

Keep it together, keep it real:  
A curriculum of holistic healthy living for teenage Jews

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## RATIONALE

Adolescents are at a place of significant physical, cognitive and emotional development and exploration. Physically, they are adjusting to their new adult-like bodies and desires, including a jump in sexual energy. Cognitively, they are thinking in much more logical, abstract and idealist ways.<sup>1</sup> Socially and emotionally, adolescents are seeking greater independence, looking to spend time with peers rather than parents. Competition and achievement are often on their minds, mood swings are the norm, and their senses of self-worth are particularly malleable.<sup>2</sup> Adolescence is an incredibly exciting period of development; it can also be, however, a time of risk and danger. John Santrock observes,

...today is both the best of times and the worst of times for adolescents in the United States. They possess longer life expectancies and luxuries inconceivable less than a century ago—television, computers, satellites, air travel. However, the temptations and hazards of the adult world descend on them so early that too often they are not cognitively and emotionally ready to handle them effectively. . .

In many ways, today's adolescents inhabit an environment that is less stable than that of adolescents several decades ago (Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998). High divorce rates, high adolescent pregnancy rates, and increased geographic mobility of families contribute to this lack of stability. The rate of adolescent drug use in the United States is the highest in the industrialized world.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John W. Santrock. *Adolescence*. 10<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: McGraw Hill, 2005. 22-23.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23, 156.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

Our world is one of dangerous possibilities, and research demonstrates that many adolescents, in spite of warnings and guidance from parents, teachers, counselors and religious institutions, are engaging in risky behavior. In *Parenting Jewish Teens* (2007), Joanne Doades presents some worrisome windows into adolescent life.

According to a study published in the April 2005 issue of *Pediatrics* magazine, one in five ninth-graders reported having oral sex and one-third planned to try it within the next six months.

By age thirteen, the average teen has witnessed 100,000 incidents of television violence and watched unwed couples engage in sexual activity on dramas at the rate of twice per hour.

A 2004 Rand Corporation study found that there is a direct relationship between TV watching and early sexual initiation among teens. "Youths who viewed the greatest amounts of sexual content," the report noted, "were two times more likely than those who viewed the smallest amount to initiate sexual intercourse during the following year or to progress to more-advanced levels of other sexual activity."

Teenage alcohol misuse, a widely increasing phenomenon, is particularly worrisome because of its association with accidents, suicide, violent behavior, high-risk sex, and emotional problems, according to a Rand Corporation study.

More than 5 million high school students admit to binge drinking at least once a month, according to a study by Columbia University. The same study points out that underage drinking is an epidemic in the United States and now germinates in elementary and middle school.

Twenty percent of eighth-graders [14-year-olds] have been drunk at least once.<sup>4</sup>

Adolescents have significant exposure to stimuli that is (a) often assumed (idealistically) to be uniquely plaguing adult life and (b) taboo and ignored in discussions with more experienced adult role models. Further, against popular assumption, these adolescent behaviors involving sex, drugs, alcohol and

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<sup>4</sup> Joanne Doades. *Parenting Jewish Teens*. Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 2007. 24.

violence are just as prominent in Jewish circles as they are in the general population. Doades writes,

Here is the answer from a study of Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist Jewish teens conducted by the Cohen Center for Modern Studies at Brandeis University: "Rates of sexual activity and drug use (mainly alcohol and marijuana) were similar to those for comparable national samples of teenagers. Except for the youngest group, Jewish commitments appeared to have little influence on sexual activity and drug use."<sup>5</sup>

Jewish adolescents, without support from experienced, mature role models, will be left to fend for themselves in a world of social and emotional unpredictability. Enticing possibilities call to our teens. In some experiences, they will coast and ride the waves, but in some, they will struggle in turbulent waters. The majority of our teens are good kids who will turn out to be good adults, and limited experimentation with sex, alcohol and drugs may not necessarily have troubling long-term consequences. The problem, though, is that these experiences can become problematic and potentially cause greater harm if we keep from offering useful realistic guidance.

Teens often have well-intentioned adults telling them what not to do, but what they really need are role models who can give them a safe environment and a value-based support structure by which they can make good decisions in the midst of experimentation. Teens do not need proscriptions against dangerous activities; they receive them from school and parents. What teens need is for someone experienced and responsible to meet them where they are and discuss the stimuli they will encounter. We need to talk about dangerous and less

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<sup>5</sup> Doades, 27.

dangerous drug and alcohol use. We need to address the pleasures of sex alongside alternative sexual activities rather than preaching abstinence and the 'pleasures' of a loving, non-physical relationship. We need to dive into issues of self-esteem and body image, healthy and unhealthy eating, exercise, partying, resting, and anything else—'appropriate' or taboo—that comes up in the life of the average adolescent.

In addition to having role models, it is important that adolescents have a community of peers struggling to make the same good decisions. Peer pressure can be a positive factor towards making healthy decisions.

Finally, it is important that adolescents know they can turn to Judaism for guidance. The Jewish tradition has a lot to say about how we can and should live our lives, and the Jewish community can offer a safety net of love, warmth and security. Their health and wellbeing are our priority; as Jewish educators, it is essential we do all within our means to provide our adolescents with realistic and necessary guidance.

I therefore propose this program of positive and constructive influence for healthy living and holistic wellbeing, from a Jewish perspective. This program will enable adolescents, with the guidance of trained facilitators, to explore what Judaism has to say about behavioral, emotional, social and even spiritual issues relevant to their lives. It will do so by examining the different enticing and sometimes taboo issues that come up in adolescence with an experienced and supportive role model, and a community of caring and experimenting peers, all seeking to learn, grow and make good decisions. Ultimately, this program seeks

to give adolescents a path towards balance, health and wellbeing in the midst of a nurturing community.

Focusing on the concept of *B'tzelem Elohim* (made in God's image), this program seeks to impart to adolescents the message "I'm important and special, and I know this because the Jewish people and the Jewish tradition tell me so." If adolescents begin to see themselves and others as holy beings, their overall lives will move in a healthier direction. Further, in knowing that there are others who care about them and see them as holy beings as well, they may be moved to care more for themselves. By embracing the challenging elements of their lives that are very real, and rather than rejecting them, incorporating them into a life of balance, our adolescents will develop a significantly stronger sense of self-worth and valuable tools to use as they go off to college and into adulthood.

## PRIORITY LEARNER GOAL

Learners will understand what it is to live a healthy life of wholeness and to use the Jewish tradition as a guide and resource.

## ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS AND ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We are all made in God's image; we are all, therefore, sacred beings.</li><li>• A healthy life requires a healthy body, mind and soul. We must strive for all three in order to find holistic health and wellbeing.</li><li>• The Jewish tradition offers many paths and directives for healthy living.</li><li>• Jewish ideals on healthy living can be present in all of life's regular activities.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Am I sacred? What difference does that make in how I view and treat myself?</li><li>• What are a healthy body, a healthy mind and a healthy soul? How does one affect the other?</li><li>• Do I care about what Judaism says about how we treat ourselves?</li><li>• Does what I do with myself matter to anyone but me?</li></ul>



## LEARNER OUTCOMES

Know
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will know what it means to live a healthy holistic life, through older and contemporary Jewish lenses.</li> <li>• Learners will know some Jewish perspectives on how we should treat ourselves, including those of Maimonides, Rav Kook, and Dr. Eugene Borowitz.</li> </ul>
Do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will apply Jewish teachings on aspects of healthy living to people in the media and to their own lives.</li> <li>• Learners will do something new that benefits their bodies, minds and souls, for their own healthy living.</li> </ul>
Believe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will explore the belief of being made <i>B'tzelem Elohim</i>.</li> <li>• Learners will explore the belief that what they do with themselves matters to others, to God and to themselves.</li> </ul>
Belong
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will belong to a community of Jews who care about how they and others live.</li> </ul>

## EVIDENCE OF LEARNING

Students will be able to articulate and apply the texts and concepts learned in class to theoretical and concrete life situations.

Students will plan their programming and meals for the closing Shabbaton.

Additionally, at one point during the second Shabbaton, students will be able to present a new activity they have tried that reflects their course learning.

## REFLECTION

Students are expected to participate in an online forum, responding to a question stemming from class discussions, posted after class by the group facilitator. Students are also encouraged to start their own online conversations.

Additionally, students are to keep a journal, at times recording their thoughts in class, at other times, recording weekly thoughts and feelings. This journal is for the student alone, though the student is welcome to share their entries for non-judgmental feedback with the facilitator.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### Shabbaton I

#### Introductory Program.

##### Mixers

There will also be an introduction to the program – the schedule and an emphasis on our creating a safe no-judgment space, where nothing said should leave the boundaries of our community. We are inclusive of all gender and sexual identities, and we are open to non-judgmental conversation of and on any topic. The only time that someone would have to leave our community would be if we hear that someone might hurt him or herself, or someone else. This safe community message will also be repeated at the beginning of the first in-class session.

#### Kabbalat Shabbat services.

These services will be lead in the meditative, niggun-intense, Carlebach style, with the intention of creating a communal sense of peace and introspection.

