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Nurturing the Wow: An Introduction to Jewish Parenthood

Caryn Roman Submitted in Fulfillment of MARE 2017

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Adriane Leveen

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE – JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION NEW YORK SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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A Letter to Potential Funders

Dear Generous Supporter of Jewish Education:

In your hands is a curriculum guide for an eight-week experiential learning program called "Nurturing the Wow: An Introduction to Jewish Parenthood". Unlike other "Jewish parenting" programs that focus primarily on childrearing advice, this curriculum for individuals and/or couples thinking about becoming parents approaches parenthood as an individual experience that offers opportunities for personal reflection and spiritual growth. It is intended for use in JCC or similar community and cultural settings.

The institutions of Jewish life are currently ill-equipped to engage young families during a crucial post-marriage, pre-children life stage. This is a time when young families are particularly likely to be seeking community but frequently find the offerings of traditional institutions lacking or off-putting and exclusive. As millennials move into the next stage of their adult lives, which for many includes building a family, it is more important than ever that Jewish institutions offer meaningful, easily accessible communal experiences that respond to the needs and day-to-day lives of 21st century young adults. Research reveals that millennials, though generally less religious than their parents and grandparents, are "as likely to engage in many spiritual practices" as older Americans¹. Young adults want space to explore personal meaning and spirituality, and our institutions are missing opportunities to illustrate how the Jewish community is an ideal place for them to do so.

Drawing on contemporary media and popular spiritual practices such as yoga and mindfulness meditation, plus elements of the 19th-century Jewish spiritual practice of *mussar*, "Nurturing the Wow" provides an inclusive Jewish communal framework for future parents to come together to explore and articulate their own values. Through

¹ "Millennials are less religious than older Americans but just as spiritual." Pew Research Center, November 2015. http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/23/millennials-are-less-religious-than-older-americans-but-just-as-spiritual/

discussion, text study, presentations from expert speakers, journaling, mindfulness practice, and more, participants will:

...know how to access and adapt Jewish practices and traditions for use in personal, familial, and communal contexts;

...build for themselves a spiritual vocabulary and a capacity to bring greater self-reflection, intentionality, and meaning to their experience of parenthood;

...express comfort with and appreciation of Jewish tradition as a source of inspiration, guidance, and comfort along their journey as parents;

...connect to a local community of parents and families committed to ongoing personal growth, spiritual development, and meaningful Jewish living.

I invite you to review the curriculum guide and materials and to contact me anytime with your questions or comments at croman@gmail.com. You can view a 20-minute narrated webinar describing the curriculum online at: http://bit.ly/2oqTbsr.

B'kavod, Caryn S. Roman, MPA, MARE Director of Jewish Family Life, Brownstone Brooklyn Kingsbay YM-YWHA (Brooklyn, NY)

Introduction

This curriculum guide describes a series of workshops on Jewish parenthood to be offered in a JCC or similar setting. The content explores parenthood as an opportunity for intentional spiritual practice, with an emphasis on viewing one's approach to and experience of parenthood in a mindful, Jewish way. The sessions also offer parents-to-be opportunities to reflect individually and together about the kind of home and family they wish to create and how Judaism and Jewish tradition can inform that vision.

Many parenting guides are published every year, not to mention the scores of online parent forums and blogs that offer endless recommendations on how parents can take advantage of the latest trends, from attachment parenting to free-range parenting to becoming the perfect "Tiger Mom". Wading into this literature can be intimidating and confusing for even the most zealous readers. In attempting to do just this, I realized that while many of these guides focus on advice around parent*ing*, few address the individual's experience of parent*hood* and how one might approach or process the emotional, physical, and spiritual ups and downs of childrearing, especially in the early years.

The intended audience for this curriculum is anyone considering becoming a parent in the near future, or expectant parents during the first six months of pregnancy. It is best suited for small cohorts of 6-8 participants who will proceed through the entire series together. The intention is to build communal groups that can continue to meet and support each other even after the formal parenting series is over.

During the course, cohorts will meet every other week over a four-month span. Both Fall/Winter and Spring/Summer courses will be offered, with both daytime and evening/weekend sessions to accommodate learners' schedules and preferences. This curriculum describes the content of in-person sessions; learners will also have opportunities for further learning and reflection between sessions using journal questions and online platforms.

Sessions will be facilitated by educators experienced in working with adult learners. The facilitator should be Jewishly knowledgeable and able to create a safe environment in which learners can be comfortable considering difficult questions and challenging personal and communal assumptions. Particular sensitivity to a wide variety of backgrounds, including non-Jewish spouses and partners, is essential to the success of the learning experience.

Rationale

Currently, the institutions of Jewish life are often ill-equipped to respond to the needs of young couples approaching parenthood. The content of this curriculum encourages future parents to consider family life, including childrearing and family relationships, through a Jewish lens. It offers participants opportunities to articulate personal and communal values and aspirations for their children, and to create ties with other young Jewish families.

Many books provide growth charts and developmental guidelines but do not consider how new parents might incorporate traditions and faith practices into the landscape of life with a new baby. The Jewish community also lacks programming to help young couples define their familial values and choices with a Jewish perspective. This is a missed opportunity to engage young families in building meaningful connections to Judaism and Jewish community at a point when formative experiences can have significant impact on both parents and children's future lives, long before children hit preschool or religious school age.

In her article titled "Family Formation, Educational Choice, and American Jewish Identity", Riv-Ellen Prell provides important analysis of a 2004 study of Jewish families in Philadelphia. She points out:

This study reveals that family formations are closely linked to issues of values and cultural meanings. How parents divide responsibilities for care and maintenance of the family is no longer determined either by social conventions or social class for the middle and affluent classes. Men and women consistently make those decisions not solely for instrumental reasons but as expressions of (often contradictory) values. Therefore, the domain of religious life is intertwined with work and the family economy...Judaism is a family matter, both in its economic and social formation as well as within educational choices. Identity must be studied within the social context of the family, and the study of family formation must be located within the context of cultural values and the making of meaning.²

In recognition of this opportunity to provide a Jewish framework for such crucial family formation, this curriculum addresses both the current lack of opportunities for young parents to consider childrearing and family dynamics through a Jewish perspective, and the difficulties of engaging young families in sustained connections with Jewish communal life.

