

Living Ritually

An Introduction to Judaism Through Holiday and Life-Cycle Rituals

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Introduction and Curriculum Rationale

Description of Topic

In 1978 Rabbi Alexander Schindler, then leader of the Reform Movement, called on American Jews to invest in outreach to intermarried families in response to "the increasing concern among American Jews about assimilation and intermarriage. "He called on American synagogues to integrate into Jewish life intermarried couples, their children, Jews unattached to congregations and non-Jews interested in converting."¹ In an ethical will posted on the website of the Union of Reform Judaism in 1995, Rabbi Schindler wrote that, "If our standards are high and our programs are substantive, those who come from the periphery to the center, from the outside to the inside, invariably are among the first to laud and cultivate a flowering of Jewish literacy and spirituality."

During this year's Biennial "State of the Union" address, the current President of the Union for Reform Judaism, Rabbi Rick Jacobs announced that in the next two years our movement will invest in "audacious hospitality," including outreach to the intermarried within our community. Referring to Rabbi Schindler's original statement decades ago, Jacobs called this once paradigm shifting idea an "axiom of Reform Judaism."²

This curriculum is meant to be a tool, not only for welcoming interfaith couples into the Reform Jewish community, but also equipping them with the tools to create a meaningful Jewish life. Participation in this course could be a step on the way to conversion for some, or simply an opportunity to learn with their partner, to experience fundamental ritual aspects of Jewish living together, and to build a community with other couples along the way.

Jewish life is centered around Jewish time, and Jewish time is celebrated with tradition and ritual. Through this program couples will study and experience Jewish tradition and ritual related both to life-cycle and annual cycle as they contemplate and experiment with Jewish ritual in their own homes.

¹ Steinberg, Jacques. "Rabbi Alexander Schindler, Reform Leader and Major Jewish Voice, Dies at 75." *New York Times* 16 Nov. 2000, Online ed.

² Jacobs, Rick. "The Genesis of Our Future." Union of Reform Judaism Biennial. San Diego CA. 12 Dec. 2013. Speech.

Setting and Model

This curriculum is designed as an addition to existing "Introduction to Judaism" courses offered by the URJ and similar offerings by individual synagogues, by creating thoughtfully organized, experiential learning opportunities to supplement classroom learning. Designed on a cohort model, the program is ideal for small groups of couples (ideally four to five couples at a time) and could be run separately from existing classroom based programs, but is not meant to replace the current model. Lessons have been created so that the entire program can be run as is, or sponsoring institutions can choose specific lessons to add to add in as desire and resources allow.

The ideal setting for this program varies. In order to experience a spectrum of Jewish ritual events and provide maximum opportunity for community building, some experiences should take place in synagogues or other Jewish communal spaces, while others should take place in group members' homes. Nature will be a key setting for some aspects of the curriculum, specifically the initial retreat.

The first four lessons are meant to be a part of a weekend long retreat, ideally held during Sukkot so that groups can experience Shabbat and Sukkot together. In most cases this would mean that the retreat is held before the first classroom session. If classes begin in the spring and not the fall, Passover and Sukkot lessons can be swapped with only small changes, allowing Sukkot to become the opportunity for the group to practice creating a ritual experience based on ritual for themselves and Pesach being the first opportunity to look for specific elements of Jewish ritual in practice.

Rationale / Worthiness of the Unit

Rabbi Jacobs called non-Jews who want to be part of the Jewish community, "the opportunity of the millennium for American Judaism."³ "We have a sacred obligation to open our doors, to add to our ranks, and to make sure that progressive Judaism has a growing, not a shrinking, voice in proclaiming what Torah must mean for our time and for our world," he exclaimed in his Biennial speech, "It is a veritable gift of God to have the opportunity of a millennium: more non-Jews who want in than Jews who want out."⁴

Being "against" intermarriage, according to Jacobs in this same speech, "is like being against gravity; you can say it all you want, but it's a fact of life."⁵ The Pew Research Center survey of American Jews published in October 2013 reports that 58% of

³ JTA, comp. "Reform Movement Sells Half of Headquarters to Invest \$1M in Youth Programs." *Jewish Daily Forward* [New York] 13 Dec. 2013, Online ed.

⁴ Jacobs, Rick. "The Genesis of Our Future." Union of Reform Judaism Biennial. San Diego CA. 12 Dec. 2013. Speech.

⁵ Jacobs, Rick. "The Genesis of Our Future." Union of Reform Judaism Biennial. San Diego CA. 12 Dec. 2013. Speech.

respondents who have married since 2000 are married to a non-Jewish spouse. Of all Jewish respondents 44% are married to non-Jews. The study only further supports Rabbi Jacobs' statement by showing that 15% of all new marriages in the United States in 2010 were between spouses of different race or ethnicities, which is more than double the reported number in 1980.⁶

Of course, this is not the first time the rates of intermarriage in the Jewish community have caused a stir. According to Joseph Reimer, "The 1990 NJPs, with its alarming news of the sharp rise in the intermarriages between Jews and non-Jews, set off a deeply felt alarm that perhaps the Jewish enterprise in North America was engaged by the forces of assimilation."⁷ The response to that alarm reports Reimer, was Jewish education.

Over the last twenty-three years, the Jewish community has invested in education. From the formation of the North American Alliance for Jewish Youth (an organization committed to building the Jewish youth community through quality informal education), to Birthright Israel, we as a community have invested in changing the way we educate. Yet, the statistics are only rising. Our investment in educating our youth has not curbed intermarriage.

Furthermore, at least some of the Jews who have chosen non-Jewish partners are the recipients of our investment in education. It is no longer accurate to classify Jews who intermarry as the outliers of our community, nor is it fair to say that these Jews are secular, for 45% of Jews "by religion" who responded to the Pew Study have non-Jewish spouses.

Intermarriage isn't a problem. It's a fact. If we seek to ensure Jewish continuity, to prevent all out assimilation, we must give intermarried couples a safe place to explore Judaism together. We must give couples the inspiration, the skills and the community necessary to live Jewish lives and raise Jewish children.

Currently the Reform Movement offers couples the opportunity to take Introduction to Judaism classes. In a 16-20 week course, couples spend 2 hours per week focused on the "fundamentals of Jewish thought and practice." According to advertisements for the program, "This course is perfect for inter-faith couples, non-Jews considering conversion and Jews looking for an adult-level introduction to Judaism."⁸ Classes are offered in synagogues and Jewish institutions. According to Rabbi Leanna Morrit, teacher of a URJ class and former Director of the 92nd Street Y's introduction to

⁶ *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*. Rep. San Francisco, CA: Pew Research Center, 2013. Print.

⁷ Reimer, Joseph. "Informal Education: The Decisive Decade - How Informal Jewish Education Was Transformed in Its Relationship with Jewish Philanthropy." *International Handbook of Jewish Education*. Vol. 5. N.p.: Springer, 2001. N. pag. Print. International Handbooks of Religion and Education.

⁸ "Introduction to Judaism." *Reform Judaism*. Union of Reform Judaism, n.d. Web. 16 Apr. 2014. <<http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/judaism-classes/intro-judaism>>.

Judaism program, Derech Torah, a handful of programs offer one or two Shabbat experiences for classes to meet and celebrate outside of the classroom.

This is not the only opportunity program offered for conversion students and interfaith couples. In New York City, in addition to the URJ and Derech Torah programs, Central Synagogue, and Stephen Wise Free Synagogue in Manhattan all offer alternative programs. Central Synagogue offers students a personal rabbinic mentor in exploring Judaism, Rabbi Lisa Rubin. This program also boasts a “cultural lending library” of films related to the Jewish experience, vetted by Rubin. Stephen Wise Free Synagogue prioritizes the small groups and the intense intellectual experience they offer. Their program takes at least a year to complete and includes an intense research project at the end of the course. Each of these programs emphasize that their goal is to offer students the basic skills necessary to live a Jewish life. To that end each of the programs spend the majority of the curriculum focused on Jewish calendar, holidays and life cycle. Yet not one of these programs includes a substantial experiential element. In each of these classes, students learn about the practice of Judaism, yet rarely engage in the experience of Judaism.

Harvard Professor David Perkins calls this practice of teaching about a topic instead of teaching how to do the thing in question, typical “aboutitis.”⁹ “Aboutitis” is a persistent plague of education in his opinion. He compares this to teaching a kid to bat without knowing the game of baseball. Instead he claims, we must teach “the whole game.” For us this means that a chapter of reading and a short lecture are enough to teach students about Jewish practice. However, we must go further help them practice Judaism themselves.