#### Evening Program – *B'tzelem What?*

We will introduce students to the concept of *B'tzelem Elohim* – made in the Divine Image. After beginning by sketching out images for ourselves of what we see as the 'ideal person,' physically and mentally, we will watch a clip from the 8<sup>th</sup> season premier of the hit TV show *Biggest Loser*. With the aid of several interpretations on the biblical verse that is the source of the concept, we will discuss whether or not the contestants see themselves as *B'tzelem Elohim* and whether the TV show sees the contestants in such a way.

##### *Sources:*

Gen 1:26-27 and commentaries (lesson with texts included)

#### Shacharit services.

We will have a camp-style service with a Torah reading, with the intention of creating safe and comfortable community.

#### Post-Service Torah Study.

We will look at various texts from 1 and 2 Samuel on the life of King David, with the intent of learning about the varying physical and sexual habits of one of the most revered of Jewish kings.

Depending on the size of the group and the group dynamic, it might be better to focus on one of the three texts as a group, all three as a group, or break into smaller groups, assigning one text to each group, and coming back and presenting and discussing.

*Sources:*

- 1 Samuel 17 (David and Goliath: David the warrior—choose key passages)
- 2 Samuel 6 (David dancing before the ark of the covenant: David the dancer)
- 2 Samuel 11 (David and Bathsheba: David the lover, seducer, repenter)

Afternoon program.

There will be two options: a swim at the pool (or lake), preceded by a Talmudic text study about a father being required to teach his son to swim, or a hike with a Hasidic prayer and an Einsteinian reflection.

*Sources:*

- Babylonian Talmud: Kiddushin 29a (on what a father is required to teach his son)
- Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav's prayer for nature (appendix)
- Albert Einstein, from *The Merging of Spirit and Science* (appendix)

S'udah Shlishit.

Havdalah.

Evening Program – *B'tzelem Elohim!*

The *B'tzelem Elohim* program continues as we read a *New York Times* article on the dangers of the kind of weight-loss program encouraged by *Biggest Loser* and follow it with a clip from the same episode showing a woman collapsing and losing consciousness from over-straining herself in a starting mile-run. We will continue our discussion about what it means for a person to treat him or herself as if made in the Divine Image, and we will introduce the concept of *K'dushat HaGuf* (the holiness of the body).

*Sources:*

- The Biggest Loser (TV show), Episode 801
- New York Times article (lesson with article included)

Motzei Shabbat Kumzitz (Campfire).

Around the campfire, we will sing songs and enjoy s'mores and grilled pineapple skewers – a snack balanced between junk food and healthy fruit.

Sunday morning closing program – *Judge! But not too much.*

In light of our earlier discussions, we will look at the concepts of *Din* (judgment) and *Rachamim* (compassion). We will discuss what it would look like if the *Biggest Loser* contestants were, to a healthy degree, judging (*din*) themselves and determining that they need to make changes in their lifestyle, but at the same time, having *rachamim* and making sure to be compassionate upon themselves as well, in terms of making sure both that they make moderate changes but also that they continue to see themselves as beautiful, sacred beings.

Students will then move into separate gender groups for explorations in self-esteem and body image.

We'll conclude by sketching out new perspectives on the ideal person and comparing them to our initial thoughts in our journals.

*Sources:*

Lesson 4 from Rachel Isaacson's Curriculum "Looks, Love and Life" (available from the Tartak Learning Center in LA)

"High School Teen Living" program (from the NFTY program bank - [www.nfty.org/resources/programbank/](http://www.nfty.org/resources/programbank/))

Unit 4, activity 5 from "Virtues of Being a Jewish Teenager" curriculum (available from the Tartak Learning Center in LA)

A source on male body image:

[http://kidshealth.org/teen/sexual\\_health/changing\\_body/male\\_bodyimage.html](http://kidshealth.org/teen/sexual_health/changing_body/male_bodyimage.html)

*Teaching Jewish Virtues*, Chapter 5 ("Din V'Rachamim; Justice and Mercy)

Babylonian Talmud Brachot 7a (on Rachamim)

Babylonian Talmud Avodah Zarah 3b (on Rachamim and Din)

Genesis Rabbah 12:15 (Midrash on Din and Rachamim, in appendix)

Evening Class Sessions

*These weekly evening classes will last one and a half hours and will be followed by a healthy communal meal.*

1: Going for the Gold (*lesson plan included*).

First, we will reiterate the statement from Shabbaton I's introduction about this being a safe non-judgmental space.

We will study Moses Maimonides and his notion of the Golden Mean. Students will play (theoretically!) with what it means to live a life that is completely out of balance, for the purpose of understanding what it is to live a healthy, moderate lifestyle.

Additionally, students will be assigned a project of taking on a new practice or approach of healthy living for the duration of the program, and students will be asked to present on this undertaking over the final Shabbaton.

*Sources:*

Excerpt from Babylonian Talmud Ketubot 111a (lesson with texts included)

Translated excerpt from a particular Mishneh Torah passage in *Medicine in the Mishneh Torah of Maimonides* (lesson with texts included)

2: We're Going to Pump You Up.

Students will explore healthy exercise practices. They'll have an opportunity to select one type of regular practice that impacts a person on mental, spiritual and physical levels – yoga, dance, martial arts and basketball. A practitioner who ideally is a practicing Jew, or has at least been familiarized with Jewish teachings on the subject and is able to incorporate them into the session, will lead each activity. Following that, we will discuss what makes these activities good for the mind, body and spirit, and we will talk about ways to appropriately balance exercise with the rest of life.

*Sources:*

"The development of Folkdance in Modern Israel" in *Physical Education and Sport in Jewish History and Culture* (for the dance section).

Excerpts from *Israel Dance 1985* (for the dance section).

“Jewish Ethics and Sport: Toward a Philosophy of Physical Education and Sport” in *Physical Education and Sport in Jewish History and Culture* (for the team sports section).

“Rabbinic Aspects of Physical Culture and Sport among Medieval and Renaissance Jewry” in *Physical Education and Sport in Jewish History and Culture* (for the martial arts section).

Passage from Maimonides on bodily health (in appendix).

### 3: Purple Haze.

We will begin with one or two case studies about celebrities with substance abuse (alcohol and/or drug) problems. We will first share our preconceived ideas of what aspects of their behavior are right and what parts are wrong, and then we will anticipate Judaism’s perspective on alcohol consumption. From there, we will look at several rabbinic and modern commentaries on alcohol and drug consumption, and we will build step-by-step system for making safe decisions for alcohol and drug-use.

Underage drinking and recreational drug use are both illegal and this will be shared up front. Nonetheless, the reality is that adolescents are engaging in both, and this discussion will assume that the participants *will* come into contact with alcohol and drugs in social situations if they have not already. While we will not encourage underage drinking, we will promote an approach of healthy moderation in safe environments.

Sources:

Babylonian Talmud Eruvin 54a, on enjoying food and drink.

Shulchan Aruch Kitzur passage on consuming food and beverages, and most other actions (in appendix).

Hasidic teaching on wine, from *The Hasidic Anthology* (in appendix).

Passage from Mark Washofsky’s *Jewish Living* on cigarettes, drugs and alcohol (in appendix).

[Http://teenshealth.org/teen/drug+alcohol/](http://teenshealth.org/teen/drug+alcohol/)

### 4: Teenage Love.

This will be the first of two sessions on sex. This session will focus on positive, loving relations. We’ll begin by looking at a person in the public spotlight with an unhealthy sex life—Tiger Woods. Students will spend some time brainstorming what parts of his sexual life were inappropriate in American culture and in the

Jewish tradition. From here, we will reorient ourselves towards a positive approach to sexual relationships. To do so, we will study Dr. Eugene Borowitz's different degrees of loving relationships. Then we will frame sexual intercourse and alternatives in a way that ensure that we are treating others and ourselves as sacred beings.

Similar to session three's approach, we assume that teenagers will be, if they have not already been, in situations involving some degree of sexual relations. We will not preach abstinence. Instead, we will teach an approach of healthy decision-making that ensures safety and respect for the human beings involved.

*Sources:*

Eugene Borowitz's five levels of sexual relationships (lesson with texts included)

Rabbinic sources on sexuality (lesson with texts included)

Excerpts from David Foreman's *50 Ways to be Jewish* (lesson with texts included)

5: Suit Up and Play Safe.

The counterpart to session four, this session will discuss dangers related to sex: STIs, pregnancy and rape. We will first discuss ways to avoid dangerous situations and things to do when in these situations. Next, we will read Rabbi Eric Yoffie's Biennial sermon on teenage sexual practices and discuss our reactions. We will conclude by revisiting the different degrees of sexual relationships and emphasize that sexual relations aren't necessarily bad but there are dangers, and there are positive and negative ways of engagement. Above all, we should approach sex in a way that treats partners as sacred human beings.

*Sources:*

Excerpt from Eric Yoffie's 2005 Biennial Sermon (in appendix)

[http://teenshealth.org/teen/sexual\\_health/](http://teenshealth.org/teen/sexual_health/)

6: Teen versus Food.