Recently, authors have begun attempting to address the individual's experience of parenthood. In the introduction to her 2016 book Nurture the Wow: Finding Spirituality in the Frustration, Boredom, Tears, Poop, Desperation, Wonder and Radical Amazement of Parenting, Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg writes of her own experience of becoming a parent as a primary motivation for exploring spirituality in parenthood:

...[I]t does seem to be the case for a lot of us that becoming a parent tends to rearrange our perception of the world and ourselves in ways that are both easy to articulate and impossible to name...Some of its logistical – life as we once knew it is now inexorably different, and that has implications for how we think about our time, our relationships, our careers, our pocketbooks, and all the identity questions that go with these things. Much of it is emotional, from a powerful, often overwhelming new understanding of love, to extreme tests of our patience, our compassion, and our ability to really see another person and their needs.

² Prell, Riv-Ellen in *Family Matters: Jewish Education in an Age of Choice*. Jack Werthimer, ed. Brandeis University Press: 2007, 4-5.

For many of us, becoming a parent can reboot our experiences of spirituality – or show us, for the first time, where our spirituality is installed.³

This curriculum empowers parents to consider their own needs and experience as well as that of their offspring. It encourages learners to approach parenthood actively and mindfully and offers a Jewish framework for doing so. Through the course of the sessions, learners will reflect on personal values and significant spiritual questions, setting a firm groundwork upon which to build their family's life.

Suggested References and Additional Reading

- Marjorie Ingall's Mameleh Knows Best: What Jewish Mothers Do to Raise Successful, Creative, Empathetic, Independent Children (New York: Harmony Books, 2016) provides a helpful framework for considering the evolution of the idea of "Jewish parenting" and how Jewish ideas can be translated to modern and universal circumstances without losing meaning and value.
- All Joy and No Fun: The Paradox of Modern Parenthood (New York: Harper Collins, 2014) is Jennifer Senior's study of how children affect their parents' lives, and illuminates some of the particular needs and challenges faced by middle- and upper-middle class parents in the "trenches" of childrearing.
- Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg's Nurture the Wow: Finding Spirituality in the Frustration, Boredom, Tears, Poop, Desperation, Wonder, and Radical Amazement of Parenting (New York: Flatiron, 2016) makes a strong case for how and why parenting can be a mindful spiritual practice rooted in Jewish theology.
- Aryeh Ben-David's Becoming a Soulful Educator: How to Bring Jewish Learning from Our Minds, to Our Hearts, to Our Souls and into Our Lives (Woodstock,

³ Ruttenberg, pp3-4

VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2016) lays out techniques and approaches for infusing all types of learning and community with spiritual exploration and significance.

 Everyday Holiness: The Jewish Spiritual Path of Mussar (Boston: Trumpeter Books, 2007) is Alan Morinis' guide to recognizing all of life's experiences as opportunities for personal growth and spiritual development by incorporating elements of mussar, a Jewish spiritual and mindfulness practice developed in 19thcentury Europe.

Desired Results

Select Priority Goals for Learners

Learners will embrace parenthood as a spiritual practice, making use of mindfulness techniques, self-reflection, and examination of personal and familial relationships. Drawing on Jewish tradition, wisdom, and community resources, learners will build a 'toolbox' to guide future personal and familial decisions.

Enduring Understandings

- 1) Parenthood offers a wealth of opportunities to foster personal growth and further one's spiritual development
- The experience of becoming a parent can fundamentally reframe one's relationships to Jewish tradition, spirituality, community, and selfidentification

Essential Questions

- 1) How can the experience of parenting become an intentional spiritual practice?
- 2) What kind of Jewish home do I want to create for my family?
- 3) In what ways can Jewish tradition and wisdom inform my decisions as a parent?

Learner Outcomes (KDBB)

- 1) Learners will know how to access and adapt Jewish practices and traditions for use in personal, familial, and communal contexts.
- Learners will build for themselves a spiritual vocabulary and a capacity to bring greater self-reflection, intentionality, and meaning to their experience of parenthood.

- Learners will express comfort with and appreciation of Jewish tradition as a source of inspiration, guidance, and comfort along their journey as parents.
- Learners will connect to a local community of parents and families committed to ongoing personal growth, spiritual development, and meaningful Jewish living.

Evidence for Learning

Evidence of learning will include learners' journal responses to reflective questions; participation in group and *chavruta* discussions; contributions to online forum discussion between sessions; the creation of a family ritual for Shabbat; and learners' articulation of personal goals for continued spiritual growth and exploration

Suggested Tools to Collect Evidence of Understanding

Tools to collect evidence of understanding will include journaling; group and *chavruta* discussions; online forums; regular one-on-one check-ins with group leader(s); and photo or video documentation.

Learning Experiences

Each session follows a similar structure, with the explicit aim of establishing a comfortable space for participants to be vulnerable and reflective. We begin with an opening ritual (check-in and/or intention) that leads into an activity or discussion based in Jewish text. These frequently incorporate chavruta and small group work as well as large group discussions. The text work is followed by either a guest speaker or activity focused around a particular skill or technique such as mindfulness meditation. Finally, each session concludes with time for journaling around a reflective question and a brief closing ritual.

Sessions are crafted with the understanding and expectation that participants approach the experience from a variety of abilities, backgrounds, interests, and needs. Activities are designed to be inclusive to those with physical limitations and all texts are presented in both English and Hebrew with sourcing and resources for further study. Following Franz Rosenzweig's paradigm of "life-Torah-life" for adult learning, learning experiences aim to put a Jewish frame on participants' common experience of becoming parents and then to extrapolate meaning and discrete skills/strategies from Jewish tradition that learners can carry into daily life.

