

Journeys through Physical Midrash:
An Exploration of Jewish Identity, Narrative, and Storytelling

Ira Rosenberg

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion
School of Rabbinic Studies
Los Angeles, California

1/28/19
Adviser: Dr. Madelyn Katz

Journeys through Physical Midrash: An Exploration of Jewish Identity, Narrative, and Storytelling

Contents

I. Introduction.....	3
II. Jacob Becoming Yisrael.....	6
III. The Wandering Jews: The Israelites from Egypt to Sinai.....	10
IV. Leviticus and The Priests.....	14
V. Exile and Return: The Story of Ezra Nehemia	18
VI. Esther: Standing Up For What You Believe In	22
VII. Jonah and Forgiveness: Family Program for Yom Kippur.....	26
VIII. Choni the Circle Maker: A Tale for Tu B'shevat.....	30
IX. A Physical Midrash of Early Zionism.....	33
X. Abraham Joshua Heschel and Prophets.....	36

Introduction

As a camper at URJ Camp Harlam I could not wait to receive the weekly schedule on Monday morning. Our counselor would post it in the doorway and we would all run up and see what the week's "evening programs" were. The evening program was always a highlight. Somehow, we would run around camp, using our imagination and creativity, and come away transformed by the experience.

As an educator I have always tried to create lessons and programs in the mold of the camp evening programs I grew up with. In the summer of 2007 I participated in a camp training for third year counselors at the Foundation for Jewish Camps. While I was there I participated in a program that brought camp style programming with Jewish texts alive for me. The program focused on the story of Jacob and brought us on the journey with him. As a small group we simulated the life of Jacob through physical activities that supplemented Jacob's narrative. It allowed me to connect with Jacob's journey in a way that I have never connected with text.

Later that summer I brought a version of that program to the rest of the camp staff. The staff participated fully and connected with a piece of text and its message in a way that was unique to how it was previously taught at camp. It brought the group closer together, allowed them to learn from one another, and engaged participants with Jewish text that they otherwise may have not connected with.

In the years to follow I experimented running this program or creating new programs in a similar style, in a variety of different Jewish educational settings. It has largely been met with success and has encouraged me to create more foundational Jewish stories using this format. In creating these programs I have chosen to engage with a key text or selection of texts, read

through the commentaries and scholarship on each text, and create a narrative that is accessible and lively for the participants. In many ways I am offering my own *drash*, my own perspective, on what these texts and narratives can teach us. That, combined with the physical nature of these programs, has led me to the title of Physical Midrash.

Gary Porton defines midrash as, “a type of literature, oral or written, which stands in direct relationship to a fixed, canonical text, considered to be authoritative and the revealed word of God by the *midrashist* and his audience, and in which this canonical text is explicitly cited or clearly alluded to.”¹ My goal in creating the Physical Midrash programs are to offer a unique perspective on the specific narratives that are instrumental to the Jewish identity formation of our Jewish youth.

The scholar, Ivan G. Marcus, in discussing the power of *midrash* and narrative in identity shaping, writes:

“It is to penetrate the history of symbolic representations that claim to express a collective memory of an individual leader, local community, region or global Jewish experience. In some ways, the importance and power of the experience being represented requires a near mythic vehicle for it to be remembered and transmitted effectively. Not nitty-gritty details... are the stuff of collective memory. Rather, heroic stories of foundings, conquests, rescue, self-sacrifice are a collective memory is based on a collective forgetting of everything but one considered theme; the spotlight requires a blacked out stage.”²

It is my hope that Physical Midrash programs can be used in a variety of different formats and adopted for use depending on setting, age group, and program goals. What each Physical Midrash program includes is a narrative and physical simulation of a specific Jewish text, story,

¹ Gary G. Porton, “Defining Midrash,” in *The Study of Ancient Judaism, Vol. I: Mishnah, Midrash, Siddur*, ed. Jacob Neusner (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1981), 62.

² Ivan G. Marcus, “History, Story, and Collective Memory”, *The Midrashic Imagination: Jewish Exegesis, Thought, and History*, ed. Michael Fishbane (New York: SUNY Press, 1993), 258.

or period in history. Each program includes learning goals, suggestions on setting, program materials, and recommended age group. These initial 10 programs were created with the Jewish calendar in mind and focus on texts and narratives that are foundational to Jewish adolescents learning as well as texts that are commonly taught in educational settings. It is my hope to keep writing and expanding the library of Physical Midrash.

Jacob Becoming Yisrael

Text: Genesis 25:15 - 33

Scope of Program:

This program is designed for 4th-6th graders, but can be adapted for any age group. This program will focus specifically on the life of Jacob. It will explore Jacob's struggles and Jacob's relationship with God. Ultimately, it is a story of transformation. The story will be told through the experience of Jacob.

Objectives:

1. Gain an understanding of the life of Jacob.
2. Experience the trials, tribulations, and transformation of Jacob's life.
3. Humanize the life of Jacob and understanding of one of the Patriarchs.
4. Draw understandings of Jacob's life in relationship to your own.

Facilitator note:

Participants should be sitting in a circle, in groups of about 6-8. If the class size is larger, they should run the program in parallel universes with a facilitator for each group.

The facilitator will read through the Jacob narrative and facilitate the various activities throughout the narrative:

Facilitator reads...

I am going to ask everyone to spread out and to lie down on your back. Make sure that your hands are by your sides and that you do not have any tension in your body. **(Wait a couple of minutes for everyone to get comfortable and quite)** The program that you are about to participate in is an extremely physical experience. It will involve vigorous physical activity and should be taken seriously. If, at any point, you feel uncomfortable or do not want to participate, please feel free to sit out.

With this being said I am going to ask everyone to close their eyes. Focus on your breathing; breath in... and breath out... continue to do this throughout this experience. Think back to 5,000 years ago... long before your time here living in _____, long before the creation of the Jewish State of Israel and the Holocaust, long before the Jewish pogroms in Russia and the massive persecution of the Jewish people across Europe, long before the Diaspora of the Jewish people and the destruction of our Temple in Jerusalem, and long before the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt. This story starts with our Patriarchs. Once God made his covenant with Abraham, that a great nation will be made from your kin, the tradition of passing on this birthright has gone

from father to son for centuries. Abraham passed his birthright down to Isaac, which brings us to the story of Jacob...

Rebekah went to inquire of the lord, and the lord answered:

“Two nations are in your womb, two separate peoples shall issue from your body; one people shall be mightier than the other, and the old shall serve the young.”

You are Jacob. You are the son of Isaac and Rebekah. You are the grandson of Abraham and Sarah. You are the forefather of a great nation. And it is here, Jacob, that you are born. Stand up Jacob, wake up!

At this time the facilitator(s) will go around and tap each participant on the shoulder, telling them to wake up. They will then start running to get things going. Run about 5 laps around the room. After running, bring it back in and form a circle, shoulder to shoulder, with your group.

The facilitator continues...

Jacob as you are born you will go through a great struggle. In your mother's womb, you and your twin brother, Esau, are constantly fighting with each other. You must break out away from Esau, Jacob!

The students will get into a tightly formed circle. One student is in the middle and needs to try and push through. This will continue until each student has gone.

The next activity involves a looser circle. Two students will stand in the middle and try to push each other out of the circle. This symbolizes the struggle between Jacob and Esau. Have the students lie back down and continue to breathe.

The facilitator continues... During the birth of the two boys, Esau came out first, and was covered with a red, hairy beard. Grasped to Esau's heel was Jacob's hand, as he would not give up the fight which started in the womb. The two boys continued to struggle throughout their childhood. Esau was drawn to his father, as they would often go on great hunts and provide food for their family. Jacob was drawn to his mother, and would help her out with cooking and all household chores. As the boys grew up they grew further and further apart. One day, when the boys were much older, Esau returns to camp extremely famished from a long journey hunting. Immediately smelling the stew that you are cooking, Esau begs for you to give him some. However, as the smart, mischievous man that you are, you decide this is a perfect opportunity for you to trade a warm meal for the birthright which was to be given to Esau, as the oldest son. Because Esau is so famished he has no choice but to accept.

You both continue to grow and your father, Isaac, becomes very old and ill. When it is time for him to pass on his birthright, your mother, Rebekah, decides to hold to her promise to trick your

father into blessing you. Rebekah dresses you up in animal furs and you ensue to trick your father into thinking that you are Esau. The birthright has now been passed down to you, as the youngest son! When Esau finds out about this trickery he immediately runs after you and tries to track you down. Your mother tells you to run away, and that is exactly what you do... RUN JACOB!!!

The students will stand up and should start running laps. Run for about three minutes, keep pushing the kids screaming that Esau is right behind and you must run fast. Throughout this time, have them gather together and hide and then continue running and screaming that Esau is right behind them.

While the students are running the narrator continues...