This session is devoted to eating disorders. We will explore a few examples in the media and statistics of teenage eating disorders, along with defining the various disorders in the realms of over and under-eating. Students will look at some case studies from the URJ's eating disorder resource book *Litapayach Tikvah*, and consider the different issues involved, both physical and psychological. We

will have a discussion of having *din* and *rachamim* on one's own body, and we will brainstorm unhealthy and then healthy ways for including both in one's dietary habits.

*Sources:*

Selected case studies from *Litapayach Tikvah* (in bibliography)

Revisited texts from the Sunday morning closing program of Shabbaton I

## 7: Embracing the Hunger.

This session will be devoted to ways of eating. We will begin with some rabbinic texts on the joys of food. Following that, we will explore different dietary approaches (local foods, organic foods, vegetarianism, *kashrut*, and *eco-Kashrut*) and build a list of pros and cons for our community. We will conclude by figuring out a system for healthy eating appropriate for the teenage participants.

*Sources:*

*Down-to-Earth Judaism's* section on food (in bibliography)

*Eat Fresh Food: Awesome Recipes for Teen Chefs* (in bibliography)

Hasidic teachings on food from *the Hasidic Anthology* (in appendix)

Babylonian Talmud Bava Mitziah 107b – on morning bread (in appendix).

## 8: Kooking Up the Point.

We will consider why a person should live a balanced healthy lifestyle, and we will start off by brainstorming who in the public spotlight leads the most healthy-holistic lifestyle. We will move into a study of Rav Abraham Isaac Kook's text on healthy physical living in order to do God's work in the world.

From here, students will take on the mantle of healthy living and use half the session to plan the programming and diet for Shabbaton II.

*Sources:*

Hasidic teachings on balanced living from *the Hasidic Anthology* (in appendix)

"Rav Kook: Working Out as Divine Work," from *Sport and Physical Education in Jewish History*.



Excerpt from Rav Kook's *Orot* on the holiness of physical living (in appendix).

## 9: Retreat planning session II.

### *Sources:*

Everything in the bibliography and more. The facilitator should explore with students their interests for Shabbaton programming, and compile some useful sources accordingly. Students should also be encouraged to do their own research.

## Shabbaton II.

### Introductory Program.

We'll have a fishbowl discussion with guiding statements related to the different issues touched upon in our preceding sessions.

### Kabbalat Shabbat.

Like Kabbalat Shabbat services during Shabbaton I.

### Evening program.

Planned and led by participants, related to *din*, *rachamim* and relaxation.

### Shacharit services.

Like Shacharit services during Shabbaton I.

### Shabbat morning Torah study.

We will study Genesis 32, where Jacob wrestles with the angel. Students will discuss the physical nature of Jacob's wrestling and then move into the greater discussion of with whom Jacob was wrestling. Finally, students will talk about the different beings we are all wrestling with in our lives.

### *Sources:*

Genesis 32

Excerpts from Elie Wiesel's *Messengers of God's* chapter on Jacob.

Rashi, Maimonides, Ibn Ezra and Nachmanides commentaries on Gen 32.

Shabbat afternoon program.

Several recreational activities, linked to text studies, planned and led by participants.

S'udah Shlishit.

Planned and led by participants, a discussion around food.

Havdalah

Planned and led by participants.

Motzei Shabbat Kumzitz.

Like the kumzitz during Shabbaton I.

Sunday morning closing program.

The program will begin with student presentations about the projects they took on throughout the course.

Next, the group facilitators will speak about the subjects we have covered and invite the group to share any insights or reflections they've had.

Finally, there will be a brief 'drash on the *U'v'charta Hayyim* biblical text and its relation to teenage life, a closing blessing for all the participants, and a concluding group *Shehechiyanu*.

*Sources:*

Deut 30:19

## PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

### *WHO SHOULD LEAD THE SESSIONS?*

The curriculum is comprised of lessons that require both an intimate knowledge of Jewish content and significant experience in working with teens from a therapeutic and/or supportive model. It is therefore strongly recommended that the course be team-facilitated by a rabbi/cantor/educator and a social worker.

### *PARENT ADVISORY*

Given that (a) the target audience for the curriculum is under the age of majority, and (b) many sensitive subjects like sexual practices and contraceptives, drugs, and eating disorders will be addressed in depth, it is strongly advised that a letter be sent home to parents and/or guardians, outlining the content that will be covered in the learning sessions.

## LESSON PLANS

*SAMPLE LESSON ONE: B'TZELEM WHAT???***Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions**

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We are all made in God's image; we are all, therefore, sacred beings.</li> <li>A healthy life requires a healthy body, mind and soul. We must strive for all three in order to find holistic health and wellbeing.</li> <li>The Jewish tradition offers many paths and directives for healthy living.</li> <li>Jewish ideals on healthy living can be present in all of life's regular activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Am I sacred? What difference does that make in how I view and treat myself?</li> <li>What are a healthy body, a healthy mind and a healthy soul? How does one affect the other?</li> <li>Do I care about what Judaism says about how we treat ourselves?</li> <li>Does what I do with myself matter to anyone but me?</li> </ul>

**Learner Outcomes**

<b>Know</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learners will know the text from Genesis 1:26-27 (people are created B'tzelem Elohim) and several commentaries on it.</li> </ul>
<b>Do</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learners will begin to reconsider their ideals for human form and human behavior with the help of Jewish teaching</li> </ul>
<b>Believe</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learners will explore the belief that human beings are all created according to the divine image, and consequently, we have a higher responsibility to treat human beings as such.</li> </ul>
<b>Belong</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learners will belong to a humanity whose very being is holy.</li> </ul>

## Materials

- Digital video projector
- Speakers
- Laptop
- Episode 801 of the Biggest Loser
- Handouts with Genesis 1:26-27 and commentaries
- Paper and pens
- Journals
- Chart Paper
- Pastels

## Timeline

0:01-0:08 – Set Induction

0:09-0:30 – B'tzelem \_\_\_\_\_ Baseline Assessment

0:31-0:50 – Text Study – Gen 1:26-27

0:51-1:10 – Text Study Presentations

1:11-1:25 – Biggest Loser Meets B'tzelem Elohim - Discussion

1:26-1:30 - Conclusion

## Lesson Plan

(0:01 – 0:08) Set Induction:

*Show the first three minutes of the television show, Biggest Loser, Episode #801. This section shows a number of obese people on the bus on the way to the event, talking about their receiving a second chance to live, and trainers yelling at them to work out while saying 'there's nothing to be ashamed of' when they couldn't perform all the activities.*

Instruct (I): Take five minutes to jot down any thoughts that you might have about what you just saw in your notebooks, we're going to leave these thoughts to you, you won't need to discuss them later.

(0:09 – 0:30) B 'tzelem \_\_\_\_\_ Baseline Assessment:

*Everyone has a piece of chart paper and pastels. Have four questions on the board:*

What does a human being look like?

How does a human being behave towards himself or herself?

How does a human being behave towards others?

What does a holy human being look like?

I: Divide your chart paper into four quadrants. You'll have one quadrant for each question. You can draw your answer, you can write your answer, and you won't need to present your answer to the group, though I would prefer it if you shared it with me (the instructor) after our session. These questions are meant to be open and vague, and for the next 22 minutes of reflection, I will not take any clarifying questions – write or draw whatever you feel is appropriate.

*The point of this exercise is to start student thinking about human ideals for form and behavior, without having the influence of the concept of B'tzelem Elohim. This is a baseline assessment for students.*

(0:31 – 0:50) Text study – Genesis 1:26-27.

As a group, read Genesis 1:26-27

And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth." And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them [JPS translation].

Question (Q): What does it mean to be created in God's likeness?

Potential answer (A): that there's something holy inside all of us, and we are holy and special, inside and out.

Explain (E): We're going to break into groups of 2 to study three commentaries about this verse. One is from the Mishnah, a text from 2<sup>nd</sup> century Eretz Yisrael, one is from Rashi, an 11<sup>th</sup> century French commentator, and one is from Nechama Leibowitz, a modern Israeli bible scholar and teacher. Read through the texts and answer the questions, and following, we'll come back to the group and present the interpretation that's most meaningful.

*Texts and questions are taken from Gersh Lazarow's Capstone Curriculum, "Finding the Kedusha in Kashrut"*

Therefore man was created on his own, to teach you that whoever destroys one soul is regarded by the Torah as if he had destroyed a whole world and whoever saves one soul, is regarded as if he had saved a whole world. The greatness of the Holy One blessed be He

is thus demonstrated. For whereas when man prints many coins from one die, each one is a replica of the other, the Supreme King of Kings, the Holy One blessed be He stamped every man with the die of Adam yet no one exactly resembles his fellow (Mishnah Sanhedrin 37a).

According to the Mishnah, what does it mean to be created B'tzelem Elohim?

*So God created man in His own image* (Gen 1:27)—In the mould that had been cast for him; for all else had been created by word, but he by hand, as it is stated (Ps 139:5): “Thou hast laid Thy hand upon me.” He was stamped as coin is minted. *In the image of God He created him*—the verse goes on to explain that the same image prepared for him was indeed the image of his Maker (Rashi on Genesis 1:27).

