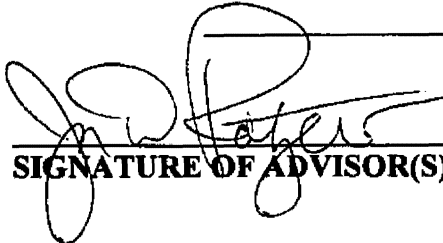



HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION  
NEW YORK SCHOOL

FINAL THESIS APPROVAL FORM

AUTHOR: Daniel Mishkin  
TITLE: Jewish Holidays PG13 :  
Teens Reclaim Jewish Holidays

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## One Page Summary

My Thesis is entitled Jewish Holidays PG13. I propose that we need to engage teens in holiday education and celebrations. My thesis urges communities to provide special, teen holiday observances that speak directly toward teen issues while teaching acceptable, customary holiday observance.

My Thesis is divided to five chapters. Each chapter explores a certain Jewish value, specifically *Kavannah*, *simcha*, the power of small, liberation, and *torah lishmah*, and links it to an appropriate Jewish holiday, specifically The High Holidays, Sukkot, Chanukkah, Pesach, and Shavuot. In each chapter there is an in-depth study of selected holiday practices and its connected Jewish value, in order to show that there is good reason to instill the selected Jewish value on that particular holiday. Also included in each chapter are appropriate teenaged themes that will help make the holiday experience significant to teens.

My experience as a Youth Director, working with teens for the past 6 years had taught me that the teens' favorite form of religious expression is Social Action. Therefore, I have provided five holiday programs that teach authentic holiday observances, but also interpret holiday rituals, stories, and customs towards social action and often the programs include a social action project.

I used studies of Jewish holiday practices, modern Jewish values, and my own experiences to intertwine ancient Jewish customs, stories, and rituals with modern Jewish ethics. My goal was to make Jewish holiday observance meaningful and necessary for today's teen.

**JEWISH HOLIDAYS PG-13:  
TEENS RECLAIM JEWISH HOLIDAYS**

**DANIEL L. MISHKIN**

**Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Master of Arts in Religious  
Education Degree**

**Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion  
School of Education  
New York, New York**

**April 17, 2007  
Advisor: Rabbi Jan Katzew**

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My family has provided such great support. I especially would like to acknowledge my wife to be, Rachel Gershon. She supported me during my countless hours of work and my moments when I felt like I was being consumed by my work. Thanks for helping me laugh when I needed it most.

Lastly, I would like to thank my students. They are the ones that make me enjoy teaching. Watching them learn and grow has provided me the most fulfilling experience of my life. Teen education has become my passion, so far the frustrating, irritating work of teen education has been the most important thing I have ever done. Teaching provides me with endless meaning and without my students I would feel a little empty. Thanks for teaching me as much as I could ever teach you.

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## Introduction

God said, "Let there be light, and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). Ever since this primordial act, light has played a central role in religious life in general and in Jewish life in particular. Light or fire is often used to express God's presence throughout the Biblical narrative. A pivotal instance where we see God's presence through light or fire is during the Exodus story. In Exodus 14:21-22 God makes his presence known through fire, by saying, "The Lord appeared before them in a pillar of cloud by day to guide them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light." Light is intimately identified with God's presence.

God's light became manifest in the prophetic call to Moses in Exodus chapter 3 in the form of the "burning bush" that was unconsumed. Moses saw the light in a way that others failed to recognize. He took the time to notice that his sight was giving him insight into God. Moses became conscious of his prophetic responsibility. It was his ability to see that gave him the power to foresee. After Moses noticed the holiness of the "burning bush" God revealed God's self to Moses, but God also revealed to Moses that he Moses has the responsibility of freeing the Israelites from Egypt. The juxtaposition of these revelations links them forever.

Jewish holidays typically begin with the blessing, "*Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu*

*Melach haolam asher kidishanu bamitzvoatav vitivanu lihadlich neir shel...*" (Blessed

are You, God, Our God, Ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us with

commandments and commanded us to kindle the candles of...) Then the holiday or

festival lights are kindled (although on Shabbat the candles are lit first and then the

blessing is recited)! Each holiday has its own rituals, blessings and stories that

commemorate its holiness. Even though each holiday contains its unique stories, rituals,

and customs, it is noteworthy that all of Judaism's sacred time is initiated with the ritual

act of kindling light.

Light often marks God's presence, and helps us see clearer our story as a people in relation to God and each other and our responsibility. Beginning each holiday by kindling light reminds us that God's presence is near, and the rituals, stories, and customs that follow will help us become enlightened. I propose we consider our existing sacred times, our Jewish holidays, and use them to enlighten Jewish teens about their responsibilities as Jews to themselves, their people, and all people.

Currently my experience teaches that Jewish holidays are not being taught properly to teens. The topic is not on religious school curricula for post b'nei mitzvah programs. Most holiday celebrations in synagogues involve some sort of kids program for young families, but frequently the teen is left out of the community's celebration. Either the teen is asked to help out at the kid's program or expected to attend the adult observance of the holiday, which are often not educational but rather a worship service. Without a continuing holiday program for teens, our students may be left with a child's understanding of observing and celebrating Jewish holidays. This would be a mistake because holidays are not just for kids. Each holiday does contain customs to keep children interested, i.e. apples and honey on Rosh Hashannah, decorating a Sukkah with ornaments on Sukkot, and reciting the four questions for Pesach, but there are also sophisticated stories and lessons that should be taught to adolescents and adults.

I believe teen education should be experiential education. Many congregational youth groups, camps, and travel programs have been very successful inspiring and teaching our teens, because these programs teach teens by doing *havdalah* or experiencing Israel rather than talking about them in a classroom setting. Teen education for Jewish holidays needs to follow this same model. In order to properly teach teens the

beauty, customs, holiness, and lessons of our Jewish, sacred time we should create or observe holiday celebrations specifically addressed to our teen community. Our goal should be to include a teen program that celebrates the holiday with authentic practices inspired by Jewish tradition and texts, but also that speak directly to teenage psychological, social and spiritual development. My experience working with teens has taught me that social action is a particularly authentic religious expression for teens, often more effective and compelling than prayer or study. Therefore, I am proposing that each holiday program should include a social action component. In order for these programs to be successful, they must also advance our students' level of holiday education by introducing sacred texts, customs, stories and rituals on a more sophisticated level than taught in pre-b'nei mitzvah education.

I have assigned an appropriate Jewish value to five Jewish holidays that can be taught using the appropriate holiday practices, texts, and customs. The cyclical nature of Jewish holidays allows us to practice and instill these chosen Jewish values rather than just teach about them. We should use our holiday symbols and stories to inspire a life of social action. A more sophisticated education of each holiday's practices will help to instill a very important Jewish value that will be revisited every year during its holiday season. For students exposed to proper teenage holiday celebrations, Jewish holidays will not just be a time to perform the existing customs, but also a time to express the accompanying Jewish value.

My thesis links five important Jewish values to five different Jewish holidays. The values of *kavannah*, living life intentionally, is related to Rosh Hashannah and Yom Kippur. The beginning of the Jewish year is a time we look inward at ourselves and



decide how we can make ourselves and our world a better place. Therefore we set goals for the year ahead and we fill this time of year with good intentions. *Simcha*, the Jewish value of joy, should be taught during Sukkot, the season of our joy, *z'man simchateinu*. The rituals and customs observed during sukkot will teach us what it means to be Jewishly joyous. The stories and rituals of Chanukkah lend themselves as a great time to instill Jewish teens with an important value of Jewish culture. Although we have often been a minority among this world we still feel that we can have a large impact. Arguably the most compelling Jewish story is our story of liberation from slavery. Pesach, the season of our liberation, is an appropriate time for our teens to identify with this part of their identity, the balance between liberation and responsibility. The last value in my thesis is Torah lishmah, studying for its own sake. Study is frequently not a teenager's most popular form of Jewish expression. Shavuot, the time of the giving of our Torah, is a fitting time to instill teens with the value of studying Torah.

I hope this thesis provides evidence that each value can correspond with its selected holiday. It also provides interpretations of Jewish texts, rituals, and customs that help teach the selected Jewish value. A practical teen program that a community can provide for its teenage community also accompanies each chapter. Each program seeks to represent an authentic form of Jewish observance of each holiday that also instills the teen community with core Jewish values.

## Chapter One:

# The High Holidays and Kavannah

*Kavannah*, means intention, purpose, and meaning. Within prayer, *Kavannah* includes spontaneous thought, song and dances through deep prepared meditation. True prayer requires *Kavannah*. Jewish educators and scholars describe *Kavannah* as directed thoughts or words that anticipate a *mitzvah* in order to make that *mitzvah* a more meaningful, more complete experience. During this chapter I will explore some classical applications of *Kavannah*, as taught by the Rabbis, explain how modern theologians and philosophers add to the uses of *Kavannah* towards life in general, and express how *Kavannah* can help make our lives more meaningful and more fulfilling.

I will also seek to demonstrate that the High Holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and the days between known as the Days of Awe, is specifically a most appropriate time to reenergize our lives and the lives of the next generation of Jewish adults with *kavannah*. The Jewish New Year is the designated time to reestablish *Kavannah* so that the upcoming year can be the experience we would hope it to be. Two central rituals during Rosh Hashanah that allow this ten-day period, The Days of Awe, to act as a ten day *Kavannah* for the upcoming year are the *Kol HaShofar* and the *Unatanatokef*. Combine these rituals with the Ten Days of Awe, a ten day period where we are able to change the fate of our upcoming year, followed by *Kol Nidre*, a prayer that asks us to make vows for our upcoming year, and we have a ten day period that will provide *kavannah* for the year to be.

*Kavannah* can be understood on several levels: personal, communal, and natural among them. The rabbis related *Kavannah* to make the *mitzvah* of *tfilla* meaningful. When prayer services became fixed, there was a reasonable fear that prayer would just become mindless recitation of words said for the sake of being recited, rather than

mindful reflection about and for God. In order to be certain that prayer would not become a mundane, even profane experience, the Rabbis educated that prayer, *Avodah Ba Lev*: “the heart’s work” required *Kavannah*. In this context, *Kavannah* translates to “directing the heart toward God.” The fear of mundane prayer was so important, the Rabbis taught that, a little with *Kavannah* is better than a lot without. A person was not considered to have fulfilled the Mitzvah of meaningful prayer without *Kavannah*. It states in the Talmud Berachot 28a, Rabbi Eliezar states, “If a person prays only according to the exact fixed prayer and adds nothing from one’s mind, the prayer is not sufficient.” *Kavannah* goes beyond simply knowing what the prayer means or simply changing one’s mindset. The early Rabbis were known to attend prayer services hours early to gain the right *Kavannah* in order to pray properly<sup>1</sup>.

*Kavannah* is still associated with prayer, but some modern philosophers and theologians have expanded the idea to include other mitzvot. One philosopher in particular that expanded the meaning of *Kavannah* is Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, perhaps the greatest Jewish theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In his book, Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism, Heschel dedicated much energy to explaining the nature of *Kavannah* for people in today’s society. Heschel states, “Prayer, too, is primarily *Kavannah*, the yielding of the entire being to one goal, the gathering of the soul into focus<sup>2</sup>.” In this statement Heschel associates *Kavannah* with prayer, but Heschel states that prayer has a function in our lives. He quotes Isaiah 1:15, “When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though ye make many prayers, I

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<sup>1</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism (New York: Crossroad, 1982) p. 15

<sup>2</sup> Heschel p. 12

will not listen; your hands are full of blood<sup>3</sup>.” to make clear that prayer without morality, proper behavior, and a sense of responsibility is not true prayer. Heschel states, “Life is fashioned by prayer, and prayer is the quintessence of life<sup>4</sup>.” I understand this quote to mean that prayer is the spiritual, powerful, and beautiful words, meditations, and thoughts that lead us to the life we think we should lead. Heschel makes it quite clear that, Prayer is an event that starts in man and ends with God. Heschel also explains that God and man meet in the human deed.

God is more immediately found in the Bible as well as in acts of kindness and worship than in the mountains and forests. It is more meaningful for us to believe in the *immanence of God in deeds* than in the immanence of God in nature. Indeed, the concern of Judaism is primarily not how to find the presence of God in the world of things but how to let Him enter the ways in which we deal with things; how to be with Him in time, not only in space. This is why the mitzvah is a supreme source of religious insight and experience. The way to God is a way of God, and the mitzvah is a way of God,. A mitzvah is where God and man meet<sup>5</sup>.

This leads me to believe that people begin their prayer with words, thoughts, and meditation, and complete that prayer when those words, thoughts, and meditations lead to righteous deeds.

Larry Hoffman writes that, “*keva* (fixed prayer) and *kavannah* (intentional. Spontaneous prayer) have meant different things at different times<sup>6</sup>.” Modern interpretations of *Kavannah* are still associated with prayer, but also can be associated with all aspects of life. Dawn J. Lipthrott writes, “*Kavannah* means to act and live with intentionality and consciousness. Instead of going through your life on ‘automatic

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<sup>3</sup> Heschel p. 12

<sup>4</sup> Heschel p. 12

<sup>5</sup> Heschel <http://www.crosscurrents.org/heschel.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence A. Hoffman, *The Way into Jewish Prayer* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 2000) p. 33

pilot,' you can live with awareness and intentional choice<sup>7</sup>." This quote encourages us to do everything intentionally, reflectively and consciously. It magnifies the idea that sometimes we go through our life with no purpose. We are called upon to live our lives with purpose and the hope that our lives make a difference. It is easy to fall into a trap where each day feels exactly like the one before. Life can feel like a random series of events that just happen to you. Judaism's value of *kavannah*, teaches the contrary. We do influence our destiny. We can set goals for the future and work to realize those goals.

Rabbi Joshua Levine Grater delivered in his September 26<sup>th</sup> 2003 sermon entitled, "Kavannah- the Focus of Prayer," ways to better understand the value of *Kavannah*. Grater relates the power of *Kavannah* to that of a baseball player getting into ready position on every pitch, in order to be ready to make a play if the ball is hit to his position. Grater states:

If you notice, just as the pitcher heads into wind-up, all of the players get into a "ready" position, focusing their entire body, mind and energy on the pitch. Depending on what happens next, they either spring into action or relax until the next pitch, when they again enter the "zone." The players never know what is going to happen from one moment to the next; their attention is highly focused because the ball could come their way at any time. This zone, which is repeated again and again before every pitch is similar to the concept of *kavannah* in prayer.

This moment, when the player (prayer) gets ready, can be related to the rabbis spending an hour preparing for the upcoming service. In order to fully be present for a meaningful moment, there needs to be time for physical, spiritual, and mental preparation that come before the moment. This preparation is *Kavannah*. For the ball player it is getting into ready position on each play. The rabbis made it quite clear how important *Kavannah* is to

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<sup>7</sup> Dawn J. Liphthrott, Shabbat: Day of Kvannah/Mindfulness [www. Relationshipjourney .com/shbt1.html](http://www.Relationshipjourney.com/shbt1.html)

prayer. Grater also states that *Kavannah* can also mean preparation for life. He states, "For when we are not present in, life moves by us, we miss opportunities, and we don't live up to our fullest potential." Grater shows us that in order to live life to our potential we must be prepared, and that means taking time during a year to get into a ready position in order to be ready to make a play if the ball is hit in our direction. *Kavannah* involves being fully present physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and this is not an easy task.

Without *Kavannah*, prayer, mitzvot, and life can become monotonous, meaningless, uninspired and tedious. *Kavannah* can enhance prayer, mitzvot, and life to become a meaningful, spontaneous, and exciting way to serve God. It is important that *Kavannah* be a part of our lives as Jews, so that we feel that our lives serve God and make a difference in making this world a better, healthier place. On Rosh Hashanah Jews reflect on the past year and recognize where we missed the mark (and sinned), then we can plan for a better more intention and fulfilling year ahead. If we admit that we saw people suffer, injustices committed, and our aspirations unfulfilled, then we can make plans to correct our previous mistakes, help heal those who suffer, and begin to right the wrongs of our society. By doing that, we are fulfilling our potential as humans.

The difference between meaningless and meaningful prayer can be getting in the right mind frame/ready position. We need a time to reflect on the year that was, peer into the year that will be, and decide which directions to take the upcoming year. The Jewish calendar has set aside time for such reflection, reflection, and changing direction of life to make the upcoming year one that serves God. The High Holy Days for the Jewish community is that time in which individuals change the direction their life. In terms of

*Kavannah*, The High Holy Days is a time to aim your heart toward God, get into ready position, and spend ten days preparing to make the upcoming year the meaningful experience it can be.

Prayer is a microcosm of life. There is the fear that it can become monotonous and rote. We can feel stuck into routine with no meaning, no spontaneity, and no readiness to grow. It can feel like nothing we do makes a difference. We might even get used to seeing injustice. We get tired, and we know that making changes in this world and in ourselves takes so much hard work. Instead of taking on this hard work we sleep. We spend our days in the routine that seems comfortable.

For the student, summer break ends. Hopefully a wonderful summer was experienced, but likely the end of summer means the beginning of school. The thought of returning to school means leaving the exciting days of summer where each day was different and returning to the days of school where everyday seems the same.

We Jews have a mechanism to wake us from our monotony. The High Holidays can remind us that each day is not the same. We are also reminded in this season that change is possible within ourselves and in the world. There is a designed ritual that marks the High Holiday season, and it wakes us from our slumber. This ritual is the *Kol Hashofar*. The explicit commandment on Rosh Hashanah is not to blow the *Shofar*, but rather to hear the various sounds of the *Shofar*, ram's horn. Although this commandment is among the most important and anticipated during this season, the meaning behind the various sounds is not made clear in the liturgy of the Days of Awe.

The blowing of the shofar is the only special biblical ritual for Rosh Hashanah. The symbolism of the shofar is not explicit in the Torah. Whether it is meant to arouse our slumbering souls or as a clarion call to war against the worst part of our natures, the



primitive sound of the shofar blasts stirs something deep within us. There is a sense of expectation in the silence before the shofar sound, followed by unease evoked by the various blasts. Part of its sense of mystery lies in the interplay of the silence, the piercing sound, and the hum of people praying. On its most basic level, shofar can be seen to express what we cannot find the words to say. The blasts are the wordless cries of the people of Israel. The shofar is the instrument that sends those cries of pain and longing hurtling across the vast distance toward the Other<sup>8</sup>.

Strassfeld recognizes the tendency for life to become rote, like prayer, and we can fall asleep on our own lives. The sound of the shofar tries to make sure this does not happen.

The sounds of the Shofar will not get the blood going and wake up our slumbering souls on its own. I have heard the sound of the shofar. I am moved by its sound, but it does not necessarily get my blood moving and stir up this notion that I must wage war against the worst part of our natures. It is the last part of this quote that makes the sound of the shofar a call to action. To interpret the sound of the shofar as wordless cries of those who suffer causes us to act toward ending suffering. Therefore we are commanded to hear the sounds of the cries of those who have reason to cry. The cry of the shofar is a symbolic reminder of the cries that are human, just like the sacrifice of the ram on Mt. Moriah was a symbol for the sacrifice of Isaac that Abraham did not carry out.

The Torah speaks of two situations where God heard the cries of the suffering. The first we read during this High Holiday period, Genesis 21:17-21 which is a special reading for Rosh Hashanah. In these verses,

God heard the boy's cry and from heaven an angel of God called to Hagar and said, 'What is troubling you, Hagar? Have no fear, for God heard the cry of the lad where he is. Get up, lift the boy, and hold him with your hand, for I am going to make of him a

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Strassfeld, The Jewish Holidays: A Guide and commentary (New York: Harper and Row, 1985) p. 99

great nation.' God then opened her eyes and she saw a well. She went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy to drink.

God hears the cry of one who suffers and provides water so that life can continue. From each life a great nation can be born. Therefore, since God heard the cries of the suffering God could sustain life and take action toward saving life. When we open our ears to the sounds of those who cry we can then take action to help those in need.

A second situation where God hears the cries of the suffering is seen in Exodus 2:23-25. In this situation God hears the moaning of the Israelite nation that has been oppressed harshly by the new king of Egypt. The text states, "The Israelites were groaning under the bondage and cried out; and their cry for help from the bondage rose up to God. God heard their moaning, and God remembered the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them." This problem was not a quick fix for God. These cries came from an oppressed nation. There was no easy, straightforward solution. However, this is the beginning of a nation being led by God out of bondage to freedom. It seems that the first step for the Israelites to be freed was God hearing their cries.