Jacob you are very tired and need to rest. Lie down, Jacob, and rest for the night. Breathe in... and breathe out... continue to breathe like this for a couple of minutes. As you are resting you fall asleep and begin to dream. In this dream you awake next to a ladder that is infinitely going up towards the sky. An angel calls down and offers you a blessing. "I am the lord, the lord of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac: The ground on which you are lying I will assign to you and to your offspring" Now get up Jacob and continue on your journey.

Go find your uncle Laban, for he will be able to help you! Jacob, you finally arrive at a well where you have seen the most beautiful girl in the entire world. You immediately know that you want to marry this girl and begin to plead with Laban. Laban tells you that you must work seven years before you can marry Rachel. Now get up and work!

Jacob will run laps constituting 7 years. In past, I have done 3 laps for a year, but you really want the participants to tired and get a workout. Throughout the laps, make the participants "jump over rocks" and "duck and roll under logs" as an extra way for them to work out. After running 7 laps, have the students lie back down and breathe.

Jacob, it is your wedding day. After seven long, hard, hot years of shepherding, you are FINALLY ready to marry the women of your dreams. The seven years flew by because of the end goal of marrying your beautiful bride, Rachel. You finally arrive at the *chuppah*, watching your bride walk down and come to you, and you lift the her veil to finally see her beautiful face, and OH NO! It's not Rachel, but in turn it's her older sister, Leah!! YOU HAVE BEEN TRICKED! Angrily, you approach Laban and he says that you must work another seven years before you are able to call Rachel your bride. So that's what you do!

Jacob continues to work for seven more years then lies back down.

Jacob, after seven additional years of hard work, you have now reached your second wedding day with Rachel. But you have certainly changed since the last time you were here. Over these past seven years you started a family with Leah. You now have children of your own. You have also reflected greatly on your life. Remembering all of the times you have fought with your

brother, Esau, stealing his birthright, betraying your father. You realize that you will have to confront your demons sooner than later. You remember your dream with the angel and how she proclaimed that a great nation will be made from your people. But just as your mind drifts, your beautiful bride walks into your arms and you finally get to marry Rachel! After your wedding, a messenger appears to you and tells you that your brother Esau wants to see you. You gather all of your belongings and bring with you a whole camp of people and things. Afraid for your encounter with Esau, you tell your family that you must go without them and send them off to your home. It is here where you lie down to rest. In a daze of sleep, you begin to wrestle with a man...

Students will be lined up on one end of the room and will be told to crawl to the other end. However, in doing this, they must try and prevent everyone else by grabbing their ankles. Remind the students to be careful of kicking each other in the face. As they are doing this activity and each participant has someone's ankle in hand, state...

Jacob, you wrestled with an Angel and won! While you grab the angel and have it in your hands, you demand that you are blessed. The angel states, *"Jacob, your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with being divine and human and have prevailed."* And it is here Jacob where you are blessed. Of course, you are left with a limp from your struggle with the Angel, one that will always be with you. After your encounter with the Angel, you have a very peaceful visit with your brother Esau. You reminisce on the old times and can finally live in peace.

Have the students return to their circle and discuss:

1. How are you all feeling right now? Physically? Emotionally? How were you feeling throughout this journey?
2. Summarize the Jacob story and explain what kind of struggles he went through. Name the struggles of Jacob.
3. How did Jacob overcome his struggles? What were some characteristics of the Jacob narrative that made Jacob stronger or made Jacob weaker? What kept him going during all of his rough patches?
4. What are some of your struggles or fears?
5. What are some things that you do to help overcome these struggles?
6. How did you overcome your struggles today during this activity? What are some things that you guys did to help each other out?
7. How can you do a better job of overcoming your struggles in the future?

The Wandering Jews: The Israelites from Egypt to Sinai

Text: Exodus

Supplies:

1. Plastic cups
2. Chairs / cones / tarps (something to use to simulate “sea of reeds” crossing)
3. Timbrels, shakers, other instruments

Scope of Program:

This program is designed for 4th-6th graders, but can be adapted for any age. This specific program will introduce the participants to the narrative of the Israelite being a slave in Egypt to becoming a free people and receiving the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. It is suggested to use this program on Shavuot. The narrative is told through the perspective of a common Israelite.

Objectives:

1. To learn the main narrative of the holiday of Shavuot.
2. To experience the journey of the Israelite people from slavery to being a free people.
3. To come together as a community.

Instructions for program set-up prior to beginning:

1. This program is best if used in multiple rooms for the different settings. Read through the script before hand and determine where each of the different scenes will take place. Feel free to set up / design the room to resemble the specific scene.
2. Set up the “Sea of Reeds” crossing before hand. It is suggested to take a bunch of chairs or cones (or anything else you can find) to set up a crossing that allows the participants to go from a “narrow to a wide open place”. Get creative!
3. Read the script a couple of times beforehand so you can incorporate the activities and movements with ease.

Narrator Begins:

Have everyone close their eyes and say, Imagine that you are living wayyyy back in the day, about 4,000 years ago. You are living as a slave in Egypt. You remember hearing the stories about how your great, great, great Uncle Joseph was once the second in command of all Egypt. How he brought your family from Canaan to Egypt to escape the famine. Those were the good old days. Now, 300 years later, you’ve grown from 300 free guests to 600,000 slaves. **(Have students stand up and act out “the work”. As the instructor you lead and do the movements with them. Have them march around in a circle pretending to “work the field”, etc. Repeat this for a couple of minutes).** Day in and day out you work. You work building giant structures, making food and serving at banquets, and working in the fields. Being a slave is all you know.

Now open up your eyes. It's time to work. In front of you are 12 red cups. Your task this day is to construct these cups into a pyramid. However, you're a slave, so it can never be too easy. You must build this pyramid with your feet, and only your feet.

Activity:

In groups of 2-3, participants will build a pyramid out of 12 (or however many we have) cups. They can only use their feet to build this pyramid. If you want, feel free to randomly knock it down if they are not following the roles. The goal is to make them feel the struggle of being a slave, to some extent. After the activity have them lie back down and close their eyes.

Instructor notes:

If you want, create "the plagues" so that you can incorporate them in this part of the narrative. Staff members can simulate being frogs jumping through the group, or through paper "locusts" into the crowd. Get creative!

Narrator continues...

You're tired of being a slave. You've heard of this guy, Moses, a former Egyptian who claims he is one of you. You've attended one of his gatherings, where he is claiming that he will set us free. That we deserve to go to the Promised Land of our God. You remember the promise which was passed from generation to generation, how God will make a great nation out of our people, and deliver us to the Promised Land. But you laugh along with everyone else. You think, "We can't be a free people, we're just slaves." However, day after day, you see miraculous things happen... frogs jumping all over the land, the rivers turning into blood, darkness and locusts. And every day, you believe a little more. **Walk the group to a door way and pretend the paint the doorposts.** Moses claims that we need to all sacrifice a lamb, and paint our doors with blood. You feel scared. Something big is going to happen. Everyone gathers in their huts and a large shadow passes over the entire city. All of a sudden you hear shouting, "WE'RE FINALLY FREE! PACK YOUR BAGS, YOU HAVE 5 MINUTES TO LEAVE." You grab your things, have enough time to make some flat bread, matzah, and begin to run to the crowd.

Instruct the group to get up and start lightly jogging. Jog in a circle for 30 seconds and keep yelling out, "You're tired, and thirsty and hungry, and scared." Stop the group and say...

Instructors note:

The Sea of Reeds should be set up before hand. If you have a ball pit, this could also work!

All of a sudden you stop in front of the Sea of Reeds. You look behind you and see the large Egyptian army approaching. You are scared! You scream out, "You left me to die here, in the wilderness! I surely would have rather have been a slave in Egypt." All of a sudden Moses instructs us to walk into the water. We're terrified but do as we are told. The water gets up to our knees, and then our waist, then shoulders, and finally, as the water covers our head, it begins to

split in two and we are able to cross! When we get to the other side, we see our leader Miriam, bursting out into song and dance.

Activity:

Pass out timbrels, tambourines, shakers, etc. and lead the students in song! We suggest singing a Mi Chamocha and then going into Miriam's song by Debbie Friedman.

Activity:

Participants will crawl through tables or chairs going from a narrow place to a wide place. After everyone crawls through, continue reading.

Narrator continues...

You have just witnessed a miraculous thing! Moses instructs us to keep walking, and that is what we do. Walking is all we do! For 49 days we walk and walk and walk. Day in and day out we walk in the hot sun. We complain that we need water, and God provides us with water. We complain that we need food, and God provides us with food. All we do is complain, yet we are always taken care of. We begin to believe.

We finally arrive at this large mountain. Moses instructs us to wait at the base while he goes up to talk to God. One day passes, two days pass, three, four, five. Ten days go by and you begin to get scared. Where did Moses go? Why isn't he back yet? What are we to do?! Someone proposes this crazy idea. "I've seen communities worship a large golden calf and good things have happened to them. Maybe we should give it a try!" After being scared and unsure of what is going on, you see people taking off their gold jewelry and begin melting it down. All of a sudden they begin to construct a golden calf and worship it.