“Aboutitis” is not the only problem plaguing the system as it currently exists. These basic Judaism courses leave little space for those who are the products of quality Jewish educations to engage in Judaism with their partner. Instead they are left bored and unengaged.

The answer to both of these problems is greater emphasis on experiential education within the introductory courses already offered by Jewish institutions. “We know that the most powerful experiences are hands-on opportunities to build, taste, and explore while nurturing powerful, life-long friendships,” Joy Friedman wrote in a URJ Blog. Yet the way we “introduce” interfaith couples to Judaism allows for little of these experiences.

According to J. Scott Armstrong, experiential learning is an “active and personal approach.”¹⁰ According to his study, “Participants report more interest in the subject

⁹ Perkins, David N. “Introduction: A Whole New Ball Game.” *Making Learning Whole: How Seven Principles of Teaching Can Transform Education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009. 2-22. Digital.

¹⁰ Armstrong, J. Scott. “Strategies for Implementing Change: An Experiential Approach.” *Group & Organizational Studies* 7.4 (1982): n. pag. Web. 13 Nov. 2013.

<http://cogprints.org/5202/1/strategies_for_implementing_change.pdf>.

and there was more attitude change,” when subjects were taught using experiential methods. Armstrong argues that, “Experiential Learning is designed to help people to modify attitudes and behavior,” and is best used to improve “skills.”

The practice of Judaism, living in Jewish time, does indeed take a basic level of knowledge. However, if our goal is truly to give students the skills to live this lifestyle on their own, to inspire students to explore their own relationship to Jewish ritual, then experiential education truly seems to be the most effective model for study.

The Intended Learners

The intended learners for this curriculum are interfaith couples experiencing a transitional period in their relationship and lives; recently committed interfaith couples who are beginning the work of creating a shared life or committed couples preparing for a big change in the life they already share.

The intended learners are primarily between the ages of 25 and 35, mostly members of what is commonly referred to as the “Millennial Generation”. According to William Strauss and Neil Howe, authors of Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation this generation will become more “civic-minded” feeling a strong “connection to communities both local and global.”¹¹ Whether this is indeed true, this is a generation who has had access to multiple communities at once. This generation, raised with the internet and cell phone service, has been able to connect with friends and loved ones all over the world with little effort. Through social-media this generation is able to interact with different social circles at once and any community built within the context of the class will be one of many in which they belong and which competes for their time.

Social networks are not the only competitors for Millennials’ time. This group entered the workforce during a challenging economic climate. Financial contributions may be an issue for many. Many will be professionals who work all day and carve time out in their busy schedules, filled with social obligations and hobbies. For many, choosing to participate in this program means choosing not to pursue other important uses of their time. They will expect quality engaging programming that makes them feel that their sacrifices were worth it.

Sometimes, this age demographic is referred to as the “Peter Pan Generation”, referring to trends that young people live with their parents longer than past generations and tend to marry and have children later as well.¹² Both partners may feel pressured to participate by family expectation. Many cohort members may be attending class out of deference to their partner’s family. It is likely too that non-Jewish partners feel some degree of guilt that they are moving towards a faith that is not what they were raised with, nor the choice of their family of origin. It may feel as though they are moving away

¹¹ William Strauss, Neil Howe (2000). *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*. New York, NY: Vintage. Pp 213-237. ISBN 0-375-70719-0

¹² Shaputis Kathleen. *The Crowded Nest Syndrome: Surviving the Return of Adult Children*. Clutter Fairy Publishing, 2004. Print. ISBN 978-0-9726727-0-2

from their family. The participants may also bring to the group their concerns that they will always be outside of the Jewish community, and may question their place in the community. All of which is important to address through the Introduction to Judaism experience.

Guide for Educator, Literature Review, List of Resources

Ideally, the leaders of this class should be Rabbis who can participate on the Beit Dein for conversion students. However, more important than education or title is the leader's ability to serve as a mentor and role model. Thus it is invaluable that the leader herself has a rich Jewish life and community, participates in both personal and communal rituals and has had some personal experience in experimenting with, discovering and creating a ritual practice that fulfills her. Equally as important, the teacher must have the social skills to necessary to build meaningful relationships with participants and serve them as a mentor. Finally it is important that the class leader not only has extensive knowledge of Jewish ritual practice specific to holidays and life-cycle, but a knowledge of Jewish history, text, and culture as well, so that teaching moments can be optimized, questions answered, and connections made between what students read about, hear about and actually experience as part of the program.

Possible resources for teachers include:

Texts currently required for students of URJ's Introduction to Judaism Class:

Syme, Daniel B. *The Jewish Home: A Guide for Jewish Living*. New York, NY: UAHC, 1988. Print.

Edwards, Lisa A., Stephen J. Einstein, Lydia Kukoff, Hara Person, and Marjorie Slome. *Introduction to Judaism: A Sourcebook*. New York: UAHC, 1999. Print.

Robinson, George. *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs, and Rituals*. New York: Pocket, 2000. Print.

Perelson, Ruth. *An Invitation to Shabbat: A Beginner's Guide to Weekly Celebration*. New York: UAHC, 1997. Print.

Sonsino, Rifat, and Daniel B. Syme. *Finding God: Selected Responses*. New York, NY: UAHC, 2002. Print.

On Jewish Practice and Ritual:

Greenberg, Irving. *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993. Print.

Hoffman, Lawrence A. *My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 1997. Print.

Waskow, Arthur Ocean. *Seasons of Our Joy: A Modern Guide to the Jewish Holidays*. Boston: Beacon, 1990. Print.

On Ritual

Kessler, Rachael. *The Soul of Education: Helping Students Find Connection, Compassion, and Character at School*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2000. Print.

Campell, Polly. "How a Simple Ritual Can Make You Feel Better." Web log post. *Psychology Today*. N.p., 19 Mar. 2013. Web. 16 Dec. 2013.

Driver, Tom F. *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998. Print.

On Experiential Education

Smith, Thomas E., and Clifford Knapp. *Sourcebook of Experiential Education: Key Thinkers and Their Contributions*. New York: Routledge, 2011. Print.

Outcomes

Mission of Organization

Union of Reform Judaism Mission

A revised mission was adopted by the General Assembly in Atlanta in December 1995

The mission of the Union for Reform Judaism is to provide vision, leadership and programmatic support to Reform Jewish congregations and to perpetuate and advance Reform Judaism.

To fulfill its mission, the Union has four major goals:

- To promote the enrichment and growth of Judaism through Reform Jewish congregations.
- To foster the vibrancy of Reform Judaism through Torah (life long Jewish education), *avodah* (worship of God through prayer and observance) and *gemilut chasadim* (the pursuit of justice, peace and deeds of loving-kindness).
- To support the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, enabling it to train rabbis, cantors, educators and other professionals and scholars who are essential to the spiritual and educational life of our religious community.
- To be supportive of the State of Israel and the Jewish people wherever they live and foster the development of Liberal Judaism worldwide under the auspices of the World Union for Progressive Judaism.

Selected Priority Goals

This curriculum will help the URJ with the first two goals of its mission.

It will help them to promote the enrichment and growth of Judaism through Reform Jewish congregations by offering congregations a tool to welcome and include a traditionally unengaged group. Furthermore, it offers interfaith couples a low-threshold opportunity to visit and engage local synagogues. Finally, while the movement commits itself to further investment in youth education, this program creates a learning opportunity not only for interfaith couples who may not already be engaged in Jewish learning, but for an age group rarely seen in synagogue based Jewish learning programs.

Enduring Understandings

1. "Over the centuries Jewish thought and values have been crystallized in religious behavior,"¹³ and so a study and practice of Jewish "behavior" in the form of ritual can offer insight into the fundamental ideas and values of Judaism.
2. Creating a meaningful ritual practice as life-partners can help us to explore and express the thoughts and values on which to build a life together.
3. As we experience life together as a couple, ritual (both traditional and new/creative) can offer a tool for marking new experiences and making meaning from them.
4. Marking time and experience through meaningful ritual can be a tool to connect to our spiritual selves, our partners and families, as well as our community.

Essential Questions

1. What does it mean to mark time as a Jewish couple?
2. When can traditional ritual best meet my needs and when is a creative or personal ritual feel more meaningful?
3. What does it mean to build any life together as a couple, let alone a Jewish one?
4. Why is Judaism important to me and to us?
5. How can we incorporate Jewish ritual into our lives in meaningful and authentic ways?