When we hear the sound of the shofar we are supposed to become more prepared to hear the cries of those who suffer. The *Kol Hashofar* calls us to wake up and act as we hear the cries of the suffering and oppressed. If we want to make our lives meaningful, then we can make this upcoming year a year that relieves suffering.

Another unique ritual aspect of the High Holiday season is seen in the liturgy of the *Unatanatokef*. The liturgy states,

On Rosh Hashanah it is written, on Yom Kippur it is sealed: How many shall pass on, how many shall come to be; who shall live and who shall die; who shall see ripe age

and who shall not; who shall perish by fire and who by water; who by sword and who by beast; who by hunger who by thirst; who by earthquake and who by plague; who by strangling and who by stoning; who shall be secure and who shall be driven; who shall be tranquil and who shall be troubled; who shall be poor and who shall be rich; who shall be humbled and who exalted<sup>9</sup>.

If one takes this liturgy literally it seems cruel and harsh. Instead we can look at this piece as a call to action and change. A commentary on the *Unatanatokef* states,

Three books are opened in heaven on Rosh Hashanah, one for the completely wicked, one for the completely righteous, and one for those in between. The completely righteous are immediately inscribed in the 'Book of Life.' The completely wicked are immediately inscribed into the book of death. The fate of those in between is suspended until Yom Kippur. If they do well, they are inscribed in the 'Book of Life.' If not in the book of death (B. Rosh Hashanah 16b).

Hopefully few of us think of ourselves as completely righteous or wicked. If one were to think of him/herself completely wicked that would be too self critical and deprecating and one who thinks of him/herself completely righteous is too arrogant. Most of us consider our selves in between; therefore the ten days of *tshuvah* are very critical. I am not convinced that the way one acts in these ten days will determine life or death, but the liturgy offers three ways to change one's fate. The liturgy states, "*tshuvah, tfillah, and Tzedakah* temper judgment's severe decree<sup>10</sup>." If one engages in these three righteous, intentional acts, then they can change their fate. I would interpret that our fate is not sealed in these ten days, but rather that our liturgy is using the ultimate motivating tool of life and death to get us to do *Tzedakah*.

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<sup>9</sup> *Gates of Repentance* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1989) p. 108-9

<sup>10</sup> *Gates of Repentance* p. 108-9

During different time periods, and based on the needs of a particular Jewish community *Kavannah* has a wide variety of meaning. For some communities *Kavannah* meant spontaneity and for others it meant preparation. This might seem quite ironic, but this is true. The word *Kavannah* during history has had actually opposite meanings. Nonetheless, *Kavannah* always was intended to make sure that prayer or mitzvot never became mundane. Therefore, in order to avoid the possibility that our upcoming year will be mundane and ordinary rather than the meaningful, holy experience we want it to be we must add *Kavannah*. For teenagers in the Reform movement it would be difficult to convince them that meaningful prayer will lead to meaningful lives. However, a year helping correct social injustice, healing the sick or learning about social issues would be a meaningful, fulfilling year. *Kavannah* to our students would mean great preparation during the high holidays in order to figure out their intentions for the upcoming year and how to make it meaningful and different. Hopefully our students will wake up everyday in ready position to catch opportunities hit their way that help them satisfy the promises they make during the long preparation period of the High Holidays.

One way to reach this goal is to provide teenagers with an educational Erev Rosh Hashanah service that will speak directly to issues relating to them. The service will provide a meaningful tfillah that includes all the usual prayers and readings, but it will also highlight certain parts of the tfillah that are unique to the High Holidays season. The service will include programs to help teens make meaning of the rituals that help observe this holiday time. Specifically it will highlight the blowing of the shofar, and the *Unatanatokef*. The programs will be designed to teach teens to use these distinctive components of the High Holidays to bring upon a year of fulfillment and social action.

Kavannah is a value deeply embedded in Jewish consciousness, but we cannot assume that it is transmitted from one generation to the next without explicit intent. By starting the Jewish (and academic) year with kavannah we are preparing ourselves to live in alignment with the Jewish calendar. This time allows us to set goals to improve the world inside us and the world around us in the upcoming year.

# Chapter Two:

## Sukkot and Simcha

There are only three holidays that technically warrant the greeting "*chag sameach- (happy holiday).*" The three days are the three pilgrimage holidays of *Pesach*, *Shavuot*, and *Sukkot*. The Rabbis called Pesach the season of our liberation as it is directly associated with the Exodus from Egypt, Shavuot became the season for giving the Torah, while *Sukkot* is the season of our joy. The associations with Pesach and Shavuot are relatively straightforward, because we remember the night of the Exodus on Pesach and we commemorate the Revelation at Sinai on Shavuot . By contrast, the link between Sukkot and joy is somewhat weaker, or at least less obvious. Sukkot is celebrated by moving out of one's primary residence and living temporarily in fragile, even flimsy huts (Lev. 23:42). How can leaving the comfort of one's home for the temporary dwelling hut of a *sukka* mark our season of joy? A close study of the text, traditions, rituals, and stories that surround *Sukkot* help to answer this question, and also teach us what it means to be filled with *simcha*/joy.

Reading text about *Sukkot* begins to offer a complex portrait depicting how *Sukkot* became the quintessential season of joy for the Jewish people. The Rabbis went as far as to label Sukkot (heChag-simply "the holiday" par excellence) Deuteronomy 16:13-16 states:

After the ingathering from your threshing floor and your vat, you shall hold the Feast of Huts for seven days. You shall rejoice in your festival, with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the Levite, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow, in your communities. You shall hold festival for the Lord your God seven days, in the place that the Lord will choose; for the Lord your God will bless you in all your income and all your handiwork, and you shall be fully joyful.

This passage that speaks of Sukkot teaches us many values, e.g., celebrating with all people, especially including the orphan and the widow. However, the dominant theme of this passage that describes Sukkot is unalloyed, complete joy. The Torah describes Sukkot as a time to reap the harvest, "Mark on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the yield of your land..." (Lev. 23:39). This might be the reason for Sukkot being referred to as the season of joy. The commentators also acknowledge a very important distinction between the three holidays, Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot. The command to rejoice is not expressed in relation to Pesach and it is expressed only once with regard to Shavuot. The ordinance of rejoicing is prescribed twice, in the above passage while talking about Sukkot, "You shall rejoice in your festival...and you shall be fully joyful" (Deut. 16:13-16) hence Sukkot is the season of simcha/joy<sup>11</sup>. It is not because the season is inherently joyful, although it might be, but rather because we are commanded to be joyful that Sukkot becomes the season of our joy. Maybe our customs and rituals used to observe Sukkot teach us how to be joyful.

What does it mean to be joyous? I would guess that different people have different definitions of joy. For some it might be yachting, for others it might be hunting, and yet for others it might be camping. What then does it mean to be commanded to be joyous? Is it to do whatever makes you happy? Leibowitz's commentary ponders what type joy is associated with Sukkot. Ibn Ezra states, "The meaning of the word, *ach*, in this context is that you should do nothing else but (rejoice)<sup>12</sup>." In comparison a lesser known 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian Jewish scholar, Moshe Hefez comments on Jewish joy by saying, there should not be joy based on abundance, because that could lead to idleness. Hefez's

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<sup>11</sup> Nehama Leibowitz, Studies in Devarim: Deuteronomy (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1980) p. 151

<sup>12</sup> Leibowitz p. 152



comments explain that Jewish joy expressed in the Torah is not overdone as to lead to levity or riotousness, because it will lead us to be sinful. Jewish joy involves a mixture of work and study of Torah, but one must be clear to do so joyously<sup>13</sup> Leibowitz sums up this argument by stating:

Both above commentators are chiefly interested in explaining the reason for the repetition of the command to rejoice on Sukkot and exact the significance of the adverbial qualification *akh* in verse 15. Ibn Ezra explains this word according the present day usage, expressing the exclusion in the sense of "except" or "only": "you shall do nothing else but rejoice," excluding all sadness. The second commentator interprets the word in the sense usually understood by our Sages, expressing limitation, not rejoicing without measure and control, but rejoicing in moderation<sup>14</sup>.

We see here that Ibn Ezra explains that the joy of Sukkot is uninhibited and anything that causes joy is acceptable for Sukkot celebration. Hefez takes a more conservative approach to joy. This seems to be a classic debate that we could have today. I remain torn, because I do believe that a season of joy should leave the individual to define joyousness for him/herself. I have also seen one person's joy be another person's sorrow. I claim that the rituals and practices of Sukkot teach us about true joy, and if we are aware during this time and attentive to the basic mitzvot we will be joyous and moral at the same time.

There are those who rejoice with excess, spending too much money on gifts, wine, drugs and some times sexual companionship. They feel that being joyous includes expensive toys, mind-altering drugs, and many strangers in a confined space. There are others who rejoice by spending quality time with friends, camping out and becoming in

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<sup>13</sup> Leibowitz p. 152

<sup>14</sup> Leibowitz p. 152

tune with nature. There are several examples and degrees in between, but the point is that joy means different things to different people. It seems that both types of joy and everything in between would be considered appropriate for Sukkot. On one hand we are commanded to leave our comfortable homes to live in temporary huts. On the other hand the Talmud describes a huge feast with many sacrifices<sup>15</sup>. The Talmud also speaks in extreme measures to describe the joy of *sukkot*. "He who has not seen the rejoicing at the place of the water-drawing has never seen rejoicing in his life"<sup>16</sup>. This passage supports the notion that *Sukkot* is the season of overwhelming *simcha*. The customs of living in huts vs. the Talmud's description of this great feast seems to contradict itself. I see that we must recognize that Sukkot is a season of joy, therefore we must include practices that bring us meaningful individual joy.

For Sukkot the mitzvah of *simcha* supersedes other mitzvot associated with Sukkot. "There is a general principle that you should rejoice in the *sukkah*, not suffer in it"<sup>17</sup>. Therefore if it is uncomfortable to sleep in the *sukkah*, because it is raining or cold, the rabbis declared that the *mitzvah* of sleeping in the *sukkah* is not required. Also, if the environment does not allow one to concentrate on their studies, then you are free to study elsewhere. Even in respect to eating in the *sukkah*, the rabbis declared it unnecessary to eat in the *sukkah* if it is raining or uncomfortable. In fact, quotes from Shulchan Aruch, "Whoever is exempt from eating in the *sukkah* and does not go out from the *sukkah*, does not receive a reward [for fulfilling a mitzvah] and is nothing but an ignoramus' (Shulchan Aruch)<sup>18</sup>. Even further Strassfeld suggests that a person who states the blessing for the

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<sup>15</sup> The Soncino Talmud: Mo'ed 3 (London: Soncino Press, 1938) p. 267

<sup>16</sup> The Soncino Talmud: Mo'ed p. 242

<sup>17</sup> Strassfeld p. 127

<sup>18</sup> Strassfeld p. 127

*sukkah* while uncomfortable is taking God's name in vain, which is strictly forbidden in the third of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:7)<sup>19</sup>. Our tradition makes it clear that the *mitzvah* of *simcha* is more important than the other *mitzvot* during *sukkot*. For example if one cannot live, eat, or study in a *sukkah* comfortably and joyously then one should do those *mitzvot* in another place as to do them joyously. "Thus the *mitzvah* to especially rejoice on Sukkot gives rise to an unusual attitude in the rabbis. Whereas they will often make exemptions to various other laws but encourage people to go beyond the letter of the law and perform the *mitzvah* anyway, their attitude is the opposite in regard to the *sukkah*. The rabbis are saying that you *must* leave the *sukkah* if it is raining. In this way, they try to ensure that the *sukkah* will be seen as a symbol of joy, not as a burden<sup>20</sup>."

The text and tradition make it quite clear that joy is the main theme of *sukkot*, but still the question remains how are we to associate joy with the *sukkah* itself? It is important that we examine the rituals and traditions associated with *sukkot* to see what they can teach us about the Jewish way to be joyous. Our sages teach us that the *sukkah* becomes a symbol of joy because it brings out an appreciation of what we have.

Many people define joy in terms of what they have, while in reality joy can only be measured by who we are, what we have accomplished and the relationships we have developed. In effect, the *sukkah* teaches, joy has little to do with the size, spaciousness and decorations of our dwelling place. As the Talmud teaches: 'When love between two individuals is strong, they can sleep on the edge of a plow; when their love is not strong, a bed of 60 cubits is not large enough'" (B.T. Sanhedrin 7a) (Rabbi Shlomo Riskin)<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Strassfeld p. 128

<sup>20</sup> Strassfeld p. 128

<sup>21</sup> Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, *Sukkot Teaches Joy* (<http://www.jewishhaz.com/jewishnews/990924/torah/shtml:1999>)

This message is powerful and relevant. We tend to associate joy with either altered states of consciousness of material possessions: alcohol, sex, large homes, fast cars, and big lifestyles. Riskin's comment on the symbolic significance of the sukkah speaks directly to the culture in which we are living. We need to be reminded about joy that transcends what we own, joy that comes from within. In the sukkah it does not matter how big your home is or how many toys you have. What matters is the company you keep. The people we are with make our sukkah joyous or uncomfortable. During this season of joy we can surround ourselves with the people we love. Too often the distraction of drugs, money, and toys may trick us into thinking we are happy, but for those of us who have sat around the campfire just talking, singing, dancing with our closest of kin, and loving the people around us, know that this is true joy. It is this idea that allows us to fully rejoice in the sukkah.

Since Sukkot is the season of our joy, we can take a closer look at the traditions that have evolved over time and see what values they can teach us about how to be joyous as a Jew. We will find that some of the values we learn run counter culture to some American values of joy. I think that it is important that a Jew takes the values learned during Sukkot and uses them to spread joy during the year. One tradition associated with Sukkot is called *Ushpizin*, which translates to "guests." The tradition of inviting symbolic guests became popular in Safed. The symbolic guests included Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, and David. For the Kabbalists of Safed, each guest represented one of the spheres that make up the universe—in the Kabbalistic system. By inviting these symbolic guests they were adding a mystical significance to

each day of the festival. One connection between the possible guests and Sukkot is that they were all wanderers or exiles:

Abraham left his father's house to go to Israel; all three patriarchs wandered in the land of Canaan, dealing with the rulers, from a position of disadvantage, Jacob fled to Laban; Joseph was exiled from his family; Moses fled Egypt for Midian and later, together with Aaron, led the people for forty years wandering in the desert; and David fled from Saul. The theme of wandering and homelessness symbolized by the temporariness of the sukkah is reflected in the lives of the *ushpizim*<sup>22</sup>.

When we invite our wanderers into our Sukkah, we should treat each symbolic guest like an actual presence. We should set aside a chair for this symbolic guest, and then try to see the world through their eyes. We try to get to know these guests by asking them questions as if they were actually in front of us. We then can discuss who in today's world that we know displays the same characteristics that our journeymen of old contained.

This activity values the joy of using our imagination. It shows that we can be joyous by using our imagination to reach another spiritual sphere. If we bend the tradition a little we can see a little kid using his or her imagination to have a real conversation with Spongebob, a favorite athlete, or an imaginary friend. We also get to explore our old heroes' value system by asking them questions and seeing how they would solve modern problems. This is a joyous exercise that can provide very fun fantasy conversations, and honors our Jewish heroes. Ethically it is a great thing to apply the values of our great characters to our modern situation<sup>23</sup>.

Another tradition associated with Sukkot also involves inviting guests, but these guests are not imaginary. We are commanded, in Deuteronomy 16:13-16, to rejoice with

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<sup>22</sup> Strassfeld p. 129

<sup>23</sup> Strassfeld p. 129

our, "son and daughter, male and female slave, the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow..." Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, the spiritual leader of Jewish community in Efrat, Israel, says that Jews should rejoice by showing concern for those who are less likely to be happy. Riskin points out that Sukkot is an appropriate time to feel compassion for the needy, due to the temporariness and fragility of the Sukkah. Riskin relates the importance of compassion for the needy and the idea of Jewish joy by saying:

Maimonides ruled that a person who makes a feast on the festival but invites only his family, disregarding the stranger, the poor, the widow and the orphan, is expressing the joy of the *keres* (belly) but not the divinely mandated joy of the festival. When a homeowner leaves his spacious house for the sukkah, a fragile hut exposed to the discomforts of wind, rain and sun, he can identify with those who lack protective surroundings, with the poor and the homeless. Such an experience should lead to heightened sensitivity for the have-less and have-nots, and to more invitations and sharing, especially with the less fortunate. The commitment to give from whatever we have to those who have less, this fundamental identification with the less fortunate, is the essence of Jewish joy<sup>24</sup>.

Both *ushpizin* and this notion of inviting the have-less into our joy of sukkot show the importance of spreading joy by inviting guests into our sukkah. Jewish joy involves inviting the less fortunate into our lives that will give us and our guests true joy. This belief of inviting the stranger rather than shunning or excommunicating the stranger based on their appearance or socio-economic status is counter culture to modern American values of joy. I am reminded of an unfortunate personal story. I was the host of my older brother's 30<sup>th</sup> birthday party. Instead of inviting guests to my home I rented space at a luxurious nightclub in Miami, Florida. I invited all of my brother's friends to

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<sup>24</sup> Sukkot Teaches Joy

spend the weekend in Miami and for one night I bought a table at the hottest nightclub. There is a door manager at the club who is in charge of letting the "right" clientele into the establishment. I handed this man, door manager of club, a list of all the friends we invited and asked them to be let into the club and shown our table. The party was fun and we enjoyed a night of cocktails, dancing and being with friends and family. I was very upset to find out the next day that two guests were not allowed entry to the club. A friend of my brother's asked if he could bring two guests to the party and we put his name on the guest list with a "plus 2" so that his friends could come with him. The day after the party our friend informed me that his two friends were young women and one of the women was overweight. Although the door manager did not actually say it, my friend felt it was quite clear that his friend did not gain entry to the club because she was fat. When I learned of this I became sick and really unhappy that I threw a party where all guests were not welcome. This is not an isolated incident. Many of these nightclubs that are supposed to be places of joy have people stand on long lines and reject patrons for entry, because they do not look a certain way or fit the profile of the other patrons. There are many restricted social clubs that are for people in a certain tax bracket or restrict women, people of a certain color or religion, and those who do not meet certain superficial standards. We learn from the Torah and Maimonides' commentary that Sukkot, the season of our joy is welcome to all guests. It is a Jewish value that joy does not involve excluding others. Rather the exact opposite, Jewish joy invites all who are less likely to be happy to join the celebration.

Another ritual that is practiced during Sukkot is the shaking of the *Lulav and the Etrog*. The lulav and the etrog are made up of four species and we are commanded in the

Bible, "On the first day you shall take the product of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days (Lev 23:40). Our tradition tells us to take these four species and shake them in six directions while we recite a blessing. This tradition reminds us of the agricultural theme of Sukkot. The use of these species reminds us of our attachment to nature. The use of these natural species is associated with the idea of *hiddur mitzvah*, which means to beautify the commandments. We associate Sukkot with aesthetic beauty, but when we think of aesthetic beauty we look to nature and seek the beauty of nature. During Sukkot, Jews are reminded to take joy in the wonders of nature.

The sukka itself is a symbol of a journey. When we build a sukka we are reminded of ancestors that wandered through the desert for forty years. The events of this journey are recorded in the Bible, and most of the journey is recorded in the book of *Shemot*. I once heard Dr. Larry Hoffman speak at Congregation Kol Ami. He stated that the five books of the Torah could be interpreted to represent the five stages of a person's life. Hoffman said that Genesis matched childhood, Exodus matched adolescence, Leviticus matched adulthood, Numbers matched a mid-life crisis, and Deuteronomy matched old age. The theme of the Israelite's journey through the desert is like adolescence. The Israelites are lost seeking their destination, they are trying to form tribes/cliques, and they sometimes lash out with bad behavior (like the Golden Calf). The journey through the desert could easily be seen as the hardships of a community before they reach their "Promised Land." Since the Sukkah is the symbol of this journey and it is supposed to be considered a symbol of our joy, then maybe we can see the journey of the Israelites as a time of joy. This would mean that the journey of adolescence should be



seen as a time of joy. Adolescence could be seen as a difficult time. You are not fully in control of your life, you might feel like you do not belong to a group, and you are unsure of where life will take you. These characteristics can also make it joyous. As an adolescent you are not tied down to your decisions like when you are an adult. I believe that by making this connection between Sukkot, adolescence, and joy we remind the adolescents of our community to relish this uncertain journey of the teenaged years. They have the ability to try new hobbies, meet new friends, change interests, and do not have major responsibilities that force them to be sensible all the time. For an adult, not having a career path, leaving a spouse, or being uncertain of the future would be considered irresponsible. For the teen it is exciting, progressive and character building.