Activity :

With a stack of cups, participants will build their own golden calf. As they are building, continue the story

Narrator continues...

Staff member should simulate being Moses coming in with the Ten Commandments.

As you are witnessing this act, you see Moses coming down the mountain, holding something in his hands. He's getting closer and closer, and getting more distraught as he sees what is happening. After being up on the mountain for 40 days, Moses is angry. He throws the tablets down and yells at the community. "How could you have done this while I left?! Have you no faith in our God? The God that led us out of Egypt, provided for us miracles, and food, and water. Now I must go back up and right this wrong." After another 40 days, Moses finally returns with the second set of commandments. And it is here... where our peoplehood begins.

Questions to discuss:

1. What was it like to be a slave? What was it like to be free?
2. How did the levels of responsibility differ? In what ways were they the same?
3. What was it like to crawl through a narrow place and exit into a wide space?
4. Where in your life do you feel enslaved? How can you bring more freedom?
5. How did this experience affect the Israelites?

Leviticus and The Priests

Text: Leviticus

Scope of Program:

This program is designed for 5th-7th grade students learning about the Book of Leviticus. This specific program will introduce them to the priests. The narration will focus on one of Aaron's sons and his experience as a new priest.

Objectives:

1. Gain an understanding of the priestly cult and their role in Israelite society.
2. Experience the basic facilitation of the sacrificial system.
3. Participate in the priestly ordination and feel "elevated" by the experience.
4. Humanize the role of the priests and imagine some of their feelings in this moment.
5. Draw understandings for 2018.

Materials:

1. Print out of offerings parts.
2. Oil / lotion.
3. Red paint.
4. An altar.
5. Robes and headdresses for Priests.
6. Headband or breastplates

Pre-program notes:

Have the room set up with all of the sacrificial supplies on one table and a gigantic altar at the center of the room. The floors should be covered in tarps.

Facilitator narrates...

We were all so new at this. It feels like we had just left Egypt yet here we are. We have come a long way from the days in Egypt. When Uncle Moses came into our lives it energized us all. He promised us freedom and now we are experiencing what freedom is. Our father has taken up the role of high priests, and he has demanded that we observe and assist with all his tasks. When we were in Egypt we were working the land, now we are speaking to God. Our task is significant... facilitate ritual offerings to communicate with God and connect our people. Moses has been taking us through a crash course... this is how you do the Olah offering, here is how you facilitate the Mincha, the Shelamim. We go step by step through each offering until it is perfect. When the stakes are this high, when we are connecting with God, there is no room for error.

Activity (Offering Construction)

Participants will receive an instruction guide of the different offerings and how to facilitate each of the different offerings on a ritual. The bolded text in parentheses are suggestions of how this activity can take place, but feel free to get creative and make it your own!

Facilitator continues...

We could feel that something big was in the air. For the first time God has commanded Uncle Mo to speak to us directly. We were told that we needed to get changed into these special garments... made out of the same material as the tabernacle. When we put it on for the first time, it felt magical! The fire on the altar was burning with fury. We were told that we needed to go to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. As we got closer and closer we could feel the spirit in the air. All of the tribal elders had gathered around. We brought with us our anointing oils, bulls, rams, and unleavened bread. All of a sudden Moses called out, "This is what God has commanded to be done!" **(As facilitator reads go through the rituals)** Moses asked us to come forward and he washed us with water **(have participants wash hands and face)** girded us with sash **(Put some oil / lotion on hands)** clothed us with robes **(Have students put on robes)** and placed on us a decorated headband and breastplate **(Have students put these on)**. Finally, Moses placed a headdress on our head **(Put headdress on)**. After Moses anointed the altar, we placed our hands on the head of the bull as it was slaughtered. We did the same act for the ram, and after it was slaughtered Moses placed its blood on the ridge of our right ear, the thumb of our right hand, and the big toe of our right foot **(Do this with paint)**. We took the bread of ordination and held it up high for all to see. When the fire burned the smells were amazing and lifted our spirits. We then went in the tent of meeting, where we stayed for seven days. The days went fast. It was truly a blur. But when we walked out we felt the weight that was now on our shoulders. A new day has arisen.

Narrator continues...

We were now responsible for connecting our people with God. Yet, we were not sure that we were even doing this ourselves. It was all so new to us. Yes, we knew to follow the instructions and create these intimate moments, but we were still unsure. We needed to gain the confidence that we were doing everything right. That it was actually working. It has only been eight days. On this eight day, dad offers up a calf and a ram, and commands that the Israelites make offerings as well. Moses proclaim to the people, that this is what God had commanded of us, and Aaron followed suit by conducting the offerings. We helped out as best as we could, smearing blood on the horns of the altar, removing the innards and causing them to produce smoke. We were given specific instructions and we followed suit. The people were entranced with the ceremony we brought forward and in this moment, our father, Aaron, blessed the people lifting his hands over them. And dad and Uncle Moses went into the Tent of Meeting and when they came out, they blessed the people, and the presence of God fell over everyone. And fire came forth from the offering, and we all saw this and shouted, and fell on our faces. In this moment we felt fear but we also felt awe. How awesome of a moment this was, we truly felt the presence of God.

Activity:

Participants will simulate the eighth day ordination sacrifices.

Narrator continues...

After these eight days, it is all up to us. Our brothers, Nadav and Avihu, were conducting a sacrifice. When they offered God an alien fire, an offering which was not commanded upon them, a flame came forth from God and consumed them. We couldn't believe what we just saw! Our brothers were gone. In this moment, we were in shock, we were angry that this had happened, and we were terrified that this could happen to us. Our father was silent. He did not say a word. Moses proclaimed that Nadav and Avihu were consumed to help magnify the glory of God, but I'm not sure I want to be in glory of a God who does this. Yet, we were right back at work.

Moses, through God, commanded upon us to follow special rules; we can't leave the tent of meeting, we can not drink wine, and it was our responsibility to teach these laws which were instructed to the Israelites.

And from that time on we taught. We taught the Israelites the laws of Kashrut. We taught laws of purity and impurity, of childbirth, bodily emissions, disease and illness. We were the deliverers and instructors of God's law. And it was up to us to keep order. These laws were to help the Israelites live a "holy" life themselves. We wanted to give them the power and tools to be holy just like us, just like God.

Explain... Leviticus, is a book all about holiness. How can the Israelite people be holy, just like God? In biblical times one aspect of coming closer to God was through offering sacrifices. As we just experienced, the sacrifices were facilitated through this priestly group, the sons of Aaron.

Ask:

1. What was this experience like for you?
2. Why did the priests undergo an eight day ordination?
3. What was it like to be the facilitator between someone and God?

Continue to explain... In 2018, we no longer offer sacrifices like the priests did in biblical times, yet we still find ways to be drawn closer to God.

Ask,

1. How do you communicate with God? In what ways are you drawn closer?
2. What does it mean to be holy, like God? How does that affect how we live our lives?
3. Who or what are the "priests" in 2018?

Sacrifice instruction guide for activity 1:

Olah Offering -- burnt or ascent

1. Take either: (Paper cutouts of animals will be laid out)
 1. Male Cattle
 2. Male Flock Animal
 3. Bird
2. The sacrifice will be presented at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.
3. The animal is then slaughtered by the person making the sacrifice. **(Cut with scissor part of neck)**
4. The Priest should dash blood on the four corners of the altar. **(Use “red paint” as blood to dash)**
5. The offerer removes the innards and skin and washes the legs. **(Rip the paper animal into many pieces)**
6. The priest prepares the fire and lays down the animal pieces **(Use either a real fire pit, candles, or something else creative)**

Mincha Offering -- grain, cereal, or gift

1. The offeror makes the grain prior to presenting it to priest:
 1. Take a bundle of wheat **(paper cut out of wheat and other ingredients)**
 2. Mix wheat, olive oil, and frankincense.
 3. Place in griddle, pan, or oven.
 4. It can not be made with leaven or honey.
2. The priest then places the Mincha on the altar.
3. The priests take a part of the offering and turn it into smoke (Rip piece of “bread” off)
4. Priests get to consume the rest (Enjoy!)

Shelamim offering -- Well-being or peace

1. Take either: (Take paper cutout of animal)
 1. Herd male or female without blemish
 2. Flock male or female without blemish
 3. Goat
2. The sacrifice will be presented at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.
3. The animal is then slaughtered by the offeror. (Cut with scissor part of neck)
4. The Priest should dash blood on the four corners of the altar. (Use “red paint” as blood to dash)
5. The offerer removes the innards and skin and washes the legs. (Rip the paper animal into many pieces)
6. Only certain parts of animal are burned by priest (all the fat that covers the entrails and the two kidneys).

Exile and Return: The Story of Ezra Nehemia

Primary Text³: Ezra Nehemia

Scope of Program:

This program is designed for students in 4th-6th grade, but it can be adapted for any age group. The program shares the story of the book, Ezra Nehemia. It is my hope that this program introduces a period of Jewish text and history that many of our participants are unfamiliar with. The narration is from the point of view of a Jewish individual living in Babylon and returning to Jerusalem.