Learner Outcomes

Know: Students will be able to identify traditional rituals of Shabbat, Sukkot, Passover, B'nai Mitzvah, and Bris/Baby-naming and explain some of the history and symbolism behind them.

Do: Students will have tried out a variety of Jewish rituals (both traditional and creative) and will have incorporated at least one Jewish practice into their lives that speaks to the values at the core of their life together.

Believe: Students will think about the ways Jewish ritual, and the ideas and values on which it is based, can help them live the lives they want together.

¹³ Greenberg, Irving. "A Word to the Reader." Preface. *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*. New York: Summit, 1988. 13-14. Print.

Belong: Students will be in relationship with other couples looking to incorporate Judaism into their lives as well as one Jewish life role-model.

Acceptable Evidence for Learning

- During each meeting couples will informally report on which rituals they have tried since the previous meeting, including analysis on how they enjoyed it, how meaningful it felt, and whether it might be a realistic addition to their current practice.
- After each meeting students will reflect in a journal.
- At the end of the course students will create a ceremony using their knowledge of Jewish ritual and symbols to mark the conclusion of this experience and the beginning of new ones. The ceremony will incorporate ritual objects, that students plan to use as part of their household ritual practice.

Lesson Outline

Terms:

I use “student” and “individuals” and “participants” interchangeably to refer to each person.
I use “couples” to refer specifically to partner units.

Time and setting:

The first four lessons are to be held during the group Shabbaton which ideally would ideally be held during Sukkot. When that isn’t possible, the Sukkot lesson may be easily detached and held in the leader or a participant’s home.

Ideally these lessons are meant to begin after the group has already begun to meet in a classroom setting and continue the process of learning together after the formal URJ classes have concluded. This draws out the learning to almost a full year and thus creates greater impact.

The ideal setting of each lesson is listed to the left of the program title.

Unit Enduring Understandings

1. “Over the centuries Jewish thought and values have been crystallized in religious behavior,”¹⁴ and so a study and practice of Jewish “behavior” in the form of ritual can offer insight into the fundamental ideas and values of Judaism.
2. As we experience life together as a couple, ritual (both traditional and new/creative) can help to mark new experiences and making meaning from them by helping us to explore and express our shared values.
3. Marking time and experience through meaningful ritual can be a connection tool, helping us to come closer to our spiritual selves, our partners and families, as well as our community.

Retreat - Lesson 1: Uncovering our Own Rituals

Core Concepts:

- We each bring unique ritual experience to the table
- Ritual without meaning is just a routine
- Making/reciting blessings is a Jewish ritual that helps to mark sacred moments and experiences and allows us to be present and focused in them.

¹⁴ Greenberg, Irving. *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*. New York: Summit, 1988. Print.

Objectives:

- Participants will be able to describe a ritual from the past that was meaningful for them.
- Participants will be able to articulate why a ritual from the past was meaningful.
- Participants will be able to identify the aspects of ritual that give it meaning.
- Participants will be able to recognize the formal blessing structure.
- Participants will be able to describe one way that saying a blessing or marking a moment with words might be beneficial.

Retreat - Lesson 2: Shabbat Service

Core Concepts:

- Through ritual we are able to believe/feel/know what we might not otherwise rationally or logically be able to articulate.
- The prayer service consists of groups of prayers placed in a specific order over history that all create an emotional preparation and build up leading to connection/communication with God at the apex of our service (the Amidah Torah reading).
- Within every prayer service there are elements of Keva (set structure) and Kavanah (heart-felt intention, innovation) which go hand in hand to create meaningful prayer experiences.
- God hears prayers in any language, however Hebrew prayer allows us to connect to tradition and our people, express Jewish concepts for which there is no English translation, and can sometimes allows us to use prayers as a mantra, freeing our minds from the words themselves and allowing our hearts to speak.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to define keva and kavanah and give examples of the interplay between the two in the Shabbat service they attended.
- Students will be able to identify points in the service that felt particularly meaningful to them.
- Students will be able to identify a prayer or part of a prayer that they have trouble believing in, but would like to explore deeper.
- Students will be able to recognize one aspect of the service that shows a build up in the service and/or the Torah service as a high point.

Retreat - Lesson 3: Rituals and Values- Shabbat Text Study

Core Concepts:

- Rituals give us an opportunity to understand our values and put them into action.
- Biblical text provides a model for creating value rich Shabbat rituals.
- The study of biblical text itself can be understood as a Jewish ritual.

- Jewish text study begins and ends with questions. By asking questions of the text and searching within it for answers we place ourselves in a long tradition of Jewish scholarship.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to identify one value they see expressed by the way in which the group has studied Torah together.
- Couples will be able to identify one value of Shabbat that they would like to live out in their lives together.
- Couples will be able to describe several ways in which they might realistically act out their shared values through ritual.

Retreat / Sukkah - Lesson 4: Sukkot

Core Concepts:

- We have an innate human need for ritual.
- “To be a good Jew one has to have every human quality and its opposite.”¹⁵ Sukkot embodies a balance of opposites and allows us to appreciate them and live them out.
- In order to truly understand Sukkot, one must study its relationship to the holidays surrounding it.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to identify several symbols associated with the holiday and explain what they signify (including the sukkah itself, lulav and etrog)
- Couples will be able to identify aspects of life that bring them both joy and will have chosen mutual expressions of joy they would like to prioritize and mark with ritual.
- Couples will be able to give an example of several “human qualities” they would like to emphasize in their lives.

Home - Lesson 5: B’nai Mitzvah

Core Concepts:

- Rituals help us to move through liminal states by giving us the opportunity to try on new roles and behaviors.
- In today’s liberal Jewish world B’nai Mitzvah may be better understood as a family event which helps the family system adapt to changing roles as a child becomes a teen, than by its ascribed meanings (that it represents the passing from childhood to adulthood as the child becomes Bat Mitzvah and becomes responsible for her own religious responsibilities.)

¹⁵ Israel Salanter qtd in Greenberg, Irving. *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*. New York: Summit, 1988. Print.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to identify the ascribed meaning of B'nai Mitzvah.
- Students will be able to identify ways in which the process of becoming B'nai Mitzvah helps both the children and parents to grow.
- Participants will be able to identify rituals from their past that helped them to make a change in role, status or behavior and/or participants will be able to identify past personal changes that could have been supported through ritual.
- Couples will be able to identify future changes in role, status, or behavior for members of their family system for which a ritual might be helpful.

Home - Lesson 6: Baby Naming / Brit Milah

Core Concepts:

- Rituals help us communicate our beliefs and values to ourselves and to those around us.
- The concept of brit, or covenant plays a central role in Jewish theology and psychology.
- During the Brit Milah Ceremony we formally link newly born sons to a four thousand year tradition, to Torah, and to the brit (covenant) with God originally made by our patriarch Abraham, and to a Jewish model of relationships understood as covenantal.
- In more recent history the Brit Habat Ceremony has been created to formally link our daughters to this brit, and offers a model for studying the creative possibilities of ritual.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to translate the Hebrew word and the concept of "brit" into their own words.
- Participants will be able to explain the parallel between the mutual responsibilities between child and parent and the mutual responsibilities between God and Jewish people.
- Couples will be able to describe a personal ritual innovation that communicates what it means to them to bring their child into the covenant.

Home - Lesson 7: Passover

Core Concepts:

- "Every aspect of the Passover Seder experience from the food, to the story, to the way we eat it, attempts to help us re-enact the Exodus from slavery."¹⁶
- By re-living the Exodus we learn fundamental Jewish psychology and perspective.

¹⁶ Greenberg, Irving. *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*. New York: Summit, 1988. Print.

- The Seder can be a tool to help us navigate the issues and concerns of our world today.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to identify aspects of ritual previously studied as it is displayed in the Passover Seder.
- Students will be able to identify the Jewish values and aspects of identity relayed through the Passover narrative to which they best relate.
- Couples will be able to explain the role of Jewish ritual in their lives and home.

Lesson 8: Concluding Ceremony

Core Concepts

- The end of the group's structured journey together marks the transition to more personal study and exploration of Judaism and ritual as a couple.
- In ritual, in Judaism, in life – we often get out what we put in, thus in order to make meaning from life experiences and ritual we must put in valuable resources (time, effort, emotion)
- We all have the power to create meaningful rituals.

Objectives:

- As a class, the entire group will create a ritual employing Jewish tradition and creative interpretations of tradition, to mark the transition from a structured, professionally led and designed exploration of Judaism and ritual, to a life-long family journey.
- Through the class ritual, each couple will sanctify a ritual object to be used in future family rituals.