## Chapter Three:

# Chanukkah and the Power of Small

Jewish tradition considers Chanukkah a minor holiday. It is not a Biblical holiday and it does not warrant the same strict observance or day off that Shabbat, Rosh Hashannah, Yom Kippur, Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot require. However, circumstances that involve timing as well as general American culture have elevated Chanukka's status to a major part of the Jewish American experience. Furthermore, the heroic, military message of Chanukkah and the many values expressed in the story of the Maccabees also helped build the modern State of Israel. Therefore, for the modern Jew Chanukkah is a major part of one's religious identity. Chanukkah begins on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the month of *Kislev*, which always falls during the "holiday season" in the American calendar Thanksgiving to New Year's Eve.

The "holiday season" is closely related to Christmas, but I would argue that for some Americans, this time has become less about religious practice and more about consumerism. The American "holiday season" is a season flooded with lavish gifts, Santa Clause costumes, green and red decorations, and Christmas trees. This overwhelming, in your face, gift giving, consumer holiday is the craze of American culture. It has penetrated all cultures that live in America, even Jews. Chanukkah now shares the value of giving presents with its secular counterpart, and there is even something called a "Chanukkah Bush." This is a bush that some Jews put in their homes that they view as a rough equivalent to the very popular Christmas tree.

Chanukkah is also exciting, because it appears as the first holiday after the whirlwind of the Jewish holiday season that is in the fall. Chanukkah ends the nearly two-month drought without a Jewish holiday (besides Shabbat) after a fall season that has four holidays in one month. It is fitting, because Channukkah translates to "dedication," and

got its name when the Maccabees "rededicated" the Temple in Jerusalem to Jewish causes. For American Jews, Channukkah can act as a "rededication" to the Jewish values and promises that we learned and made during the fall. American Christmas creates a holiday buzz for America. Jewish Americans should use Chanukkah as a time to reaffirm Jewish values and separate themselves from the horror of this obnoxious consumer, material gift giving culture. It is a time when we can let our *Chanukkia* shine bright, and we can literally be a "light among the nations."

Instead of downplaying Chanukka's significance, because it is not one of the major holidays, we should celebrate the values Chanukkah can inspire for the modern Jew. It would be irresponsible for Jewish educators to tell the modern Jew that Chanukkah is a minor holiday, because it has now become the one of the most celebrated festivals in modern Jewish life. This fact alone makes Chanukkah a major Jewish holiday that obviously speaks loudly to the modern Jew. I believe that Chanukkah has gained significance not only because of its season, but also because the message and values of the Maccabees speaks to this generation of Jews, chiefly the value that, "humans could not 'leave it all to God'<sup>25</sup>". I believe this value has fueled two of the major modern Jewish movements, the modern State of Israel and the movement of "social action." It is our responsibility as Jewish educators to feed off our congregants' energy for Chanukkah, and we should use our traditions including the stories of the Maccabees, the debate between Hillel and Shammai about how to light a Chanukkia, our added prayers in the Siddur, the Hallel Psalms, and the lighting of the Chanukkia to teach and uphold the Jewish values that speak to the modern Jew.

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<sup>25</sup> Rabbi Irving Greeneberg, The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays (New York: Touchstone, 1988) p. 263

Many Jews would tell the story of oil lasting for eight days, if asked to tell the story of Chanukkah. We now know that story to be historically false. We understand that the Talmudic rabbis invented that story, because they did not want to glorify Jews that led a rebellion against the controlling government. Now that we live under a secure government that promotes religious freedom, we can tell the real Chanukkah story and investigate it for Jewish values that speak to us.

Two accounts of the story of Chanukkah are retold in the Books of Maccabee I and II. These two books, found in the *Apocrypha*, tell the story of Chanukkah becoming a holiday in Jewish history and narrate the details of the Maccabean revolt against the Hellenized majority during the second century B.C.E. During these two recounts of the story we read how the Jews of the time became absorbed into a Hellenistic culture. We see in both stories that Jason assumed the power of the High Priest and quickly the Jewish way of life shifted toward a Greek way of life. One primary example of this assimilation was the building of a gymnasium in Jerusalem. 1 Maccabees puts the responsibility on the Jewish people, "and some of the people eagerly went to the king, who authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles. So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant" (1 Maccabees 1:13-15)<sup>26</sup>. This description blames the people for their stray toward gentile culture. In contrast 2 Maccabees 4:7-10 describes a situation where Jason assumes the power of High Priest through corruption and then he is responsible for the shift to a Greek way of life. "He took delight in establishing a gymnasium right under the citadel and he induced the

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<sup>26</sup> The New Oxford Annotated Bible, Third Edition: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha. (Oxford: Oxford University, 2001) Apocrypha p. 205

noblest of the young men to wear the Greek hat" (2 Maccabees 4:12)<sup>27</sup>. Although both of these stories recount the extreme assimilation of the Jewish community, 1 Maccabees shows that the people willingly assimilated into a Hellenized culture, while 2 Maccabees maintains that corrupt leadership led to the assimilation of the Jewish people.

This is one example that magnifies the difference between the two recounts of the Chanukkah story. The two stories tell similar stories, but magnify different values and stress different characters and decisions. In summary, the Chanukkah story tells us that Jews were beginning to assimilate into the majority Hellenistic culture. There was a group of Jewish zealots that were committed to fight against the assimilation. An army of Jews, led by Judas Maccabee, claimed victory over the Selucids who had defiled the Temple. There was dissention among the zealots about God's role in saving the assimilated Jews and rededicating the Temple. The story ends with an eight-day festival that rededicated the Temple toward Jewish causes.

The two accounts of the story try to promote different values. One prime example of the same act described differently to promote different values is shown through the Chasidim of the story. 2 Maccabees makes the Chasidim to be heroes, because they would sooner die than defile the laws of Torah. In a grand speech, Eleazar states, "Therefore, by bravely giving my life now, I will show myself worthy of my old age and leave to the young a noble example of how to die a good death willingly and nobly for the revered and holy laws" (2 Maccabees 6:27-28)<sup>28</sup>. Greenberg comments that the second book, "stresses the martyrs' role in opening up God's renewed love and concern

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<sup>27</sup> Apocrypha p. 253

<sup>28</sup> Apocrypha p. 259

to save Israel.<sup>29</sup> I Maccabees 2:29-39 describes the martyrs differently. The text shows that the martyrs would not defend themselves on the Sabbath day. They would rather die than profane the Sabbath. The interesting piece of the text comes immediately after their death. It states:

When Mattathias and his friends learned of it, they mourned for them deeply. And all said to their neighbor: "If we all do as our kindred have done and refuse to fight with the Gentiles for our lives and for our ordinances, they will quickly destroy us from the earth." So they made this decision that day: "Let us fight against anyone who comes to attack us on the Sabbath day; let us not all die as our kindred died in their hiding places<sup>30</sup>."

Greenberg contrasts the two books by saying, "The first book repeatedly glorifies the Hasmoneans and their destiny; they were called by God to rule and deliver the Jewish people. That book suggests the uselessness, if not destructiveness, of the Priests' martyrdom."<sup>31</sup>

It is this debate that speaks to the modern Jew. One side holds those who have heroic faith as saviors of true religion; the other side holds those who act and no longer wait for God to be our savior as religious activists. I think it is the second side of this debate that speaks to the modern, Reform Jew and also inspires those who defend and settle the modern State of Israel. Rabbi Irving Greeneberg relays many values that speak to these groups of modern Jews. First, as stated earlier, was the idea that, "humans could not 'leave it all to God' but had to initiate some action to save the Torah and the Jews."<sup>32</sup>

This value spoke directly to the early Zionists from Europe. At that time many Jews were victims of horrible anti-Semitism. The thought of a Jewish homeland came up

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<sup>29</sup> Rabbi Irving Greeneberg, The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays (New York: Touchstone, 1988) p. 263

<sup>30</sup> Apocrypha p. 206-207

<sup>31</sup> Greenberg p. 268

<sup>32</sup> Greenberg p. 263

for debate. The religious side of the argument wanted to wait for the prophecy to come true. Our prophets instructed us that God would deliver us back to our homeland all together. It was the non-religious Zionists that were propelled to take action and settle in the land of Israel. These early Zionists did not want to wait for the prophecy that God would deliver them to their land, rather these Jews went to Israel, bought land, set up Kibbutz, eventually put together an army and established the modern State of Israel.

This value can also inspire Jews to consider Tikkun Olam a religious duty. We recognize that our world is broken. There are diseases without cures, thousands who are homeless and hungry, genocide in Darfur, etc. This value motivates us to act. We cannot think that there is a divine plan that will fix these wrongs, but rather we Jews must act in order to fix these broken parts of our world with acts of tikkun olam.

A second value that Greenberg identifies is that we shall live by the commandments rather than die by them. This value is echoed in the Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 85A, B. It states, "You shall observe my statutes and laws that a man shall do and *live by them* and not die by them...From this we learn that life saving overrides the Sabbath."<sup>33</sup> This value was practiced by Mattathias and his friends, and it also influences us today. Israeli soldiers stand guard on Shabbat, doctors may perform life saving surgery on Shabbat, and almost all laws from Torah may be broken in order to save lives. This value makes Judaism's chief value the preservation of life.

A third value derived from the Chaukkah story is less obvious. Greenberg states:

They responded respectfully to Hellenism's ideas and methods, but only when where they could enrich and be assimilated compatibly with the tradition. In short, without fundamentalism there would have been no Maccabean revolt, without moderate Hellenization the revolt would not

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<sup>33</sup> Greenberg p. 264



have succeeded. The differences between these allies led to significant splits later on and to errors on both sides. Yet, without the coalition, the Maccabean Jews very likely would have been destroyed.<sup>34</sup>

Fundamentalist Jews and the moderately Hellenized Jews disagreed on most issues. The success of the Maccabean revolt shows the importance of the pluralism. Although these two groups disagreed about religious issues, they were both wise enough to recognize the need for the other and form a coalition that resulted in a successful revolt and the survival of the Jewish people.

The success of pluralism in this story should speak loudly to the modern Jew here in American, and especially in Israel. In America we have clearly defined denominations of Jewish practice. The three traditional denominations are Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox Judaism. A fourth sect that is growing is the Reconstructionist movement. All four sects have clear ideologies that differ from one another, but I think we often try to identify the sect we belong to as the superior or holiest sect. I think that sects are important and necessary for Judaism's survival. Each person should be free to join the congregation he/she chooses, and each person should be happy to find a community that shares the same values and religious practices. However, our particulars of religious practice often get in the way of all Jews identifying with the entire Jewish community. We often are unable to come together for projects or religious work. Chanukkah is a great celebration of different sects coming together to defeat a majority evil. A true celebration of Chanukkah should be a celebration of Jewish pluralism. Chanukkah is a great holiday to celebrate our differences, and we should use Chanukkah as a time for all the Jewish movements to unite for a common cause like those who fought with the Maccabees. In

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<sup>34</sup> Greenberg p. 265

Israel the situation is much more pressing and complicated. Orthodox rabbis do not recognize other sect's rabbis as clergy and neither does the government. I will offer no solution for this problem, but rather say that the need for a celebration of pluralistic Judaism in Israel is now desperate.

Besides reading the story of the Maccabees and relaying the values those stories teach, we have other practices to commemorate Chanukkah. Our main symbol for Chanukkah is the Chanukkia. Our *mitzvah* for honoring Chanukkah is to light a candle for each of the eight days of the festival. Hillel and Shammai debated about how the Chanukkia should be lit.

In Shabbos (21b), Beis Shamai and Beis Hillel argue about how the Chanukah lights are to be kindled. Beis Shamai says that they are kindled in descending order, with eight lit on the first night, and one lit on the eighth night. Beis Hillel says that they are lit in ascending order, with one lit on the first night, and eight lit on the eighth night.

This dispute is based on this ideological difference. Beis Shamai maintains that the Ko'ach, or potential, is most important. Hence, on the first night of Chanukah, the oil that burned in the Menorah in the Beis ha'Mikdash not only contained the miracle for that night, but it also contained the \*potential\* to remain lit for the remaining seven nights. Since the oil contained the potential for eight days of miracles, we light that number of candles on the first night. Beis Hillel, on the other hand, maintains that the Po'el, the realization of the potential, is most important. Hence, on the first night of Chanukah, we only saw one actual miracle occur. By the eighth night, though, we had seen eight miracles occur<sup>35</sup>.

The fact that Hillel wins this argument, and now we light one candle each night until we reach eight, shows that holiness happens gradually, change happens gradually, and each small light contributes to a larger holier light. Therefore, each light that is lit represents a

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<sup>35</sup> Rav Mordecai Kornfeld, <http://dafyomi.shemayisrael.co.il/chagigah/insites/ch-dt-12.htm>

miracle and is specifically celebrated. The way we light our Chanukkia reminds me of a passage from Pirkei Avot. Pirkei Avot 4:2 states, "Ben Azzai said: Hasten to do even a small deed and free from illusion; for action generates more action, while wishing generates only frustration. We are here to act. We are life's way of getting things done. The reward for more action? The opportunity to do more. The payment for illusion? Despair<sup>36</sup>." The way we light our Chanikcia and Ben Azzai's statement teach us that each small deed leads to more deeds. When we commit a small act of *tzedakah* we move one step closer toward a perfect world.

During Chanukkah we celebrate the power of small. The Maccabees were a small army that defeated a much larger, more powerful army. Our false Talmudic story teaches us that a small portion of oil lasted for eight days, and our method for lighting the Chanukkia reminds us to commemorate each small miracle. All these small miracles teach that each one of us is powerful and can make a difference.

An expanded Chanukkah observance should include a community taking some small action toward slaying a big problem. We should recognize that any small action could lead to big results. Chanukkah's theme should inspire a teen community to launch a great social action project. An idea of a social action program that would emulate Chanukkah would be one in which teens in youth groups in the Reform, Conservative, Orthodox and Reconstructionist movements would all work together. This would promote the pluralism that the story of the Macabees teaches. A good social action project also promotes the values of the Macabees by not waiting for God to solve some of

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<sup>36</sup> Rabbi Rami M. Sahpiro, Wisdom of the Jewish Sages: A Modern Reading of Pirkei Avot (New York: Bell Tower, 1993) p. 69

earth's greatest problems. During Chanukkah, a teen community should create a social action program in which each individual feels like he/she can make a big difference.

# Chapter Four:

## Pesach and Liberation

As a teacher, I see the Pesach Seder as the ultimate lesson plan that teaches Judaism's ultimate lesson. During the Seder we tell stories, use food as teaching tools, encourage the kids to ask questions, and use excellent visual aids to tell our story. Our story teaches one fundamental truth; all people deserve freedom. This idea is not only a Jewish teaching, but Jews have been very successful in actually upholding this idea and advocating for it to be a universally held ideal. This idea is also a major part of American ideology.

The quotation "All men are created equal" (sometimes modified to "All people are created equal") is arguably the best-known phrase in any of America's political documents, as the idea it expresses is generally considered the foundation of American democracy. It appears in the opening of the American Declaration of Independence, written by Thomas Jefferson in 1776, as follows: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness<sup>37</sup>."

These statements are clear in writing but have not necessarily been followed in American practice. For nearly one hundred years Black skinned people of African descent were forced into slavery. Until the 1960s there was lawful separation of Blacks and Whites. Equality was a theory on paper, but not a value that was properly taught and internalized. Judaism has found an ultimate way to pass along the teaching of this ultimate value; therefore Jewish practice has upheld this core value. In the mid 1980s the Israeli government rescued impoverished, Ethiopian Jews by making them Israeli citizens and physically airlifting them from Ethiopia to Israel. The fact that Israel is a modern country that has taken African people out of Africa without the intent of enslaving those people

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<sup>37</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All\\_men\\_are\\_created\\_equal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_men_are_created_equal)

shows that Judaism has successfully taught its people the value of equal rights. This shows that Judaism's core value is carried out on the highest level of Jewish practice, because it has been taught properly to all Jews.

During our Seder, we creatively tell our story of escaping Egypt and slavery 3,500 years ago. This story serves as a way Jews remember their past, recognizing that we are descendents of slaves, but it also serves as a rallying cry for our responsibility as Jews today and our hope for a better future. Our hope for a better future and our sense that we should take part in perfecting the world are revealed during the Pesach Seder. Greenberg suggests, "Slavery is merely an exaggerated version of the reality endured by most human beings. Oppression and deprivation are not that dissimilar<sup>38</sup>." This quote proposes the Pesach story is not only about our Exodus from Egypt, but also about all those who struggle to overcome extremely harsh conditions. Greenberg also notes:

The overwhelming majority of earth's human beings have always lived in poverty and under oppression, their lives punctuated by sickness and suffering. Few escape damaging illness; even fewer dodge the ravages of old age (except by untimely death); and no one, to date, has avoided death. Most of the nameless and faceless billions know the world as indifferent or hostile. Statistically speaking, human life is of little value. The downtrodden and the poor accept their fate as destined; the powerful and the successful accept good fortune as their due. Power, rather than justice, seems always to rule.

Jewish religion affirms otherwise: Judaism insists that history and the socio-economic-political reality in which people live will eventually be perfected...<sup>39</sup>

Too many people live in economic and political despair. Some religions, such as Hinduism, justify this by saying that those who live in despair do so because that is their

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<sup>38</sup> Greenberg p. 35

<sup>39</sup> Greenberg p. 34

position in the world, due to their previous life. Our Exodus story from slavery, retold during the Pesach Seder, reminds us that we were once a community in despair and we became free. Therefore all who live in despair deserve freedom from their oppression.

This message is so important to Jewish identity; therefore Judaism has set aside a holiday to tell this story and to teach this lesson each year. The word Seder, which means order, is a designed order of a meal, which includes specific stories, discussions, readings, and foods that help us tell the story of our Exodus from Egypt, our story from oppression to freedom. One of the main components of the Seder is that it must be done each year, "Even if all of us were wise, all of us discerning, all of us veteran scholars, and all of us knowledgeable in Torah, it would still be a mitzvah for us to retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt."<sup>40</sup> Why must we retell this story, and why do we have a Seder that helps us retell this story?

The main ritual of the Pesach festival occurs on the first night of the eight-day holiday. It is the ritual meal known as the Seder, and it is the time where the Exodus story is dramatically retold. Greenberg defines Pesach as "the ultimate attempt to involve people in the experience of Exodus...The goal is to go back thousands of years and to experience, first the crushing bitterness and despair of slavery and, next the wild exhilarating release of freedom"<sup>41</sup>. The retelling of the story is told with the help of the haggadah, a book that guides the story teller to create a dramatic telling of the Exodus story. It contains the order of the evening and the common traditions that are used to help tell the story. There are hundreds of versions of the haggadah that can be used for the Pesach Seder. In his Haggaddah, Noam Zion includes:

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<sup>40</sup> Noam Zion and David Dishon, A Different Night: A Famili Participation Hagaddah (Jerusalem: Shalom Hartman Institute, 1997) p. 16

<sup>41</sup> Greenberg p. 36



The Haggadah transforms parents into storytellers. It is a very serious task to tell stories. My parents bring me into contact with my historical roots, with my grandparents and a world other than me. Whether it is relevant, the child will decide; but the parent must bear witness to a history and a memory that is needed in order to realize that there is a dimension to existence beyond the self<sup>42</sup>.

As we can see, the leader of the Seder takes on the tall task to connect his or her guests to the past and to feel part of something larger than the self. Zion also includes, "The more one expands and embellishes the story, the more commendable it is<sup>43</sup>." Since the story is about leaving slavery to escape toward freedom, the leader tries to make all participants feel part of the liberating story, and the haggaddah is designed to do just that.

I have extracted four authentic Pesach themes that are relevant to teens, keep the story interesting/entertaining, and help each participant of the Seder understand the feeling of being liberated. The themes I will explore in detail are: questions, four children, food, and an ending of hope. As I examine each theme I will expose its relevance to teens, its ability to make the Seder entertaining, and also show how it helps each participant understand the meaning of liberation.