Objectives:

1. Introduce participants to a text and period of Jewish history that they might not be as familiar with.
2. Introduce students to Ketuvim.
3. Experience journey of leaving Babylon and return to Jerusalem.
4. Draw connections between physical landmarks in biblical times and how we view them today.

Supplies:

1. Lots of cardboard boxes and other recycled items
2. Duct tape / blue tape
3. 20 plastic cups per group
4. Torah

To Set up Before Program:

Ideally, there will be two large rooms that you can journey to and from. One room will be in “Babylon” where the journey starts, the other will be in “Jerusalem” where the journey ends. The “Jerusalem” room should have all of the building materials available.

Facilitator will ask everyone to close their eyes and then share:

The year is 538 BCE. You are a Jew living in the great city of Babylon. You have just received word, from the great Persian King Cyrus that you will be moving to the land of Judah to a city called Jerusalem. You have heard of this city of Jerusalem from your parents and your grandparents, but you have never been there yourself. You only hear about the “glory days” of

³ This narrative is based upon the story of *Ezra Nehemiah* as well as secondary material found in, Meyers, Jacob M. A. *The Anchor Bible: Ezra Nehemiah* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965).

Jerusalem. That it was taken from you by the Babylonians. And that you were sent here to live far away from your home. That this is where “your people” are from. But for you Babylon is “your people. It is all that you know. And honestly it is great! You think, “why would I want to leave this wonderful booming city to go to a new far off place.” You’ll miss the modernity and wealth of the city and you will long for the diversity of cultures and peoples. And you’ll certainly miss the Ishtar Gate in all of its glory. But you were ordered by the Great Cyrus to “return” to Jerusalem and to build for him a “house in Jerusalem.” So... you go. You pack up all of your things, and you make your journey to the Land of Judah.

Instruct the participants to stand up and begin to walk. Say, as walking:

As you made our journey to Judah you could not help but think about a story your parents told you when you were a boy. You remember the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. That Moses led the Jewish people out of Egypt and to the Promised Land. You can’t help but think that now, you, too, are on an exodus. You are returning to the land that was promised. As you’re walking, you are hot and you are tired and you are sick of carrying your possessions on your back. You miss your home, Babylon, but you continue to trek on. You have with you silver and gold and livestock and goods, and you are told that this will all be used to build the greatest temple that one can imagine. But all you think about is that Ishtar Gate. Perhaps you can create something just as glorious, but wouldn’t it be nicer to stay in Babylon. As you get closer you hear the elders talk about the terrible days of Nebedchunezzar, and how he kicked you out of your land. How grateful they sound that Cyrus is letting them return. You, too, begin to get angry at Nebedchunezzar. You, too, begin to feel a sense of community and pride in “returning to your land.”

Stop the group and continue to talk:

Finally, you get to Jerusalem! It is a bit underwhelming. You return to old homes and tents and you all gather at the center of town. You begin to get comfortable with these people. You begin to feel as one. Finally, you are put to work. You were instructed to build the foundation of the Temple.

Activity: Build Temple with feet

In groups of 2-3, participants will build a Temple out of 12 (or however many we have) cups. They can only use their feet to build this pyramid. The goal is to make them work as one community to build the foundation of this temple. We will build the foundation in a pyramid structure, stacking cups 4-3-2-1.

After the activity, continue the narration:

Now that we have laid the foundation for the Temple we begin to settle into our new home. After working on the foundation stone I became friendlier with my fellow “yehudim”, my fellow Jews. I realized that we are more alike than I thought. We all have the same stories of our older family once living in this land. We all speak the same language, we have shared memories and history, and the same religious belief. Yes, there might be other neighbors who have joined us along the way, but we are all working towards the same goal... to make Jerusalem a holy city, a city for

our God. Ezra keeps encouraging us to work together, to get together for meals and get to know each other better. Each day we continue working on the foundation of the temple, but it also seems that only small progress was being made on its construction. But every day, as we get closer to completion, we begin to feel closer to God.

As we become more organized, Nehemiah, the governor of Judah, tells us that we need to rebuild the wall surrounding Jerusalem. He is very bureaucratic in nature and has a whole plan telling us what to do. He tells us to fill in the gaps, to make our boundaries complete. This will truly separate us from our neighbors, but it will also unify us as *yehudim*. We're excited about the possibility of being a known people. A wall will certainly help. A wall will allow us to control who comes in and out. So... we start building.

Activity -- build the wall:

Using recycled large boxes, students will physically build a surrounding wall enclosing them in their space. The wall should also be built around the foundation stone of the Temple.

Once the activity is complete, continue the narration:

The wall is now built and Nehemiah has led the city of Jerusalem to become a real, modern city. We have boundaries and we have a Temple, but something still feels off. Frankly, we did not come here to build, we came to Judah to return to our roots, to re-take our land and heritage that was taken away from us. We came here to live as the Jewish people. Soon later, Ezra instructs all of us to meet him at the Water Gate. Here, he is going to make a big announcement. Rumor has it that they are bringing the word of God. That these stories that have been passed down for generations are going to be read a scroll. We all gather at the Water Gate. Hundreds of us are gathered here as one. As we are gathered, Ezra begins to read!

Ezra (to be acted out by someone) stands up on a “wooden tower” and holds up the Torah scroll for everyone to see. He then reads a blessing for God:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הַמְּבָרֵךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בָּנוּ מִכָּל
הָעַמִּים וְנָתַן לָנוּ אֶת תּוֹרָתוֹ. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who has chosen us from among the peoples, and given us the Torah. Blessed are You, Adonai, who gives the Torah.

People start crying in joy and amazement. They are so overcome. Nehemiah declares this a holy moment. We go and celebrate, eating the best foods and the best wines. We then return to hear Ezra read the next day, we are amazed at what we hear! We are instructed to celebrate sukkot and to live in huts.

Activity: Sukkah Build!

Using recycled goods students will go around the area looking for “olive trees”, “pine trees”, and “myrtle trees” and other materials to build the sukkah. They will learn the way to have a kosher sukkah along the way.

Continue narration:

As time goes on in Jerusalem, we find ourselves reading from and listening to the words of Torah every day. It guides our life! We are inspired and have a feeling of awe. And WE are doing it now. We, the people, are fully in control, as *yehudim*! Ezra, who so wonderfully got us to this point, has taken a step back and has become one of us. I often think back to what life was like in Babylon. I am amazed at how close and bonded we all are, how we now live an inspired, holy life and bask in the teachings of the Torah. This city, Jerusalem, truly is a holy city. There is holiness in all of us.

Esther: Standing Up For What You Believe In

Primary Text⁴: Esther

Scope of Program:

This program is designed for 5th-7th graders, but it can be adapted for any age. This program will take participants through the Megillah (scroll) of Esther. It will be told through the perspective of Esther. The program can be used around the time of Purim.

Objectives:

1. Learn the narrative of Megillah Esther from the perspective of Esther
2. Articulate moments in their life when they hid their Judaism.
3. Articulate moments in their life when they stood up for something they believed in.

To set up before program:

The room will be set up as a market place. There will be stands offering different “snacks” and “smells”. The program facilitator can get creative with what that looks like. Below are suggested materials. Fruit stand: lots of (dates, pomegranates, figs, apples, etc). Bread stand: bread, crackers, challah. Vegetables: peppers, tomatoes, olives, etc. Spices: lots of things to smell.

Before students go into the market, the facilitator will read:

It is another wonderful day in Shushan! The markets are full of fruits and vegetables, breads and spices. Life is pretty good here! When my grandparents first arrived in Shushan, they were scared. They didn’t know what to expect. The Assyrians exiled my people from our home. We were removed from Jerusalem. Our holy land. My parents still talk about it, and it is a part of who we are, but Shushan feels like home to me.

Students will get to spend time wandering through the market. After 2-3 minutes of walking around, begin to read again.

By and large, your life and your community feel removed from the Persian kingdom, but you hear bits and pieces of the gossip. And Vashti is at the center of it. You all look up to her and hear

⁴ This narrative is based upon the story of *Megilat Esther* as well as secondary material found in, Moore, Carey A. *The Anchor Bible: Esther* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1971).

how strong of a woman she is. Yes, she is the queen, but she is not just a puppet of the king. She gives us hope that women can have a voice in our community. Apparently last night, the king took it too far. He was drunk and rude and inappropriate and Vashti left the banquet. I admired her courage! It is so inspirational for her to stand up to the king.

Ask,

1. When have you displayed courage?
2. When was it difficult for you to stand up for something you believed in?

Continue reading,

A couple of days later guards rushed into our marketplace. Everyone gathered around them as a decree was read. Uncle Mordi was there and he couldn't believe what he was hearing. The king asked for the most beautiful women to gather at the King's court to possibly become the next queen. Uncle Mordecai encouraged me to go. He told me how smart I was and that I could possibly do some good in this land. I could make a real difference. I kept thinking about how strong Vashti was. How much she inspired me. So I decided to go! Before I left, Uncle Mordecai told me to hide my Jewish name. I was no longer Hadassah. I was only Esther, the name that would identify me as a Persian. He warned me to hide my Judaism at all costs.