According to Rashi, what does it mean to be created B'tzelem Elohim?

Nehama Lebowitz explains that every person has a personal relationship with God, and “every individual is equally significant before God” because every person was created in God’s image (Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Bereshit*).

According to Nehama Leibowitz, what does it mean to be created B'tzelem Elohim?

What are the differences between the three perspectives?

What do you think it means to be created B'tzelem Elohim?

(0:51 – 1:10) Text Study Presentations

(1:10 – 1:25) Biggest Loser meets B'tzelem Elohim – Discussion

E: Lets look back to the opening scene of Biggest Loser, and if it will help to jog your thinking, please pull out the chart you made of human ideals at the beginning of our session.

Q: Does Biggest Loser treat their contestants as if they’re B'tzelem Elohim?

A: Yes, they’re trying to help them reach their healthy potential and make them feel better about themselves.

A: No, because they’re saying that they’re not perfect the way they are, that they have problems and their lives can’t be lived well as they are.

Q: Does it seem like the Biggest Loser contestants understand that they’re made B'tzelem Elohim?

A: Yes, they want to do honour to their bodies- they have an idea that their lives are gifts, and they need to do their best to preserve these gifts.

A: No, because they've let themselves get to a place of unhealthiness.

Q: Is this show a good way to show honour to human beings?

A: Yes, we're helping them to reach their potential and improve their health.

A: No, we're putting them on display, like a circus.

(1:26 – 1:30) This evening's conclusion

E: This is only the beginning of our conversation on B'tzelem Elohim. Humans as beings made in the image of God will be the central theme for our entire course of study, and tomorrow night, we're going to spend more time on B'tzelem Elohim in connection to the show the *Biggest Loser*. In the meantime, before we go off for the night, I'd like for you to take some time to jot any thoughts about today's session that you might have in your journals.



*SAMPLE LESSON TWO: B'TZELEM ELOHIM!***Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions**

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We are all made in God's image; we are all, therefore, sacred beings.</li> <li>A healthy life requires a healthy body, mind and soul. We must strive for all three in order to find holistic health and wellbeing.</li> <li>The Jewish tradition offers many paths and directives for healthy living.</li> <li>Jewish ideals on healthy living can be present in all of life's regular activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Am I sacred? What difference does that make in how I view and treat myself?</li> <li>What are a healthy body, a healthy mind and a healthy soul? How does one affect the other?</li> <li>Do I care about what Judaism says about how we treat ourselves?</li> <li>Does what I do with myself matter to anyone but me?</li> </ul>

**Learner Outcomes**

<b>Know</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The concepts of B'tzelem Elohim and Sh'mirat HaGuf.</li> </ul>
<b>Do</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learners will begin to reconsider their ideals for human form and human behavior by the help of Jewish teaching.</li> </ul>
<b>Believe</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learners will explore the belief that human beings are all created according to the divine image, and consequently, we have a higher responsibility to treat human beings as such.</li> </ul>
<b>Belong</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learners will belong to a humanity whose very being is holy.</li> </ul>

**Materials**

- Digital video projector
- Speakers
- Laptop
- Episode 801 of the Biggest Loser
- Handouts of New York Times article
- Paper and pens
- Chart Paper
- Pastels

### **Timeline**

0:01-0:10 – Introduction / Review

0:11-0:16 – Defining Sh'mirat HaGuf

0:17-0:23 – Biggest Loser clip

0:24-0:54 – New York Times article – Biggest Loser Chevruta

0:55-1:10 – Group Discussion

1:11-1:30 – Concluding Visual Reflection

1:31-1:50 - Havdalah

### **Lesson Plan**

(0:01 – 0:10) Introduction / Review

E: Last night, we watched the beginning of the premier for Season 8 of the Biggest Loser, and we discussed B'tzelem Elohim and how the show honours human beings. To review, I'd like for us to briefly answer the following questions as a group:

Do we think Biggest Loser treats its contestants as if they're created in God's image? Why or why not?

How should we be honouring human beings?

(0:11-0:16) Defining Sh'mirat HaGuf

E: I want to introduce another relevant Jewish concept to our discussion. We've talked about honouring the human body, as we're made B'tzelem Elohim, and a Mitzvah in relation to that is Sh'mirat HaGuf – taking care, or literally, guarding the body.

Q: (*without bringing in additional Jewish concepts*) – What are ways that someone should guard their body?

A: Exercise

A: Hygiene

A: Moderation

A: Diet

Let's keep all these in mind as we watch this clip from Biggest Loser

(0:17-0:23) Biggest Loser Clip (episode 801, 17:45-22:08)

*We're going to watch this clip showing a participant who is physically unable to complete the activity and may significantly risk her life as a result. We're not going to discuss this clip after, instead we'll break into chevruta study to look at the New York Times article, as will be instructed in the next section.*

(0:24-0:54) New York Times / Biggest Loser Chevruta

*Article is available with the lesson.*

E: Before discussing this clip as a group, we're going to break into chevruta and read an article about this show from the New York Times. After you've read the article, answer the following questions (attached to the article). Following, we'll discuss them as a group.

Given what you've just seen and read, does Biggest Loser honour B'tzelem Elohim and Shmirat haGuf? Why or why not?

Has your perspective changed since yesterday, and why or why not?

Does Biggest Loser honour God? Why or why not?

(0:55-1:10) Group discussion

*Students should share their observations with the group.*

E: We have one final question for you. In today's clip from the show, we saw the show participants come together to help out their fallen 'friend.'

Q: What were we seeing here?

A: Community

A: A sense of being in the same boat as others

A: A sense of obligation towards helping those around

Q: Why might they behave this way even though they just met?

A: sometimes, when we face challenges in life and realize there are others facing similar challenges, an instantaneous bond forms (or perhaps the bond is there and we just often don't notice it until we run into trouble)

A: Why wouldn't they behave this way? Human beings should look out for each other

(1:11-1:30) Concluding visual reflection

E: With that, it's time that we turn inward for some final reflecting before we get ready to begin our week and the greater 2-month journey we'll have together. Last night, we drew or wrote in response to 4 questions. On a new piece of paper, I'd like you to draw or write what you now think about those same four points, and if you want, you'll be able to share tomorrow morning.

What does a human being look like?

How should a human being behave towards himself/herself?

How does a human being behave towards others?

What does a Jewish human being look like?

(1:31 – 1:50) Havdalah

November 25, 2009

## On 'The Biggest Loser,' Health Can Take Back Seat

By EDWARD WYATT

LOS ANGELES — When more than 40 former contestants from “The Biggest Loser” gather Wednesday for a reunion television special, the winner of the program's first season, Ryan C. Benson, who lost 122 of his 330-pound starting

weight, will be absent. Mr. Benson is now back above 300 pounds but he thinks he has been shunned by the show because he publicly admitted that he dropped some of the weight by fasting and dehydrating himself to the point that he was urinating blood.

Now in its eighth season, “The Biggest Loser” is one of NBC’s most-watched prime-time programs besides football, drawing an estimated 10 million viewers each week, according to Nielsen. It has clearly tapped into the American obsession with losing weight, as more than 200,000 people a year submit audition videotapes or attend open casting calls for the program.

It also has spawned a licensed merchandise business that will generate an estimated \$100 million this year.

The series also highlights the difference between the pursuit of engaging television and the sometimes frenzied efforts of contestants to win, perhaps at the risk of their own health. Doctors, nutritionists and physiologists not affiliated with “The Biggest Loser” express doubt about the program’s regimen of severe caloric restriction and up to six hours a day of strenuous exercise, which cause contestants to sometimes lose more than 15 pounds a week.

At least one other contestant has confessed to using dangerous weight-loss techniques, including self-induced dehydration. On the first episode of the current season, two contestants were sent to the hospital, one by airlift after collapsing from heat stroke during a one-mile race.

New contestants are entering the show more out of shape. Each of the last two seasons has broken the record for the heaviest contestant ever, at 454 and 476 pounds.

Medical professionals generally advise against losing more than about two pounds a week. Rapid weight loss can cause many medical problems, including a weakening of the heart muscle, irregular heartbeat and dangerous reductions in potassium and electrolytes. “I’m waiting for the first person to have a heart attack,” said Dr. Charles Burant, a professor of internal medicine at the University of Michigan Health System director of the Michigan Metabolomics and Obesity Center.

“I have had some patients who want to do the same thing, and I counsel them against it,” Dr. Burant said. “I think the show is so exploitative. They are taking

poor people who have severe weight problems whose real focus is trying to win the quarter-million dollars.”

Dr. Rob Huizenga, the medical consultant to “The Biggest Loser” and an associate clinical professor of medicine at [U.C.L.A.](#), said that the program was safe. “This is not only a major amount of weight loss, it is a totally different kind of weight loss compared with surgery or starvation diets,” he said.

In interviews, the show’s trainers and producers acknowledge that unsafe practices can occur.

“If we had it to do over, we wouldn’t do it,” Dr. Huizenga said of the recent one-mile race that resulted in hospitalizations. “It was an unexpected complication and we’re going to do better,” he said, adding that “that challenge has changed a lot of the way we do things,” including more closely monitoring contestants’ body temperatures during exercise.