Scripted Lesson 1

Key to creating community among participants, and creating safe space within the group quickly so that participants are comfortable embarking on a very personal journey together, will be an overnight Shabbaton. The following scripted lesson is intended to be the second group activity of the weekend after some scripted ice-breakers and some unscripted/free schmoozing time.

Uncovering Our Own Rituals

Enduring Understandings:

1. "Over the centuries Jewish thought and values have been crystallized in religious behavior,"¹⁷ and so a study and practice of Jewish "behavior" in the form of ritual can offer insight into the fundamental ideas and values of Judaism.
2. Creating a meaningful ritual practice as life-partners can help us to explore and express the thoughts and values on which to build a life together.
3. As we experience life together as a couple, ritual (both traditional and new/creative) can offer a tool for marking new experiences and making meaning from them.
4. Marking time and experience through meaningful ritual can be a tool to connect to our spiritual selves, our partners and families, as well as our community.

Core Concepts:

- We each bring unique ritual experience to the table.
- Ritual without meaning is just a routine
- Making/reciting blessings are a Jewish ritual that help to mark moments and experiences and allow us to be present and focused in them.

Goals:

- For students to begin to get to know each other in a deeper way.
- For leader to begin to learn more about where each student is coming from and what knowledge/feelings they bring with them.
- Come up with a working definition for "ritual"

Objectives:

¹⁷ Greenberg, Irving. "A Word to the Reader." Preface. *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*. New York: Summit, 1988. 13-14. Print.

- Participants will be able to describe a ritual from the past that was meaningful for them
- Participants will be able to articulate why a ritual from the past was meaningful
- Participants will be able to identify the aspects of ritual that give it meaning

Activities:

Candle Lighting Ceremony : 20 minutes

- Leader will explain that traditionally, at the start of Jewish holidays, at the transition from regular, mundane time to holy sacred special time, we light candles and say a blessing (or blessings, depending on the holiday).
- Give opportunity for participants in the group to share about candle lighting traditions from their past or that they currently engage in.
- Discuss “sacred time” briefly. What makes time sacred? Is the time itself sacred or do we bring the sanctity to it?
- Explain that we are not only marking the transition from Friday into Shabbat, but we are marking our transition into this weekend and this journey together.
- Share proverb that one should say 100 blessings in a day.
- Ask group if they say blessings with any regularity.
 - Let those who do share examples of when they say a blessing.
 - Ask them why they do it
 - Ask them to explain what it does for them (if different from why)
- Share a few examples of different blessings in Hebrew and in English
 - As a group, brainstorm what value saying blessings might have.
 - Help you be present and focus on the moment, help you to be appreciate, help express that there is something special happening, sets intention, to mark sacred time.
- Explain that we are going to say the traditional blessing for lighting candles on Shabbat and light a communal candle together and then every couple will have a chance to light their own set and share with each other a blessing for the start of this experience together. It could be in traditional prayer format and start with the “Baruch atah Adonai” formula if that feels comfortable, or it could be something you want to appreciate about this experience so far; it could be a wish for yourself or for the group, or it could also just be something you want to focus on during this process together. When everyone has lit candles and shared with their partner, we’ll sing Shalom Aleichem together.

- Explain Shalom Aleichem. This liturgical poem was written by the mystics called Kabbalists of Safed in the late 16th or early 17th century. According to the story passed down in the Talmud, two angels accompany people on their way back home from synagogue on Friday night — a good angel and an evil angel. If the house has been prepared for the Shabbat ("the lamp has been lit, the table set, and his couch spread"), the good angel utters a blessing that the next Shabbat will be the same, and the evil angel is forced to respond "Amen". But if the home is not prepared for Shabbat, the evil angel expresses the wish that the next Shabbat will be the same, and the good angel is forced to respond "Amen". This song, this liturgical poem, acts much like a blessing. In it we ask that the angels come in peace and bless us with peace, and leave in peace as well. Generally it is sung before saying Kiddush on Friday night – which we will get to in more detail later when we sit down to dinner.
- Pass out song sheets with lyrics in Hebrew, transliteration, and English translation
- Give students a minute of quiet to think about what their blessing might be and mentally prepare
- Light the big candle as a group, recite the traditional blessing as a group, then allow each couple a turn to light their own candles.
- Once everyone who wants to share has shared, sing Shalom Aleichem together.

What Is Ritual? (10 minutes)

- Leader should point out to students that we all just participated in a ritual together.
- What is a ritual? – brainstorm together
- As a group create a working definition of ritual.
- Questions to support creation of definition
 - Must rituals be religious?
 - Must ritual be repeated over and over?
 - May want to share the dictionary definition and ask what people think of it; does it fully express what you think of as a ritual? Can you think of examples of something you think of as a ritual that doesn't match this definition?
 - an established or prescribed procedure for a religious or other rite.
 - a system or collection of religious or other rites.
 - observance of set forms in public worship.

Sharing rituals (25 minutes)

- Guided meditation
 - Invite students to close their eyes.

- o Begin by teaching 3x3 breathing (breath in through nose for three counts, hold for three counts, breath out slowly through mouth for three counts and repeat three times) and leading group through a set.
 - o Invite group to continue this deep breathing on their own, and while they are breathing, ask them to think back over the rituals they have been a part of, as a participant, as a leader, as a spectator or community member. (Give what feels like a long long pause to give people a chance to think.)
 - o Ask participants to think about which one of those rituals stands out, as they think which bring back the strongest memories, which one feels most emotional or meaningful (another long pause).
 - o Invite participants to keep breathing and they try to really remember the details of that ritual experience. Where were they? Who else was there? What was going on? What were you feeling? What were you seeing, hearing, smelling. (Give another long pause for thinking about this.)
 - o Lead group through one more set of 3x3 breathing and when they are ready invite participants to open their eyes when they are ready.
- Sharing experiences
 - o Allow another few seconds for quiet reflection and ask if anyone is comfortable sharing.
 - o Instructor should be ready to share a personal experience.
 - o Encourage everyone to share the ritual experience
- Reflection on Reflection
 - o Allow students to share (if they are comfortable) what they are thinking and feeling after this exercise.
 - o Ask students if they heard any repetition or any themes.
 - o Ask students to reflect and share why they think these are the rituals that stand out.
- Search for qualities of meaning
 - o Finally, ask group, based on their own experiences and those that they heard, to create a list together of what makes a ritual particularly meaningful.

Siyyum (5 minutes)

- Thank students for sharing something personal
- Invite students to offer thanks to someone in the group for something that felt touching

Scripted Lesson 2

Lesson #3: Rituals and Values - Shabbat Text Study

Enduring Understandings:

1. "Over the centuries Jewish thought and values have been crystallized in religious behavior,"¹⁸ and so a study and practice of Jewish "behavior" in the form of ritual can offer insight into the fundamental ideas and values of Judaism.
2. Creating a meaningful ritual practice as life-partners can help us to explore and express the thoughts and values on which to build a life together.
3. As we experience life together as a couple, ritual (both traditional and new/creative) can offer a tool for marking new experiences and making meaning from them.
4. Marking time and experience through meaningful ritual can be a tool to connect to our spiritual selves, our partners and families, as well as our community.

Core Concepts:

- Rituals give us an opportunity to understand our values and put them into action.
- Biblical text provides a model for creating value rich Shabbat rituals.
- The study of biblical text itself can be understood as a Jewish ritual.
- Jewish text study begins and ends with questions, by asking questions of the text and searching within it for answers we place ourselves in a long tradition of Jewish scholarship.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to identify one value they see expressed by the way in which the group has studied Torah together.
- Couples will be able to identify one value of Shabbat that they would like to live out in their lives together.
- Couples will be able to describe several ways in which they might realistically act out their shared values through ritual.

Goals:

- To provide a comfortable introduction to Jewish textual tradition.
 - To give students an example of the way Reform Jews can make educated choices
 - To encourage students to think about the ways Shabbat can be a part of their lives
-

Pre-Retreat Classroom Prep:

As part of URJ curriculum students have already read Essential Judaism and Introduction to Judaism chapters on Jewish textual tradition (see URJ syllabus for specifics).