Instruct the participants to start walking. Facilitator will lead them on a walking path as they enter "The Kingdom". If it is possible, take them to a completely different room.

Continue reading:

The entire journey to the palace I kept thinking about why I was told to hide my Judaism? Why wasn't this something I could be open about? I didn't understand. We were free in Shushan. We never once had to think about hiding our Judaism. Uncle Mordecai told me that it was not safe outside of our neighborhood. That there were some people who did not like us just because we were different. So... I did as I was told.

When we arrived at the palace, I met all of the other girls. We were all in this together. We spent days and nights talking about how we could help the people in our kingdom. People seemed to really like my ideas! When we had a chance to present to the King, I took my newfound confidence and won him over. He respected my ideas. He believed in me. And he chose me to be the new Queen of Shushan.

Ask,

1. If you were placed in a position of power, what things would you want to accomplish?
2. How would you work to make your neighborhood, community, or country a better place?

Continue reading...

When I moved into the kingdom I met all of the important people running the country. They walked around with their chests puffed out and acted as if they were the most important people there. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I couldn't believe that I was the only woman.

There was one man in particular who stood out...Haman. He was a mean, mean man and occasionally spoke out about "the others" who were occupying their kingdom. It must have been people like Haman as to why my Uncle Mordecai told me to hide my Judaism. For some reason, the king admired him. I am not sure why.

Within the first couple of days I learned how to talk to these people. I learned when to use my voice, and when to hold back. I thought of Vashti often... what would she do?

I learned that the courtyard was where I should spend my time. It is where I could pick up helpful information...

Activity:

Spread around the courtyard. There will be three staff members offering three different stories. Instruct the participants to go around and try and get the information from the staff members. They should schmooze and see what types of things they can learn. There will be three primary staff members with big pieces of information. If there are other staff members, have them play other roles... either helping to nudge the participants in the right direction or refusing to go beyond surface level stuff.

The staff members with the information should take their time in offering it and make the participants work and prod to give them the information they are looking for.

Three stories:

- 1. Staff member 1:** I heard that a Jew, a man named Mordecai, overheard a plot to overthrow King A.
- 2. Staff member 2:** I heard that a Jew, a man named Mordecai, refused to bow down to Haman as he was marching around the kingdom... something about him not bowing down to any individual other than his God.
- 3. Staff member 3:** I heard that King A really likes banquets... and that the way to his heart and trust is to throw him a big banquet in someone or something's honor.

After about 5-8 minutes, gather back together as a group and ask what pieces of information people have learned.

Then continue narration:

When I came back I knew I had to tell the King about the plot against him. I was afraid to share the news but I thought of Vashti and the strength she displayed. I walked into the royal chamber and told the King that a man had plotted against him. He was so relieved to hear this.

In that same moment Haman came running through the door. He told the king that a man, a Jew, had refused to bow down to him. He was furious. He wanted this man, and all the Jewish people to pay. When he told King A. his plan, and the king agreed to it, it dawned on me that the Jewish people were going to be wiped out. They chose the 13th day of the month of Adar... this was the day the Jewish people were cast to be destroyed in Shushan.

When I heard this I began to get so angry inside. How dare this man come out against my people. I needed to do something. I had to talk to Mordecai.

I snuck out of the palace and met Uncle Mordi in the city square. I told him all that I had learned. I was scared, but my uncle encouraged me to take action. I needed to talk to the King. My people's livelihood depended upon it. I decided to throw a banquet, and then I would tell him that I was Jewish.

Activity:

Participants will write a statement that they will then deliver to the King. The statement should reflect why being Jewish is so important to them. They will then make this declaration to the King (a staff member).

Narrator continues:

I was amazed at how positive the king's response was to me! He really values me. He doesn't care that I am Jewish. And he now never will let anything happen to our people. In fact, he told me that when he saw that it was Mordecai who saved the plot against him, he wanted to reward him and celebrate him.

Questions to discuss:

1. What was it like for you to go through this experience?
2. What was challenging for Esther?
3. When, in your life, were you put in a similar situation? How did you overcome it?
4. Has there ever been a time where you hid your Judaism?
5. Has there ever been a time where you didn't speak up for something you believed in?
6. What was it like to stand up for something you believed in?

Jonah and Forgiveness: A Family Program for Yom Kippur

Primary Text: Jonah

Scope of Program:

This program is designed for families of children in elementary and middle school. It can be adapted for any age group. The program takes the participants through the narrative of Jonah, through his perspective. Participants will gain an understanding of the lessons learned in Jonah and the power of God's forgiveness. This program is written to be used for a Yom Kippur family program.

Objectives:

1. To learn and experience the story of Jonah.
2. To gain an understanding of how God forgives.
3. To reflect on the areas in one's personal and familial life of where they need more forgiveness or who they need to forgive.
4. To provide space for one's personal T'shuvah.

To Set up beforehand:

Participants will be journeying through multiple locations throughout this program. Pre-designate the areas where the participants will be traveling (boat, belly of the big fish, Nineveh). If possible, there should be a small room where participants can gather while they are in "the belly" of the big fish.

Participants should start the program seated. Facilitator reads,

Jerusalem, somewhere in the 5th century BCE. You are Jonah. You are sitting in your house one morning, doing what you usually do... eating your breakfast, drinking your coffee... oh, sorry! I know I shouldn't be talking about food right now. Anyway.... One morning you hear a strange, mysterious voice call down to you... "**Jonah**" ... "**Jonah**". You begin to panic. You look all around to see if anyone is there. You look through the window. No one is there! You splash some water on your face... pinch yourself... and realize that this isn't a dream. You are, in fact, awake!

The voice keeps calling out, "**Jonah**"... "**Jonah**"... and you begin to panic. What is this? Is this actually happening? You've heard the stories of this happening before. Abraham... Moses... the prophets... Could it be? Was this really happening to you? But you weren't worthy men like they were. No, you must just be hearing things... but finally you hear it.

“Hey Jonah, this is real. It is actually happening. Yes, this is God, and I am calling out to you! Can you hear me? Need me to turn up the volume? Ok, good! Let’s begin. Here is what I need you to do Jonah. There is a city called Nineveh, and in this city, the people have done some pretty bad things. I need you to go to Nineveh and warn them that God isn’t happy with them. Got it? Good!”

When this voice stopped talking you were shocked! Was this really God speaking to me?! No, it must be some other God... it must be a SPAM God. But then you remember...”Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad...” it couldn’t be another God, there is only one God! You begin to panic... why has God chosen me? He must have meant to talk to someone else. I’m certainly not doing this... i’m not going to Nineveh.

So... you run away in the complete opposite direction. **(At this time, instruct participants to stand up and follow you. You will begin walking to another location [have them walk either to a new room or in continuous circles so it feels as if they are journeying]. As you are walking, continue to read):**

You think this whole thing is crazy. It just doesn’t make sense. From all you have heard the prophets who came before you were there to help the Israelite people. Now God was telling you to leave the Holy Land and cast judgement on people that aren’t Jewish. You know that God dwells within the Holy Land of Jerusalem, but there is no way God will find you if you flee. So, instead of Nineveh, you go the complete opposite direction to Tashish! No way God can find you in Tashish...

So, you start traveling to Tashish. You find a boat with a crew ready to set sail and you ask if you can join. After you handed them your money to pay the way you go below deck. In this moment you think about why God called out to YOU to cast judgement on other people. It’s not like I have been so perfect myself this year! You begin to reflect on your past year.

Activity: Instruct the families to come together and reflect on the following questions:

- 1.** What mistakes have we made as a family or individually this year?
- 2.** How can we be better for the year ahead?
- 3.** Is there anyone in your family that you need to ask for forgiveness? That you, yourself, need to forgive?

After discussing as families they will come back together to continue their journey.

Narrator continues:

As you reflect on your own year you begin to feel water splash over you (to simulate this, we do not recommend using real water! We recommend tossing blue pompoms or balls of tissue paper to simulate the water coming on board). You notice that the boat is rocking back and forth, back and forth, picking up in intensity. You get scared! Why is this happening? In the back of your

head you know why. Clearly God is upset that you ran away. Clearly God can be found outside the Holy Land. How could you have been so naive to think otherwise?

The sailors who were taking you began to throw all of their cargo overboard. They were praying to their Gods asking to be saved. But you stayed below the ship. Too scared and embarrassed to own up that it is you who is causing this. When the sailors came down they yelled at me to call upon my God. To ask for this to stop! I told them that it was me, a Jewish man, who has caused this, for I have run away from my God. They pleaded for me to call out, but I asked them to throw me overboard. Finally they agreed to it. When I hit the water... I wasn't sure what to expect. I was numb. I was frightened by what was to happen next but comforted, strangely enough, that God was with me.