JD Roth, an executive producer of the series who created its current format, said that while the show was extreme, “it needs to be extreme in my opinion.”

“For some of these people this is their last chance,” he said. “And in a country right now that is wrestling with health care issues and the billions of dollars that are spent on obesity issues per year, in a way what a public service to have a show that inspires people to be healthier.”

Some contestants have claimed that dangerous weight loss techniques were common among contestants. Kai Hibbard, who lost 118 pounds and finished as the runner-up in Season 3, has written on her [MySpace](#) blog and elsewhere that she and other contestants would drink as little water as possible in the 24 hours before a weigh-in. When the cameras were off, she said, contestants would work out in as much clothing as possible.

Ms. Hibbard, who weighed 144 pounds at the show’s finale, wrote that she added 31 pounds in two weeks, most of it simply by drinking water. That experience is not isolated. Including Mr. Benson, the winners of the first four seasons of the show each have added at least 20 percent to their weight at the end of the show.

Jillian Michaels, one of the two trainers who supervise contestants’ workouts on the series, said the experience of Ms. Hibbard and Mr. Benson was evidence of “the dark side of the show.”

“Contestants can get a little too crazy and they can get too thin,” she said. She said contestants are medically checked and disqualified if they are dehydrated or are found to be taking drugs or diuretics. “That is the worst part of the show,” she said. “It’s just part of the nature of reality TV.”

Contestants are required to sign releases that stand out even in the waiver-intensive world of reality television.

One such release, which was provided to The New York Times by a former contestant who did so on the condition of anonymity, says that “no warranty, representation or guarantee has been made as to the qualifications or credentials of the medical professionals who examine me or perform any procedures on me in connection with my participation in the series, or their ability to diagnose medical conditions that may affect my fitness to participate in the series.”

The current season started with five contestants of more than 400 pounds. Yet contestants have been required to sign a document certifying that they believe themselves to be “in excellent physical, emotional, psychological and [mental health](#).”

Mr. Roth said that those “standard release forms” are similar to those used “on any reality show.” He added that the show’s medical professionals had “appropriate qualifications and credentials.”

Getting contestants to talk openly about the environment of the program is difficult. Shortly after a reporter started contacting former contestants to interview them about their experiences, a talent producer on the series sent an e-mail message to many former contestants reminding them that “serious consequences” could ensue if they ever talked to a reporter without the show’s permission.

To do so could subject them to a fine of \$100,000 or \$1 million, depending on the timing of the interview, according to the e-mail message, which was obtained by The New York Times. The show’s producers did provide an opportunity to interview several former contestants, but the interviews were conducted with an NBC publicist listening in.

Ali Vincent, a fifth-season contestant who became the first female winner of “The Biggest Loser,” said she believed that her involvement in the show was “definitely worth it.”

“I went from a life of nothing to being active every day, six days a week,” said Ms. Vincent, who started the program weighing 234 pounds and finished at 122. She now weighs about 125 pounds, she said, and is a spokeswoman for products and ventures related to “The Biggest Loser.”

Ms. Michaels and Bob Harper, the other trainer, as well as Mr. Roth all say that at least half of the contestants stay close to the weight levels they achieve on the show for several years.

Mr. Roth said he happily accepted a 50 percent success rate — noting that only a handful of former contestants regained all or most of the weight they carried before joining the show.

“Getting 100 percent to keep the weight off has never been the goal,” he said.

“The goal is can we inspire people in America to make a change in their life. In that, we’re batting 1,000.”

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## SAMPLE LESSON THREE: GOING FOR THE GOLD

## Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions

<p><b>ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are all made in God's image; we are all, therefore, sacred beings.</li> <li>• A healthy life requires a healthy body, mind and soul. We must strive for all three in order to find holistic health and wellbeing.</li> <li>• The Jewish tradition offers many paths and directives for healthy living.</li> <li>• Jewish ideals on healthy living can be present in all of life's regular activities.</li> </ul>	<p><b>ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Am I sacred? What difference does that make in how I view and treat myself?</li> <li>• What are a healthy body, a healthy mind and a healthy soul? How does one affect the other?</li> <li>• Do I care about what Judaism says about how we treat ourselves?</li> <li>• Does what I do with myself matter to anyone but me?</li> </ul>
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## Learner Outcomes

<p><b>Know</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will know what it is to live a life of healthy balance versus a life in unexpected extremes.</li> <li>• Learners will know Maimonides' 'Golden Mean' texts from <i>Hilchot Dei'ot</i> in the <i>Mishneh Torah</i>.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Do</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students will create and apply a framework for personal decision making that is influenced by Maimonides' Golden Mean teaching.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Believe</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will explore the notion that when aspects of life are lived in extremes, other aspects will be affected.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Belong</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To a group that understands the need to balance the different elements of a person's life.</li> </ul>

## Materials

- Handouts with the Maimonides text and questions
- Paper and pens
- Chart paper
- Markers
- Coloured post-its (if desired for the scheduling)

## Timeline

0:01-0:10 – Set Induction

0:11-0:30 – Maimonides and the Golden Mean (Discussion)

0:31-1:00 – Painting the opposite of balanced (Group Work)

1:01-1:20 – Presentations and Discussions

1:21-1:30 – Conclusion, Journaling

1:31-2:00 – Dinner

## Lesson Plan

(0:01 – 0:10) Set Induction:

*Students are at their desks*

*The following quote is on the board:*

Do not sit too much, for sitting aggravates hemorrhoids;  
Do not stand too much, for standing hurts the heart;  
Do not walk too much, for walking hurts the eyes.  
So spend a third of your time sitting, one third standing, and one third walking.  
*Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 111a*

Q: What comes to mind when you see this quote? Words, phrases, issues are all appropriate answers. (*Chart issues on board*)

A: Balance in life; too much/ not enough exercise; hemorrhoids are funny; healthy living

Explain (E): This text comes from Talmud, which means it was written by the rabbis in Babylonia at some point between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Even then, we were well aware of the need for balance in life and that moderation in activities is beneficial but too much of anything can create a lot of problems.

Q: Can you think of any contemporary 'sage' wisdom that sounds familiar or contradictory?

(0:11 – 0:30) Maimonides and the Golden Mean

E: Today, we're going to move ahead roughly 500 years and focus on an 12<sup>th</sup> century doctor, philosopher, and rabbi: Moses Maimonides, also known as the Rambam.

*E: give about 3 minutes of interesting biographical information about Maimonides, culminating in his Mishneh Torah, making sure to touch on his textual commentaries and his medical work in Egypt.*

*Hand out copies of the following excerpt from the Mishneh Torah, on the Golden Mean. After the following introduction, we'll read through the text as a class, stopping at the end of each paragraph with guided questions directed at students, inviting short discussion, designed to ensure p'shat understanding.*

Q: Someone please offer us the meaning of the term "Mean"

A: the quotient of the sum of several quantities and their numbers, or more relevantly, a condition, quality or course of action equally removed from two opposites.

E: The following ideas are often referred to as 'Maimonides' Golden Mean.' Let's find out why.

Every human being is endowed with many temperaments, and each is different from the other and very far apart from it. There is one type of man who is quick-tempered and always angry, and there is another type of man whose mind is at ease and who is not angry at all; ... there is another type of man who is excessively arrogant; and one who is extremely humble. And there is one who is a sensualist, whose soul's desires can never be satisfied; and there is one whose heart is extremely pure and does not even long for the few things which the body needs. . . .

Q: What's going on here?

A: He's talking about extreme personality traits and behaviors that are way too far on any rational behavioral spectrum.

Between each human temperament and its counterpart at the opposite extreme, there are intermediate temperaments each distinct from the other. Of all the temperaments, there are some with which man is innately endowed from the beginning of his creation according to the nature of his body. And there are some temperaments toward which a man's nature is disposed and which he acquires more rapidly than

other temperaments. And there are some which are not innate in man from the beginning of his creation but which he learns from others, or towards which he leans according to the thoughts which enter his heart, or because he has heard that a certain temperament is good for him and it is appropriate that he adopt it and conduct himself according to it until it becomes ingrained in his heart.

Q: What's happening?

A: Everyone has different degrees of behaviors and personality traits—some we do just because that's part of who we are, some we've learned to do. Some are better for us, some are worse for us.

To follow either extreme of each and every temperament is not the right path, and it is not proper for man to follow such a course or learn it for himself. If he finds his nature inclined toward one of them or predisposed toward one of them, or if he has already acquired one of them and is accustomed thereto, he should reverse himself to good and follow the path of good people, and that is the proper path.

Q: What does this paragraph say?

A: If a person finds himself towards one extreme on a given spectrum, he should try to explore the other side, so he can find balance.