Questions are an important part of the Pesach Seder. One of the more celebrated sections of the haggadda is the "Four Questions." The custom for this section is that the youngest child at the table recites the "Four Questions" for the rest of the guests. This is usually a dramatic portion of the Seder, because everyone excites over the child's accomplishment of memorizing the Hebrew melody and words. It is kind of a rite of passage in the Jewish tradition. Around my family's Seder we would become excited when a new child became old enough for the custom of reciting the "Four Questions."

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<sup>42</sup> Zion and Dishon p. 49

<sup>43</sup> Zion and Dishon p. 48

Although this custom provides great entertainment and certainly helps keep the kids interested in the story, the theme of questions runs much deeper than just a child reciting some memorized Hebrew. In fact, if the child is not old enough to understand his/her own question than an older child should repeat the question. Furthermore, if there is no child present at the Seder then simply an adult asks the question, and even if the leader of the Seder is alone he must still ask the questions. "In all circumstances the *Hagaddah* is to be told in response to question."<sup>44</sup> Zion's *haggada* asks, "Why were the rabbis so insistent that the Exodus story open with a spontaneous question?" It continues:

First of all, one can view this as an educational device. Teachers know that if they can get their students to pay attention, get their minds working on something they find interesting, then teachers have gone a long way towards creating an openness to learning new things. The Rabbis wanted to remind the leaders of the seder not just to focus on the story – but first to make sure to have an active, **attentive audience.**<sup>45</sup>

Here we see this portion and the theme of asking questions as an educational tool that will keep the leader intent on making the seder interesting for children. As a teacher, sometimes I tell my students to put their hands down until I am finished telling my part of the lesson. The Seder is not about that. Rather when a child's hand goes up, everything must stop so we can hear the child's question and hopefully answer it. The text of the *hagaddah* continues:

An essential characteristic of free people is that they notice the world around them, make distinctions and search for meaningful patterns. They want understanding, not inscrutability. **For a slave mentality nothing is "different"** – all tasks are part of the same meaningless arbitrariness.

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<sup>44</sup> Rabbi Joseph Elias, The ArtScroll Mesorah Series The Haggadah: Passover Haggadah with Translation and a New Commentary Based on Talmudic, Midrashic, and Rabbinic Sources (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1988) p. 70

<sup>45</sup> Zion and Dishon p. 43

There is no point in asking if no one answers, no place for questions in a world where master's arbitrary orders are the ultimate justification for the way things are.

In beginning the seder with genuine (not rote) questions, the Rabbis show that we not only tell the story of freedom, but we act like free people<sup>46</sup>.

Here we see that the freedom to ask is one of the essential traits of being a free person. A free person not only has the right to ask, but also has the responsibility to ask questions. We cannot just assume that things are the way they are for no reason, but rather we must notice our surroundings and ask, why. This custom teaches Jewish children to question the world around them from a very young age. Judaism teaches that children should ask, because they should know that they are free to ask. They are not just receiving a tradition, they are becoming part of a tradition and the freedom to ask questions makes them a part of the tradition.

Unfortunately, my seders growing up included the tradition that the youngest child would recite the four questions, then everyone would clap, then we would all move on to the next part of the seder. The importance of questions was not emphasized. I think that during the "Four Questions" it is important also to highlight the importance of questions. The "Four Questions" is actually only one question, "How is this night different from all other nights?" with four answers. The four answers are:

On all other nights, we eat either leavened bread or matzah but on this night we eat only matzah. On all other nights, we eat other kinds of vegetables, but on this night we eat maror (bitter herbs). On all other nights, we need not dip our vegetables even once, but on this night we dip twice. On all other nights, we eat either sitting upright or reclining, but on this night we all recline.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Zion and Dishon p 43

<sup>47</sup> Zion and Dishon p. 40

Maybe that means we need to ask three more questions and that the definition of a good question is one that contains at least four possible answers. A great role for the teens at the table is to find ways to keep the kids interested because it is no secret that younger kids always admire their older kin and teens can act as a great bridge between the elders' message and the children's receiving that message. The teens at the table could keep score of a game for the children. They can say that each child will receive a point for each good question that is asked. A good question will be defined as one that has at least four possible answers. This game would be a great way to keep the teens and children interested in the seder, while also teaching the importance of asking questions.

Another technique the haggadah uses to engage children in the story is the recognition of "four children." During this unique portion of the seder we find four different type of children, that are named by the hagaddah as the "wise child," the "wicked child," the "simple child," and the "child who does not know how to ask" learning about their Jewish heritage. Personally this was a great way for keeping the children in attendance engaged in the seder. Our parents would ask us with which child we identified, and why? There was never deep psychoanalyses being done, but it was fun for all of us kids to state which child we felt we were. It does seem odd to classify children in such rigid categories and to teach accordingly. Zion's haggada suggests a good reason for the distinction of the four children.

Thus far the Haggadah has given guidelines to the parent who is full of earnest enthusiasm to pass on an historical and cultural "message" to the younger generation. If ever there was an event which appeals to the parent's desire to bring their youth-culture-centered children to appreciate the old values of cultural and ethnic pride and identification, the Pesach Seder is it! Here lies a dangerous pitfall for the parent-educator. The leader of the seder is likely to

concentrate on the text of the Hagaddah without sufficiently taking into consideration the audience – the younger generation – and their level of interest. Absorbed with the sales-pitch, the sales-person often forgets the customer<sup>48</sup>.

We see here that this section is designed to make the children the center of the seder and the focal point of the education. We must be careful not just to tell the story, but rather we must tell the story to each child according to his or her personality. What does this section say about freedom? An artistic commentary in Zion's haggadah reminds us that each of the four children is a blessing and that we celebrate their diversity rather than try to get each child to conform to a norm<sup>49</sup>. A child born into slavery is not wicked, simple, wise or unable to ask. They are just unable to ask. They are raised to be slaves to their slave master, and we are unable to celebrate their diversity. Today as we celebrate our freedom, we acknowledge this by recognizing all different types of children are a blessing and a celebrated part of our tradition.

This section is also a place where teens can act as a bridge between the generational gap of parent and young child. It would be interesting for teens to tell the children which child they identified, and to go further, for the teen to ask the parents to share which child they identified. This will create a nice dialogue where children can recognize their parents as people that were once children.

Another theme that runs through the seder evening is that we use the food we eat to help tell our story. The food on the table is not just to be eaten, but it also has significance in telling the liberation story. Three foods that are identified with the pesach seder are matzah (unleavened bread), marror (bitter herbs), and the pascal lamb. The

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<sup>48</sup> Zion and Dishon p. 57

<sup>49</sup> Zion and Dishon p. 64-65

haggada states, "Rabbi Gamliel used to say: whoever does not explain the following three things at the pesach festival, has not fulfilled his duty, namely pesach sacrifice, Matzah, and Maror." The hagadda comments,

Rabban Gamliel would appear to teach us that it is not enough to *retell* historical reminiscences – they must lead to *definite and concrete actions*. In the first place, it is only through such actions that we are really influenced to absorb the lessons we are taught (Sefer Hachinuch, see p. 22). Conversely it is also true any lessons to be learnt need to be put to concrete and practical use. It is fundamental to Judaism that 'great is study, for it brings to action,' and Judaism has in fact been defined as a faith that expresses itself in action<sup>50</sup>.

Eating the commanded food is a way of internalizing the lesson of the seder, we were once slaves in Egypt. This commentary shows that actions speak louder than words. It is not enough to study our liberation. Study is incomplete unless it leads to action. Eating the commanded foods is necessary, but not sufficient to really observe Pesach. The seder is designed to retell the story of our liberation. We remember that we too were once slaves. The actions that accompany should be ones that help liberate those who are still oppressed by hunger, homelessness, or abusive behavior.

There are many interpretations for why we eat the foods commanded for the seder. Zion suggests some simple thoughts. The pesach lamb reminds us that God passed over the homes of the Israelites when God plagued the Egyptians. The maror reminds us that the Egyptians embittered our ancestors' lives with hardship. Finally the matzah, simply put, reminds us that during the escape from Egypt there was no time for the dough to rise to become bread<sup>51</sup>. As Jews we are commanded to continue the eating of matzah for the entire festival and also we must refrain from eating chametz, the leavened

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<sup>50</sup> Elias p. 141

<sup>51</sup> Zion and Dishon p. 110-114

counterpart to matzah. The ban on chametz and the commandment to eat matzah can teach us much about liberation. When we cut chametz out of our diet, we do so not only literally but also spiritually.

The obsessive search and destruction of cchametz from our homes has spiritual as well as ritual overtones. Yeast came to symbolize **arrogance** because the bread raised itself above the level of matzah though it was only filled with pockets of hot air. Yeast is also a catalyst that symbolizes the restless force of evil inclination (yetzer ha-ra). Just as yeast causes fermentation in bread and wine, it also turns them sour when not controlled<sup>52</sup>.

When we remove cchametz from our diet we also remove our arrogance. We know that we were once slaves, and when we remove cchametz we are reminded to be humble and to realize that we are no better than anyone. We are all equal to all others. Eating cchametz can some times fill us with "hot air." This is our arrogant nature, but during pesach we deflate our egos.

This section of the seder speaks to youthful energy and sympathy. Teens have a sympathy and an energy that make social action a great expression of religion for this age group. The theme of staying humble and backing up study with action lends this section of the seder to be a great time for a teen to introduce social action to the table. A teen should come prepared to a seder with a way to continue liberation. As stated earlier, many people are still oppressed by hunger, poverty, or abuse, and we should consider it our responsibility, as a people once liberated, to help liberate the oppressed. Hopefully, the teen community has thought ahead so that each seder can be working towards liberating a community. A seder that does not seek to liberate the still oppressed is not

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<sup>52</sup> Zion and Dishon p. 15

acting upon the study of the seder, and the teen community should introduce some social justice practice to each seder.

Each seder ends with theme of hope. The last sentiment offered and usually sung in the seder is a message of hope "l'shana haba'ah b'yerushalayim" which translates to "next year in Jerusalem." The song provides a literal and spiritual goal for the upcoming year. For many years, before 1948, and the modern State of Israel there was a longing to return to our homeland. "We also look forward to next year's seder. Hopefully we will celebrate it in a more peaceful world and in a fully restored Jerusalem." Pirkei Avot: 3:1 teaches that all should, "Know from where you came, where you are going..." In this case we came from slavery, and with this knowledge, we should be going toward a society where all are free.



# Chapter Five:

## Shavuot and Torah Lishmah

The study of Torah is a mitzvah of the highest level. In our daily prayers, we recite these words, "These are the obligations without measure, whose reward is without measure (Mishnah Peah)." We follow these words with a list of mitzvot:

to honor father and mother; to perform acts of love and kindness;  
to attend the house of study daily; to welcome the stranger; to visit  
the sick; to rejoice with bride and groom; to console the bereaved;  
to pray with sincerity; to make peace when there is strife.

The list concludes, "And the study of Torah is equal to them all." Why is the study of Torah equal to all of these mitzvot? Our Reform *siddur* suggests, "...because it leads to them all." This refers to the need to study as a basis for practice. There are many reasons and rewards for a person to engage in the study of Torah. Primary among these reasons is the survival of the words and lessons of Torah.

This sentiment is taught in Pirkei Avot 1:1, "Moses received the Torah from Sinai and handed it down to Joshua; and Joshua to the Elders; and the Elders to the Prophets; and the Prophets handed it down to the members of the Great Assembly." We learn here that each generation must receive and accept the Torah in order to teach the Torah to the next generation, which would ensure that the Torah survived from generation to generation. This concept is echoed in Deuteronomy 6:7 when it says "You shall teach it diligently to your children." The "it" refers to Torah and one should study when teaching. As Jews we have a strong sense of responsibility toward the survival of the Jewish people. Judaism is a religion and an ethnicity. A unique aspect of Judaism is that you can be born Jewish and remain Jewish without upholding any of its beliefs. You can also be born non-Jewish and become Jewish by converting to Judaism and accepting its religious beliefs. Therefore the survival of both the Jewish people and the religion are at the forefront of Jewish responsibility. The Torah is the center of the Jewish religion. The

primary reason for studying Torah is the continuity of Jews reading, analyzing, and teaching its words and lessons. It is essential to the survival of religious Judaism. During *b'nei mitvah* ceremonies there is a beautiful moment when the oldest member of a family passes the Torah to the next oldest all the way down to the bar/bat mitzvah student. This is our symbolic gesture that reminds us of our responsibility to receive and transmit Torah just as Moses passed it on to Joshua, and so on.

Another dimension the mitzvah to study Torah is friendship. Pirkei Avot 1:6 teaches, "Provide for yourself a teacher and get yourself a friend, and judge everyone towards merit." We learn here that studying helps people find worthwhile friends. When two people study Torah together they not only learn about Torah, but they also learn about each other. Engaging in text study allows people to discuss important issues and often springboards deep conversation in which people share very personal feelings and thoughts. To find someone to enjoy studying with can be a springboard to a great and lasting friendship. Like any other activity that people engage in, Torah study can be just as much about the company as the content. The act of studying Torah will produce a stronger friendship, because the participants will share some deep thoughts and feelings on important issues.

We are also taught that studying Torah, combined with steady work will keep people from sin. Pirkei Avot 2:2 states, "Great is the study of the Torah when combined with a worldly occupation, for toil in them both puts sin out of mind." I interpret this to mean that Torah can help the worker from cheating or sinning in his daily work. Many of the lessons of the Torah are practical and legal issues that deal with daily matters and one can apply these ancient truths of business and daily life to our lives and businesses today.

Torah study often involves ethical questions, and we often explore its contents and texts for ethical truths. Our hope is that our words and thoughts will also effect and alter our ethical decisions to keep us from sin. Study influences action. Presumably the study of ethics can result in ethical behavior.

A fourth reason for Torah study is that we are commanded to do so by God. Pirkei Avot 2:9 teaches, "If you have learnt much Torah do not claim for yourself moral excellence, for to this end you were created." This teaching highlights that study needs no end, but rather is our obligation as Jews. A person should need no additional reason and shall receive no reward for studying Torah, because God has commanded us to study.

Torah study, at its best, influences our intelligence, our character, and our spirit. Ideally, it might lead to a life free of sin, provide us with great friends, or fulfill our obligation to learn and to grow. However, there is one reason to study Torah that the rabbis claim to be higher than all other reasons for Torah study. This reason is *Torah Lishmah*, studying for its own sake. Rabbi Meir says:

Whoever engages in Torah for its own sake earns many things; furthermore, he is deserving of the whole world. He is called friend, beloved, and intimate of God, lover of humanity; it clothes him in humility and reverences, and rendering him fit to become righteous, saintly, upright, and faithful; it keeps him far from sin and brings him near to virtue, and from him men take counsel and sound knowledge, understanding, and fortitude, for it is written, Counsel is mine and sound knowledge, I am understanding, I am fordable. And it gives him kingship, dominion, and discernment; to him are revealed the secrets of the Torah, and he becomes like a never-failing fountain, a river that never ceases to flow; he becomes modest, longsuffering, and forgiving of insult; and it magnifies him and exalts him above all things<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> A World Dependent on Torah for Torah's Sake [www.yutorah.org/\\_shivrim/Torah%20lishmah.pdf](http://www.yutorah.org/_shivrim/Torah%20lishmah.pdf)

This passage reveals the high honors and praises that a person who studies Torah *lishmah* receives. However, this text seems to present a paradox. One who studies Torah for its own sake ends up receiving great rewards, and we learn from another text that one should not study Torah in order to receive rewards. Pirkei Avot 1:3 clearly states:

Antigonous of Socho received the Torah from Shimon the Righteous. He used to say: Be not like the servants who minister unto their master for the sake of receiving a reward, but be like servants who serve their master not upon the condition of receiving a reward.

This text can be compared to studying Torah. One way to serve God is to take seriously God's word, studying Torah. One ought not do so for reward, but the first text proposes that if one studies, not seeking reward, then that person will receive great rewards. How can we differentiate between those who study Torah for reward vs. those who receive rewards for studying Torah *lishmah*?

The Talmud states, "A person should always occupy himself (herself) with Torah and good deeds, even if not for their own sake, for out of doing good with ulterior motive, a person will (eventually) do good for its own sake" (Pesachim 50b). This text shows us that one may not start studying for its own sake, but builds toward it, and eventually the ultimate goal is Torah *lishmah*. One may begin studying Torah in order to make new friends, learn to avoid iniquity, or to impress others, but eventually the act of studying Torah will speak for itself and the learner will see its intrinsic value. Maimonides explains this notion further:

The father should cajole his son to learn with things that children desire, so that he will go happily to study. When he is young, the father should give him nuts and honey and dates. When he grows older and rejects these small gifts, the father should give him fine clothes, and when he grows yet older and rejects these, the father

should give him money. Afterwards, when he grows still older, the father should say, "Study Torah and you will become a great leader and be called Rabbi." And afterwards he should say, "With Torah you will merit paradise." And when he becomes wise, his father should train him to learn Torah for its own sake<sup>54</sup>.

Maimonides' statement would indicate that a father may start a child studying using bribes and rewards, but eventually a father should steer his son toward a life of study for its own sake. One might ask, how can we be so sure that one will eventually study Torah for its own sake? One possible answer lies again in Torah's intrinsic value, but another suggestion is that in a person's heart of heart's there may seem to be ulterior motives but actually the inner reason for study is for its own sake always<sup>55</sup>. The tangible rewards are temporary, whereas lasting fulfillment comes from Jewish learning itself.

Jewish American teens desperately need to learn the value of Torah *lishmah*. My experience working with teens leads me to believe that this might be the most significant counter cultural value we can teach our students. American culture is a capitalistic culture; therefore nearly everything one does is for the reward at the end of the work. We study not to learn, but rather to get good grades. Our good grades will lead to acceptance to a competitive college. High marks in college hopefully will result in a high paying job. When do we study for the sake of studying? More importantly where does the study of Torah fit into our lives if it will not increase our material success?

Studying Torah is a part of all Jewish holidays, but the day that study is celebrated most is Shavuot (weeks). This Holiday commemorates our ancestors' encounter with God at Mt. Sinai, where God gave the children of Israel Torah. The event at Sinai is arguably the defining moment in Jewish history. However, since the destruction of the Second

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<sup>54</sup> <http://e-wellsprings.org/Article.asp=25&Category=3&pg+=2>

<sup>55</sup> <http://e-wellsprings.org/Article.asp=25&Category=3&pg+=2>

Temple in 70 C.E. there is some question about how to mark this event. Like Pesach and Sukkot, Shavuot is described in the Torah as an agricultural holiday, "...and Feast of the Harvest, of the first fruits of your work, of what you sow in the field" (Ex. 23:16). Also in Leviticus 23 Shavuot is described only as an agricultural holiday:

And from the day on which you bring the sheaf of elevation—the day after the Sabbath—you shall count off seven weeks. They must be complete: you must count until the day after the seventh week—fifty days; then you shall bring an offering of new grain to the Lord. You shall bring from your settlements two loaves of bread as an elevation offering; each shall be made of two-tenths of a measure of choice flower, baked after leavening, as first fruits to the Lord...On that same day you shall hold a celebration; it shall be a sacred occasion for you.

Missing from the Bible's description of the celebration is any mention of this being the day where God revealed Godself at Sinai. Ironically, "Nowhere in the Bible is any link made between Sinai and Shavuot<sup>56</sup>." The Bible tells us to tell the story of the Exodus, hence the Hagaddah, and our modern celebration of Pesach. The Bible also commands us to dwell in huts for seven days, hence our modern celebration of Sukkot. However there is no commandment to commemorate the Revelation, and no explicit link to the Revelation and Shavuot. Since the destruction of the Second Temple the Rabbis associated Shavuot with the revelation at Sinai.

The nature of Shavuot began to change following the destruction of the Temple in C.E. 70. Without the Temple, neither of the two agricultural rites of Shavuot could be observed. At some point in the rabbinic period, connections began to be made with the Revelation at Sinai<sup>57</sup>.

Since the Bible does not make the exact connection between the Sinaitic Revelation and Shavuot, there are no rituals provided to commemorate Shavuot as the day of Revelation.

