom she has earned over time. She is not afraid of aging and knows that every wrinkle on her skin is a line in the story of her life. She trusts her instincts, does not judge and gives counsel when it is asked of her.

Garments she makes and sells, and she delivers a belt to the peddler.
Today's woman of valor carefully chooses the items she uses in her daily life and the nourishment she takes into the temple that is her body. She is ever mindful of the footprint she leaves upon the Earth.

Strength and splendor are her clothing, and smilingly she awaits her last day.
Today's woman of valor strives to dwell in the here and now of life. She has learned from her past and looks forward to her future.

She opens her mouth with Wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
Today's woman of valor is ever conscious of her thoughts and actions and the effect they have on herSelf, others, and the world. She considers the way her words taste on her tongue and how they may be digested by those to whom she speaks. She allows the light of her heart to guide her.

She anticipates the needs of her household, and the bread of idleness, she does not eat.

Today's woman of valor works to feed her own needs, as well as she feeds those of others. She knows that neglecting herSelf can lead to neglecting the other vital parts of her life.

Her children rise and celebrate her; and her husband, he praises her:
Today's woman of valor mothers what she wants to nurture in her life. She actively loves herSelf, the people with whom she surrounds herSelf, and the universe. She makes an effort, no matter how great or small, to improve whatever she may want to change about herSelf, her life, the world.

"Many daughters have attained valor, but you have surpassed them all."
Today's woman of valor strives to build a support system of other women in her life. Whether they be friends, sisters, adult daughters or co-workers, she reaches out to the other women in her life.

False is charm, and futile is beauty; a God-fearing woman, she should be praised.
Today's woman of valor is comfortable in her own skin. She possesses an inner beauty that radiates so strongly that it is the first thing one sees when they look at her. She is a living embodiment of the Divine Feminine and is aware of and celebrates the divinity within herSelf.

Give her the fruits of her labor, and she will be praised at the gates by her very own deeds.
Today's woman of valor acknowledges and enjoys the fruits of her labors. She feels proud of all that she does in the world, whether great or small; of those whom she loves in the world, one and all. This is how today's woman of valor lives her life. She is you and she is me. Kein y'hi ratzon! *So may it be!*

APPENDIX D: Lesson Three Materials

[This child inside me]
Galit Hasan-Rokem (transl. Kathryn Hellerstein)[66]

This child inside me
sorts my existence into elements
blood and urine
calcium and iron.
In my sleep I am a quarry
where rare treasures are suddenly found.

The Blood of Birth
Tikva Frymer-Kensky[67]

In the blood of the mother you come,
blood washing over you,
purifying you,
cleansing you,
anointing you –
tabernacle of God –
at the moment of your consecration.

In the blood of life you come,
essence of life,
purest of the pure.
The flowing of blood carries us between worlds.
The blood on the child
is the blood of the mother.
The mother's blood flows, you come to our
land of life.
Her blood stops flowing, she will stay with
you here.
Only an instant separates life from death,
only a breath and the flow of blood.

O my child, you are marked with the substance
of life itself.

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[66] Galit Hasan-Rokem, "This Child Inside Me," in Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss, ed. *The Torah: A Women's Commentary,* (New York: URJ Press, 2008), 655.

[67] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "The Blood of Birth," in Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss, ed. *The Torah: A Women's Commentary,* (New York: URJ Press, 2008), 656.

Blood of the covenant,
which bonds us to God,
blood of the lamb,
the blood of delivery.
Blood of redemption, blood of life.

O Child, my blood of life surrounds you,
B'damai chayee: through my blood, may you
live.
Today your blood of life flows through your own body,
b'damayich chayee, b'damayich chayee,
through your blood, live!
With your blood, live!

“Perfect Mother” Trait	**How does this affect the kind of person I am at home?**	**What might my daughter learn from this?**	**What might I do differently?**	**When, where, and how will I do it?**

APPENDIX E: Mothers Focus Groups - Protocol Questions

1. Describe, with "thick detail," a moment when you felt a strong connection between you and your daughter. Questions to consider:

- Where were you?
- Who else was there?
- What was happening?
- What were you doing?
- What do you think enabled this connection to occur?
- In what ways (if any) did this moment deepen or enrich your relationship with your daughter?
- In what ways did this moment have future effects/ramifications for you, for your daughter, or your relationship?
- How could you re-create this moment? What would you need for another moment like this to occur?

2. What are the issues, or moments, that cause the most tension between you and your daughter?

3. What brings you the most joy and satisfaction as a mother of a teenage daughter?

4. What are some of the most challenging aspects of being a mother of a teenage daughter?

5. What Jewish holidays, customs or traditions have nurtured or strengthened your relationship with your daughter?

6. If a group of moms of teenage daughters were to come together on a regular basis, what kinds conversations and learning experiences would be most beneficial for you?

7. What (if any) other resources do you have or use, to support you in your role as a mother of a teenage daughter?

8. Look at topics/themes of Rosh Chodesh curriculum. What conversations would enable you to support your daughter's 9th grade learning experience at Larchmont Temple?