The proper path is the middle (or intermediate) tendency of each of the temperaments with which man is endowed. It is the temperament which is equidistant from the two extremes and is not closer to one extreme than the other. Therefore, the early Sages instructed that a man should constantly reevaluate his temperaments and weigh them and direct them to the middle path, in order that his body be perfect. How should this be done? One should not be an angry person, easily enraged, nor like a dead person, who cannot feel. Rather, steer the middle course. One should become irked only over something serious over which it is proper to become angered in order that such a thing not be done again. Similarly, one should not lust for things save those which the body needs and without which it is impossible to live, as the matter is stated: *The righteous eats to the satisfaction of the soul* (Prov. 13:25). .... One should not be too jovial and frivolous nor too sad and mournful; rather one should be pleasantly happy all the days of one's life with a cordial countenance. The same applies to the other temperaments. And this is the path of the Sages. Every man whose temperaments are intermediate and follow the middle path is called a wise man."

Instruct (I): Everyone, take 3 minutes and jot down a few ideas about that this text means to you and how it connects to what you already know or believe.

E/Q: Now, we're going to make this practical. What are some categories of living, in own lives, where we might have a hard time finding balance? (*write down these categories on the board*)

A: Eating, exercise (physical vs. non-physical activities), working (working vs. relaxing), partying (vs. restful downtime)

(0:31 – 1:00) Painting the opposite of balanced

E: Let's have some fun and paint a life that Maimonides would highly discourage.

We're going to break up into four groups, along different behavior topics.

Each group is going to take the topic and design two different schedules – one that has far too little of your topic, and one that has far too much.

You'll have 2 pieces of chart paper and markers on which to design your schedules.

After half an hour, we're going to come back together, and present our schedules. After each schedule presentation, as a whole class community, we're going to present our schedules and then collectively discuss the ways that such a schedule would do to a person—we'll bring up the benefits and the drawbacks. We'll give five minutes to each group.

(1:00 – 1:20) Group Presentations and Discussions

(1:21 – 1:30) Conclusion, Journaling

E: I hope that what we've learned from this activity is that too much of anything that we might enjoy in smaller quantities might not be a good thing – what I hope we see, in contrast, is that we want to find a balance between the two – Maimonides' Golden Mean. Let's think back to the Talmudic quote from the beginning of class:

Do not sit too much, for sitting aggravates hemorrhoids; Do not stand too much, for standing hurts the heart; Do not walk too much, for walking hurts the eyes. So spend a third of your time sitting, one third standing, and one third walking.

Instruction (I): Everyone take 5 minutes to jot down your thoughts and feelings about our learning today, and I'd like you to focus on what you're taking away and now have to share with a younger sibling or a friend who is not here. Also, starting today, and continuing over the next two months, we'll have dinner together with the opportunity to discuss anything you'd like, but I would encourage you to share some thoughts or opinions related to what you're going to write.

(1:31 – 2:00) Dinner! (*something delicious and healthy*)

*SAMPLE LESSON FOUR: TEENAGE LOVE*

**Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions**

<p><b>ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We are all made in God’s image; we are all, therefore, sacred beings.</li><li>• A healthy life requires a healthy body, mind and soul. We must strive for all three in order to find holistic health and wellbeing.</li><li>• The Jewish tradition offers many paths and directives for healthy living.</li><li>• Jewish ideals on healthy living can be present in all of life’s regular activities.</li></ul>	<p><b>ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Am I sacred? What difference does that make in how I view and treat myself?</li><li>• What are a healthy body, a healthy mind and a healthy soul? How does one affect the other?</li><li>• Do I care about what Judaism says about how we treat ourselves?</li><li>• Does what I do with myself matter to anyone but me?</li></ul>
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**Learner Outcomes**

<b>Know</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When we speak about sexual practices, it does not only refer to intercourse; it refers to all sexual acts involving ourselves and someone else, or with ourselves alone (masturbation)</li> <li>According to contemporary Jewish teachings, sexual activity should occur only in a loving, trusting relationship – this is the healthiest way, in terms of body, mind, and soul, to engage in sexual activity.</li> <li>Judaism sees sexual activity as a good thing.</li> </ul>
<b>Do</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore Jewish perspectives on sexual behaviors, and articulate what these Jewish perspectives define as healthy sexual behavior.</li> <li>Explore rabbinic and contemporary commentaries on sex and then present it to the group</li> </ul>
<b>Believe</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I can discuss my sexual practices with my peer and Jewish community, knowing that I'll only be judged in terms of how my behaviors reflect my treatment of myself and others as sacred beings.</li> <li>The Jewish perspective on sexuality is worth our consideration, as it offers helpful and meaningful frameworks</li> <li>There are others ways beside sexual intercourse to be intimate with someone special (from the sacred choices curriculum)</li> </ul>
<b>Belong</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To a group of Jewish teens who are thinking about their sexuality in a healthy way</li> </ul>

**Materials**

- Handouts with the Borowitz text and questions
- Handouts with the Rabbinic and Contemporary quotes
- Paper and pens
- Blank bumper stickers
- Sharpies
- A digital image of Tiger Woods to project on the screen.

**Timeline**

0:00 – 0:05 – Welcome, reintroducing the safe space, introducing sex talk

0:06 – 0:15 – Set induction: Tiger Woods conversation

0:16 - 0:30 – In group text studies

0:31 – 0:45 – Presentations and discussion

0:46 – 1:00 – Teenager appropriate sexual activities conversation

1:01 – 1:20 – Bumper sticker creation – appropriate B'tzelem Elohim messages to their peers...

1:21 – 1:25 – Bumper sticker presentation

1:26 – 1:30 – Reflections, conclusion

## Lesson Plan

(0:00 – 0:05) Welcome, reintroducing the safe space, introducing sex talk

*Explain to students that today, as often the case, we're going to be discussing a topic that is can be very touchy, to which we may be very sensitive – we're going to talk about sexuality, and we may address all sorts of relationships and sexual behavior. It is important that we create a Makom Kadosh, a sacred space here, where we can all trust each other and know that (a) we will not be judged and (b) nothing shared today will leave this room.*

*As we're talking about sex, make sure to say up front that we are not encouraging students to engage in sexual behaviour. Some people here have engaged in it, some have not; some may be planning / hoping to soon, some may want to wait. We're having this discussion because we want everyone to be prepared for whenever they're ready, and we want everyone to know how they should best treat themselves and others.*

(0:06 – 0:15) Set induction: Tiger Woods conversation, brainstorming

Q: Does anyone know who this is? If so, please share.

A: Tiger Woods, professional golfer, involved in a huge sex scandal

Q: What do we know about this scandal?

A: cheating on his wife

A: sleeping with lots of women

Q: Did he do anything wrong? What?

A: cheating on his wife.

A: sleeping with lots of women without caring about them.

Q: Let's think to a concept we've been talking about: B'tzelem Elohim. What does it mean?



A: We're all holy, we're all made in the divine image, we should treat ourselves and others as such.

Q: How does this concept apply to Tiger Wood's situation? Did he treat his wife as B'tzelem Elohim? The women he slept with? Himself?

A: Yes, he entered into consenting relationships, he was enjoying himself.

A: No, he wasn't in real loving, connecting relationships. It was all about acquisition, power, thrill, and addiction – the women were objects. And he couldn't hold himself in the highest regard for how he should be interacting with others, relating to others.

Q: What do we think it means to treat others like they're B'tzelem Elohim, in the context of a sexual relationship?

*Chart answers*

(0:16 - 0:30) In group text studies

We're going to divide into groups of three, and we'll be looking at Rabbi Eugene Borowitz's five levels of sexual relationships. I'd like for you to read over the levels and then answer the following questions:

Think of an example for each relationship – perhaps the example is something or someone you've heard about in the news, or maybe you can think of someone you know that fits this relationship.

Are one or both parties treated as B'tzelem Elohim, in each of the relationships?

What do we think is the ideal kind sexual relationship for a sacred human being?

Afterwards, your group will be expected to present your findings to the rest of the class.

*Hand out text and questions to students and circulate while students work.*

(0:31 – 0:45) Presentations and discussions

*Groups present their conclusions to their peers. Write the different answers on the board, and after, discuss any differences and similarities.*

(0:46 – 1:00) – Teenage appropriate sexual activities conversation

E: Now that we've talked about different ways in which you can have sexual relationships with another person, let's talk about what a sexual relationship actually is. When we talk about sexual relationships, we're not only referring to vaginal intercourse. Let's take 3 minutes to jot down as many kinds of sexual relationships you can think of.

After 3 minutes, make a list on the board, and make sure that oral sex, masturbation, touching, cuddling, kissing are on there.

Q: How to touching, kissing differ from masturbation, how does masturbation differ from oral sex, how does oral sex differ from others?

A: different degrees of intimacy, but also, less dangers in some than others, some may be seen as more than appropriate for teens than others.

E: A message we hope to get across is that you don't need to have vaginal intercourse to have an intimate sexual relationship, to show someone you care.

Q: How would a person who's made B'tzelem Elohim and sees others as such approach these kinds of relationships?

A: only engaging in these when they feel comfortable and connected to the person they love, and taking as many safe precautions as possible to ensure the wellbeing of both partners.