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<sup>56</sup> Strassfel p. 69

<sup>57</sup> Strassfeld p. 69

One goal for our Shavuot observance is to, "...remember the event and reaffirm our commitment to Torah and its study<sup>58</sup>." Since we were not given instructions in the Bible to mark this most significant event, how can we capture the essence of this monumental occasion with ritual and symbols? Strassfeld states:

On a more symbolic level, the Revelation at Sinai can be viewed as an experience so cosmic and mysterious that no ritual could encompass it, just as the Torah itself is so multifaceted that it eludes any attempt to delineate it. Like God, who cannot be described, His Torah cannot be limited by a specific ritual or symbol other than the Torah scroll itself<sup>59</sup>.

Strassfeld's statement shows how important and complex the Torah is to the Jewish people. It is quite interesting that the Torah does not tell us to commemorate the event of its Revelation, therefore we have difficulty creating a ritual to express the appreciation of this moment. Our Torah is so essential to Judaism, that the only symbol that can honor its importance is the Torah itself. Strassfeld's quote also compares the Torah to God, indicating that they are both indescribable and without equal. Comparing the Torah to God elevates Torah to the highest possible plane, the most sacred sphere. The Torah has no earthly peer. We are commanded to study it, obey it, interpret it to fit modern issues, tell its stories, and love it. Torah teaches us what to do and what not to do. Torah means "instruction" and our instructor is Moses, known affectionately as Moshe Rabbeinu, Moses our teacher. Torah is God's greatest gift to the Jewish people, through the Jewish people it has become a gift to the world, especially to Muslims and Christians whose sacred texts are based on Torah. On Shavuot we remember the day we received Torah at Sinai, and we commit ourselves to accept it into our lives.

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<sup>58</sup> Strassfeld p. 77

<sup>59</sup> Strassfel p. 72



One custom that has become a popular way to capture the magic of revelation is the *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*. This Tikkun is a book that contains special sections from Torah and Talmud to study on Shavuot. Erev Shavuot it is meritorious stay up all night studying Torah. The object is to prepare for the momentous revelation that will happen the next day, the giving of the Torah. This practice of staying up all night is the opposite of what happened the eve of the actual Revelation. According to tradition the Israelites slept late the morning of the Revelation and had to be awakened by Moses. We now stay awake the entire night to make up for the oversleeping of the first Israelites<sup>60</sup>. A traditional tikkun includes the study of selections from each of the books of Torah and Talmud to represent all the central texts of Jewish tradition.

A community that spends an entire night studying together hopefully will see the value and power of Torah. The word Torah has the same root as the Hebrew word *morah*, which means teacher. When we study Torah together we see that God's gift to us, the Torah, is our teacher. The custom of Tikkun Leil Shavuot encourages a community to enjoy and celebrate an evening together with the act of studying Torah as the central activity. We can hope that a night of study will provide the participants with the values mentioned above associated with studying Torah, such as, friendship, an appreciation for moral living, and a sense of continuity to Jewish generations. If the participants experience one of these values, then this one night of study can lead to a lifetime of study that is hopefully for its own sake.

Reform Judaism has already instituted a tradition that involves teens celebrating Shavuot as the festival where tenth graders reconfirm their dedication to receiving Torah. Confirmation is most often a tenth grade, yearlong class that allows the students to

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<sup>60</sup> Strassfeld p. 77

continue their religious school studies past B'nei mitzvah. The culmination of the Confirmation is a service led by this class on Shavuot. The goal is for this class to reconfirm their dedication to Jewish studies. Confirmation class and the ceremony on Shavuot are widely popular and have really helped address the problem of students discontinuing their religious school studies post B'nei Mitzvah. The experience offers these young adults and their families another public chance to receive accolades and respect from their community as Jewish scholars.

Confirmation offers a great opportunity for students to reconfirm their study of Torah, and it is meaningful that it is connected with Shavuot, the time which all Jews are asked to act as the first Israelites at Sinai and accept Torah from God. The problem I have noticed is that this program does not promote the highest level of Torah study, the study for its own sake. Many students and families participate in this program because it has a public ceremony, looks good on college applications, or to obtain adulation from the community for being a Confirmand. I think we can use this inspired population, but help them reach a higher level of Jewish practice. The Confirmation tradition has proven successful by inspiring students to continue their study, but we must aim higher. I propose that all students who have completed Confirmation take part in a reunion every Shavuot until they have graduated college. These students will be asked to rededicate themselves to Torah study every Shavuot, but in pursuit of Torah *lishmah*. Each synagogue should offer a teen appropriate *tikkun leil Shavuot* that offers students a chance to spend an evening studying Torah together that will seek to create an environment that allows for the Torah to speak for itself and inspire the students to study Torah for its own sake.

An appropriate, teen *tikkun* should include short study sessions led by several different teachers. Also there should be social time, food, and topical teen issues. I suggest that there be several tables, each with a different teacher. Each teacher should prepare a 30-minute text based lesson. There will be a certain number of chairs at each table. All the lessons will begin at the same time so everyone is studying simultaneously. At the end of the 30-minute session a sound will go off to declare the end of the session. Then everyone will be invited to enjoy snacks and social time for about 20 minutes. Then another sound will go off to declare the beginning of a new text session. Each teacher will teach the same lesson, but the students will rotate or choose different tables to never duplicate a lesson they have seen already. This cycle should repeat until the night loses steam. This type of light, social, food filled study session will provide post-Confirmation students a time to reunite socially and for study. A night like this hopefully will provide students with the feeling that studying is a fun, social activity that has value for its own sake.

## Conclusion

My thesis provides evidence that we as Jewish educators should rethink the way we teach Jewish holidays to our adolescent/teenage students. It is important that we find unique, authentic, teen friendly Jewish celebrations for each holiday. We ought not to concentrate solely on the pre-b'nei mitzvah grades when teaching the rituals and holiness of observing Jewish holidays. If we do, then our students may be left with a child's understanding of Jewish holiday practice. They may lose motivation to observe and celebrate Jewish holidays on their own when they become adults.

I have tried to show that the sacred symbols such as the shofar, sukkah, chanukkia, hagaddah, and Torah are not just artifacts that help us observe our holidays. They represent more than symbols used for the sake of tradition, although that symbolic representation is also a legitimate reason for performing a ritual and using a sacred object. Jewish symbols inspire emotions that can help us lead an ethical life that is filled with acts of social justice. The stories that accompany our rituals of holiday observance turn our sacred symbols from being means of holiday observance into symbols that remind us how to act as responsible Jews.

The shofar can remind us to open our ears. The mitzvah of the shofar involves listening to its sounds. We are reminded to keep our ears open during the High Holiday season so we can have an acute awareness to those who cry out, people that are suffering in our society. This awareness can lead to a year trying to help those who suffer. The sukkah is a symbol of joy, because it is the main symbol of Sukkot, our season of joy. Seeing the sukkah through this lens reminds us that being Jewishly joyous involves being modest and hospitable. The chanukkia serves as a symbol of holiness. We learn that

holiness is a process that develops one step at a time, one small miracle after another. We also teach that the hagaddah is not just the book we read on Pesach, but also the story of our liberation. It is designed to teach us the importance of being free. Finally, the most powerful Jewish symbol, the Torah, takes on a life of its own as it becomes the center of religious Judaism when it is studied. The Torah becomes a symbol of the fundamental Jewish value of studying for its own sake.

By relating these values to our ritual practices, we give our students a rationale and a purpose for celebrating each holiday. No longer will the sole goal of holiday observance be to fulfill halakhically ordained behaviors by performing all the rituals the proper and correct way. An additional goal would be to express the ethical value that ought to be expressed. In addition to hearing the sounds of the Shofar one should be reminded to be more aware of those who suffer. Not only should we build a sukkah, we should also learn to have a joyous celebration while in the sukkah. As well as lighting the chaunakkia we should also perform small miracles in good faith with the intention that they will lead to larger, holier miracles. We also must read the hagaddah with the intention of recognizing the importance of freedom. Knowing this value reminds us why we retell our liberation story and will give the seder more meaning. Shavuot teaches us of the revelation at Sinai, where God gave us our most important symbol, the Torah. The Torah teaches us the importance of studying. We should teach our students to perform our ritual acts and celebrate our holidays with a purpose in mind and a sense that these acts have important and enduring value.

Each generation is responsible for making Jewish life authentic and relevant. I believe that in our culture it is vital to connect Jewish teens to Judaism through

meaningful symbolic acts. No series of programs makes a Jew, but programs that are engaging and enduring can help to shape Jewish life by challenging the mind, heart, and soul that re open to Jewish experiences.

Creating meaningful holiday practices that are relevant to teenagers will hopefully connect teens to a cycle of Jewish life. The beauty of teaching teens to observe Jewish holidays meaningfully is that our teaching will be revisited each year during the Jewish holiday even when the student is no longer part of the community or a teen. Jewish holidays are so important to keeping us connected to the Jewish community, that one should feel that he or she has missed something meaningful by not observing a holiday. They would miss family gatherings, hearing a story, learning, laughing, remembering etc. A Jew should feel that each holiday and ritual he or she performs has a significant lesson to teach them, therefore not performing the ritual and observing the holiday will leave a person feeling a little empty. My goal is for each holiday ritual to trigger an emotion, memory, or story that reminds a student to do an appropriate act of social justice.



# Educational

## Programs:

- 1) Erev Rosh Hashannah Service for teens: kavannah
  - a. Liturgy from Gates of Prayer: Days of Awe
  - b. Programs written by Danny Mishkin
- 2) Sukkot Sleepover: Sukkot Rituals and Jewish Joy
  - a. Programs written by Danny Mishkin
- 3) Chanukkah Fundraiser: Small acts can make a difference
  - a. Program written by Danny Mishkin
- 4) Pesach Take Home: Liberation
  - a. Program written by Danny Mishkin
- 5) Shavuot Tikkun Leil Shavuot: Torah Lishmah
  - a. Programs inspired by Kutz Camp's Beit Midrash



Erev Rosh Hashannah  
Teen T'fillah

**Core Concept:** The sound of the Shofar wakes us up to hear the cries of those who suffer, and the Unatanatokef uses the ultimate motivation of life and death to trigger immediate action. During the Days of Awe it is imperative to do *tzedakah* so that your year can be filled with action towards social justice.

**Essential Questions:**

- 1) What do the sounds of the Shofar represent?
- 2) Why do we blow the Shofar during the High Holyday period?
- 3) Why is the Unatanatokef so harsh?
- 4) What should I do during the Ten Days of Awe?
- 5) Why is it so important to do Tzedakah during the Ten Days of Awe?
- 6) What is Kavannah? How does it relate to the High Holydays?

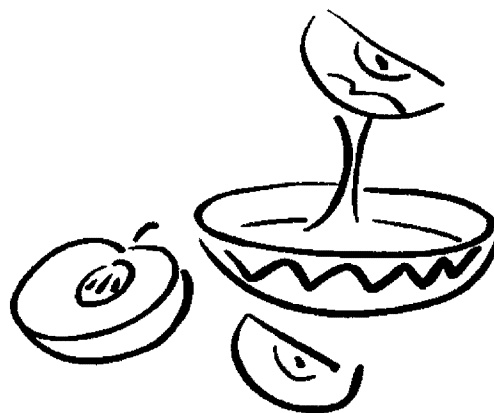
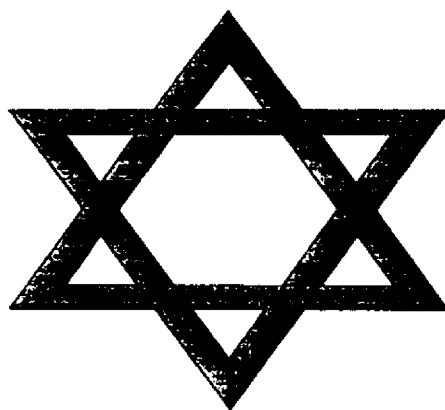
**Goals:** To engage the students in a meaningful, educational, and youthful High Holyday Service on Erev Rosh Hashannah that inspires a year of social action. During the regular adult service the teen community will congregate in another space in the synagogue for a special teen t'fillah. The service should include much of the liturgy of the adult service, High Holyday melodies as well as more familiar melodies, and activities that teach about the major themes of the High Holydays: e.g. *Shofar, Tshuvah, and the Unatanatokef*.

Liturgical Sources for this program come from: Union Prayer Book: For the Days of Awe

# TEEN T'FILLAH

Erev Rosh Hashannah

ערב ראש השנה



You and I can Change the World!

## Change

By Tracey Chapman

If you knew that you would die today  
If you saw the face of God and love  
Would you change? (repeat)  
If you knew that love can break your heart  
When you're down so low you cannot fall  
Would you change? (repeat)

Chorus : How bad how good does it need to get?  
How many losses how much regret?  
What chain reaction  
What cause and effect  
Makes you turn around  
Makes you try to explain  
Makes you forgive and forget  
Makes you change (repeat)

If you knew that you would be alone  
Knowing right being wrong  
Would you change? (repeat)  
If you knew that you would find a truth  
That brings a pain that can't be soothed  
Would you change? (repeat)

## Chorus

Are you so upright you can't be bent  
If it comes to blows  
Are you so sure you won't be crawling  
If not for the good why risk falling  
Why risk falling

If everything you think you know  
Makes your life unbearable  
Would you change? (repeat)  
If you'd broken every rule and vow  
And hard times come to bring you down  
Would you change? (repeat)

If you knew that you would die today  
If you saw the face of God and love  
Would you change?  
Would you change?

## MEDITATION

**Kavannah:** The Rabbis taught us that for one to fulfill the *mitzvah* of prayer, one must not just pray with their mouth but also with their heart. Creating the right mindset for prayer takes time and concentration. Rabbis of old would arrive to the their synagogue as much as an hour before the service to prepare for worship.

We will take part in exercises to help create the right mindset to make our worship more meaningful and eventually to make our upcoming year more meaningful.

May our thoughts during these exercises begin to stimulate the proper introspection of the next ten days that will make the upcoming year more meaningful and fulfilling.

### Phase 1:

Walk around the Chapel. You will notice quotes from several Jewish Philosophers that help provide a proper mood. Read all of the quotes. When you decide on the one that inspires you most; settle there and you are ready for phase two.

### Phase 2

Fill out the packet that asks for forgiveness for sins that we have committed. Some of your replies will be read during the greater community Yom Kippur service. When you have finished that packet you are ready for phase three.

### Phase 3

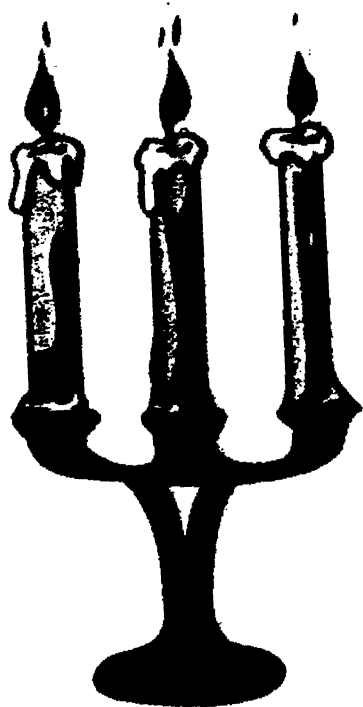
You have 4 business cards in your hand. Please finish the sentence in four different ways.

- 1) It would be a more wonderful world if **I were to...**
- 2) It would be a more wonderful world if **I did not...**
- 3) It would be a more wonderful world if **We were to...**
- 4) It would be a more wonderful world if **We did not...**

**Use a separate card for each reply. Hold on to them you will need them at the end of the service.**

When you have finished all those tasks return to your seat and wait quietly for all to finish. *Shannah Tovah!!!*

# Erev Rosh Hashannah:



ברוך אתה, יי אלקינו, מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו  
במצותיו וצונו להדליק נר של (שבת ושל) יום טוב.

Blessed is the Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who  
hallows us with mitzvot, and commands us to kindle the  
lights of (Shabbat and) Yom Tov.

ברוך אתה, יי אלקינו, מלך העולם, שהחנינו וקיימנו  
והגיענו לזמן הזה.

Blessed is the Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, for  
giving us life, for sustaining us, and for enabling us to  
reach this season.

Leader: Behold us, of little merit, trembling and afraid, as We stand before You to plead for Your people.

*Congregation: O gracious God, the One enthroned by Israel's praises, Lord of Compassion and love, accept our prayers and those of our people.*

Sinners though we are, let our prayers come before You innocent and pleasing, as though from hearts more worthy than our own.

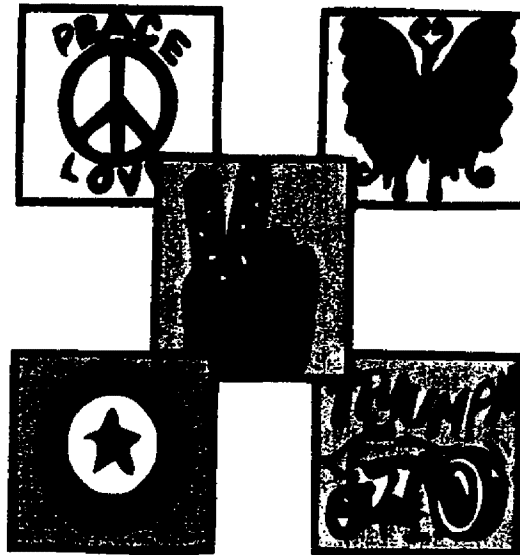
*Let love be the banner we raise in your sight, and let that love conceal all our sins and make them as though they had not been.*

Let these prayers change our afflictions to joy and gladness, and our misdeeds to acts of life.

*May our love of truth and peace remove all that hinders us from sincere and fruitful prayer to the Eternal.*

O God supreme, God of every age, God eternal, let our prayer find favor for the sake of the righteous, the loyal, the honest and upright, and for the sake of Your own glorious purpose on earth.

*O God eternal, You are the One who in mercy hears our prayer. Blessed are you, who hearkens to prayer.*



## Esa Enai

Dm Gm Dm Gm Dm Gm C  
 E - sa é - nai el he - ha - rim mé - a - yin mé - a - yin  
 1. C7 F A7 2. A7 Dm Gm  
 ya - vo ez - ri ya - vo ez - ri ez - ri  
 C F Bb C Am Dm  
 me - im Ha - shem o - sé sha - ma - yim va - a - rets

I lift up my eyes to the mountains; what is the source of my help? My help will come from the Lord, Maker of heaven and earth. God will not allow your foot to slip; your Guardian will not slumber. Behold, the Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. The Eternal is your Keeper, the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will guard you from all evil, and protect your being. The Lord will guard you, coming and going, from this time forth, and for ever.

**SACRED ASSEMBLY**

In the seventh month,  
on the first day of the month,  
there shall be a sacred assembly,  
a cessation from work,  
a day of commemoration  
proclaimed by the sound  
of the Shofar.

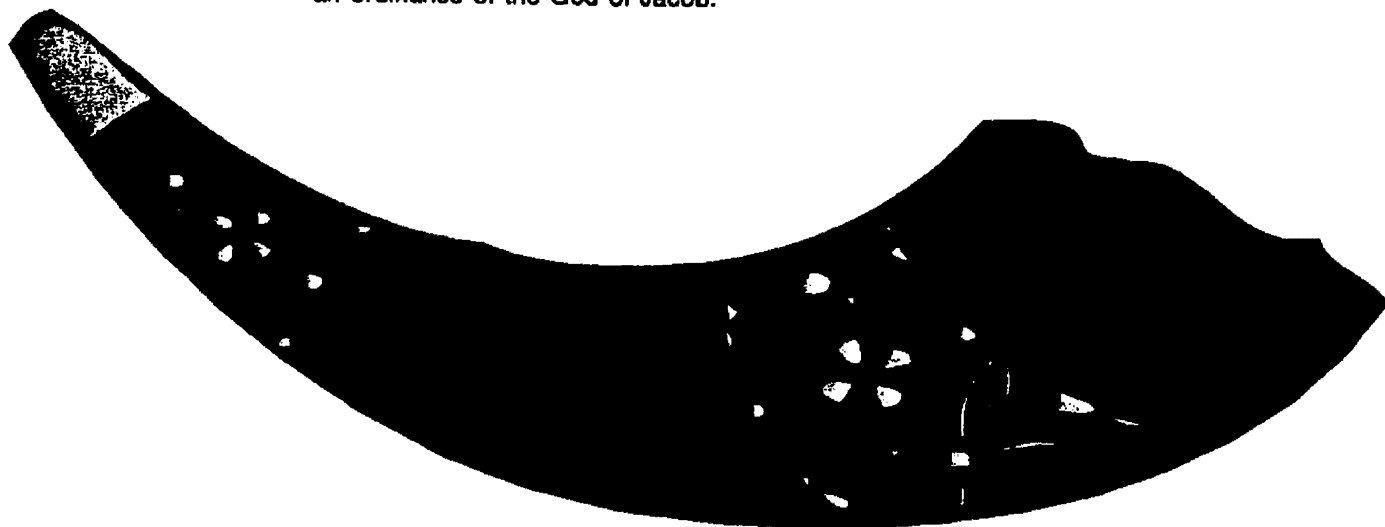
**בחדש השביעי**

בחדש השביעי,  
באחד לחדש,  
יהיה לכם שבתון,  
זכרון תרועה,  
מקרא-קדש.  
כל-מלאכת עבודה  
לא תעשו.