Activities:

Blessing for the Torah Study

- Review what students know about blessings from the last session.
 - 100 blessings in a day proverb
 - marking transitions
 - help focus and be present in the moment
 - help to appreciate
 - other ideas the group came up with
- Give students handout with blessing for study of Torah.
 - Look at the blessing together in Hebrew, English and Transliteration.
 - Ask students if they have any initial thoughts or questions about the words of the blessing itself.
 - Ask students why they think it is appropriate (based on how we've already discussed blessings) to say one as we begin to study Torah together?
- Recite the blessing together

Quick Review - What is Torah?

- Depending on personality of class and time since the classroom portion of experience began teachers may choose to simply verbally review the terms or play a game (like jeopardy). It is important that students are not bogged down or confused by this. Text study itself can be intimidating and students should be energized and enthusiastic when they begin to read the text.
- Be sure to include a review of the following terms:
Torah, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Nevi'im, Ketuvim, Mishna, Gemara, Talmud, Midrash

Shabbat Text Study

Set Induction:

- Ask students who has heard the phrase, "There is no such thing as a stupid question."

- Ask students to think back over life experiences, have they ever felt like they were asked a “stupid question” by someone else? Have you ever felt like you asked a stupid question, or were worried that your question was stupid? (Do not share aloud, only think internally)
- Share Carl Sagan quote: “There are naive questions, tedious questions, ill-phrased questions, questions put after inadequate self-criticism. But every question is a cry to understand the world. There is no such thing as a dumb question.”
 - Ask students to reflect on this quote.

Shabbat Texts

- Pass out text sheet of **Exodus 20:8-11** including Hebrew text and English translation. Explain that what we are about to read is often called the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments.
 - Teacher should set scene and explain that the Israelites have been wandering in the desert for a while (earlier in the chapter it says about 3 months since they left Egypt). The community is camped out at the base of Mt. Sinai. Moses goes up and talks to God and God tells him to tell the people that God is going to make a covenant with them all. God tells Moses to tell them to prepare, to stay pure, to wash up and get ready. God gives the people three days to prep and then on the third day there is thunder and lightening, a cloud over the mountain – and then after building up the drama – God speaks to the whole community of Israelites for the first time, laying out the details of this covenant, this new relationship he’s making with the whole people.
- As a group read the text together in Hebrew and in English
- Break up into groups of 4 (two couples together).
 - In groups students should go through the text word by word and line by line.
 - Any time there is a word that is unclear, that could be defined in different ways, the group should underline it.
 - Anytime they have a question, they should write it on the side of their paper.
 - *(Teacher may want to go through the Exodus verse 7 to provide an example without taking the work from the students.)*
 - Come back together and share some of the questions each group came up with to create a running list on the board.
- Present to students Deuteronomy 5:12-15.

- Again, teacher should offer students background. Reminding students that in many ways Deuteronomy serves as a summary of the other books of the Torah. Here the Israelites are about to enter the Promised Land and Moses their leader will soon die. They are getting organized and ready to start a new chapter in their communal life. Moses begins this speech by telling the people how and why the laws were given to him and that what he is about to tell them (again) is the basis of the covenant they made with God already. He repeats the Decalogue as evidence that God spoke to Israel and gave them laws, and that the subsequent laws, which he is now about to give the people, which implement the principles of the Decalogue are also from God.
- As a class, again read in English and Hebrew.
 - Now invite students to add new questions they may have to the running list on the board.

Looking at Tradition

- Explain to students that we are neither the first nor the last to struggle with these questions. Each group (groups from before) will be assigned a famous commentator. (Teacher should remind students that this is only a sampling. There are countless other interpretations, explanations, of these texts)
 - As a group, answer the following questions
 - What question(s) is the commentator answering?
 - What conclusion does the commentator come to?
 - Where or how do they find answers?
 - How do you as a group feel about the “answer”?
- Groups should come back together and share what they’ve learned from their assigned commentator (groups should also explain briefly who the commentator was and when he/she lived)

Asking our Own Questions

- Teacher: Explain that we have answered some questions but as Jews we believe that we each have the authority and the responsibility to ask our own questions and struggle to find our own answers. We also believe that answers can, will, and should change over time.
 - With your partner, decide on a question from the text that seems most important to you. (It could be “why” celebrate Shabbat, could be “how” to celebrate Shabbat, could be related to a redundancy or inconsistency within the text.)
 - Search the text for meaning and together come up with a response that feels meaningful for you, using the context, the grammar (if you know Hebrew), comparisons between the texts etc. Together you are creating your own commentary.

- Finally, how could your question and response come into play in your life (for example if the question is why celebrate Shabbat, and the response is because it connects us to the world around us, then you should discuss how might you go about making time in your life to connect to the world around you, and what that would actually look like for you two)

Ideally students should take a short break after, time to socialize, move around, and reflect before coming back together for the siyum.

Siyum:

- Give couples a chance to share with the wider group a part of the conversation they had. If they were able to come up with an action for their lives, give everyone a chance to share it.
- Invite students to think about the experience of studying text
 - It may be helpful to review the order of the exercises
- Ask students how this form of text study compares to other ways in which they have studied texts in other settings (in school, in church, etc)
- Ask students if they could come up with a one line description or characterization of how they studied the Jewish text today.
- If we understand this as a form of particularly “Jewish” text study, what might we infer about Judaism and Jewish values?
- Based on what we have learned about ritual so far (look back to definition created in lesson 1), in what ways did we just participate in a ritual?

Commentaries to Choose From:

Depending on number of participants the ideal class would use texts from a variety of sources, representing a variety of time periods as well as diverse methods of exegesis representing responses to different questions.

Furthermore if there are students with a background in text study they may be offered more challenging texts.

1. Found in Sefer Ha Aggadah (collection of Midrash) taken from Pesikta Rabbati, an early medieval Midrash on Jewish festivals

R. Berekhiah taught in the name of R. Hiyya bar Abba: The Sabbath was given solely for enjoyment. R. Haggai said in the name of R. Samuel bar Nahman: The Sabbath was given solely for the study of Torah. But the two do not really differ. What R. Berekhiah said in the name of R. Hiyya bar Abba about the Sabbath's being given for enjoyment applies to disciples of the wise, who weary themselves in study of Torah throughout the week but on the Sabbath come out and enjoy themselves. What R. Haggai said in the name of R. Samuel bar Nahman about the Sabbath's being given for study of Torah applies to workingmen, who are monopolized by their work throughout the week, but on the Sabbath come in and busy themselves with the Torah.

Bialik, Hayyim Nahman, and Yehoshua Hana Rawnitzki. *Legends of the Talmud the First Complete Translation of Sefer Ha-agada*. New York: Schocken, 1992. Print.

2. Obadiah ben

Jacob **Sforno** was an Italian rabbi, commentator, philosopher and physician. He was born at Cesena about 1475 and died at Bologna in 1550.

The infinitive form (of the word זכור) tells us that we should be aware of the Sabbath every day of the week, even while involved in our daily routines. This is also the same mode chosen by the Torah for demanding that we be forever mindful of what Amalek, our enemy did to our ancestors after they crossed the Sea on dry land (Deut 25:17). The same is true of the invitive form chosen by the Torah when urging us to remember the legislation pertaining to the "month of spring," ie the month of the redemption from Egypt. Compare Deut 6:1, the reminder to remember the Sabbath constantly was intended to ensure that you observe all the commandments associated with the day. Even the order to work six days is intended to ensure that by concentrating on the need to make a living during those days, this will enable such people to take their minds off such mundane matters on the Sabbath.

Munk, Eliyahu, Hananel Ben Hushi'el, Samuel Ben Meir, David Kimhi, and Obadiah Ben Jacob Sforno. *Hachut Hameshulash: Commentaries on the Torah by Rabbeinu Chananel, Rabbi Sh'muel Ben Meir (Rash'bam), Rabbi David Kimchi (R'dak), Rabbi Ovadiah Sforno*. New York: Lambda, 2003. Print.

3. **Rashbam-** (1085 – 1158) an acronym for Rabbi Shmuel Ben Meir, was a leading French Tosafist (medieval commentator on the Talmud) and grandson of Shlomo Yitzhaki, aka "Rashi.

Remembering something always refers to past events. We have numerous such verses as in Deuteronomy 32:7-8 "remember past history, etc." Exodus 13:3, Deuteronomy 9:7-8 plus many other verses exhort the Jewish people to remember events in the past. Usually the command to do so is phrased as an imperative. However, in the Ten

Commandments, the expressions *zachor* and *shamor* are in the infinitive mode. Seeing that both are followed immediately by the command, “to sanctify it,” this makes an imperative of the whole paragraph. The Torah, in a way, commands us to “commemorate” something which God had done long before there was a legislation to observe the Sabbath as a day of rest. Already when creating the “day” He had blessed it, ie made provisions for those who would observe it not to be deprived by their observance but to find that God in his generosity had provided the needs for the people in question. Observing, emulating something God had done, is a way of honoring Him. He “worked” for 6 days before “resting,” so do we as a way of honoring Him.