Outline of Learning Experiences

Session	Title	Value Focus	Core Concept	Text Study	Learning Activity
1.	Who am I?	Humility/ Anavah	Defining myself and my values helps me understand who I want to be as a parent.	Hineini (Exodus 3, Genesis 22)	Intro to Mussar; Soul-trait Inventory
2.	Managing Expectations	Gratitude/ Hakarat Hatov	The text of Eshet Chayil reminds us how much we undertake in our daily lives as parents and to appreciate our efforts and those of others.	Eshet Chayil (Proverbs 30)	Creating a Gratitude Practice
3.	Finding the Wow	Wonder/ Malchut	Recognizing the sacred in the experience of everyday life helps me be fully present.	Abraham Joshua Heschel on Radical Amazement	Mindfulness Meditation
4.	All Joy and No Fun	Joy/Sameach	Overcoming distractions to experience true joy connects me to the transcendent.	Psalms	Writing Personal Blessings
5.	Who's in charge?	Compassionate Criticism/ Tochecha	Accepting my own limitations makes me better able to guide my family in learning from mistakes.	Pirke Avot	Family Conflict Resolution
6.	Can You Hear Me Now?	Listening/ Shemirat HaOzen	True dialogue is an opportunity to fully recognize each other.	Martin Buber, I and Thou	Active Listening & Appreciative Inquiry
7.	Who's on Your Team?	Community Mindedness/ Areyvut	Being part of a community helps me be my best as a parent.	Yitro (Exodus 18-20)	Sacred Reading
8.	Living with Intention	Wholeness/ Shleimut	Each of us has the opportunity to individually define our aspirations and to intentionally strive to attain them.	Mi Shebeirach IaCholim & T'filat HaDerech	Personal Manifesto/ This I Believe

Scripted Learning Experience – Session 1: Who am I?

Enduring Understandings:

- 1) Parenthood offers a wealth of opportunities to foster personal growth and further one's spiritual development
- 2) The experience of becoming a parent can fundamentally reframe one's relationships to Jewish tradition, spirituality, community, and self-identification

Core Concept:

Defining myself and my values helps me understand who I want to be as a parent.

Essential Questions:

- What does it mean to be present for my family?
- How do I meet my own needs (physical, emotional, spiritual) while simultaneously caring for others' needs?
- What resources does Jewish tradition offer to help me think intentionally about my identity, as a parent and otherwise?
- 1) Anchor: Set Induction (20 minutes)
 - a) Opening check-in: Have each person introduce themselves and say what brought them to the session (What do you want to learn here?).
 - b) Explain: So much of what we talk about in considering parenthood is about children; but in our time together we are going to spend a lot of time looking inward. We want to really examine ourselves and our sense of who we are and how we engage with others because that is the foundation of who we might become as parents.
 - Turn to the person next to you and share a time when you responded to someone's call – for help, for friendship, etc. How and why did you respond the way you did?

- c) This very human challenge the challenge of responding to those in our lives – is not unique to our time. In the introduction to his book on the *mussar* tradition, *Everyday Holiness*, Alan Morinis writes, "To think that we have to invent how we live all on our own, or in completely novel ways because our ancestors did not know cars or dishwashers or computers, is a curse, because it means we have to relearn all the lessons in living that have already been learned. Why deprive ourselves of the cumulative experiences and conclusions drawn by dozens of generations who passed this way before? We must be grateful to our forebears who had the foresight and compassion to record their insights and guidance and pass these down to us."
- d) We'll look more deeply into the tradition of *mussar* later, but right now we're going to spend some time with some biblical figures who dealt with this same need to respond and try to learn from them.
- e) Introduce Blessing for Torah Study: Judaism has a tradition of reciting 100 blessings each day. Jewish tradition has blessings for everything from the food we eat to bodily functions! Blessings are a way of ritualizing noticing. It's a special way of being mindful and intentional about our actions and to recognize everything that's sacred in our day-to-day experience. The blessing for studying Torah, which concludes *"la'asok b'divrei Torah,"* expresses our gratitude for the opportunity and ability to learn new ideas from something very old by immersing ourselves in its words and stories.
- Recite Blessing for Torah Study: Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech HaOlam, Asher Kid'shanu Bemitzvotav v'Tzivanu La'asok B'divrei Torah.
- 2) Add: Hineini Text Study (20 minutes)
 - a) Distribute text study sheets and invite learners to choose a study partner. Judaism places great emphasis on study, and especially on the practice of studying in *chavruta*, in partnership with another. *Chavruta* study is not just about reading or discussing with someone else, but about enhancing

our learning and understanding through being challenged by another's perspective and questioning.

- Explain that each *chavruta* should read the texts presented in English (or Hebrew) and use the questions listed below the texts as starting points for discussion.
- c) Allow 10-15 minutes for discussion in *chavruta*, then bring the group back together and ask for a few volunteers to share something from their discussions.
- 3) Apply: Introduction to Mussar (30 minutes)
 - a) Explain: Unlike Moses or Abraham, we are probably not being called on by God on a regular basis. There are many aspects or moments in our lives – like becoming a parent – that do call on us to assess who we are and who we'd like to become.
 - b) There are many different ways to approach self-assessment and personal growth. As we mentioned before, the Jewish spiritual movement called *mussar* is one systematic way of doing this work of personal inventory. So what is *mussar*, exactly? We're going to watch a video that gives an overview from a contemporary perspective and then discuss how it will be part of our sessions together.
 - c) Play video (Let it Ripple, "The Making of a Mensch". Approximately 10 minutes) https://vimeo.com/136174803 or www.letitripple.org/films/making-of-a-mensch/
 - d) Ask group to share questions, comments, or reflections.
 - e) Explain that in the coming sessions, we will focus each time on a particular *middah*/trait, explore it in Jewish text, and introduce a practice for developing that *middah* further in our own lives.
 - f) Today's *middah* is *Anavah* or humility (write out or post where everyone can see it).
 - i. How did the video explain this *middah*? (understanding the space you are occupying). How does this definition fit or not—with your own understanding of *anavah*?