*All rise*

תקעו בחדש שופר, בפסח ליום חגנו.  
פי חק לישראל הוא, משפט לאלהי יעקב.

Sound the Shofar when the new moon appears,  
at the turning of the year,  
at the returning of our solemn celebration.  
For this is a statute binding on Israel,  
an ordinance of the God of Jacob.





## Program 1

**Introduction:** Tomorrow you will hear the sound of the Shofar. It is the defining sound of the High Holydays. It's origin is biblical and its vibrations are intense. The sound is piercing. Oddly enough, the *mitzvah* for the shofar is not to blow it; but to **hear** the piercing sound. What are we listening to? What should I hear?

"On its most basic level, the shofar can be seen to express what we cannot find the right words to say. The blasts are wordless cries of the people Israel. The blasts are the wordless cries of the people Israel. The shofar is the instrument that sends those cries of pain and longing hurtling across the vast distance toward the Other."

In other words, the blasts of the shofar open our ears and hearts to those who suffer, and during this time of year we are reminded to listen.

In your Siddur, there are five articles that are cries for help for those who suffer. Read them with open ears and an open heart. Tomorrow, when you hear the sound of the shofar, picture those who cry out and ask for our help.



## **Issues Concerning Schools**

### **School Vouchers**

Vouchers are a form of government subsidy given to parents for use towards tuition and other school-related public, private and parochial schools. Many state and national legislators, as well as civic groups, have proposed programs as means of addressing the nation's educational woes and also of assisting families who send their children to private and sectarian schools. The constitutionality of voucher programs is often questionable — many proposals have been found to amount to government funding of religious institutions, a violation of the First Amendment's Establishment Clause.

For more information, go to the RAC's Vouchers Issues Page.

### **School Modernization**

Too many of America's schools are crumbling, crowded and obsolete. It's a national problem requiring a national solution. America's schools are in disrepair. The average public school in America is forty-two years old. Twenty-eight percent of public schools in America are over fifty years old.

America's schools are overcrowded. Record enrollments and growing communities are leading to severe overcrowding in public schools. Putting students in trailers and going to school in shifts is not the answer.

America's schools can't support today's technology. Forty-six percent of the public schools in America lack the communication wiring to support today's computer systems.

We can't expect our children to succeed under these conditions. Students learn better with smaller classes in safe surroundings. Yet our states and local communities alone don't have the resources to fix our schools.

It doesn't have to be this way. We need a federal/state/local partnership to address this school building crisis. Congress has a plan to help our states and local communities rebuild our schools.

Representatives Nancy Johnson (R-CT) and Charles Rangel (D-NY) have jointly introduced H.R. 1076, America's Classroom Act. H.R. 1076 is a bipartisan bill that would make \$25 billion in interest-free bonds available to state and local school districts to modernize outdated buildings, repair safety problems, build new schools, connect classrooms to the Internet and provide better technology for schools. Interest-free bonds make school construction affordable by providing interest on construction loans. The interest on a 15-year loan can add up to almost half the amount of the original loan. The program is administered through existing agencies. Interest-free school modernization bonds are fiscally sound. Every dollar in federal tax credits generates \$25 billion in bonds, with every dollar going to repair, renovation, or construction. H.R. 1076 currently has a bipartisan group of nearly 100 cosponsors.

Modernizing our nation's schools transcends partisanship and geography. Representatives from all parties and all over the country want safe and modern school facilities. A bipartisan majority of Members of Congress signed or cosponsored legislation to provide federal resources for school modernization during the 106th Congress. A recent bipartisan study found strong support for a federal role in initiatives such as school repair and modernization. Yet school leaders have failed to bring meaningful school modernization and construction legislation to a vote.

The American Institute of Architects has published a report detailing conditions in the high schools from which Members of the House Ways and Means and Senate Finance Committees graduated. To see a copy of their report, visit their website. Enough for Congress? A Pictorial Representation of Why Americans Deserve Better School Buildings, visit their website.

### **Class Size**

Recent studies confirm what every teacher and parent knows. Smaller classes increase student achievement. (student teacher achievement ratio), the class size reduction study based in Tennessee, followed students from kindergarten through high school. STAR research had already demonstrated that smaller class sizes in the K-3 years lead to higher test scores. By the time they reached eighth grade, children who had attended smaller classes in K-3 were at least one year ahead of their peers academically.

To fund smaller class sizes, President Clinton proposed a class size reduction program to hire 100,000 new teachers over the next seven years as part of his FY1999 budget. Last year, Congress provided a down payment to fund 30,000 new teachers for the first year. That program expired in September 1999. The final FY 2000 budget must

class size reduction program to keep the 30,000 new teachers teaching and increased funding to hire even more. Additional funding has allowed for an additional 8,000 new teachers to be hired in 2002.

The FY 2000 budget agreement strengthened teacher quality and accountability provisions in the program. It requires that 15 to 25 percent of the amount local schools can use to train teachers, and requires teachers hired with class size reduction funds to be fully certified and have the subject matter knowledge and teaching skills necessary for their assigned teaching assignment. Schools using class size reduction funds must report publicly on how they are reducing class size, the impact of the program on classes on student achievement, and their progress in increasing the percentage of core academic classes taught by fully certified teachers.

The class size reduction program requires reauthorization and funding every year. It is not automatic. Ask your Representatives to continue to support the program.

Human activities are causing an enormous, dangerous experiment to be conducted around the globe—in fact, in the atmosphere, various gases, including water vapor, carbon dioxide and other trace chemicals, act like the greenhouse and trap heat near the earth's surface. This natural "greenhouse effect" is essential for life on the planet by keeping global average surface temperatures warmer than they otherwise would be. But human activities are enhancing this natural effect – thickening the walls of the "greenhouse" – with significant consequences for the climate. The burning of fossil fuels, deforestation, and certain agricultural activities and industrial practices contribute to the release of tons of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) into the environment. Since the industrial revolution, atmospheric levels of CO<sub>2</sub> have increased by more than 30 percent to levels unsurpassed in the past 160,000 years.

The increase in the earth's average temperature is often referred to as "global warming." But since higher temperatures may not be the only effect of increased pollutants in the atmosphere, many scientists and environmentalists now prefer the broader term "climate change." Scientists have discovered that in some places, climate change may cause temperatures to decrease, even if the earth's average temperature rises, and the term global warming does not imply the only atmospheric changes, such as severe weather patterns, that are predicted to occur.

At the behest of the Reagan and first Bush Administrations, a massive international scientific effort known as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was launched to explore the scientific and policy issues associated with the climate challenge. The IPCC assembled 2,500 climate change experts and conducted one of the most thorough and comprehensive and peer-reviewed scientific inquiries in human history. In the IPCC's 1990 First Assessment Report, scientists predicted an increase of two to six degrees Fahrenheit over the next century, and called on industrialized countries to cut global warming pollution by 60 to 80 percent. This report was used as background for the Framework Convention on Climate Change, which was signed by President George H.W. Bush in 1992 and ratified by the Senate that same year. The treaty suggested that industrialized countries voluntarily cut carbon dioxide emissions, but imposed no binding obligations on the signatories. The IPCC's Second Assessment Report, issued in 1995, concluded that "the balance of evidence indicates that there is a discernable human influence on global climate."

The Third Assessment Report, released in 2001, predicts an increase in the earth's average temperature of as much as 2 to 6 degrees by 2100, more than 60 percent higher than what the IPCC predicted in its last study. An increase of this magnitude would be the most rapid change in 10,000 years. The report, approved unanimously, is the most comprehensive global warming report to date.

The science is clear: unless we change our ways and stop polluting the atmosphere, the world's climate will change more dramatically; further increasing temperatures, raising sea levels, flooding coastal areas, threatening food production, and spreading harmful diseases.

Over the next 100 years, the IPCC predicts that increasing temperatures could raise sea levels by as much as 6.6 feet, causing floods that could displace tens of millions of people in low-lying areas such as China's Pearl River Delta, Bangladesh, densely populated areas of Egypt, and in small island nations such as the Marshall Islands. Malaria, dengue fever, and other infectious diseases could spread to areas that have never experienced them before due to increased ranges for mosquitoes. Droughts could strike farmlands, exacerbating world hunger.

While the world's wealthiest nations are most responsible for climate change, communities and nations that are agriculturally marginal, and lacking adequate health infrastructures will be most severely impacted. Farmers are vulnerable to changing rainfall patterns that may make their land infertile. Slum-dwellers in coastal areas or in areas least able to relocate to avoid chronic flooding. Undeveloped areas are least able to prevent the spread of disease.

The United States will be better able to counteract the negative effects of climate change than developing nations, but will not be immune from those effects. In America, places like South Florida, coastal Massachusetts and California, Louisiana and other Gulf Coast areas and Manhattan Island are likely to experience severe flooding as a result of rises associated with climate change. An Environmental Defense Fund report suggests that by the end of this century, portions of New York City and surrounding areas could experience "temporary flooding or permanent inundation."

The Third Assessment Report cited "new and stronger evidence that most of the observed warming of the last century is attributable to human activities," primarily the burning of oil, gasoline, and coal, which produce carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases that trap heat in the earth's atmosphere. Carbon dioxide levels have increased by 31 percent over the last century, reaching a concentration unseen on the planet in 420,000 years and perhaps as far back as 20 million years.

We in America use twice as much energy to produce a unit of gross domestic product as our primary industrial competitors, Germany and Japan. The top five producers of CO2 are the U.S., China, Russia, Japan, and U.S. autos. U.S. autos produce more CO2 than all but four of the world's countries. However, despite our current consumption habits, there are tremendous economic opportunities available to the United States in leading a broad international effort to meet the challenge of climate change. In fact, a group of 2,500 economists, including eight Nobel Prize winners, issued a statement in 1997 rejecting the notion that addressing climate change requires trading off our economic well-being and asserting that the United States can prevent further environmental damage and increase economic efficiency by converting to alternative modes of production and consumption.

The United States does not have universal health care or system of socialized medicine, although programs such as Medicare and Medicaid provide basic health insurance to elderly, disabled, and poor residents. For most US residents, health insurance is provided as an employee benefit, leaving unemployed and part-time workers to pay for their own insurance. As of 2001, 41.2 million people in the United States (14.6% of the US population), including 8.5 million children, had no health insurance coverage. By 2004, this had risen to 45 million (15.6%). The US Census Bureau attributed the drop primarily to the loss of employer-provided plans due to the economic downturn and a continuation of rising costs. 2 (<http://usgovinfo.about.com/od/censusandstatistics/a/censusbadnews.htm>)

A recent Harvard University study found that medical bills are a leading cause of bankruptcy in the United States. The study found that many declaring bankruptcy were part of the middle class and were employed before they became ill but lost their health insurance by the time they declared bankruptcy 3 ([http://www.consumeraffairs.com/news04/2005/bankruptcy\\_study.html](http://www.consumeraffairs.com/news04/2005/bankruptcy_study.html)). In the U.S. employer plans can be continued through COBRA at a rate that is usually double the rate the employee paid while employed. When an employer-insured person loses his or her job due to illness and does not have sufficient resources to continue to pay for their COBRA health insurance, they also lose their coverage.

Efforts to provide universal health care in the 1960s and early 1990s floundered against widespread opposition, particularly by more conservative politicians who objected to government control of medicine and business groups which did not want to experience a loss of profits with the increase of government bureaucracy in the healthcare and insurance industries. Despite a general agreement, enforced in law, that emergency care must be provided even to the indigent, there is no consensus in the United States that the availability of broader health care should be considered a right, nor that this service should be paid for by the state. {1} (<http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2002/cb02-127.html>)

## Death Stalks A Continent

By JOHANNA MCGEARY

Monday Feb 12, 2001

Imagine your life this way.

You get up in the morning and breakfast with your three kids. One is already doomed to die in infancy. Your husband works 200 miles away, comes home twice a year and sleeps around in between. You risk your life in every act of sexual intercourse. You go to work past a house where a teenager lives alone tending young siblings without any source of income. At another house, the wife was branded a whore when she asked her husband to use a condom, beaten silly and thrown into the streets. Over there lies a man desperately sick without access to a doctor or clinic or medicine or food or blankets or even a kind word. At work you eat with colleagues, and every third one is already fatally ill. You whisper about a friend who admitted she had the plague and whose neighbors stoned her to death. Your leisure is occupied by the funerals you attend every Saturday. You go to bed fearing adults your age will not live into their 40s. You and your neighbors and your political and popular leaders act as if nothing is happening.

Across the southern quadrant of Africa, this nightmare is real. The word not spoken is AIDS, and here at ground zero of humanity's deadliest cataclysm, the ultimate tragedy is that so many people don't know--or don't want to know--what is happening.

As the HIV virus sweeps mercilessly through these lands--the fiercest trial Africa has yet endured--a few try to address the terrible depredation. The rest of society looks away. Flesh and muscle melt from the bones of the sick in packed hospital wards and lonely bush kraals. Corpses stack up in morgues until those on top crush the identity from the faces underneath. Raw earth mounds scar the landscape, grave after grave without name or number. Bereft children grieve for

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parents lost in their prime, for siblings scattered to the winds.

The victims don't cry out. Doctors and obituaries do not give the killer its name. Families recoil in shame. Leaders shirk responsibility. The stubborn silence heralds victory for the disease: denial cannot keep the virus at bay.

The developed world is largely silent too. AIDS in Africa has never commanded the full-bore response the West has brought to other, sometimes lesser, travails. We pay sporadic attention, turning on the spotlight when an international conference occurs, then turning it off. Good-hearted donors donate; governments acknowledge that more needs to be done. But think how different the effort would be if what is happening here were happening in the West.

By now you've seen pictures of the sick, the dead, the orphans. You've heard appalling numbers: the number of new infections, the number of the dead, the number who are sick without care, the number walking around already fated to die.



World > Africa

from the December 11, 2006 edition



**SPREAD:** Children in a camp in Chad that's home to more than 14 000 Darfur refugees

*by Rich Schapiro*  
*Contributor to The Christian Science Monitor*

## Darfur crisis crosses borders

**Violence threatens to drag Chad and the Central African Republic into a regional war.**

**By Rich Schapiro | Contributor to The Christian Science Monitor**

**GOZ BEIDA, CHAD** – For the past three years, Arab militiamen have helped Sudan's government quell a rebellion in Darfur by slaughtering the region's mostly black African population and leaving behind a trail of rape, murder, and destruction. The result: more than 200,000 dead and 2 million displaced in what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian emergency.

At the very least, however, the violence in western Sudan was mostly confined to its borders.

No more.

The crisis in Darfur has exploded in recent weeks, and now threatens to drag fragile neighboring countries into a regional war.

Both Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR) have become engulfed in fighting that involves a toxic mix of rebel groups, government forces, armed militias, and civilians.

"It's not a steady deterioration," Jan Egeland, the outgoing UN humanitarian chief, told reporters last week. "It's a free fall, and it includes Darfur, eastern Chad, and northern Central African Republic."

In the past month alone, nearly 60,000 Darfurians have been forced from their homes to escape massacre at the hands of Arab militias known as the *janjaweed*. Aid workers, UN personnel, and independent observers say the *janjaweed* are backed by Sudan's government, but Khartoum has repeatedly denied this charge.

In eastern Chad, hundreds of aid workers have been evacuated due to increased hostilities between military forces and anti-government rebel groups, while Arab militiamen have ventured deeper into the country to conduct assaults, resulting in the displacement of nearly 100,000 Chadians.

And atrocities committed by a variety of rebel groups and armed bandits over the past few months have forced tens of thousands of people from

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the CAR to cross the border into Chad.

"The internal conflicts in Darfur, Chad, and the CAR are now linked by the regional presence and movement of armed groups, arms, and civilians across the three borders," said Georgette Gagnon, deputy director of the Africa division of Human Rights Watch. "And of course, the regional governments are using these insurgencies to carry out a proxy war against each other."

Indeed, leaders in Khartoum, Sudan's capital, and N'Djamena, its Chadian counterpart, have traded accusations as to who is responsible for stoking the bloodshed that has plagued Darfur since 2003. Both countries blame the other for supporting rebel groups.

In the past two weeks, the fighting has become so severe that hundreds of aid workers have been pulled from the region, leaving behind the displaced Sudanese, whose plight is now especially grim.

"For sure, if this situation lasts it will have a greater direct effect on the refugees' lives," said Hélène Caux, a spokeswoman for the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR).

Since the last week of November, nearly 500 aid workers have been relocated from Abéché, the eastern city that serves as the hub for relief agencies in the region, to N'Djamena, while more than 100 are still awaiting evacuation from Guereda, a town farther north, according to the UNHCR.

Aid officials concede that, with only the skeleton crews now left behind in camps across the east, the refugees' situation has become particularly precarious.

"We haven't seen any downfall or deaths as a result of the reduction in personnel," says Joseph Aguetant, of the International Rescue Committee (IRC), which has trimmed its international staff in Bahai, a city along Chad's northern border, by 80 percent. "But we know this is something that can happen."

The area around the Goz Amir refugee camp, about 60 miles from the border, has become so rife with attacks that the Sudanese refugees and Chadians living nearby are stricken by fear of being set upon by the Arab militias.

Men head into the bush carrying bows and arrows, while young boys walk around with spears that are often taller than they are. When asked why they have the weapons, the response is unanimous: "defense."

The *janjaweed* - joined at times by Chadian Arabs - have been laying siege to villages east of Goz Beida, a Chadian town 100 miles from the Sudan-Chad border. The locals who survive are forced to trek miles to the closest villages, which often are plundered days later. They are then forced to flee yet again, and often end up setting up makeshift camps on wide swaths of parched land that offer little more than dust and thorn trees.

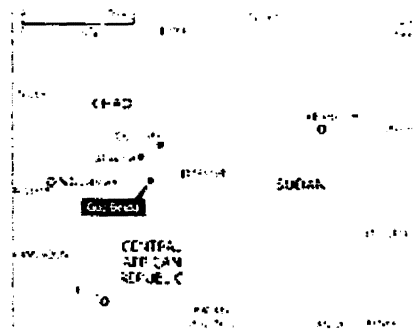
Hawaye Ismail arrived at just such a place, an open field 25 miles east of Goz Beida, last week with about 600 others. "We don't have anything to eat, and look, there's death all around us," she says.

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Ms. Ismail's village was torched by Kalashnikov-carrying Arabs on horseback and camels in early November in an ambush that left 14 men dead. She made it to a nearby village, but was left homeless days later after the raiders rampaged again.

"The young attackers abused the young girls and the women," Ismail says, gesturing to the half-dozen women in tattered clothes gathered around her. "Today, with our situation, only God knows what we've been through."

בָּרְכוּ אֶת־יְיָ הַמְבָרָךְ!

Praise the Lord, to whom our praise is due!

בְּרוּךְ יְיָ הַמְבָרָךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד!

*Praised be the Lord, to whom our praise is due,  
now and for ever!*



שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל: יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְיָ אֶחָד!

*Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is One!*

בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד!

*Blessed is His glorious kingdom for ever and ever!*

*All are seated*

וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל־לֵבְךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ  
וּבְכָל־מְאֵדְךָ. וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ  
הַיּוֹם, עַל־לֵבְךָ. וְשִׁנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ, וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָם  
בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ, וּבְלִקְחֶךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ, וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ.  
וְקָשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל־יָדְךָ, וְהָיוּ לְטָטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ,  
וּבְתַבְתָּם עַל־מְזוֹזֹת בֵּיתְךָ, וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ.