Munk, Eliyahu, Hananel Ben Hushi’el, Samuel Ben Meir, David Kimhi, and Obadiah Ben Jacob Sforno. *Hachut Hameshulash: Commentaries on the Torah by Rabbeinu Chananel, Rabbi Sh’muel Ben Meir (Rash’bam), Rabbi David Kimchi (R’dak), Rabbi Ovadiah Seforno*. New York: Lambda, 2003. Print.

4. Ramban – aka Nahmanides (1194–c. 1270), Rabbi Moshe ben Nahman, Catalan rabbi, philosopher, physician, Kabbalist and biblical commentator.

The following has been edited in an attempt for clarity. It is not a literal translation. In addition, Ramban had MUCH more to say about these verses, including an explanation about the significance of their placement in relation to other commandments, why the command is to remember in one place and to guard in another, and a Kabbalistic interpretation of “remember” and “guard”, as well as a discussion as to what actions must take place in order fulfill these commandments, and whether or not women are obligated as well as men.

In reference to vs 9 and the words (עבודה) translated as labor and (אכאמל) work.

The idea of labor is work that is not for direct physical benefit, such as food preparation (which is for direct physical benefit) and the like, as we see in Ex 1:14 “labor of the field”, and in Genesis 4:12 “when you work the ground” and Ezekiel 36:9 “and you will be tilled and sown.” This is why the Torah says both of these expressions. “Six days you shall labor” meaning in the field, and “accomplish all your work” meaning all that is for your physical needs and benefit, as it is said in Exodus 16:23 “Tomorrow is a rest day, a holy Sabbath to God; bake what you wish to bake and cook what you wish to cook.” But then on the Sabbath, as the verse continues, you shall not do any work of either kind.

Adapted from English translation found in

Nahman, Moše Ben, Yaakov Blinder, and Yoseph Kamenetsky. *The Torah: With Ramban’s Commentary Translated, Annotated and Elucidated*. Brooklyn (N.Y.): Mesorah Publ, 2004. Print.

5. Rabbi Arthur O. Waskow (leader in the Jewish Renewal movement, ordained by a prolific author known especially for political activism) and **Rabbi Phyllis O. Berman** (also leader in Jewish Renewal movement, activist, wife and writing partner of Waskow, especially known for contributions to liturgy)

According to the Exodus version of the Word that came from Sinai, the reason for Shabbat is cosmic. It is intended to affirm through human action (or inaction) that in the very creation of the universe, God paused, rested, on the seventh beat of time. Carved into the deepest recesses of reality is the need for a rhythm of Doing and Being.

Regardless of who we think wrote the book of Deuteronomy and when, it clearly redefined Shabbat. In the course of calling for justice throughout society, it singled out Shabbat as a special sign and symbol of that justice, insisting that Israel’s covenant with God is a covenantal affirmation of human freedom, justice, and equality.

Is there any value in teaching both that Shabbat is a cosmic reality and that Shabbat is a political commitment?

This very truth about the cosmos embodies the truth about the freedom of humanity. Only a society that knows to pause, to play to meditate and dance and sing and make love, to reflect on its life and thus experience its collective consciousness, is in accord with the cosmic truth.

And it is not just that the cosmic leads to the political. The political leads to the cosmic. Only a society that knows to pause can intuit and celebrate the cosmic truth of a universe of pause and rhythm. It may even be true that if the human race were to abandon this truth in our behavior, we would bring disaster and destruction upon our planet, our own local aspect of the cosmos.

Waskow, Arthur O., and Phyllis O. Berman. *Freedom Journeys: The Tale of Exodus and Wilderness across Millennia*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2011. Print.

7. Carol Meyers –feminist biblical scholar and Professor of Religion at Duke University. She is known for using history as a basis for understanding text.

When it (reference to Shabbat) appears in Exodus in the community precepts known as the Decalogue, the paradigm for the Sabbath is a priestly one, linked to the creation of the cosmos; it is a ritual remembrance (20:8) marking God's cessation from work on the seventh day after six days of creation (20:11; cf. Gen 2:2-3). A similar rationale appears in the priestly tabernacle texts in 31:12-17. Quite different is the rationale in Deuteronomy, where the Sabbath precept is explicitly commemorative of Israel's past. It uses language recalling the redemption of the people from Egypt: "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day" (Deut 5:15). As a hallowed day that becomes a premier social and religious institution of the Israelites and, whether observed on Saturday or Sunday, a hallmark of the religious week of both Jews and Christians since postbiblical times, it is linked in the Bible to both the order of the cosmos and the origins of Israel.

The rationales may differ in Exodus and Deuteronomy, but the implications of the Sabbath for the people are the same. Both sources stipulate that the sanctity of the seventh day is meant to provide a respite for all. Unlike the Passover regulations, there is no distinction between Israelites and uncircumcised servants for foreigners. Noncitizens and servants and even animals are to observe the Sabbath. The regulations are gender and age inclusive. The somewhat puzzling omission of the wife can probably be understood as a function of the conjugal pair being understood as a unit, with the masculine singular "you" (20:9) being used inclusively, as it is in the verbs that proclaim the native imperatives (such as "You shall not murder. . ."). It should be noted, in addition, that 20:10 lists seven categories of household members; the male (and female?) head of house, son, daughter, male slave, female slave, livestock, and alien resident. That symbolic number may be intended to emphasize the totality of household members required to observe the Sabbath.

. . . What remains is the strong possibility that the Sabbath actually originated among the Israelites, perhaps for the humanitarian reasons that the biblical texts suggest. The Israelites presumably added a special day to the existing six-day week of the biblical world, thereby creating the unit of time, the seven-day week, that culminates in a day with enduring social and religious significance. It was a day that became particularly important in late First Temple times as a benchmark of covenant obedience. And in the exilic and postexilic periods, it took on added significance as an institution that was not dependent on temple cult and that would help the people, including many now living in diaspora communities, maintain their identity and faith.

Meyers, Carol L. *Exodus*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005. Print.

Scripted Lesson 3

Lesson #6: Passover Seder

Enduring Understandings:

1. "Over the centuries Jewish thought and values have been crystallized in religious behavior,"¹⁹ and so a study and practice of Jewish "behavior" in the form of ritual can offer insight into the fundamental ideas and values of Judaism.
2. Creating a meaningful ritual practice as life-partners can help us to explore and express the thoughts and values on which to build a life together.
3. As we experience life together as a couple, ritual (both traditional and new/creative) can offer a tool for marking new experiences and making meaning from them.
4. Marking time and experience through meaningful ritual can be a tool to connect to our spiritual selves, our partners and families, as well as our community.

Core Concepts:

- Every aspect of the Passover Seder experience attempts to help us to re-enact the Exodus from slavery.
- By re-living the Exodus we learn fundamental Jewish psychology and perspective.
- The Seder can be a tool to help us navigate the issues and concerns of our own world.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to identify aspects of ritual previously studied as it is displayed in the Passover Seder.
- Students will be able to identify the Jewish values and aspects of identity relayed through the Passover narrative to which they best relate.
- Couples will be able to explain the role of Jewish ritual in their lives and home.

Pre-Lesson Reading:

Students will have already read and discussed the following vocabulary : haggadah, matzah, maror, charoset, chametz, kitnyot, 4 questions, and will have read chapters on the traditional Seder practice from Essential Judaism as well as Introduction to Judaism (see syllabus)

In addition to URJ homework, before this lesson students should be asked to look through a Haggadah, and bring one to class this week. Students should be encouraged to ask friends and family to suggest a favorite, to look online, to try to find a unique Haggadah. Each

student should bring one, couples should bring two different ones. Additionally couples should study the Haggadah together as they would study another Jewish text, looking for questions, looking for big themes. Finally each student should find one part of their Haggadah that particularly speaks to them.

Timing/Setting:

This lesson is written as a whole, but in actuality will be parts of 3 meetings. As the curriculum is built to give students time to learn, experience and reflect, part one of the lesson will take place before students participate in a Seder together and part two will take place after the Seder.

Part 1 Before Seder Activities:

The goal of this part is to prepare for the group Seder.