- ii. Refer back to the text study. Where do you see anavah in these texts? (Abraham doesn't question God, Moses is unsure of his own leadership ability)
- g) Distribute mussar cards from https://s3.amazonaws.com/letitripplemedia/Downloads/MOAMCards.pdf and/or "Periodic Table of Being a Mensch" https://s3.amazonaws.com/letitripplemedia/Downloads/Periodic+Table+of+Being+a+Mensch.jpg.
- Explain that these materials will be referenced throughout the remaining sessions and can be kept with other materials in a binder (provide if budget allows).
- 4) Away: Journaling (15 minutes)
 - a) Distribute journals (or ask learners to bring them to sessions) and explain that part of each session will be time for personal reflection and journaling. These journals are personal and will not be shared with anyone.
 - b) Distribute or post journaling prompts:
 - i. Which five elements from the "Periodic Table" do you think are most important for you right now?
 - ii. Which five elements do you think are most important for parents (can be same or different from above)?
 - iii. Which five elements do you think are most important for children to develop?
 - iv. Which five do you display most strongly on a regular basis (can be same or different from above)?
 - v. Which five elements do you want to develop more in yourself?
- 5) Away: Closing lyyun (5 minutes)
 - a) Explain that each session will conclude with an *iyyun* or intention. This session the instructor will share something; in the coming sessions, individual learners will be asked to volunteer to prepare opening and/or closing intentions for the group.

Genesis 22:1-8

(1) Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test. God said to him, "Abraham," and he answered, "Here I am." (2) And God said, "Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you." (3) So early next morning, Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering, and he set out for the place of which God had told him. (4) On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar. (5) Then Abraham said to his servants, "You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go up there; we will worship and we will return to you." (6) Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He himself took the firestone and the knife; and the two walked off together. (7) Then Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he answered, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?" (8) And Abraham said, "God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son." And the two of them walked on together.

Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki)¹ on Genesis

22:1:2

(1) הנני HERE AM I — Such is the answer of the pious: it is an expression of meekness and readiness (Midrash Tanchuma² 1:4:22).

בראשית כ״ב:א׳-ח׳

(א) וַיָּהִי אַחַר הַדְּבַרִים הַאֶּלֶה וְהָאֵלהִים נְסֵה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיָּאמֶר אֵלֵיו אַבְרָהָם וַיָּאמֶר הּנִּני: (ב) ויאמר קחרנא את־בּנָדָ את־יִחִידָדָ אַשֵׁר־אַהַבָתַּ אֶת־יִצָּחָק וְלֵדְ־לְדָּ אֵל־אָרֵץ הַמֹּרִיָה וְהַעֵּלֵהוּ שֵׁם לְעֹלֵה עֵל אֲחָד הָהָרִים אַשֵׁר אַמֵר אָלֵידָ: (ג) וַיַּשְׁכָּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקָר וַיָּחַבשׁ אֶת־חַמֹּרוֹ וַיָּשְׁח אֶת־שָׁנֵי נְעַרֵיוֹ אָתוֹ ואָת יִצְחֵק בִּנִוֹ וַיִבַקֵּע' אַצֵי עֹלָה וַיָּקָם וַיָּלָד אֵל־הַמַּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־אַמַר־לְוֹ הַאֱלֹהִים: (ד) בַּיִּוֹם הַשִּׁלִישִּׁי וַיִּשָּׂא אַבִרָהָם אֵת־עֵינֵיו וַיַּרָא אָת־המַקוֹם מַרַחָׂק: (ה) וּיָּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אָל־ נְעָרִיו שִׁבוּ־לָכֵם פּהֹ אָם־הַחֵלוֹר וַאָנִי וְהַנַּעַר ַנְלְכָה עַד־כָּה וְנִשְׁתַּחֵוָה וְנָשִׁוּבָה אֲלֵיכֶם: (ו) ויקה אברהם את־עַצִי הַעֹלָה ויַשָּׁם על־יצָחָק בּנוֹ וַיָּקֵח בִּיַדוֹ אֶת־הַאֲשׁ וָאֶת־הַמַּאַכֵלֵת וַיֶּלְכָוּ שִׁנֵיהֵם יַחָדָו: (ז) וַיּאמר יִצִחָק אֵל־ אַבְרָהָם אַבִיוֹ וַיִּאמֶר אַבִי וַיָּאמֶר הָגָּגִי בְנֵי וּאַמֶר הַנָּה הַאָשׁ וָהַעַצִים וָאַיָה הַשֵּׂה לְעֹלָה: (ח) וַיֹּאמֶר אָבָרָהָם אֵלהָים יָרָאָה־לְּו הַשֵּׂה לְעֹלָה בְּנִי וּיּלְכָוּ שָׁנִיהֵם יחָדָו:

רש"י על בראשית כ״ב:א׳:ב׳ (א) הנני כַּךְ הִיא עֲנִיָּתָם שֶׁל חֲסִידִים, לְשׁוֹן עֲנָוָה הוּא וּלְשׁוֹן זִמּוּן:

1. What emotions characterize the two 'Hineini' responses in this section? What might Abraham be communicating about himself in each case?

2. How does Rashi's interpretation, written in 11th century France, fit with how you understand Abraham's response (or not)?

¹ Rashi, an acronym of the initials of **Ra**bbi **Sh**lomo ben Isaac, was a medieval French commentator and one of the most influential writers on the Torah and Talmud in Jewish history. Learn more at www.myjewishlearning.com/article/who-was-rashi/.

² A collection of rabbinic sermons on, discussions of, and stories about Torah, probably compiled around the 9th century. Learn more at www.myjewishlearning.com/article/midrash-tanhuma/.

Exodus 3:1-4, 11

(1) Now Moses, tending the flock of his fatherin-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, drove the flock into the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. (2) An angel of Adonai appeared to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed. (3) Moses said, "I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; why doesn't the bush burn up?" (4) When Adonai saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him out of the bush: "Moses! Moses!" He answered, "**Here I am**."

(11) But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?"