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your mind, with all  
your strength, with all your being. Set these words, which I  
command you this day, upon your heart. Teach them  
faithfully to your children; speak of them in your home and  
on your way, when you lie down and when you rise up. Bind  
them as a sign upon your hand; let them be a symbol before  
your eyes; inscribe them on the doorposts of your house, and  
on your gates.*

לְמַעַן תִּזְכְּרוּ וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֶת־כָּל־מִצְוֹתַי, וְהָיִיתֶם  
קָדְשִׁים לֵאלֹהֵיכֶם. אֲנִי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי  
אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לִהְיוֹת לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים. אֲנִי יְיָ  
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

OUR FAITH IN TOMORROW

גאולה

What does it mean to be a Jew? "You shall be holy."

*In the face of the many, to stand for the one; in the presence of fragments, to make them whole.*

What does it mean to be a Jew? "You shall be a holy people."

*To hold fast to our vision of truth, to retain our faith in tomorrow.*

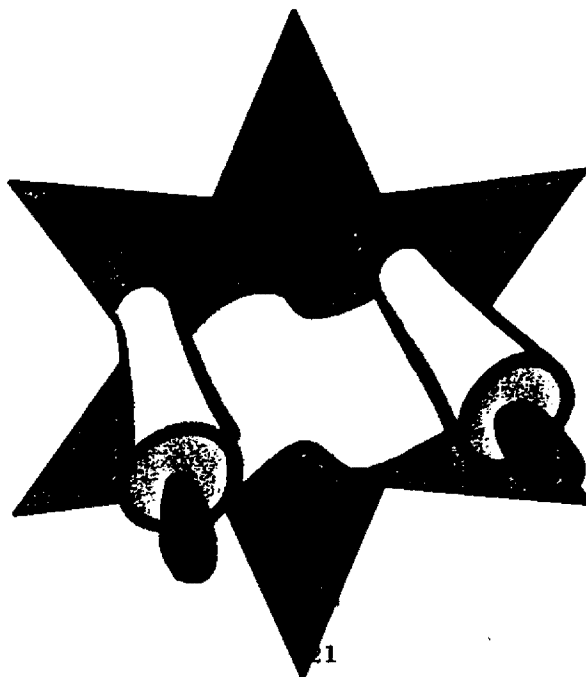
Holy in our past is the memory of redemption from Egyptian bondage.

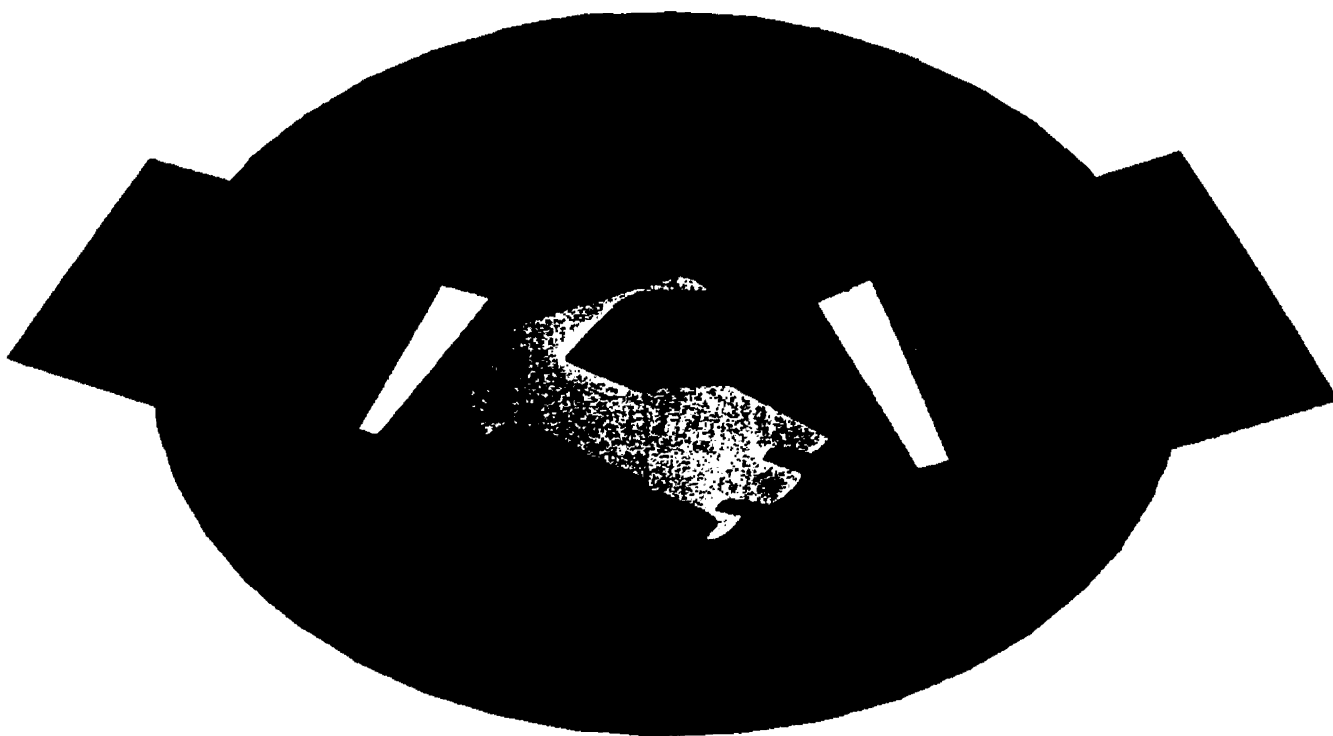
*Holy in our day is the hope of a redemption we still await.*

Twice holy in our past are those who gave their lives to hallow this world.

*Holy is the Jew, today and tomorrow, who bears witness to the goodness of life.*

And holy are those whose lives are songs in freedom's cause:





מִי־כְמֹכָה בְּאֵלִים, יְיָ?

Who is like You, Eternal One, among  
the gods that are worshipped?

מִי בְּמֹכָה, נֹאדָר בְּקִדְשׁ,  
נוֹרָא תְהִלָּת, עֹשֶׂה פִלְא?

Who is like You, majestic in holiness,  
awesome in splendor, doing wonders?

מְלִכּוּתְךָ רָאוּ בְנֶיךָ, בּוֹקֵעַ יָם לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה; "זֶה אֱלֹהֵינוּ"  
עָנוּ וְאָמְרוּ: "יְיָ יִמְלֹךְ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד!"

In their escape from the sea, Your children saw Your sovereign  
might displayed. "This is my God!" they cried. "The Eternal will  
reign for ever and ever!"

## תפלה

אלני, שפתי תפתח, ופי יגיד תהלתך.

Eternal God, open my lips, that my mouth may declare Your glory.

GOD OF ALL GENERATIONS

אבות

ברוך אתה, יי אלקינו ואלהי אבותינו, אלהי  
אברהם, אלהי יצחק, ואלהי יעקב: האל הגדול,  
הגבור והנורא, אל עליון. גומל חסדים טובים,  
וקונה הכל, וזוכר חסדי אבות, ומביא גאולה לבני  
בניהם, למען שמו, באהבה.

We praise You, Lord our God and God of all generations;  
God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob; great,  
mighty, and awesome God, God supreme.

*Master of all the living. Your ways are ways of love. You  
remember the faithfulness of our ancestors, and in love bring  
redemption to their children's children, for the sake of Your  
name.*

Remember us unto life, O King who delights in life, and  
inscribe us in the Book of Life, for Your sake, O God of  
life.

זכרנו לחיים, מלך חפץ בחיים, וכתבנו בספר  
החיים, למענה אלהים חיים. מלך עוזר ומושיע  
ומגן. ברוך אתה, יי, מגן אברהם.

You are our King and our Help, our Savior and our  
Shield. Blessed is the Lord, the Shield of Abraham.

אתה גבור לעולם, אדני, מחיה הכל אתה, רב להושיע.

מכלכל חיים בקסד, מחיה הכל ברחמים רבים.  
סומך נופלים, נרופא חולים, ומתיר אסורים,  
ומקים אמונתו לישגי עפר.

*Great is Your might, O Lord, in this world; great is Your power in the worlds beyond.*

*Your love sustains the living. Your great compassion is the source of life. Your power is in the help that comes to the falling, in the healing that comes to the sick, in the freedom You bring to the captive, in the faith You keep with those who sleep in the dust.*

מי כמוך, בעל גבורות, ומי דומה לך, מלך ממית  
ומחיה ומצמיח ישועה? מי כמוך אב הרחמים,  
זוכר יצוריו לחיים ברחמים? ונאמן אתה להחיות  
הכל. ברוך אתה, יי, מחיה הכל.

*Who is like You, Master of Might? Who is Your equal, O Lord of life and death, Source of salvation?*

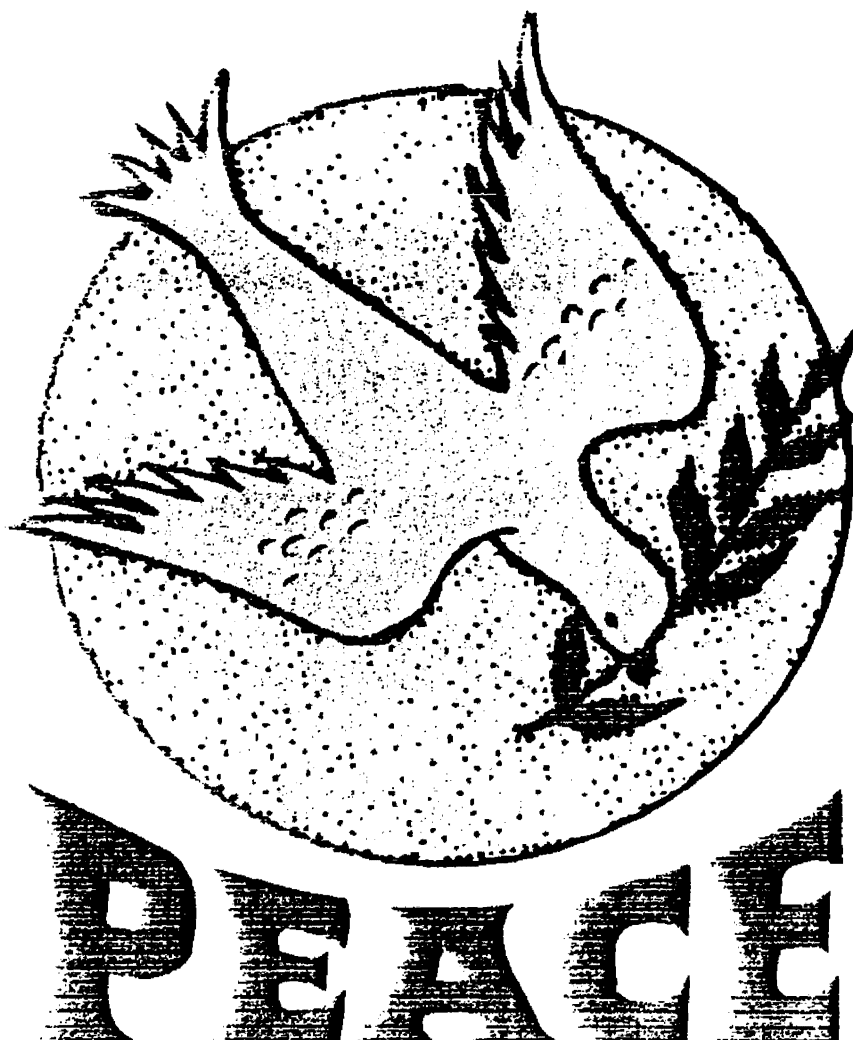
*Who is like You, Source of mercy? In compassion You sustain the life of your children.*

*We trust in You to restore our life. Blessed is the Lord, Source of all life.*



עֲשֵׂה שָׁלוֹם בְּמִרוֹמָיו, הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל  
כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.

May the One who causes peace to reign in the high heavens let  
peace descend on us, on all Israel, and all the world.



All rise  
The Ark is opened

אבינו מלכנו

אֱקִינוּ מֶלְכֵנוּ,

hear our voice.

אֱקִינוּ מֶלְכֵנוּ,

we have sinned against You.

אֱקִינוּ מֶלְכֵנוּ,

have compassion on us and on our

children.

אֱקִינוּ מֶלְכֵנוּ,

make an end to sickness, war, and

famine.

אֱקִינוּ מֶלְכֵנוּ,

make an end to all oppression.

אֱקִינוּ מֶלְכֵנוּ,

inscribe us for blessing in the Book of

Life.

אֱקִינוּ מֶלְכֵנוּ,

let the new year be a good year for us.

אֱקִינוּ מֶלְכֵנוּ,

give strength to Your people Israel.

אֱקִינוּ מֶלְכֵנוּ,

be gracious and answer us, for we  
have little merit. Treat us generously and with kindness, and  
be our help.

# 60. AVINU MALKEINU

## YOM KIPPUR

Folk Song

*Slowly* (♩.=52)

E Dm E

A vi - nu mal - kei - nu — cha - nei - nu va - a - nei -

E Dm E Dm E Dm

nu, — A - vi - nu mal - kei - nu, cha - nei - nu va - a - nei - nu, ki ein ba - nu ma - a -

*Fine*  
E E7 Am Bdim/D E

sim. — A - seih i - ma - nu — tz' - da - kah va - che - sed, — a -

Am Dm Bdim E *D.C. al Fine*

seih i - ma - nu tz' - da - kah va - che - sed v' - ho - shi - ei - nu. —

אָבינוּ מלְכֵנוּ, חַנּוּן וְעַנּוּן, כִּי אֵין בָּנוּ מַעֲשִׂים, עֲשֵׂה  
עֲמָנוּ צְדָקָה וְחֶסֶד וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ.

Our Father, our King, be gracious and answer us, for we  
have little merit. Treat us generously and with kindness,  
and be our help.

ברוך אתה, יי אלהינו, מלך העולם, בורא פן הגפן.

ברוך אתה, יי אלהינו, מלך העולם, אשר בחר בנו מכל-עם, ורוממנו מכל-לשון, וקדשנו במצותיו, ונתת לנו, יי אלהינו, באהבה את-יום (השבת הזה ואת-יום) הזכרון הזה, יום תרועה, מקרא קדש, וזכר ליציאת מצרים. כי בנו בחרת, ואותנו קדשת מכל-העמים, וזכרך אמת וקים לעד. ברוך אתה, יי, מלך על כל-הארץ, מקדש (השבת ואשר) אל יום הזכרון.

ברוך אתה, יי אלהינו, מלך העולם, שהתנינו וקיימנו והגצענו לזמן הזה.



Blessed is the Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

Blessed is the Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who has chosen us from all the peoples, hallowing us with the Mitzvot. In Your love, O Lord our God, You have given us this (Shabbat and this) Day of Remembrance, to hear the sound of the Shofar, to unite in worship, and to recall the Exodus from Egypt. For You have chosen us from all peoples, consecrating us to Your service, and Your word is truth eternal.

Blessed is the Sovereign God, Ruler of all the world, who hallows (the Sabbath,) the House of Israel and the Day of Remembrance.

Blessed is the Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, for giving us life, for sustaining us, and for enabling us to reach this season.

## עלינו

*All rise*

עלינו לשבח לארון הכל, לתת גרלה ליוצו  
בראשית, שלא עשונו כגויי הארצות, ולא שמנו  
במשפחות הארמה: שלא שם חלקנו בהם, וגרלנו  
בכל-המונים.

*We must praise the Lord of all, the Maker of heaven and earth,  
who has set us apart from the other families of earth, giving us a  
destiny unique among the nations.*

נאנחנו כורעים ומשתחוים ומודים לפני מלך מלכי  
המלכים, הקדוש ברוך הוא,

*We therefore bow in awe and thanksgiving before the One who  
is Sovereign over all, the Holy One, blessed be He.*

## MOUNTER'S KADDISH

## קדיש יחום

יתגדל ויתקדש שמה רבא בעלמא די-ברא  
כרעותה, וימליך מלכותה בחייכון וכיומיכון וכחיי  
דכל-בית ישראל, בעגלא ובזמן קריב, ואמרו: אמן.

*Yit-ga-dal ve-yit-ka-dash she-mei ra-ba be-al-ma di-ve-ra  
chi-re-u-tei, ve-yam-lich mal-chu-tei be-cha-yei-chon  
u-ve-yo-mei-chon u-ve-cha-yei de-chol beit Yis-ra-eli, ba-a-ga-la  
u-vi-ze-man ka-riv, ve-i-me-ru: a-mein.*

יהא שמה רבא מכרך לעלם ולעלמי עלמיא.

*Ye-hei she-mei ra-ba me-va-rach le-a-lam u-le-al-mei al-ma-ya.*

יתברך וישתבח, ויתפאר ויתרומם ויתנשא,  
ויתהדר ויתעלה ויתהלל שמה דקודשא, בריך  
הוא, לעלא מן-כל-ברכתא ושירתא, תשבתתא  
ונחמתא דאמירן בעלמא, ואמרו: אמן.

*Yit-ba-rach ve-yish-ta-bach, ve-yit-pa-ar ve-yit-ro-mam  
ve-yit-na-sei, ve-yit-ha-dar ve-yit-a-leh ve-yit-ha-lal she-mei  
de-ku-de-sha, be-rich hu, le-ei-la min kol bi-re-cha-ta*

On Yom Kippur (and until Hoshana Rabbah) the greeting is *Gemar hatimah tovah* ("A good final sealing [to you]!") or *Hatima tovah* ("A sealing for good!").

## TRADITIONS FOR ROSH HA-SHANAH

*The Shofar* The blowing of the shofar is the only special biblical ritual for Rosh ha-Shanah. The symbolism of the shofar is not made explicit in the Torah. Whether it is meant to arouse our slumbering souls or as a clarion call to war against the worst part of our natures, the primitive sound of the shofar blast stirs something deep within us. There is a sense of expectation in the silence before the shofar sound, followed by unease evoked by the various blasts. Part of its sense of mystery lies in the interplay of the silence, the piercing sound, and the hum of people praying. On its most basic level, the shofar can be seen to express what we cannot find the right words to say. The blasts are the wordless cries of the people of Israel. The shofar is the instrument that sends those cries of pain and longing hurtling across the vast distance toward the Other.

There are three shofar sounds: *tekiah*—one long blast; *shevarim*—three short blasts; and *teru'ah*—nine staccato blasts. The Torah does not state explicitly how many shofar blasts are required, but the rabbis (based on a complicated exegesis of Lev. 25:9 and 23:24, and Num. 29:1) derive the necessity to have three blasts of *teru'ah* preceded by and followed by *tekiah*. The only question for the rabbis is what constitutes a *teru'ah*. One opinion is that it should sound like groaning (our *shevarim* sound); another is that it should sound like sobbing (what we call *teru'ah*); and a third opinion is that it should sound like both together (our *shevarim teru'ah*). Therefore, we have the pattern of *tekiah teru'ah tekiah, tekiah shevarim tekiah, tekiah shevarim teru'ah tekiah* to cover all possibilities.

The shofar blowing takes place at a number of times during the Rosh ha-Shanah service. One set occurs right after the Torah reading (this set is called *de-miyushav*—"while sitting," since at one time you were allowed to sit during these blasts). According to one tradition, this was the point in the

the day of our festival; for it is a statute for Israel, a ruling of the God of Jacob" (Psalm 81:4-5). Rosh ha-Shanah is the seventh, and thus a special, new moon. Two of the shofar's other associations in the Torah make it appropriate to Rosh ha-Shanah. The shofar heralds the nearing of God at the Sinai revelation (Exod. 19). On Rosh ha-Shanah we turn ourselves back toward the ways of God that the Torah teaches. In addition, the shofar is sounded, significantly, on Yom ha-Kippurim, the tenth day of the seventh month, to announce the Jubilee Year, the fiftieth year, in which land, estates, and freedom that people had lost in the forty-nine ( $7 \times 7$ ) preceding years will be restored: "Declare independence in the land for all its inhabitants" (Lev. 25:10). Rosh ha-Shanah promises a new lease on life, a shot at redemption, to all those who are moved by the sounding of the shofar to do *teshuvah*.

E.G.R.