1. Begin with blessing for Torah study
2. As a part of every lesson after the retreat, we begin by giving each couple the opportunity to share rituals they have tried out, what is working and what isn't. Teachers should be sure to ask couples to think about why certain rituals are sticking while others are may not, to identify aspects of rituals that speak to them more than others, and what they have learned about themselves as individuals and as couples through this process.
3. Separate into small groups of 3-4 (trying to diversify Haggadot in groups). Compare Haggadot. What do they have in common, what makes each unique?
4. Come back together as a class. Based on what you saw, based on what you read in the book and in the Haggadah, what would you say "the point" of Passover is? As a group, try to create a Seder Mission Statement. It should explain what the group's Seder should be attempting to do and how.
5. As a class, create a comprehensive list of all of the elements the group Seder should have based on the mission. Use the commonalities in all of the Haggadot to help create the list and the mission to help define how the group's Seder might be unique.
6. Take a moment to think about the rituals we have participated in so far in the course and in life. Review the elements of ritual that we have learned so far. Are there any special elements to add based on our ritual experiences?
7. Based on the parts of the Seder individuals marked as especially interesting (done ahead of time), divide the community into small groups and assign each group a portion of the service to lead. Small groups should be responsible for bringing ritual elements for the group. Meal responsibilities should be evenly divided between couples.

8. Some time should be given for small groups to get together and discuss how they can make the element or portion of the Seder they are leading the most transformative possible.

Part 2 : Following the Group Seder Activities

1. Begin with blessing for Torah Study

2. Give couples time to share home rituals (see explanation above)

3. Discuss together:

- How was our Seder compared to what you thought it would be like?
- How did taking part in Seder compare to the reading about the holiday you did?
- How did our Seder compare to others you attended this year or in years past?
- If you were to do it over again, what might you change about it?
- Describe any thoughts or feelings that stood out to you as you were planning, as you were leading, as you were heading home that evening, as you were thinking about it again in preparation for today.
- Were there any lines from the service, any moments from the experience that stood out to you?

4. As a group, make a comprehensive list of symbols in the Seder, (you may want to include especially meaningful symbolic language or phrases). Then, looking at this list, what are the messages you think we learn from Pesach? How might the telling of this story, in this way for generations and generations had an impact on the Jewish people?

5. The four sons – Ask participants to turn to the 4 sons or 4 children in their Haggadah. Explain that there are as many interpretations of this tradition as there are Jews who read it.

- Show several different interpretations of the four sons. Compare the differences between haggadot. (Leaders may want to bring in a few artistic interpretations, God-cast offers a modern take, and the Noam Zion Haggadah offers several.)
- Read one version, and then ask everyone to share how versions differ. In most versions the wicked child is wicked because she is detached from the tradition and the community, because she asks, what is it to you, instead of what's it to me or us. Is that true for in all versions? What is the difference between the wise and wicked children? What do we learn from this?

6. As couples compare your personal list with that of your partner. Where are there overlaps? Are there contradictions? How might you live out some of these values in your home together, during Pesach, but in the rest of your lives and your years?

7. Finally – still as couples, return to the experience of leading and running a Seder with the group. Thinking about the elements that felt most meaningful, what kinds of rituals do you

see being a part of your life together? Based on the experiments with ritual you've been living out, what would you like to invest more in and what seems irrelevant to your lives? What is the role of ritual in the life you are building together? What might be the role of specifically Jewish ritual and Jewish tradition in that life?



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| Finding God | Sonsino/Syme | URJ Press, 2002 | \$13.95 |
| Aleph Isn't Tough | Motzkin | URJ Press, 2000 | \$18.95 |
| Aleph Isn't Tough Flashcards | Motzkin | URJ Press, 2000 | \$ 7.95 |
| Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures | Jewish Publication Society, 1985 | | \$13.70 |
| Essential Judaism | Robinson | Atria, 2001 | \$12.84 |

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Introduction to Judaism with Rabbi Leana Moritt

Beginning November 6, 2013

Please complete the weekly **reading in preparation for (before)** class.

Write your journal reflection entries **after** class.

1. Nov 6
3 Kislev

Orientation/Introductions

God, Torah & Israel

Written Torah, Early History

Our first class will be an introduction to the course and to each other. We will look over the syllabus and calendar and books, especially the *Tanakh* (Bible). We will plan our Shabbat get-togethers and establish some ground rules. We'll go over how to give a d'var Torah (and circulate a sign up list) and leave plenty of time for your questions.

Parashat HaShavuah: Vayetzei

Vocabulary: d'var Torah, parsha/parshat hashavua, drash, Tanakh, chumash, Torah, Nevi'im Ketuvim, Haftarah

Journal Entry due by our next class: What is my current level of religious commitment? Why am I taking this class? What do I hope to learn? What are my questions, doubts or concerns? What are the things about Judaism that most appeal to me? What gives me pause?

2. Nov 13
10 Kislev

Evolving Responses to "Modernity:"

Reform Judaism's Pioneering Role in the Major Modern Movements

The concept and currency of Mitzvah/Mitzvot

Oral Torah

IJ: 23, 271-289, EJ: 195-234, 257-265, 268-306, 311-357,

Optional: <http://www.theworld.org/2009/08/03/new-age-judaism/>

Parashat HaShavuah: Vayishlach

Vocabulary: mitzvah, minhag, halakha, aggada, Talmud, Mishnah, gemarrah, 613 Commandments, aseret hadibrot, bein adam l'makom, bein adam l'chavero, tikkun olam, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, Renewal, mechitzah, hassidic, haredi

Journal Entry due by our next class: The concept of mitzvot is central to Judaism. What actions do I consider mitzvot (a mitzvah) compared to actions that are "good deeds"? How might the idea of commandment affect my actions at home, work or in the community? Do I feel there is a relationship between ethical and ritual mitzvot? How might performing one (type) inform or affect the other?

3. Nov 20
17 Kislev

Hanukkah, Tu B'Shevat, Purim and Tisha B'Av

EJ: 111-118, 130-133, JH: 38-57, 85-90, Book of Eicha/Lamentations, Book of Esther

Parashat HaShavuah: Vayeshev

Vocabulary: dreidel, latke, hanukkia, menorah, shamash, gelt, 3 weeks, 9 days, Megilla, grogger, hamentashen, mishloakh manot, matanot l'evyonim, ta'anit Esther (IJ: 24, 152)

No Class November 27: "Erev" Thanksgiving

Journal Entry due by our next class: Which holidays of my youth continue to be important to me and why? Which would be the hardest to give up? Are there any changes I would like to make in my observance of these holidays? What holiday memories are especially dear to me?

OR

What are your thoughts about the differences between Chanukah and Christmas? How might you handle the two holidays if there is one Jewish and one-non Jewish partner in your family?

4. Dec 4 **Jewish Ethics and Tzedakah:**
 1 Tevet **Its Central Historic Role In Jewish Life and A Reform Perspective**
EJ: 142, 234-244, **IJ:** 21-22, 171-176
Parashat HaShavuah: Vayigash
Vocabulary: tikkun olam, mitzvah, gemilut hasadim, pushka,
 tzedakah box, Pirkei Avot, mensch

Journal Entry due by our next class: How do I feel about tzedaka being obligatory rather than voluntary (from the heart)? Can it be both? Why should people who receive tzedakah have to donate tzedakah? Is there more to religion than ethics?

5. Dec 11 **Commitment & Covenant:**
 8 Tevet **Brit, Birth/adoption ceremonies**
Jewish Education/Camp
Bar/Bat Mitzvah and Confirmation
EJ: 139-160 (ex. 142), **JH:** 90-121, **(IJ: 6)**
Parashat HaShavuah: Vayechi
Vocabulary: simchat bat, brit milah, bar/bat mitzvah, bris, pidyon
 haben, cheder, sandek, Hebrew name, day school, Hebrew/religious school

Journal Entry due by our next class: How do rituals and customs having to do with birth, brit, b'nei mitzvah, mark the path of the life cycle? How can I find meaning in these rituals? How do I understand the covenant between God and the Jewish People? How is it expressed?

6. Dec 18 **Death and Mourning**
 15 Tevet **EJ:** 181-192, **JH:** 159-209 **IJ:** 87-90
Parashat HaShavuah: Shemot
Vocabulary: Shivah, kriah, yahrzeit, shloshim, kaddish, tahara, aron,
 met, cheura kadisha, yizkor, zikhrono/a l'ivrakha,
 alav/aleha l'shalom **(IJ: 75-76)**

Journal Entry due by our next class: How have death and mourning rituals been of comfort to me at a time of a loved one's death? What is the purpose of death rituals?