שמות ג׳:א׳-ד׳, יא

(א) וּמֹשֶׁה הָיָה רֹעֶה אֶת־צָּאן יִתְרוֹ חֹתְנוֹ כֹּהֵן מִדְיָן וַיִּנְהַג אֶת־הַצֹּאן אַתַר הַמִּדְבֶּר וַיָּכָּא אֶל־הַר הָאֶלֹהִים חֹרְבָה: (ב) וַיֵּרָא מַלְאַׁד יְהֹוָה אֵלֶיו בְּלַבַּת־אָשׁ מִתּוֹד הַסְגָה מַלְאַׁד יְהֹוָה אֵלֶיו בְּלַבַּת־אָשׁ מִתּוֹד הַסְגָה וַיִּרָא וְהַנָּה הַסְּגָה בַּעֵר בָּאֵשׁ וְהַסְגָה אֵיגָנּוּ אָבָּל: (ג) וַיִּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אָסָרָה־נָּא וְאָרְאֶה אֶבְל: (ג) וַיִּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אָסָרָה־נָּא וְאָרְאֶה הַסְּגָה: (ד) וַיִּרָא יְהָוָה כִּי סָר לְרָאוֹת וַיִּקְרָא הַסְּגָה: (ד) וַיִּרָא יְהָוָה כַּיָלָה וַיָּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מֹשֶׁה וַיָּאמֶר הַגָּנִי וַיָּאמֶר הַגָּנִי וַיָּאמֶר הַגָּנִי.

(יא) וַיָּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָאֱלהִים מִי אָבֹכִי כִּי אֵלֵך אֶל־פַּרְעֵׂה וְכִי אוֹצְיָיא אֶת־בְּגַי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרְיִם:

When he [Moses] hears his name booming forth from the Burning Bush, he is absolutely speechless. He is overwhelmed and cannot utter a word. His reticence, his insecurity, his seeming lack of confidence are all clearly in evidence. God has to call out his name again before Moses responds, showing just how human he is. Are we any different when we are called on to undertake a difficult task, one that we feel ill-prepared to take on?...[D]oes not each of us in our hearts recognize and understand Moses' fears and insecurities? We, too, feel like imposters who cannot countenance the possibility that anyone will believe us, trust us, or follow us. (Dr. Norman Cohen, *Hineini in Our Lives: Learning How to Respond to Others through 14 Biblical Texts & Personal Stories.* Jewish Lights Press, 2003)

1. What do you think allows Moses to overcome his speechlessness and fear to answer God's call?

2. When have you experienced an inability or hesitation to respond to someone's call?

Scripted Learning Experience – Session 2: Managing Expectations

Enduring Understanding: The experience of becoming a parent can fundamentally reframe one's relationships to Jewish tradition, spirituality, and community

Core Concept: The text of Eshet Chayil reminds us how much we undertake in our daily lives as parents, leading to an appreciation of our efforts and those of others.

Essential Questions:

- What are my expectations of myself and my partner in the day-to-day experience of parenthood?
- How will we recognize and appreciate each other's contributions to our family life?
- What elements of Jewish tradition can be models or inspiration for expressing gratitude to each other?
- 1) Anchor: Set Induction (10 minutes)
 - a) Opening check-in [this will be the same for each session to emphasize ritual and group norms]
 - b) Read from handout -- Mamaleh Knows Best quote #1: Here's a great summary of what I've termed 'Judgy Parent Syndrome'. Maybe you can relate to the author's experience.

"I need to remind myself sometimes that if one is a human walking this planet, someone, at some point, somewhere, is going to hold up something one does as proof that one sucks at parenting. An illustration: I live across the street from the Hells Angels [a notoriously tough motorcycle gang] clubhouse. When [my daughter] Josie was a few months old, I wheeled her out for a walk, and a giant, tattooed, bearded man fixing his hog glared at me and yelled, 'HE NEEDS A HAT!'" – *Marjorie Ingall*, Mamaleh Knows Best, *p34*

c) Ask for learners to share stories of similar experiences of having their parenting choices judged by others (i.e. choosing to work outside the home, or not;

eating/not eating organic; sleep training/not sleep training; breastfeeding/not breastfeeding)

- d) Another source of judgement on how we're doing as parents is social media. Ask: how does the actual experience of parenting compare to the images/posts you've seen online? (posts always show perfectly groomed kids, immaculate house, wellcoiffed and rested parents, etc but my kids are always crying and I'm exhausted).
- e) Explain: Today we want to acknowledge and examine the pressures and expectations that we take on or absorb from the surrounding culture regarding what a "good parent" looks like, and we'll look to Jewish text and other sources in thinking about how we respond to those pressures.

**Note: while this discussion often becomes about moms/women, we want to be inclusive and think about all parent/caregivers

- 2) Add: Eshet Chayil, Proverbs 31:10-31 (10 minutes)
 - a) Distribute handouts and give a brief overview of the poem Eshet Chayil and the tradition of reciting it on Friday evening at the Shabbat table and at women's funerals
 - i) Explain: This text is an unattributed acrostic poem that comes from the final chapter of the book of Proverbs, which is classified as a "wisdom" book of the Bible; Leonard Kravitz and Kerry Olitzky write in their commentary on Proverbs that, "Of all the books of the Bible, Proverbs more than any other deals with an understanding of the world and approach to life that comes from reflections based on human experience...it reflects the broader wisdom literature of the ancient Near East."
 - ii) The tradition of reciting it on Friday evening as part of the Shabbat ritual is believed to have originated with Kabbalists, Jewish mystics in the 17th century who understood the woman described as an allegory for the Shekhina, or feminine aspect of God
 - iii) In some observant homes, a husband recites this to his wife after blessing their children
 - iv) It is also sometimes recited at women's funerals as a tribute to her contributions to the community