*Give everyone the opportunity to jot down thoughts and feelings in their journals.*

(1:01 – 1:20) Bumper sticker creation

E: Given what we've learned today, I want us to create worthwhile messages to pass on to our peers that aren't here in our community. Let's teach them about B'tzelem Elohim and the right ways to engage in sexual relationships, and a good way to do this is by making bumper stickers for our cars. We can make them individually, or in pairs. You should come up with a slogan or statement that has a positive Jewish message about healthy sexual relationships and treating others and ourselves as B'tzelem Elohim, and you can illustrate the sticker any way you feel appropriate. In 20 minutes, we'll share our creations with our peers, and to help you come up with ideas, I'm passing around a sheet with some rabbinic and contemporary quotes about Jewish sexuality.

(1:21 – 1:25) Bumper sticker presentation

(1:26 – 1:30) Reflections, conclusion

Everyone, take five minutes to jot down any ideas from today, and later on, you can elaborate on them in your e-journals or in the online-forum.

*After five minutes,*

Thank you to everyone that shared today, and thank you for giving your full respect to such an important topic. If today was your first time talking about this, know that this is only the beginning of a lifetime of conversation. Next week, we'll continue to discuss sex, though we'll be looking at the topic from a different angle.

Before we conclude, I'd like some sharing of things we've learned today.

(1:31 – 2:00) Dinner

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A work incorporating yoga practices into a Jewish framework – a useful source for the lesson on yoga and other healthy practices.

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Interesting background information and possible discussion sources for Jews leading healthy athletic lives. This one is particularly helpful because of its focus on female athletic role modeling.

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An incredible source on current teenage practices, and a wonderful resource for Jewish parents struggling to offer the best guidance and support to their Jewish teenage children.

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A fantastic accessible collection of Jewish perspectives on different issues relevant in a teenager or young adult's life.

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This book has a great chapter on Din and Rachimim (Judgment and Compassion). It's filled with texts and discussion and activity ideas.

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Necessary background information for the lesson on Rav Kook's theology of a healthy body in addition to a healthy mind and soul.

Gold, Rozanne. *Eat Fresh Food: Awesome Recipes for Teen Chefs*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2009.

A wonderful cookbook for teens looking to eat in a healthy manner, and a necessary background read for the facilitator and resource for the participants planning the Shabbaton meals.

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A great source book on Jewish involvement in sports from biblical times to the present.

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A useful resource for exploration into dancing as a Jewish physical practice and mode of cultural, social and historical expression.

*Israel Dance 1985*. Tel Aviv: America Israel Cultural Foundation. 1985.  
*Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: A New Translation and Commentary*. Translation and Commentary by Avrohom Davis. New York: Metsudah, 1996.

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Kook, Abraham Isaac. *Orot*. Trans. Bezalel Naor. Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993.

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Levy, Joseph. "Maccabi Canada: Fifty Years of Jewish Cultural Identity and Continuity through Sport." In *Sport and Physical Education in Jewish History*. Eds. George Eisen, Haim Kaufman, Manfred Lammer. Jerusalem: Wingate Institute, 2001.

A useful source on contemporary Jewish athletic practices.

*Litapayach Tikvah, To Nourish Hope: Resource Manual*. New York: UAHC, 1999.

A resource for texts and case studies connected to eating disorders. This compilation provides the texts for the class on eating disorders.

Mencher, Edyth Held, Yael Shmilovitz and Michael Howald. *Resilience of the Soul: Developing Emotional and Spiritual Resilience in Adolescents and their Families*. New York: URJ Press, 2007.

A useful resource and program guide for physical, emotional and spiritual resilience in the face of average and uncommon life stresses. Any facilitator for the curriculum should be familiar with this resource.

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This is a wonderful collection of Jewish approaches to meditation, physical exercises, visualizations, and text studies. Michaelson's work offers a road for turning every-day activities into holistic physical-emotional-spiritual endeavors. This work should also be read by the course facilitator.

Newman, Louis I. *The Hasidic Anthology: Tales and Teachings of the Hasidim*. Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1987.

A valuable collection of Hasidic tales, and a particularly useful resource for Shabbaton I's text study and hike as well as other Shabbaton services.

*NFTY Program Bank*. [www.nfty.org/resources/programbank/](http://www.nfty.org/resources/programbank/)

Useful programs in the bank:

- "A Blessing for My Daughters" and "A Letter to My Son;" these are separate gender programs that draw connections between genders and biblical matriarchs and patriarchs.
- "High School Teen Living:" a program delving into different teen issues like body image and dating.

- “Hooking Up Program:” a program teaching respect in the context of brief sexual relational encounters.
- “Let’s Talk about Sex:” a teen program on sex.
- “Nashim Gevarim:” a program engaging participants in discussion about Jewish perspectives on gender identity, sexuality, and reproductive choice.
- “Sexual Values:” a program designed to teach ethical dimensions of sexual relations in a Jewish framework.

Osterhoudt, Robert G. “The Mind-Body Problem in World Intellectual History: The Case of Sport in Personalistic Monotheism.” In *Physical Education and Sport in the Jewish History and Culture*. Ed. Uriel Simri. Jerusalem: Wingate, 1981.

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This article looks at European non-Jewish influences on early-Israeli athletic practices. It explores the question of how the Jewish people regained their athleticism. This is a worthwhile read for the lesson on exercise.

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This work provides the translation for Maimonides’ treatise on the Golden Mean, and there is also a lot of useful commentary on Maimonides’ approaches to medicine and health.

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*Sacred Choices Curriculum: High School Module*. New York: URJ, 2008.

A curriculum including lessons on sexual choices. This curriculum offers the framework and sources for this curriculum's lessons on sex.

Santrock, John W. *Adolescence*. 10<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: McGraw Hill, 2005.

A well-written university textbook on adolescence; it is an important read for any facilitator of this curriculum.

Sclar, Ari. "A Sport at which Jews Excel: the Search for Basketball in American Jewish History." In *Jews and American Popular Culture*, Vol. 3. Ed. Paul Buhle. Westport: Praeger, 2007.

This article provides an example of Jewish engagement in American athletics – it's a useful resource for the basketball session in the exercise class.

Solomon, Eric. "Jews, Baseball, and American Fictions." In *Jews and American Popular Culture*, Vol. 3. Ed. Paul Buhle. Westport: Praeger, 2007.

This article provides an explanation for the Jewish American infatuation with baseball. This might be a useful resource for the teens planning a Shabbaton II session.

Soreq, Yehiam. "Rabbinic Aspects of Physical Culture and Sport among Medieval and Renaissance Jewry." In *Physical Education and Sport in the Jewish History and Culture*. Ed. Uriel Simri. Jerusalem: Wingate, 1981.

An article on Jewish involvement in and attitudes towards sports (or lack thereof) during the middle ages. This might be an interesting resource for discussion.

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This compendium offers Reform Rabbinic perspectives on all issues pertinent to this curriculum.

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Wiesel, Elie. *Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits of Legends*. New York: Random House, 1976.

This work offers an insightful interpretation of Jacob's wrestling with the angel in Genesis.

## APPENDIX – INCLUDED TEXTS

### Shabbaton I Afternoon program.

Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav's Prayer:

"Master of the Universe, grant me the ability to be alone; may it be my custom to go outdoors each day among the trees and grass and all growing things, and there may I be alone and enter into prayer."

Albert Einstein, from *The Merging of Spirit and Science*

The most beautiful and most profound experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the sower of all true science. ...To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their primitive forms – this is knowledge, this feeling is at the center of true religiousness. (Albert Einstein, the Merging of Spirit and Science)

### Shabbaton I Sunday morning closing program – *Judge! But not too much.*

Genesis Rabbah 12:15 (adapted)

There was a king who had delicate glass cups. He said to himself, "If I pour hot water into them, they will expand and burst; if I pour cold water into them, they will contract and shatter." So what did he do? He mixed hot water with cold, and poured it into them, and they did not break.

So it was with God. When it came time to create the world, God reflected, "If I create the world with the attribute of rachamim, compassion, alone, there will be an overflow of wrongful acts—no one will be afraid of punishment. But if I create the world with din alone, how could the world endure? It would shatter from the harsh measure of justice. So I will create it with both justice and compassion, and it will endure."

### 2: We're Going to Pump You Up.

Maimonides on Bodily Health

One does not consider exercise though it is the main principle in keeping one's health and in the repulsion of most illnesses...

And there is no such thing as excessive bodily movements and exercise. Because body movements and exercise will ignite natural heat and superfluities will be formed in the body, but they will be expelled. However, when the body is at rest, the natural heat is suppressed and the superfluities remain...

Exercise removes the harm caused by most bad habits, which most people have. And no movement is as beneficial, according to the physicians, as body movements and exercise.

Exercise refers both to strong and weak movements, provided it is a movement that is vigorous and affects breathing, increasing it. Violent exercise causes fatigue, and not everyone can stand fatigue or needs it. It is good for the preservation of health to shorten the exercises.

...

Emotional experiences cause marked changes in the body which are clear and visible to all and bear witness in clear testimony.

You see a man strongly built whose voice is powerful and pleasant and whose countenance is splendid. When he is affected all of a sudden by a feeling of great disgust, his facial expression falls and loses its luster. The light of his countenance changes, his posture becomes low and his voice hoarse and weak...