No Class December 25 or Jan 1

7. Jan 8 **Creating Jewish Lives (part 1) in TIME:**
 7 Shevat **Shabbat Rest & (Re)creation: A Reform Palette of Possibilities**
 An Invitation to Shabbat (Perelson book), **EJ** 81-91, **JH** 3-10 **IJ:** 223-228
Parashat HaShavuah: Beshalach
Vocabulary: Shabbes, gut Shabbes, Shabbat shalom, bracha, kiddush,
 motzi, netilat yadayim, bensch, havdalah

Journal Entry due by our next class: What does the concept of Shabbat mean to me? What am I doing/can I do to observe Shabbat? What aspects of Shabbat are meaningful/relevant to me? What might I add or take away to create a time of rest, sanctity and delight?

Friday, January 10
 Shabbat Services & Class Dinner
 Approx 6.00pm: exact times & location TBD

8. Jan 15 **The Shoah (Holocaust)**
 7 Shevat **Modern Zionism**
 The Meaning of the State of Israel
 Israel and Her Holidays
 Antisemitism

EJ: 128-130, IJ: 155-157, Review 309-314, 315-342, 356-363
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=saeky9I5T9c&feature=player_embedded
 and <http://youtu.be/WMPPhRTIaAto>
 Parashat HaShavuah: Yitro
 Vocabulary: *Hatikvah (song in IJ, pg 348), magen david, kibbutz, aliyah, antisemitism, shoah, 'never again'*

Journal Entry due by our next class: Why do you think that Jews have been the focus of discrimination throughout history? Do you think anti-Semitism still exists? Have you ever experienced or witnessed anti-Semitism?

OR

How might the Zionist movement be an outgrowth of anti-Semitism? What is your reaction to the longing for Jerusalem, which is reflected in much of Jewish history? What are your feelings about the modern State of Israel? What role should Israel play in the lives of Jewish Americans?

9. Jan 22 **High Holy Days, Part I:**
 21 Shevat **Teshuvah: Spiritual Realignment: Turning, Letting Go and Forgiving**
 Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur

EJ: 92-97, JH: 14-27, IJ: 169-170
 Parashat HaShavuah: Mishpatim
 Vocabulary: *teshuvah, yamim nora'im, machzor, Kol Nidre, shana tova, g'mar chatima tova, tzom kal, gut yontif, ne'ila, une'taneh tokef (IJ:162, 364)*

Journal Entry due by our next class: What do I believe about sin? Is ultimate teshuvah/atonement possible? Is forgiving the same as forgetting? Do I believe there is one step that is the most important in the teshuvah process? What does the term "God's sovereignty" mean to me?

10. Jan 29 **High Holy Days, Part II: Yom Kippur (continued),**
 28 Shevat **Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah**

EJ: 101-109, JH: 27-37,
 Optional: Book of *Kohelet/Ecclesiastes* (Bible/*Tanakh*)
 Parashat HaShavuah: *T'rumah*
 Vocabulary: *sukkah, lulav, etrog, s'chach, ushpizin, Kohelet/Ecclesiastes (IJ:266-267, 291)*

Journal Entry due by our next class: What is gained through community affiliation, activities and prayer? How often does one need to participate to truly feel "part of the community?"

**11. Feb 5 Prayer Part 1/Nurturing A Jewish Soul;
5 Adar I Prayer Part 2/Its Structure & What We Do**

EJ: 7-47, 53-55, 69-76, **IJ:** 3-5, 93, 200-222

Parashat HaShavuah: *Tetzaveh*

Vocabulary: *Keva, Kavvana, siddur, sh'mah, amida, shacharit, kabbalat Shabbat, davven, tefilla, shul, minyan, shacharit, mincha, ma'ariv, kipah/yarmulke, tallit, tefillin, bimah, mizrach, chazzan/cantor, bracha*

Journal Entry due by our next class: What is the purpose of prayer? Does prayer play a role in my life? What do I believe about prayer? How do the different words for prayer speak to me: "prayer," "worship," "tefillah (self-reflection/discernment)," "service of the heart," "meditation" mean to me? Why are the majority of Jewish prayers offered in the first person plural (we/our) form?

**Friday Night, February 7
Shabbat Services & Class Dinner
Approx 6.00pm: exact times & location TBD**

**12. Feb 12 Guest Facilitators and group discussion on Conversion,
12 Adar I Identity and the impact on our families**

IJ: 36-50, 123-128, 377-391

Parashat HaShavuah: *Ki Tisa*

Journal Entry due by our next class: In what ways can I see myself making a Jewish home? If I am considering conversion, what are some of the hopes for the future and what are some of the challenges that I foresee? If I am the partner of someone considering conversion, how do I feel about my partner's potential conversion?

**13. Feb 19 Creating Jewish Lives in Space (Pt II):
19 Adar I Ritual Objects in the Home & Synagogue
Marriage, Sexuality, Divorce**

EJ: 50-52, 160-174, 244-246, **JH:** 1-3, 121-159, **IJ:** 20, 114-122, 137, 269-270,

Parashat HaShavuah: *Vayakhel*

Vocabulary: *Mezuzah, aron kodesh, huppah, shutafut, get, mikvah, taharat mishpacha, ketubah, beshert, t'naim, aufruf, bedekin, yichud, sheva brachot, chatan/kallah (IJ: 97-99)*

Journal Entry due by our next class: In what ways can I see myself involved in the Jewish community? What does Jewish community mean to me? What is the value of a Synagogue Community to a modern life? How will people coming to my home know that it is a Jewish home?

14. Feb 26
26 Adar I

God and Creating a Personal Jewish Theology
Finding God/Soncino & Syme (book): 7-168 OR **EJ**: 404-458,
Parashat HaShavuah: *Pekudei*
Vocabulary: *Shekhinah, Adonai, Elohim, Hashem,*
HaKadosh Baruch Hu, transcendent, immanent, panentheism, ein

Journal Entry due by our next class: What do I believe about God? What do I not believe about God? How has my view of God changed over time? What is my relationship, if any, with God? How does this relationship affect my actions and decisions? What makes me feel closer to God? What do I think is God's role (if any) in the running and day-to-day of the world? What do I believe about who wrote the Bible? Do I need to reconcile the God of the Bible and the God I can relate to? If so, how? What do I believe about the relationship between the existence of God and the existence of evil in the world?

15. Mar 5
3 Adar II

Passover and Holy Eating through the Lens of Reform Judaism
EJ: 118-123, 247-254, **JH**: 57-75, **IJ**: 142-147, 138-139
Parashat HaShavuah: *Vayikra*
Vocabulary: *haggadah, kosher l'Pesach/Paysadik, matzah, maror,*
charoset, chametz, kitnyot, 4 questions/ma nishtanah. parve,
milchig, fleishig, hechsher, kosher, eco-kosher, ethical kosher,
Biblical Kosher, treif

Journal Entry due by our next class: How is a Jewish dietary consciousness/practice different from any other? How might a dietary consciousness make me a better person? A better Jew?

OR

What is the point of freedom? Why is the Passover story the seminal Jewish identity story?

16. Mar 12
10 Adar II

Choosing & Chosenness:
Shavuot & The Omer
Conversion
Chosenness

EJ: 125-128, 174-181, **JH**: 75-85, **IJ**: 54-58, 71-74, 234-261, Book of Ruth
Parashat HaShavuah: *Tzav*
Vocabulary: *ger (tzedeq), mikvah, "Jew by choice," beit din,*
Law of Return, sfira, omer (IJ:232)

Journal Entry due by our next class: conversion Judaism does not recognize Jesus as the son of God or as the Messiah, nor does Judaism include the New Testament in its Holy Scriptures. How do I feel about this? What are the most apparent differences between Judaism and Christianity to me? What are the similarities?

OR

At the time of conversion one promises to "cast one's lot" with the Jewish people. What are the implications of casting one's lot with the Jewish people? To choose to be Jewish, what different choices are implied? What does it mean to me to be "chosen" or a member of the "chosen people?"

17. Mar 19
17 Adar II

The Reform Jewish Calendar
Jewish Mysticism and Kabbalah
Messianism and the Afterlife in Judaism
Sium (Conclusion)

EJ: 76-81, 192-195, 360-402
Parashat HaShavuah: *Shmini*
Vocabulary: *Rosh Chodesh, Sephirot, Mashiach, olam haba*

Final Journal Entry due by next week: What is the next step in my Jewish Exploration? What is the one next thing I could commit myself to?

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