### Make a shofar—Plan 1:

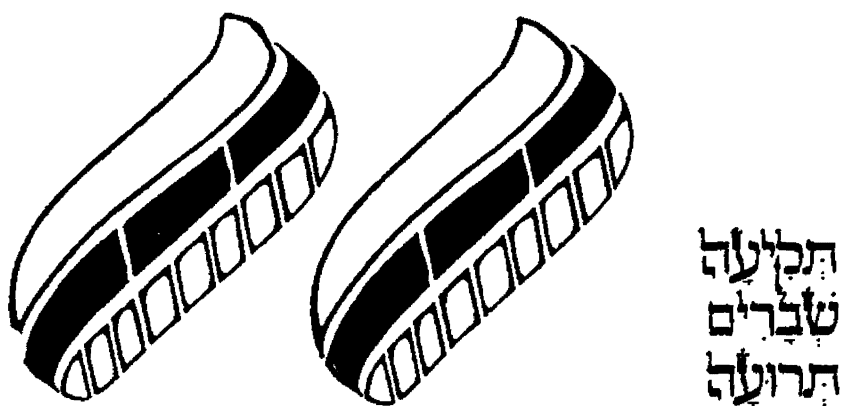
Go to a slaughterhouse and obtain a ram's horn. Boil it for three to five hours until you can remove the cartilage. Heat sand to 300°-500° and let the horn sit and sit and sit in the sand. Using insulated gloves, pick up the horn and bend it little by little until the fibers stretch. You have to straighten it out enough so that you can drill a hole to form a mouthpiece. When you have the shape you want, plunge the horn into cold water. Drill a hole for the mouthpiece until you reach the hollow part of the shofar.

### Make a shofar—Plan 2:

Have the whole congregation, not just one person, call out the shofar blasts during Rosh ha-Shanah services, then have anyone with a shofar sound it. Let the congregation continue to call the sounds in Hebrew or in English: blast, break, shatter, and blast. At the end of Yom Kippur, let the shofar begin and then let all the congregation join in with the traditional words chanted out loud.

Z.S.

Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib of Ger suggests that Rosh ha-Shanah refers to the state of being prior to the differentiation of the divine emanation into distinguishable parts (a play on Rosh ha-



## Program 2

**Introduction:** Tomorrow you will hear these scarily harsh words...(Unatanatokef). These words will sound unreasonable and unforgiving. If misunderstood, it may seem that your fate is already decided.

I would have a hard time believing in a religion that supports these words literally. I do believe in Judaism. I do not think these words are to be taken literally. I see these words as a choice. I can make a choice to support life or to support death. Judaism understands the importance of starting the year in the right direction. Judaism understands that we are creatures of habit, and what we do in the beginning of the year could become habit forming. You will notice that Tzedakah is one of the methods for ensuring your transcription into the book of life.

We are now going to split into groups to decide how we can heal some of the injustice we read about before.

### **Activity:**

The large group will be split into 5 equal groups. Each group will have a pre-assigned leader that knows about the issue he/she will discuss. The group will reread one of the articles from the earlier articles. The leader will then ask the group to suggest two concrete actions that will help heal the injustice that is presented in the article. When the group agrees on two concrete and feasible actions that each congregant could perform in the next ten days, the group will take their seats. When all the groups are finished, the leader from each group will announce the group's two ideas.

The Service leader will type all the suggestions on the attached form. This form will be handed to each congregant during the Rosh Hashannah morning service.

**Conclusion:** In the beginning of our t'fillah, we read about *kavannah*. This word is usually associated with prayer, but it also pertains to life. It means direction or intention. Sometimes we live our life without thinking about the right direction to walk. The sounds of the shofar and the words of the Unatanatokef provide our year with the right *kavannah*. The blasts remind us to listen to those who suffer, and the words teach us to act now to end suffering. With this *kavannah* our year will be one that aims toward a more perfect world.

### Tikkun Olam Form For the High Holidays

- 1) Day 1: Social Action Suggestion\_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Day 2: Social Action Suggestion\_\_\_\_\_
- 3) Day 3: Social Action Suggestion\_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Day 4: Social Action Suggestion\_\_\_\_\_
- 5) Day 5: Social Action Suggestion\_\_\_\_\_
- 6) Day 6: Social Action Suggestion\_\_\_\_\_
- 7) Day 7: Social Action Suggestion\_\_\_\_\_
- 8) Day 8: Social Action Suggestion\_\_\_\_\_
- 9) Day 9: Social Action Suggestion\_\_\_\_\_
- 10) Yom Kippur: Social Action Suggestion\_\_\_\_\_



**Sukkot Program**  
**The Time of our Joy**

**Core Concept:** Sukkot is the time of our joy. The Sukkah should be a symbol of Jewish joy, which does not include spending lots of money, buying huge gifts, or showing off how much you own, but rather symbolizes hospitality, close friends, and roughing it a little.

**Essential Questions:**

- 1) What are some differences between the American value of joy and the Jewish value of joy?
- 2) Why is Sukkot the time of our joy?
- 3) What can the Sukkah teach us about being joyous?
- 4) Why are building, dwelling, and eating in a Sukkah such an important part of our tradition?
- 5) Is it more important to fulfill the mitzvot of sukkot or to enjoy the season? If the two were to contradict each other, which would trump the other?

**Enduring Understandings:**

- 1) Sukkot is a time for joy above anything else.
- 2) The Sukkah is a symbol of joy?
- 3) Jewish joy should include spreading joy to those less fortunate.
- 4) Jewish joy is less about fancy cars, toys, or houses, but rather more about friends, family, and nature.
- 5) The journey of adolescence can be compared to the Exodus journey and both are to be joyous.

**Plan of Action:**

- 1) Teen community should build a sukkah or two on the synagogue property or in a space where they can use it. (for quick easy sukkah kits go to [www.sukkot.com](http://www.sukkot.com)). This is a skill all students should learn, and it will be a sukkah for the teens to eat, sleep, and enjoy for the week of Sukkot.
- 2) "You shall live in booths seven days; all citizens of Israel shall live in booths" (Lev 23:42). A great way to observe this commandment:

- i. The Shabbat of Sukkot should be a sleepover in the Sukkah. This quote should be placed in your sukkah so that the students know that this is a biblical commandment.
  - ii. It is important to note that if it is too cold or raining there should be an indoor possibility for sleeping.
    - 1. It is more important for the sukkah to be seen as a symbol of joy. If people are uncomfortable than it is a symbol of burden.
- 3) During the sleepover enjoy a fine Shabbat meal in the sukkah.
- 4) The evening's activities should be:
  - i. Really fun, social, and out doors, if possible.
  - ii. There should be no cell phones, no video game or electronics of any kind besides lights
- 5) Educational Activity:
  - a. Provide time for each student to have at least 10 minutes alone in the sukkah. In the sukkah should be a piece of paper:
    - i. **Paper should say:** (See attached Sheet)
    - ii. At a reasonable hour discuss people's answers to the questions. See if people understand that Jewish joy is about being with friends and family and less about material wealth.
- 6) **The next morning:** "After the ingathering from your threshing floor and your vat, you shall hold the Feast of Huts for seven days. You shall rejoice in your festival, with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the Levite, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow, in your communities. You shall hold festival for the Lord your God seven days, in the place that the Lord will choose; for the Lord your God will bless you in all your income and all your handiwork, and you shall be full joyful" (Deut 16:13-16). Jewish joy includes bringing joy to those who might have difficulty being joyous.
  - i. Arrange for an orphanage, children's hospital, or senior citizens center (any organization that might need help finding joy) to come to your sukkah and share the joy of Sukkot.
    - 1. Have a nice breakfast, play some music, have one on one board or card games etc.

**Conclusion:** Hopefully this experience will teach teens about Sukkot. The goal is that the sukkah will become a symbol of joy, so that forever these students will build sukkot with the aim of making this season joyous. Also students should understand that Jewish joy is simple, i.e. being with friends, family and sharing joy with others.

## Front

I just want to thank you for being here at the Sukkot sleepover. I hope that this sukkah provides for you a sanctuary separate from your everyday life. Please take this time to reflect, relax, breathe and be fully present in this home that has been built by Jews all over the world for hundreds of years. Take a deep breath, take in your surroundings and just be. When you feel ready, please answer the questions on the front and back of this sheet. Please fill out the front before looking at the back. When you feel you have answered the questions sufficiently and had enough alone time in the sukkah, please ask another participant to take your place in the sukkah to fulfill the exercise. At the end of the evening we will have a chance to share our answers. Enjoy the rest of the night.

- 1) Think about your answer and then write it down: What brings you joy?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) Now take some time to think, meditate, talk to yourself, whatever, but try to figure out why you are commanded to build a sukkah and then dwell in it for seven days.
  - i. Write down your answers.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) When you are done turn the page over.

**Back**

- 1) Sukkot is the time of our joy, which makes the sukkah a symbol of Jewish joy. What do you think Judaism is trying to teach us by making Sukkot the season of our joy?
- 2) Does this exercise/reflection change your answer to the question, what brings you joy? Please write your answers,

## Chanukkah Program

**Core Concept:** The stories of the 1 and 2 Maccabees as told in the Apocrypha promote several Jewish values and teach us about the creation of Chanukkah. Among them are pluralism, the power of small, and the fact that people should take matters into their own hands; therefore a community's Chanukkah celebration should promote these values.

### Essential Questions:

- 1) What values can the Maccabee stories teach us?
- 2) What is the difference between 1 and 2 Maccabees?
- 3) Why is pluralism so important?
- 4) Why should people feel empowered that their small actions make a difference?
- 5) Can we balance the idea that God watches over us and protects vs. we the people should take action.
- 6) Does the Maccabee story inspire the modern Jew for social action and to protect and settle Israel?
- 7) How can lighting the Chanukkia inspire us to act for social justice?

### Enduring Understandings

- 1) One of the differences between the 1 and 2 Maccabees is that 1 Maccabees promotes and stresses the heroics of the military leaders who fought on Shabbat and taught us not to wait for God to save us. 2 Maccabees promotes and emphasizes the heroics of the Chasidim who showed great faith in God by choosing to die upholding God's laws by refusing to fight on Shabbat. The book of 1 Maccabees teaches us to act based on what we believe and it motivates us toward social action and fighting to settle in the land of Israel.
- 2) In the Chanukka story, Jews who disagreed about Jewish practice put their differences aside and united to fight together for the greater good, Jewish survival. We should use Chanukkah to put our denominational differences aside and act for a common good. Not only will this remind us that we are all united as Jews above all our denominational differences, but also as we work together our small act of social justice becomes more powerful.
- 3) Lighting the Chanukkia one at a time teaches us that each small mira

**Plan of Action:**

- 1) Shortly after Sukkot: Two teen representatives and their advisors from an Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist synagogue should have a meeting. During the meeting they should decide on a recipient they can all agree upon for a Chanukkah fundraiser. In the spirit of Chanukkah, I think the recipient should be in Israel, and possibly to a part of the Israeli army. The second part of the meeting should be to design a t-shirt that promotes the cause that was chosen in the first part of the meeting.
- 2) Flyers and posters should be put up around the Synagogue and sent to all members of the Synagogues participating in the initial meeting while also being posted in all synagogue publications. The promotions should include: (see attached flyer).
- 3) The event will be a huge fundraiser with a great Chanukkah celebration on the eighth day of Chanukkah. The fundraiser will work like this:
  1. All members of the each participating synagogue will be asked to be a *shamash*-The candle that lights the other candles. A *shamash* in this case will buy nine t-shirts for a \$180 (\$20 dollars a shirt but the actual shirts will cost \$10 a shirt, therefore each *shamash* will make a \$90 prophet). One shirt will be for him or herself and be a different colored shirt from the other eight in a package. The *shamash* will then sell for \$20 or give as a gift the eight other t-shirts in the package. The more people who become *shamash*, the more money will be made to go toward the chosen cause. This will empower each member of the synagogue to be a small light that helps enlighten other people to a good cause and ask them to help act toward achieving goals for that cause.
- 4) On the eighth night of Chanukkah a celebration that will include music for teens, a speaker from the organization receiving the donation, and games for kids will ensue. Everyone wearing the t-shirt will receive free admission while those not wearing the t-shirt will pay a donation fee.

**Conclusion:** This event should be a Chanukkah celebration that promotes the values taught by the Maccabees. It involves Jews who might have some different religious beliefs working together toward a common goal, taking action, and empowering each individual to be a small part of a larger miracle.

## Pesach Program

**Core Concept:** The Pesach Seder is a special lesson plan to teach one of Judaism's more important values, the greatness of being liberated. Although much of the Seder is designed to keep young children engaged, but teens can really help bridge the gap between adults and children by making the story relevant and entertaining for children and introducing social action projects and issues that relate to modern liberation issues.

### Essential question:

- 1) Who are some modern peoples in need of liberation, i.e. impoverished, diseased, addicted?
- 2) How can we help liberate ourselves from difficult times and others in need of help?
- 3) How can we translate the words and actions of the Seder to become actions that promote social justice?
- 4) How can a teen help keep young children involved during the Seder to ensure that they are instilled with the value of liberating others?
- 5) Why is it so important to ask questions?
- 6) Why should each generation feel as if they were personally liberated from Egypt?

### Enduring Understanding:

- 1) The difference between freedom and slavery is so huge that we need to remember that we were once slaves, in order to feel empathy for those who are still enslaved today. Since we were once slaves we should feel responsible to help free others from the oppression of poverty, disease or addiction.
- 2) The value of liberation is so important that we must make sure our Seders are entertaining, relevant, informative, and current of social issues, in order to ensure that each generation of Jews are properly taught that we were once slaves and we have a responsibility to help others and ourselves become free.

**Plan of Action:** This program will be a take home assignment for teens to bring to their Seders. This program should provide teens with proper readings, skits, and current information to help keep kids involved at the Seder while also introducing social action projects to the adult participants of the Seder.

Here I will provide a program that highlights certain parts of the Seder and then provide additional readings or thoughts that can enhance the Seder for the teen to introduce during the Seder. This goal of this program is twofold. First, to empower the teen to be a major part of the Seder. I think this will make the Seder a special night for the teen to teach his/her family some of the things he/she learns at Religious School. Second, the teen will become a leader in his/her family by helping create a beautiful Seder.



### Teen Pesach Tool:

This provides you, the teen, with methods to help your family enjoy a meaningful Seder

As a teen you are a very powerful person for the Jewish people. Your age automatically makes you a role model for young children, and you can use this position to help the children in your family stay connected to Jewish ideals. The Pesach Seder is a wonderful intergenerational evening that has been a long time tradition for the Jewish people. At its best a Seder can be a beautiful evening for friends and family to wine, dine and discuss the defining moment of Jewish history, the Exodus, and relate the event to modern issues. Even at its worse, the Seder is a beautiful night that creates family get together and memories. Hopefully you are beginning to understand for yourself that the Jewish story is rich with history, tradition, and a bright future. Hopefully you believe that you are a vital piece of Judaism's present and feel obliged to encourage a bright future for the Jewish people.

Now that you are above the age of Bar/Bat Mitzvah you should begin to understand that we the Jewish people were once slaves, and God helped free us from the oppression of the Egyptians. You should also be figuring out that many still live under great persecution. As Jews we feel empathy for those still oppressed by disease, poverty and abusive behavior and respond to our miraculous Exodus by trying to help other become free.

In order to ensure that this vital, Jewish teaching remains a part of each Jewish family, Judaism created the Seder night where we retell our story from slavery to freedom. Your role is very important, because you can help keep young children interested in learning, while also making sure that the adults do not get too caught up on the history and tradition as to forget the present and future conditions of the world. There are many ways for you to add to your Seder and create a meaningful joyful evening, and provided here are some suggestions. **Remember when teaching the children, do not be too oppressive. There are different types of children that will respond differently to each part of the Seder, so be gentle!**

- 1) **Before the Seder:** Ask all who are invited to the Seder to bring canned or non-perishable food to the Seder. **At Ha Lachma Anya:** We say, "Let all who are hungry come and eat." This tradition of inviting strangers off the street is rarely practiced, because it is dangerous to invite strangers into your home. Nonetheless, the value expressed here is important to Jewish tradition. Take all the food brought by guests to a homeless shelter or food bank the day after the Seder so that this saying does not become meaningless.

- 2) **After the recitation of the 'four questions:'** Teens can ask all the children to count the number of questions actually asked in the 'four questions.' The answer is actually only one question, "How is this night different from all other nights?" The rest of the section is four answers to the one question.
- i. **As a follow up:** Ask each child to think of more questions they can ask during the rest of the Seder and encourage them to ask them whenever they want. It might be nice to even have candy or a prize for each question they ask that has four possible answers.
    - 1. This exercise keeps the children of the Seder at center stage, recognizing that they are the most important students.
    - 2. It also teaches children to ask good questions, which is the mark of a free person, being able to question the world around them. Questioning the world around us helps us make it a better place. We realize that the current injustices do not need to remain injustices.
- 3) **After eating the Mitzah, Marror, and Harosset:** As you already know we eat these foods, in order to recreate the oppression our ancestors endured from the Egyptians. This is a good time to ask everyone at the Seder, why we eat food to tell our story, why do we not just talk about our oppression?
- i. **One possible interpretation:** As Jews it is not enough to speak about religions, because all words need to be followed by actions. Therefore the eating of these particular foods is an action that accompanies telling our story of oppression to freedom.
    - 1. **Ask your family:** What actions should accompany our Seder to make sure we understand the difference between slavery and freedom? This should lead to a discussion about current peoples who are still oppressed and how we could help free them from oppression.

Hopefully these suggestions will help make your Seder more interesting and meaningful for you and your family.

Please write a reflection explaining which exercises you used during your Seder. Explain if they helped create conversation, and if they helped keep the children interested in the Seder. Pesach Sameach!

## Shavuot Program

**Core Concept:** Shavuot is the day when Jews celebrate the day God gave us the Torah. We can celebrate this holiday by promoting the highest level of Torah study, *Torah Lishmah*, studying for its own sake with a teen appropriate *tikkun leil Shavuot*.

### Essential Questions:

- 1) What is *Torah Lishmah*?
- 2) Why is the highest level of Torah study?
- 3) How can one achieve this level of study?
- 4) Why should it be promoted on Shavuot?

### Enduring Understandings:

- 1) Studying Torah is a life long pursuit.
- 2) *Torah Lishmah* is counter culture to American goals for study.
- 3) Studying Torah is so important to the survival of Judaism.
- 4) Studying torah is fun and social.

**Goals:** The goal of this program is to connect Shavuot with the Jewish value of studying Torah for its own sake. A *tikkun leil Shavuot* is a Shavuot custom in which the community stays awake all evening studying in preparation for receiving the Torah the next day. This is to make up for the fact that the original Israelites overslept the day God revealed the Torah to them at Sinai. An evening of studying Torah, socializing with friends, and discussing important Jewish topics provides a fun evening and celebrates the special event of the Revelation at Sinai. By creating a great event with studying Torah as the central activity promotes *Torah lishmah*, and this is a very important value for our students to understand.

**Audience:** The Confirmation ceremony is customarily performed by the tenth grade class during Shavuot. Although Confirmation has helped address the issue of students leaving religious school after B'nei mitzvah, it still does not promote studying Torah for its own sake because there is still a public ceremony used as a reward. Therefore Shavuot could act as a Confirmation Class reunion for years to come starting in eleventh grade. All those who received Confirmation will be invited to attend the Confirmation ceremony and enjoy a special *tikkun leil Shavuot* for the rest of the evening until midnight. This will be a nice evening for those who became Confirmed to reunite with their classmates after they all went off to college, but also to reunite with the joy of studying Torah.

**Plan of Action:**

- 1) Have several tables set up, with the same number of chairs at each table (depending upon attendance).
- 2) There should be 6 or 7 teachers ready to teach one 30-minute lesson each (If there is a large attendance you need more teachers).
- 3) After the Confirmation Ceremony concludes invite all those who were Confirmed at the institution to sit at one of the tables.
  - a. One key to the program is that the chairs cannot move. Each teacher only teaches to the number of chairs at the table.
  - b. At each table there will be a teacher, who has prepared a thirty-minute lesson.
  - c. A bell or any sound will begin the lesson, and simultaneously all the teachers will teach there small study groups for thirty minutes.
  - d. At the end of the thirty minutes another sound will end the study session.
  - e. All students will have fifteen minutes for coffee, snacks, and socializing.
  - f. At the end of the fifteen minutes the sound will then mark the beginning of the second study session. This cycle will repeat four times.
    - i. Students should know that they do not need to stay with their original group.

**Conclusion:** This night creates a light, meaningful, and social *tikkun leil shavuot*. Hopefully people will enjoy seeing old friends and studying with them. Studying will be seen as an activity people do together for fun and for its own sake. I think students studying together in this manner will teach that Studying Torah is a life long pursuit with no degree at the end.

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