You see quite the reverse in the man whose body is weak, whose appearance is strange and whose voice is low. When something happens to him which causes him to rejoice greatly, you will see how his body becomes strong, his voice rises, his face brightens, his movements become manifest in his face and eyelids....

...When one is overpowered by imagination, prolonged meditation and avoidance of social contact, which he never exhibited before, or when one avoids pleasant experiences which were in him before, the physician should do nothing before he improves the soul by removing the extreme emotions.

...

In order to strengthen the vital powers, one should employ musical instruments and tell patients gay stories which will make their hearts swell and narratives that will distract the mind and cause them and their friends to laugh.

...

The physician should have both technical knowledge and skill as well as understand the patient's personality and lifestyle.

...

*All of the preceding are from Maimonides (1135-1204 CE; Egyptian Physician, Theologian, Jurist), The Preservation of Youth*

3: Purple Haze.

### Hasidic teaching on wine

Said the Koretzer: "The Talmud declares that wine taken in moderation unfolds the brain of a man. He who is a total abstainer is rarely possessed of wisdom." (Erubin, 58; Yoma, 76; Baba Batra, 12).

### Shulchan Aruch Kitzur on consuming food and drink

Our Rabbis of blessed memory said (Berachot 63a), "Upon which short verse are all the principles of the Torah" predicated? [It is] "In all your ways acknowledge Him." (Proverbs 3:6) It means that even in those things that you do for your personal needs, you should acknowledge God, and do those things for the sake of His Name, blessed be He. For example, eating, drinking, walking, sitting, lying down, getting up, sexual intercourse, and talking—all these physical needs should be done for the sake of serving your Creator, or for the sake of [doing] something that will be conducive to the service of Him.

### Mark Washofsky on cigarettes, drugs and alcohol

As Judaism forbids us to endanger our lives needlessly and to treat our bodies with reckless disrespect, so it forbids us to smoke.

Bible on wine – "gladdens the human heart" – Ps. 104:15

Use of wine / grape juice necessary for ritual practices –  
Kiddush, weddings, brit milah, seder

Must caution, it can be for pain too

Beware of wine, for 'it bites like a snake' and distorts the workings of our minds – prov 23:31-32

We value clear thinking

Someone who is drunk cannot perform religious, legal, political functions, or even pray

"Judaism holds us responsible for failure to treat our health with care and respect."

The taking of non-medical drugs is forbidden because they injure physical and mental health. No recreational drugs in Judaism

*Living on cigarettes, drugs and alcohol (in appendix).*

### 5: Suit Up and Play Safe.

Excerpts from Rabbi Eric Yoffie's Biennial Sermon. November 19, 2005, Houston, TX.

...A growing number of middle school students are sexually active, and oral sex is both prevalent and widely accepted. Most striking of all is a social ethic known as "hooking up" that severs sex from any pretence of a relationship. "Hooking up" can refer to different kinds of physical contact, but it always

means a casual, no-strings-attached sexual encounter. It means getting physical without getting emotional. It means never having a healthy relationship and not knowing what's involved in developing one.

Judaism does have something to say to [Jewish teens]. It tells them that they are created in the image of God, and each and every one of them is unique, of infinite worth, and entitled to respect.

It tells them that the guiding principle of sexuality in the Jewish tradition is *K'doshim tih'yu*—"You shall be holy," which means that sexuality is linked to blessing, commandment, and God.

It tells them that in our tradition, both partners in a sexual relationship must be sensitive to the sexual needs of the other. In Judaism, a woman never exists to be a subordinate vessel to the man.

And it tells them that it is impossible to make love only with your body without dragging in your heart and soul. Judaism teaches that we cannot divide human beings into component parts. Since we are creatures of God and holiness is attained through loving relationships, sex for its own sake leads to exploitation and hurt.

...We do not promote abstinence from all forms of physical contact. We talk about the kinds of sexual expression that teens who care about each other might consider. But we do take on the issues of oral sex and hooking up. We tell both boys and girls that sex is not about controlling or servicing the other. And we tell girls in particular that their worth is not defined by what they do for boys.

## 7: Embracing the Hunger.

Hasidic teachings on food

The Bratslaver on "Etiquette for Eating"

1. One who eats more than he needs is worse than an animal.
2. Overeating is the cause of many maladies.
3. When one eats with the motive of gaining bodily strength to serve the Lord, his food becomes incense before him.
4. Unripe fruit is dangerous. There is a prohibition against breaking off unripe fruit from the tree, just as there is a prohibition against chopping down a fruit-bearing tree until it dies.
5. A Man should eat slowly and with etiquette even if alone at the table.

Said the Besht: "When you eat and take pleasure in the taste and sweetness of the food, bear in mind that it is the Lord who has placed into the food its taste and sweetness. You will, then, truly serve Him by your eating."

Babylonian Talmud Bava Mitziah 107b

Our masters taught: Many things were said of the morning bread. It is an antidote against heat, against cold, against winds, and against demons. It instills wisdom into the simple. It helps a man to be acquitted in a lawsuit. It helps him to study Torah and to teach it; his words are heeded, and he retained what he has learned. His body does not steam [after bathing]. The bread he eats in the morning kills the worms in his intestines. Some say that it also expels jealousy and induces love.

8: Kooking Up the Point.

Hasidic teachings on balanced living

Said the Besht: "Do not consider the time you spend for eating and sleeping wasted. The soul within you is rested during these intervals, and is enabled to renew its holy work with fresh enthusiasm."

Said the Besht: "You may be free from sin, but if your body is not strong, your soul will be too weak to serve God aright. Maintain your health and preserve your strength."

Excerpt from Rav Kook's *Orot* on the holiness of physical living (Section 33, pp. 189-190).

Great is our physical demand. We need a healthy body. We dealt much in soulfulness; we forgot the holiness of the body.(201) We neglected physical health and strength; we forgot that we have holy flesh,(202) no less than holy spirit. We turned from active living,

the clarification of the sense and the connection with physical, sensate reality, due to a “fallen fear,” (203) due to lack of faith in the sanctity of the land. “Faith,” (204) this refers to the order *Zeraim* (Seeds)—for one believes in the ‘Life of the Worlds’ (God) and plants.” (205) Our return (*teshuvah*) will succeed only if it will be—with all its splendid spirituality—also a physical return, which produces healthy blood, healthy flesh, mighty, solid bodies, a fiery spirit radiating over powerful muscles. With the strength of holy flesh, the weakened soul will shine, reminiscent of the physical resurrection (206).

201 – R. Isaiah Halevi Horowitz, *Shnei Luhot ha-Berit, Beit Yisrael*

202 – *Tikkuney Zohar, tikkun 19*

203 – *Yirah nefulah*, a Hasidic term.

204 – Isaiah 33:6

205 – *Shabbat 31a*

206 – Cf. R. Nathan of Nemirov, *Likkutey Tefillot*, chap 22

The exercise that Jewish youths in the Land of Israel engage in to strengthen their bodies in order [for the purpose (207)] to be powerful sons to the nation, enhances the spiritual prowess (208) of the exalted righteous, who engage in (mystical) unifications of divine names, to increase the accentuation of the divine light in the world. The one revelation of light cannot stand without the other. *David made a name.* (209). *David performed justice and righteousness for all his people.* (210) *Yoav ben Zeruyah was over the army.* (211) “Avner was punished only because he made sport of the blood of youths.” (212) However, if youths sport to strengthen their physical ability and spirits for the sake of the nation’s strength at large, this holy work raises up the *Shekhinah* (Divine Presence), just as it rises through songs and praises uttered by David, king of Israel in the Book of Psalms. Through the supernal *kavvanot* (mystical intentions), the inner soul rises, and through actions to strengthen the body of individuals for the sake of the community, outer spirituality ascends. Both together round out all the orders of holiness by making more pronounced the character of the nation, by “the short passage upon which depends the entire corpus of Torah: *In all your ways know Him.*” (213) P. Do not be astonished if there are shortcomings in the way of life of those engaged in physical and terrestrial strengthening in Israel, for even the manifestation of divine inspiration (*ruah hakodesh*) requires clarification from the admixtures of impurity that seep in, (214) yet it becomes increasingly purified, sanctified, and refined, redeems itself from exile, until it becomes the path of the righteous. *The brilliant light grows increasingly brighter until morn.* (215)

207 – Hebrew *ha-megamah*.

208 – Rav Zevi Yehudah here refers to Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed III*, ch. 25

209 – 2 Samuel 8:13; *Zohar III*, 113.

210 – 2 Samuel 8:15.

211 – 2 Samuel 8:16. The point of these citations is that David was equally involved in praising God through singing psalms and reciting divine names as in pursuing the enemies of Israel. “Said Rabbi Abba bar Kahana: Were it not for David, Yoav could not have waged war; were it not for Yoav, David could not have studied Torah, as it is written, *David performed justice and righteousness for all his people — Yoav ben Zeruyah was over the army*” (Sanhedrin 49a).

212 – *Leviticus Rabbah*, ch. 26

213 – Proverbs 3:6, *Berakhot* 63a

214 – R. Hayyim Vital, *Shaarei Kedushah* 3:7

215 – Proverbs 4:18