Simulate swimming in the water... leading to a small room that you could all cram into. Right before you enter the room, read:

In that moment, a big fish... *a dag ha'gadol*... the biggest fish I have ever seen, jumped out and swallowed me whole. **(Participants should move into the small closet or room with the lights off except one flashlight in the middle -- simulating the belly of the big fish).** Wheeerrreee am I? You think. What is that smell? It is grrooossss! It's wet, it's muggy, it's cold, and it smells. "God" you scream... "Here I am!" And God heard you from the belly of this fish. For many days and nights, you kept calling out and speaking to God.

Activity:

Participants should write down what they would like to say to God in this moment.

Narrator continues...

And God heard your prayers and commanded the fish to spit you out. And you finally found yourself on dry land. You immediately pick yourself up and begin to walk to Nineveh (begin walking with the participants to another location). You're tired, you're hungry, you could really use a shower, but you have felt the power of God and know that you need to fulfill this mission.

Keep talking until you get to next location. You want the participants to feel the tiredness of Jonah after this journey. Continue the narration:

When you finally arrive in Nineveh you see chaos, pollution, and lawlessness amongst the people. Now you understand why God asked you to come here. You proclaim in the center of town, "In forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown by the God of Israel." The people looked at you and immediately began to atone for their wrongdoings. They decided to fast and prayed to God for forgiveness. The King immediately followed suit and also prayed for God's forgiveness. It was amazing to see how quickly their mindset had changed. And God was just as quick to forgive.

I could not believe how quickly God had forgiven them. This made me feel so angry! I cried out to God saying, “God! Is this not what I said to you when I was still in the Holy Land?! This is why I fled to Tarshish. Why I didn’t want to take on this journey. For I know that you are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, renouncing punishment. Please God! I don’t want any more of this.” And God responded to you, “**Are you so deeply hurt?**”

And once again, you left God. You walked east and set up a Sukkah shelter.

Activity: With boxes and supplies, construct your own shelter.

Narrator continues:

In the hot sweltering heat a plan sprouted right from the ground. I was relieved, and knew that God was still with me. I was able to sleep in peace for the first time in days. (**Participants should lie down and rest**). When I awoke I couldn’t believe what I had seen. My plant was completely dead! I screamed in anger and frustration, knowing that God had allowed this to happen. Then God called down to me.

“Are you so deeply hurt about the plant?” You cared about the plant, which you did not work for and which you did not grow, which appeared overnight and perished overnight. Should I not care about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not yet know their right hand from their left”

Questions to discuss:

1. What did you think of God’s role in Jonah’s journey?
2. Was God a forgiving God?
3. What role does God play for you in forgiveness?
4. What do the actions demonstrated by God teach us about forgiveness?

Choni the Circle Maker: A Tale for Tu B'Shevat

Text: B.T. Taanit 19a (Circle story) B. T. Taanit 23a (Carob Tree story)

Scope of Program:

This program is designed for 4th-6th graders. It can be adapted for any age group! We suggest using this program during Tu B'shevat. This program shares the story of *Choni Ha'magal*, a figure in rabbinic literature that is often involved in miracles.

Objectives:

1. To introduce students to *Choni Ha'Magal* - Choni the Circle Maker, a character found in rabbinic literature.
2. To experience Jewish stories on human beings / God's role in the environment.
3. To think about the relationship between prayer and human beings / prayer and God.
4. To draw understandings for 2019.

Narrator begins:

You are Choni...everyone say it with me... "Choni"... you are a Jewish man living within the hills of Israel. It is the last century before the common era. You are a simple man and everyone loves you in your neighborhood! Growing up, you loved to listen to stories. You would hear stories about Elijah and Elisha, and how they would sometimes hold magical powers that would allow them to make miracles. As a kid, you felt like you were one of them. You always felt like you were different. That you could somehow think things into happening. Of course, it would always happen when there was really a need. When you were called you truly felt that the thing should happen, because it is what we needed. And we were good people, so shouldn't this miracle occur?

It has been a hard year recently. Our town's crop and resources were low. It hasn't rained in a month. So much of our life relies on rain. Rain for the crops so that they can grow and be plentiful and sustain us throughout the year. Rain for water that we can use to drink, clean, cook, bathe ourselves. And rain for the nature and world around us to flourish and prosper and provide us with moments of awe.

You have always prayed for rain, yet it wasn't long before the entire community approached you and asked you to do something about this massive drought. You wished it was that easy, you thought, that you alone had the magical power to bring upon rain. But you figured you would try. This felt different. The community came together. We all, together as one, wished in our hearts that the rain would come and the drought would subside.

So, you did what you know best, and you drew a large circle. You stepped inside this circle, and you proclaimed that you would not leave this circle until the rain falls! While in your circle you begin to pray.

Activity:

Instruct participants to write down their own prayer for rain. Why are they praying for rain? Why is rain so important? They should write down a 2-3 line prayer / poem about the rain. When they have complete writing (3-5 minutes) have them stand up and start running around inside of their circle while reciting their prayer.

Narrator continues:

After going at this for a while, rain begins to fall! It is amazing! You are so overjoyed! You and the entire community do a little dance! Yet, it is not enough. The rain is just drizzling down. It is wonderful and exciting, but we need more. You beg and plead for more! And finally, it begins! The rain is coming down hard and fast and the entire community again is overjoyed! You dance and sing, but you fear that it is too much, that it will be destructive to the entire community and the crops you have in place. So you ask for a little less. Finally, it is just right. A normal rain begins to fall, and once again we dance and we sing and we are overjoyed. And we know that God is with us and that we will have a sustainable year....

That miracle was a good time! And many people were amazed at what they deemed your “super powers”. But the reality was that you had a very special relationship with God. And it was not just your “super powers”, but it was the power of community coming together for a cause that was important to them.

Ask,

1. What role did prayer play in having the rain fall? God? Choni?
2. Have there been times when you have prayer for something and it has happened? When nothing happened?

Narrator continues:

Now there is another story that you are famous for. Once upon a time, you were walking around town when you saw a man planting a carob tree. You asked this man how long it takes for a carob tree to bear fruit. This man responded, “70 years!” You then asked, “Are you sure that you will live another 70 years?” to which this man responded, “No, but I am not planting this for me. I am planting this for all the generations to follow.”

Amazed at the patience of this man, you shrugged your shoulders and walked away. A little bit later, you found a nice shaded spot, sat down, and fell asleep. When Choni woke up, it was 70 years later! He saw a man picking Carob from the tree and he asked, “Excuse me, did you plant this tree?” The man responded, “No, but my grandfather planted this tree for me, and my father told me that his father planted the tree for me.”

Ask,

1. What is the message of this story?
2. Why is it important for us to take care of the environment?

Activity:

Make human tree statues or a human pyramid. Plant a tree.

A Physical Midrash of Early Zionism

Scope of Program:

This program is designed for students in 6th-8th grade. It can be adapted for any age group. The narrative is told through the perspective an early Zionist settler and his/her journey from Eastern Europe to the Land of Israel.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to understand the early roots of Zionism
- Students will be able to imagine the hope that the early Zionist felt, along with the struggles that occurred on the ground.
- Students will be able to connect the Hatikvah (The Israeli national anthem) with the early Zionist settlers.

The Facilitator reads:

The year is 1903... You are living in a small town in the Pale of Settlement in the Russian Empire. You are ten years old. It's winter time, and it's cold. You stand as close to the stove as you can without breathing in all the smoke. Mom hands you a piece of bread. As you bit into it, you think to yourself, this is three days old. But it's ok, at least it's something. Fresh food is hard to come by these days. But then you remember it's Shabbat. Finally a hot meal! You run to the kitchen and smell the chicken cooking. It will be a good night. As you sit down at the dinner table, you begin to hear bangs and crashes and screams. Your parents tell you to go to your room and close the door. You are used to this at this point. The army rolling through town to disrupt our Sabbath, disrupt our times as a family.

When it finally calms down, you run into the street and join the crowd. Everyone is silent and looking straight ahead. Our beloved synagogue has been destroyed. The windows are broken, the doors kicked open, and our siddurim, our prayer books, have been cast all over the floor. Luckily, you see the rebbe holding the Torah in his hands. No one has been hurt, but you are sick and tired of the hate, of the feeling that you will never be free because of what you believe. You wish there was another way.

As the months pass, you begin to join your friends at "youth group". Oh how you love youth group! You play fun games, go on hikes, and talk about your dreams. You all dream of a better life, a better world. You hope for a time when you can live as a free Jew. You dream of being strong and self-sufficient.

Activity: Hopes and Dreams -- A Utopian Society (8 minutes)

Students will break into groups of 3-4. Facilitator will explain that in their youth groups, they would often sit around and discuss and plan out what a society and community could look like living in Israel. The facilitator will instruct students to “map it out”. Students will draw a “blueprint” for their idealized community in the land of Israel.