- b) Ask learners to take turns reading the text in English couplets.
 - (1) Ask: What terms here do you find confusing? Troubling?
 - (2) Ask: What are your initial impressions of the woman described in the poem? (she's really busy, no one really does all this stuff)
 - (3) Ask: What does it mean that she is "like a merchant fleet"? (provides needed items for her family)
 - (4) Ask: Women in ancient Israel were not generally permitted to buy land;what might be meant by "She sets her mind on an estate and acquires it"?(she does a lot of negotiating behind the scenes, trusted by her husband)
 - (5) Ask: From a modern perspective, what might be reasons that some people find this text and tradition problematic? (familial roles, same-gender couples, etc)
 - (6) Ask: What in this text do you find interesting and/or refreshing?
- c) Challenges with the text are important to acknowledge and consider, but they don't preclude us from finding/creating meaning around the idea of having a ritual that recognizes an individual's or group's contribution to our daily experience. In fact, it opens some important discussions about how we shape our expectations and acknowledge the many aspects of our lives that someone else might be taking care of for us! Or that we're taking care of for others. With that in mind, let's look at some other ways of reading/understanding/using this text
- 3) Apply: Reinterpreting Translation (10 minutes)
 - a) Present examples (on handout) of other uses of חיל elsewhere in the Bible
 - i) Ask: How can translating the idea of חיל differently (as strength/triumph, etc) change the way we view this idea? (less patronizing, viewing traditionally female roles in a more empowering way)
 - ii) Ask: How can reading this text as a celebration of the many, many things that women/parents/partners accomplish change our view? (allows us to recognize contributions not always seen as valuable/real work, acknowledges that 'it takes a village')
 - b) Creating New Traditions

- i) Feminist scholar Wendy Zierler writes about her own family's traditions:
 - (1) "We all know, of course, that it is best not to reserve one's appreciation for that ultimate occasion. Instead, why not sing it each week to others as well as ourselves? This past Friday night, after completing a draft of this essay as well as a dizzying array of other home-related tasks, I giddily joined in the singing of Eshet Hayil, adding in my own extemporaneous musical list of my accomplishments and those of the people around me-my kids had been remarkably cooperative that Friday, my husband survived another week on Wall Street and had managed to get home just in time for candle lighting-to the praised attainments of yesteryear. A better way to begin my Shabbat, who can find?" (http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/howto-read-eshet-hayil/#)
- ii) Ask: How might you re-write the text to reflect your own experience?
- 4) Apply: Gratitude Exercise (20 minutes)
 - a) Briefly Review Mussar (Morinis: "Mussar refers to a spiritual perspective and also to a discipline of transformative practices", means "correction" or "instruction", offers a Jewish "map of the inner life and a body of practices we can employ to transform our inner ways") and the value/middah of hakarat ha'tov – practice recognizing and articulating the good
 - b) Provide learners with paper and writing utensils and instruct them to create a list of what they're grateful for
 - c) Provide art supplies to make a version of this gratitude list suitable for display and ask learners to decide somewhere to put it up at home that's visible every day
 - d) Ask learners to also decide on a time each week to review and add to the list as a family
- 5) Away: Journaling (5 minutes)
- 6) Away: Closing Iyyun (5 minutes)

Proverbs 31:10-31

FIOVEIDS 51.10-51
10. What a rare find is a capable wife!
Her worth is far beyond that of rubies.
11. Her husband puts his confidence in her,
And lacks no good thing.
12. She is good to him, never bad,
All the days of her life.
13. She looks for wool and flax,
And sets her hand to them with a will.
14. She is like a merchant fleet,
Bringing her food from afar.
15. She rises while it is still night,
And supplies provisions for her household,
the daily fare of her maids.
16. She sets her mind on an estate and acquires it;
She plants a vineyard by her own labors.
17. She girds herself with strength,
And performs her tasks with vigor.
18. She sees that her business thrives;
Her lamp never goes out at night.
19. She sets her hand to the distaff ⁶ ;
Her fingers work the spindle.
20. She gives generously to the poor;
Her hands are stretched out to the needy.
21. She is not worried for her household because of snow,
For her whole household is dressed in crimson.
22. She makes covers for herself;
Her clothing is linen and purple.
23. Her husband is prominent in the gates,
As he sits among the elders of the land.
24. She makes cloth and sells it,
And offers a girdle to the merchant.
25. She is clothed with strength and splendor;
She looks to the future cheerfully.
26. Her mouth is full of wisdom,
Her tongue with kindly teaching.
27. She oversees the activities of her household
And never eats the bread of idleness.
28. Her children declare her happy;
Her husband praises her,
29. "Many women have done well,
But you surpass them all."
30. Grace is deceptive, Beauty is illusory;
It is for her fear of ADONAI that a woman is to be praised.
31. Extol her for the fruit of her hand,
And let her works praise her in the gates.

אֵשֶׁת־**חַיִּל** מִי יִמְצָא ורַחֹק מִפּנִינִים מְכְרַה: בַּטַח בַּהּ לֵב בַּעְלָה ַוֹשָׁלַל לא יֵיחָסָר: גמלתהו טוב ולא־רע כּל יְמֵי חֵיִּיה: דרשה צמר ופשתים ַוֹתַעשׂ בִּחֱפֵץ כַּפֵּיהָ: הַיתָה כָּאֵנִיּוֹת סוֹחֵר מִמֶּרְחֵק תַּבִיא לַחִמַה: ותַקַם | בַּעוֹד לַיַלָה ותתן טֵרֵף לְבֵיתָה ַוֹח**ָק** לְנַעֲרֹתֵיהָ: זממה שִׁדָה ותקחהו ַמִפְּרִי כַפֵּיהָ נטע [נָטָעָה] כֵּרֵם: חַגְרָה בִעוֹז מָתָנֵיהָ וֹתָאַמֵּץ זרעוֹתֵיהַ: טָעַמָה כִּי־טוֹב סַחָרָה לא־יִכְבֵּה בליל [ב<u>ַל</u>ִיְלָה] נֵרֶה: יִדֵיהָ שִׁלְחָה בַכִּישׁוֹר וֹכַפֵּיהַ תַּמְכוּ פַלֶרְ: כַּפַּה פַּרשַׂה לֵעַנִי וַיִדִיהַ שִׁלְחֵה לַאֶבִיוֹן: לא־תִירָא לְבֵיתָה מִשָּׁלֵג ַכִּי כָל־בֵּיתָ לָבֵשׁ שָׁנֵים: מַרְבַדִּים עַשִׂתַה־לַה שֵׁשׁ ואַרְגַּמַן לְבוּשָׁה: נוֹדָע בַּשָּׁעָרִים בַּעְלָה בִּשְׁבִתּוֹ עִם־זִקְנֵי־אָרֵץ: סַדִין עַשִׂתָה וּתִמכֹר וֹחֵגוֹר נַתְנָה לַכָּנַעֲנֵי: עז־והַדַר לְבוּשָׁה וֹתִשִּׁחַק לִיוֹם אַחֲרוֹן: פּיהַ פַּתָחַה בְחַכָמָה וִתְוֹרַת־חֵסֵׁד עַל־לְשׁוֹנַהּ: צופיה הליכות ביתה וְלֵחֵם עַצְׁלוּת לָא תֹאכֵל: קמו בַנִיה וֵיאַשָּׁרוּה בַּעְלָה וֵיהַלְלָה: רַבּוֹת בַּנוֹת עֲשׂוּ חֵיל וֹאַת עַלִית עַל־כָּלֵנָה: שֵׁקֵר הַחֵן והֵבֵל הַיָּפִי אשָה יִרִאַת־יִהוָוֹה הִיא תִתְהַלֵּל: תִּנוּ־לָה מִפְּרִי יָדֵיָה ויהַלְלוּהָ בַשָּׁעָרִים מַעֲשֵׂיהָ:

⁶ a stick or spindle onto which wool or flax is wound for spinning

Possible Meanings of חיל (Chayil)

And if you know any capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock. (Gen. 47:6)	וְאִם־יָדַׁעְתָּ וְיֶשׁ־בָּם [`] אַנְשֵׁי־ חֵׁיִל וְשַׂמְתָּם שָׂרֵי מִקְגָה עַל־אֲשֶׁר־לִי:
The stout-hearted were despoiled; they were in a stupor; the bravest of men could not lift a hand. (Psalm 76:6)	אָשְׁתּוֹלְלוּ ו אַתִּיבִי לֵב נָמְוּ שְׁנָתָם וְלא־מָצְאָוּ כָל־ אַנְשֵׁי־ ַתְיִל יְדֵיהֶם:
The tents of the victorious resound with joyous shouts of deliverance, "The right hand of ADONAI is triumphant !" (Psalm 118:15)	קוֹל ا רִנָּה וִישׁוּעָׂה בְּאָהֲלֵי צַדִּיקֵים יְמִין יְהוָה עֵשָׁה חִיִל :

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"I need to remind myself sometimes that if one is a human walking this planet, someone, at some point, somewhere, is going to hold up something one does as proof that one sucks at parenting. An illustration: I live across the street from the Hells Angels [a notoriously tough motorcycle gang] clubhouse. When [my daughter] Josie was a few months old, I wheeled her out for a walk, and a giant, tattooed, bearded man fixing his hog glared at me and yelled, 'HE NEEDS A HAT!'"

- Marjorie Ingall, Mamaleh Knows Best, p34

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"In Western culture, no matter what your faith or perspective, you're set up to worry that you're failing all the time...You're supposed to have a life of your own but be present at every dentist appointment and school play (but then not brag about it). You're supposed to look gorgeous and put-together and skinny (but you're not supposed to be vain or try too hard). You're supposed to be nurturing (without ever descending into smothering territory). Perpetual perfect is impossible. 'Good enough' is more than good enough." – *Marjorie Ingall,* Mamaleh Knows Best, *p44*

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"Rather than take the text as a description of Supermom, it seems to me, the song [Eshet Chayil] serves to connect us with the *universal* image of wife and mother. After all, the passage has been interpreted as a metaphor for the *Shechina*, the Sabbath, the Torah and the soul. Doesn't it make sense that the acrostic, spanning all twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, alludes not to one woman's all-encompassing virtues (Supermom) but to our collective identity (Everywoman)?"

- Shimona Tzukernik, Exchanging Supermom for Everywoman, in More Precious Than Pearls, Sinai Live Books, 2012

"[I]n reality, I'm not doing it all. I'm neglecting many, many things—cooking, cleaning, phone calls to family and friends—because there simply isn't enough time. I'm trying really hard to give my kids the attention they need, even if it means letting the laundry pile up or foregoing freelance assignments I'd otherwise be inclined to jump on. And I'd rather acknowledge my circumstances and limitations rather than set unrealistic expectations that can only end up making me, and potentially other mom friends, feel inadequate. I'd rather tell it like it is."

••

- Maurie Backman, http://www.kveller.com/thanks-to-my-mom-friend-who-made-my-day-by-keeping-it-real/