Narration continues: It is four years later... you just left your home. Your parents said that you have 10 minutes to pack whatever you can fit into your backpack. It was time to go. As you left your house you turned around to get one last look. You begin to walk...

Activity -- Journey to the promised land (5 minutes): everyone stand up and begin walking. As you are walking the narration continues:

As you leave your house you stop at your neighbor's doors. More and more of your friends from youth group and their families join. Everyone has a nervous look on their face, but you also see a glimmer of hope. This is the moment you have been waiting for. This is what you and your friends and your family have been talking about for many months. You are on your way to the Land of Israel, to finally live a life of freedom. You walk and walk and walk for what feels like days. Through the forests, through the farmland, and through the cities. You finally arrive at a train station that is taking you towards the land of Israel. The train is hot and damp and crowded. You are hungry and tired, and dirty, but your hope remains. Finally you are free! Once the train stops, your journey continues. You and your caravan are shuffled onto a boat. You are directed to the bottom of the boat, tired, damp, hungry, and crammed together. Your friend breaks out into song.... Kol od ba'le'vav p'nima, Nefesh yehudi ho'miyah. U'lefa-atei mizrach kadimah, Ayin le'Tziyyon tzofiyah. Od lo avda tikva-teinu, Ha'tikvah bat sh'not al-payim Lih-yot am chofshi b'ar-tzeinu Eretz Tziyyon v'Yerushalayim. As you sing these words, you are amazed at how loud and proud you feel. No longer do you have to shelter yourself from speaking Hebrew. No longer do you have to dream of saying these words out loud. The moment is finally here. No one talks about what they are leaving behind, just what they are hopeful for in the days ahead. Finally, you arrive on the shores of the land of Israel.

Activity: Am Yisrael Chai! (2 minutes)

When you get to land, you kiss the ground and you immediately break out into “Am Yisrael Chai”. Facilitator will guide students in circle dancing and celebration, as well as teach them the words to “Am Yisrael Chai”

Suddenly, you find yourself in the wilderness, just like how it is described in the Torah. The land is barren and swampy. Yet, you are determined to make it to your home. For the first time, you are part of a free society. Your dreams which you dreamt up in your youth group can finally be actualized. You work hard, day in and day out, but your hope remains. Each day, you build. You build irrigation systems, you plant crops, you build homes. And each day you welcome more and more brothers and sisters who join you on this journey.

Activity: Building the Kibbutz (8 minutes)

Students will take their “blueprints” which were previously drawn and will construct their idealized society. As they build, the facilitator will take away certain privileges, like the ability to speak, or only using your feet, etc. This will demonstrate that the actuality of constructing these communities presented great difficulties.

Narration continues: It is 10 years later. You are living in a fully functional kibbutz community. Your crop is plentiful. Your community is organized. You have become a model of success for the entire Zionist movement. More and more Jews have made their way to Israel to help develop the land. The society is strong. You have established governance, you have created armies. You are a strong people. And the world is taking notice. The British government finally declared, through the Balfour Declaration, that a Jewish state would exist in the land of Israel! What a monumental occasion! You can feel that things are happening. Your dreams of Israel becoming a home for the Jewish people are becoming real. As you listen to the news of the Balfour Declaration on the radio, you join in song with your Jewish family:

Activity: Sing Hatikvah (1 minute)

Kol od ba'le'vav p'nima, Nefesh yehudi ho'miyah. U'lefa-atei mizrach kadimah, Ayin le'Tziyyon tzofiyah. Od lo avda tikva-teinu, Ha'tikvah bat sh'not al-payim Lih-yot am chofshi b'ar-tzeinu Eretz Tziyyon v'Yerushalayim.

Debrief (5 minutes)

1. What was this experience like for you?
2. What are some things that you learned?
3. How did it feel to struggle in constructing your idealized society? Did you ever want to give up? Did your hope remain?
4. What questions remain?

Abraham Joshua Heschel and Prophets

Scope of Program:

This program is designed for High School students who are learning about Judaism and Social Justice. The program could fit in particularly well in preparation for a high school trip to the Religious Action Center or a civil rights tour in the south. The program creates a framework of a narrative and supplemental activities that should be adapted based on space, age group, or specific areas the instructor wants to focus on. Feel free to make it your own!

Enduring understandings:

1. Learn about the life of Abraham Joshua Heschel and the moments that led him to become a leader in social justice.
2. Explore the text and voice of our prophetic tradition and how Heschel understood the prophets.
3. Articulate issues that are important to themselves and their responsibility to act on them.

Narrator reads⁵:

The year is 1917 and you are in Poland. It is Friday morning. And that meant that it was almost Shabbat! As you ran from your house to your rabbi's study you could smell the smells of Shabbat. The freshly made challah, the chicken soup, and the babka's baking in the oven. There was a certain buzz around town on Friday mornings. Everyone was busy getting ready. You were just a 10 year old boy, however, and you did as you were told. Your family demanded that you study, and it was something you truly loved doing. Every single day you met with the best and brightest tutors. At this point, you have covered it all... Torah, Talmud, the Zohar, Jewish Mysticism. If you've heard of it, you have read it. As you walked in to the study this morning, everyone stood up as you entered. You were a prince! An heir to the great Hasidic tradition and being groomed as the next great rebbe. People called to you an *illui*, a genius, but you didn't let it get to your head. Your family lived a modest life, as everyone in the community, but it was the community that kept everyone together. Everyone lifted each other up.

Narrator continues:

⁵ All biographical material comes from: Heschel, Susannah, "Introduction", *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Anthology*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux (New York), 1996 and Kaplan, Edward K. & Dresner, Samuel H., *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Prophetic Witness*, Yale University Press (New Haven & London, 1998), 77-96; 289-303.

The year is 1928 and you are now living in Berlin, Germany. You have been in Berlin for about a year and you are constantly amazed at the booming life and culture this city has to offer. You are studying for your PHD and are in conversation with fellow students and professors, Jewish and non-Jewish. You treasure these relationships as they have become your new family. Your professors are good to you and empower you to explore and develop your own scholarship. You are commissioned to write your first book, a biography on Maimonides. As you dive into and learn about the great medieval rabbi and thinker, you are amazed at his ability to remain faithful to God, even after experiencing such tremendous hardships. This perspective will hold influence over you for the rest of your life. After your Maimonides biography is met with tremendous success, you take it upon yourself to write a biography on another medieval rabbi, Abravanel. As you are writing this, you are amazed at the comparison of his worldview with the world you are experiencing today. You view this project as a book of comfort to his fellow European Jews, arguing that, while the Jews faced hardship and expulsion from Spain, they were better off, writing: “Had the Jews remained in the Iberian peninsula, they would certainly have participated in the actions of the Conquistadors. When the Conquistadors arrived in Haiti, there were 1,100,000 inhabitants; twenty years later there were only 1,000 remaining.”⁶

Yet, you remain troubled at what is going on in Germany. You are wondering why more people don’t speak out. You are infuriated that your teachers, the teachers you cherished and respected, are no longer giving you time because you are Jewish. As you continue to work on your thesis, about Prophecy, you are continually inspired to head the prophetic call yourself.

Activity:

Participants will engage in a text study on Prophets. Quotes from Heschel’s *The Prophets* will be posted around the room with a question. Students will take time to respond to the questions, writing it on the paper.

Explain:

Just as Heschel studied, became inspired, and wrote about the Prophetic tradition in Judaism, so to will we! Here is a little taste of how Heschel viewed the role of prophets as well as some quotes from our prophetic texts. Feel free to add your commentary to both!

See supplemental paper below for quotes and questions.

Narrator continues:

Things in Germany were getting bad. You sensed that the political environment was changing. The modern, open city of Berlin was now filled with prejudice. You began to think about leaving Berlin when no German publisher would publish your thesis. Your professors would respond to each of your letters with “Heil Hitler”. This caused you great concern. Your PhD was riding on this. You needed publication to receive your PhD, and you needed to receive your PhD to immigrate to London or America. You were in conversation with Professor Morgenstern of the

⁶ Heschel, Susannah, Intro to *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, XVI

Hebrew Union College in America. He was working diligently to bring you to safety, but you desperately needed the PhD. Finally, a publisher in Warsaw published your thesis!

But danger remained. The Jewish people were being persecuted once again. There was a Jesuit librarian at your school who refused to speak out against the Nazi treatment of Jews for fear that the Nazis would close down the library. This profoundly impacted your view that it was imperative for religious people to speak out against social injustice. You famously said, **“Racism is satanism, unmitigated evil... You cannot worship God and at the same time look at man as if he were a horse.”**

As you are reading this, you will simulate the narrative as a group:

One week before Kristallnacht, the German police, the Gestapo, came in and said you have 10 minutes to pack your bags before going back to Warsaw. You were deported from Germany because you were Jewish. The conditions to Warsaw were horrific. You stood for three days straight, crammed into a tiny train car. When you arrive, you and everyone who was with you waited in camps as the Polish government would not let you in. Luckily your family was able to bring you back, but you knew you had to leave. You fled to England and stayed with your brother, Jacob. You tried desperately to bring your family with you.