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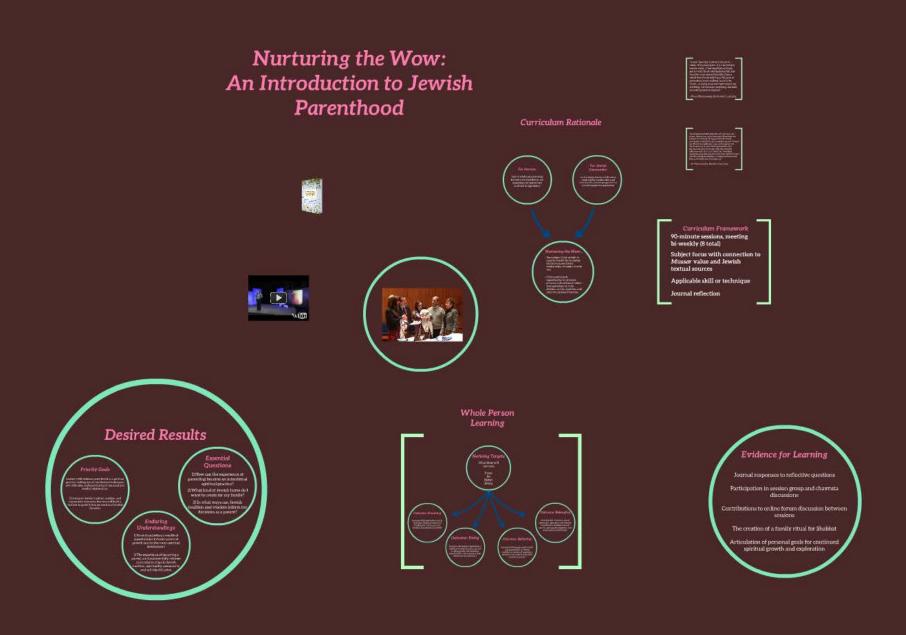
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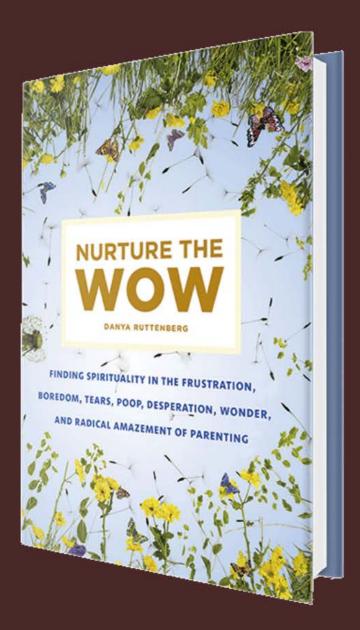
Appendix: Prezi Presentation Slides

Nurturing the Wow: An Introduction to Jewish Parenthood











Curriculum Rationale





For Parents:

Lots of advice on parenting, but not a lot available on the experience of parenthood and how to approach it

For Jewish Community:

Lack of programming to help young couples define familial values and choices with a Jewish perspective is a missed engagement opportunity

Nurturing the Wow...

- Encourages future parents to consider family life, including childrearing and family relationships, through a Jewish lens
- Offers participants

 opportunities to articulate
 personal and communal values
 and aspirations for their
 children, and to create ties with
 other young Jewish families

"A new 'learning' is about to be born -rather, it has been born. It is a learning in reverse order. A learning that no longer starts in the Torah and leads into life, but the other way round: from life, from a world that knows nothing of the Law, or pretends to know nothing, back to the Torah....in being Jews we must not give up anything, not renounce anything, but lead everything back to Judaism"

--Franz Rosenzweig, On Jewish Learning

"Reading a sacred text demands self-reflection. No matter who we are and or how much knowledge we bring to the moment of engagement with Torah, meaning is created if we open ourselves up to it. Though we all may be at different stages on the journey of Torah study, each of us has the potential to find personal meaning in the text. And since the text addresses each of us according to our individual capacities and where we are in our lives, the biblical text may be read differently by us at different times in our lives and in different circumstances."

-- Dr. Norman Cohen, Hineini in Our Lives

Curriculum Framework 90-minute sessions, meeting bi-weekly (8 total)

Subject focus with connection to *Mussar* value and Jewish textual sources

Applicable skill or technique

Journal reflection

Desired Results

Priority Goals

Learners will embrace parenthood as a spiritual practice, making use of mindfulness techniques, self-reflection, and examination of personal and familial relationships.

Drawing on Jewish tradition, wisdom, and community resources, learners will build a 'toolbox' to guide future personal and familial decisions.

Enduring Understandings

1) Parenthood offers a wealth of opportunities to foster personal growth and further one's spiritual development

2) The experience of becoming a parent can fundamentally reframe one's relationships to Jewish tradition, spirituality, community, and self-identification

Essential Questions

1) How can the experience of parenting become an intentional spiritual practice?

2) What kind of Jewish home do I want to create for my family?

3) In what ways can Jewish tradition and wisdom inform my decisions as a parent?

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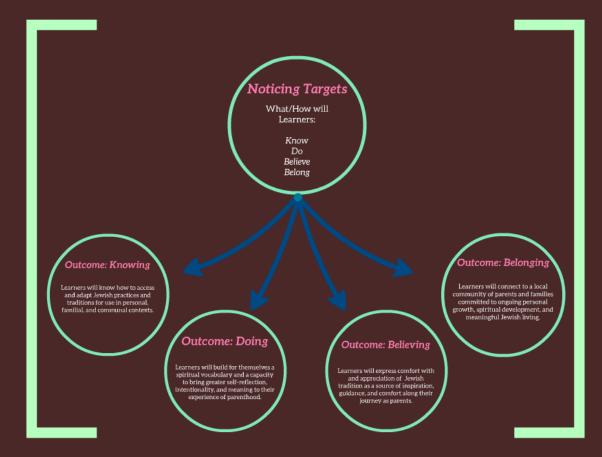
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Whole Person Learning



Whole Person Learning

Noticing Targets

What/How will Learners:

> Know Do Believe Belong

Outcome: Knowing

Learners will know how to access and adapt Jewish practices and traditions for use in personal, familial, and communal contexts.



Outcome: Doing

Learners will build for themselves a spiritual vocabulary and a capacity to bring greater self-reflection, intentionality, and meaning to their experience of parenthood.

Outcome: Believing

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Learners will express comfort with and appreciation of Jewish tradition as a source of inspiration, guidance, and comfort along their journey as parents.

Outcome: Belonging

Learners will connect to a local community of parents and families committed to ongoing personal growth, spiritual development, and meaningful Jewish living.



Evidence for Learning

Journal responses to reflective questions

Participation in session group and chavruta discussions

Contributions to online forum discussion between sessions

The creation of a family ritual for Shabbat

Articulation of personal goals for continued spiritual growth and exploration

Sample Lesson Activity

בָּרוּדְ אַתָּה יִיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶדְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשְׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוְּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדָבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech haolam, asher kid'shanu bemitzvotav vetzivanu la'asok b'divrei torah.

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, who calls us to holiness through mitzvot, commanding us to engage in the study of Torah.

Nurturing the Wow: An Introduction to Jewish Parenthood