When you immigrated to America, with the help of the Hebrew Union College, you desperately tried to bring over family, friends, and colleagues. You were amazed at how little the American Jewish community was doing to help their fellow Jews. This brought you great frustration and remained with you throughout your time in America. Why didn't the Jewish community do more? Why were they not taking action and responsibility?

The Holocaust and the destruction of Eastern European culture brought your great sorrow and loneliness. Most of your family was murdered and your entire Eastern European Jewish culture was destroyed. Never again, you thought, will I stand idly by. Few are guilty, but all are responsible.

You spent the next decade writing some of the most important contributions to Jewish text in the 20th century, “Man is not Alone”, “The Sabbath”, “God in Search of Man”, and “Man’s Quest for God”. Many of these texts discuss the idea of **Divine Pathos**, and the need for humanity to be active in God’s world. This was something you profoundly believed. You wrote, **“To be is to stand for, and what human beings stand for is the great mystery of being God’s partner. God is in need of human beings.”**

When you famously gave an elegy on this culture, everyone stood up at the end and recited Kaddish. You became the Jewish voice of this generation.

You began to revisit your thesis on prophecy and were hoping to turn it into a book in English. This work inspires you and encourages you to be a leader in the world of social justice.

Activity - Prophet Shopping:

Around the room, there will be a variety of text coming from prophets. Participants will take their time reading through the verses. They will then collect texts that are meaningful to them and make protest signs. **See below for text.**

Narrator continues:

While two decades have passed since the Holocaust and the destruction of your childhood, the pain and memory has always stuck with you. The anger that the world didn't do enough inspired you to take action on causes that you felt were unjust. You published "The Prophets" in America with the hope that it would inspire and encourage Americans to take up the unjust causes of their time, civil rights, the war in Vietnam, equality for all. If there was suffering in the world, you needed to be involved.

You first met Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at the Chicago Conference on Race and Religion in 1963. At this conference, you famously addressed the crowd with the following words: "At the first conference on religion and race, the main participants were Pharaoh and Moses. Moses' words were: "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me." While Pharaoh retorted: "Who is the Lord, that I should heed this voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover I will not let Israel go." The outcome of that summit meeting has not come to an end. Pharaoh is not ready to capitulate. The exodus began, but is far from having been completed. In fact, it was easier for the children of Israel to cross the Red Sea than for a Negro to cross certain university campuses. Let us dodge no issues. Let us yield no inch to bigotry, let us make no compromise with callousness."

You, like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., invoked the story of Egypt and the Exodus as your call to action. You joined protests and marches to fight for civil rights. You grew close with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and had mutual respect and admiration for one another. You were proud that you were representing the Jewish people, but disappointed that more did not join. You joined the march in Selma, Alabama, marching at the front lines with Dr. King. **(In this moment, instruct the participants to stand up and march with you - holding up their protests signs)**. As you walked, you were overcome with the power of that day. It was a religious experience. You remembered your experience with Nazi Germany, when you wish people would have marched then. You remembered how little the Jewish American community did, and hope they will feel inspired by your actions. You thought of the Prophets and hoped you were living up to the spirit they invoked. And you thought of God and your call to be active in God's world. You felt as if your feet were praying. You wrote later that evening:

"I thought of having walked with Hasidic rabbis on various occasions. I felt a sense of the Holy in what I was doing. Dr. King expressed several times to me his appreciation. He said, "I cannot tell you how much your presence means to us. You cannot imagine how often Reverend Vivian and I speak about you." Dr. King said to me that this was the greatest day in his life and the most important civil rights demonstration... I felt again what I have been thinking about for years — that Jewish religious institutions have again missed a great opportunity, namely, to interpret a

civil-rights movement in terms of Judaism. The vast number of Jews participating actively in it are totally unaware of what the movement means in terms of the prophetic traditions.”

You took it upon yourself to be a leading figure for this cause. Prior to meeting with the President John F. Kennedy, you wrote the following telegram:

“TO PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY, THE WHITE HOUSE, JUNE 16, 1963. I look forward to privilege of being present at meeting tomorrow. Likelihood exists that Negro problem will be like the weather. Everybody talks about it but nobody does anything about it. Please demand of religious leaders personal involvement not just solemn declaration. We forfeit the right to worship God as long as we continue to humiliate Negroes. Church synagogue have failed. They must repent. Ask of religious leaders to call for national repentance and personal sacrifice. Let religious leaders donate one month's salary toward fund for Negro housing and education. I propose that you Mr. President declare state of moral emergency. A Marshall plan for aid to Negroes is becoming a necessity. The hour calls for moral grandeur and spiritual audacity.”

Explain:

Heschel lived a remarkable life and was always concerned with the moral fabric of humankind. His interest in the prophetic tradition and belief that the Prophets did not end in biblical times, helped to shape his mindset that perhaps he was carrying on that prophetic tradition. His experience with Nazi Europe and the lack of response from the American Jewish community brought him great disappointment and urged him to never miss an opportunity to speak out.

Discuss:

1. What are your thoughts on the life of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel? How has he influenced you?
2. What events in your life have helped influence the issues you care most about?
3. What role does Judaism play in your desire to fight for social justice?
4. How will you be a prophet in 2019?

Heschel and Prophecy text to be posted around the room:

“The prophet’s task is to convey a divine view, yet as a person he is a point of view. He speaks from the perspective of God as perceived from the perspective of his own situation. We must seek to understand not only the views he expounded but also the attitudes he embodied: his own position, feeling, response — not only what he said but also what he lived; the private, the intimate dimension of the world, the subjective side of the message.”⁷

1. How does Heschel view the role of the prophet?
2. How does the prophet interact with God and the world around him?

“To us a single act of injustice — cheating in business, exploitation of the poor — is slight; to the prophets, a disaster. To us injustice is injurious to the welfare of the people; to the prophets it is a deathblow to existence: to us, an episode; to them, a catastrophe, a threat to the world. Their breathless impatience with injustice may strike us as hysteria. We ourselves witness continually acts of injustice, manifestations of hypocrisy, falsehood, outrage, misery, but we rarely grow indignant or overly excited. To the prophets even a minor injustice assumes cosmic proportions.”⁸

1. When have you acted like a prophet? When have you not?
2. What causes would inspire the prophet to come out in you?

“Above all, the prophets remind us of the moral state of a people: Few are guilty, but all are responsible. If we admit that the individual is in some measure conditioned or affected by the spirit of society, an individual’s crime discloses society’s corruption. In a community not indifferent to suffering, uncompromisingly impatient with cruelty and falsehood, continually concerned for God and every man, crime would be infrequent rather than common.”⁹

1. What would the prophets say about the moral state of our people?
2. In what ways can we be more concerned for God and humankind?

⁷ Heschel, Abraham Joshua, *The Prophets*, Jewish Publication Society (Philadelphia), 1962, XIV.

⁸ Heschel, Abraham Joshua, *The Prophets*, Jewish Publication Society (Philadelphia), 1962, 4.

⁹ Heschel, Abraham Joshua, *The Prophets*, Jewish Publication Society (Philadelphia), 1962, 26.

An analysis of prophetic utterances shows that the fundamental experience of the prophet is a fellowship with the feelings of God, a sympathy with the divine pathos, a communion with the divine consciousness which comes about through the prophet's reflection of, or participation in, the divine pathos... Sympathy is the prophet's answer to inspiration, the correlative to revelation.

1. How do you understand the prophets relationship with God from this quote?

*The more deeply immersed I became in the thinking of the prophets, the more powerfully it became clear to me what the lives of the prophets sought to convey: that morally speaking there is no limit to the concern one must feel for the suffering of human beings.¹⁰

1. What are the reasons you get involved in issues that are important to you?
2. How have Heschel's understanding of the Prophets influenced you?

¹⁰ "The Reasons for My Involvement in the Peace Movement" [1972], in: *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux (New York), 1996, 226.

Selected Prophet text

Jeremiah 20:7-9

O LORD, Thou hast enticed me, and I was enticed, Thou hast overcome me, and hast prevailed; I am become a laughing-stock all the day, Every one mocketh me. (8) For as often as I speak, I cry out, I cry: 'Violence and spoil'; Because the word of the LORD is made A reproach unto me, and a derision, all the day. (9) And if I say: 'I will not make mention of Him, Nor speak any more in His name', Then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire Shut up in my bones, And I weary myself to hold it in, But cannot.

Micah 6:8

It hath been told thee, O man, what is good, And what the LORD doth require of thee: Only to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.

Zechariah 4:6

Then he answered and spoke unto me, saying: 'This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying: Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.

Amos 5:24

But let justice well up as waters, And righteousness as a mighty stream.

Isaiah 40:4-5

Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the rugged shall be made level, and the rough places a plain; (5) And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.'

Isaiah 2:4

And He shall judge between the nations, And shall decide for many peoples; And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war any more.