

TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT GOD

An Education Capstone Project

LIUDMILA YAKHNINA

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

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

April 30, 2008

Advisor: Dr. Lisa Grant

Table of Contents

Teaching Children about God

I.	Introduction: My Personal Journey	Page 3
II.	Rationale:	
	A. Time to Start: When Do We Begin?	
	Jewish Children and Development of Faith.....	Page 5
	B. Vocabulary to Use: Is God He or She?	
	Jewish Feminist Theology.....	Page 9
	C. Nurturing a Relationship to God:	
	Why It Is Important? How Do We Create It?	
	Teaching your Children about God.....	Page 15
III.	Letter to Teachers and Parents.....	Page 22
IV.	List of Resources for Teachers and Parents.....	Page 24
V.	Unit-by-Unit Outline	
	A. Curriculum Guide.....	Page 25
	B. Enduring Understanding.....	Page 25
	C. Essential Questions.....	Page 26
	D. Cognitive and Affective Evidence of Learning.....	Page 26
VI.	Lesson Plans.....	Page 30
VII.	Annotated Bibliography.....	Page 72

I. Introduction: My Personal Journey

As far back as I can remember, I have always wanted to work in the field of education. I devoted much time and energy to learning Hebrew and eventually began teaching children. When the Jewish Agency for Israel opened its *ulpanim* in Belarus, I started my career as a Hebrew teacher and subsequently worked in many WUPJ and JAFI camps. In the Reform congregation of my city, I was principal and teacher at the *Emunah* Jewish nursery school. In New York, I entered the MARE program at HUC-JIR, where my studies have advanced my short-term and long-term goals. I am always encouraged by the thought that I am becoming a part of a living, vital Jewish community.

Working in Jewish education, I have come to realize the difficulty of the task, arising in part from the uniqueness of this field. We are people who must live in the contemporary world while maintaining Jewish values. It is particularly complicated to integrate Judaism into our students' souls and lives. I have taught Jewish tradition, Hebrew, Jewish history, and Israel. How can teaching these topics embrace teaching about God? When considering the topic of my thesis, I found myself reflecting upon my answers to this question.

Our tradition reminds us that God is present in each beautiful unfolding of nature and in every joyful and sad event of life. When we teach children Hebrew, we are teaching the language in which our people heard the voice of God, the language of love between God and the Jewish people. In teaching Jewish history, we need to introduce children to the possibility that Jewish history is the working out of God's providential design for the Jewish people. I think that I personally have not always been comfortable with this idea, because I have always been looking for right and clear answers. The fact

that there were no “right” answers was at the same time a pleasant surprise and a discouraging discovery for me. However, I finally realized that teaching and learning about God is the journey that is important in my Judaism. The most powerful tool for instilling in a child a sense of living within the circle of Jewish tradition, Torah, and existence of the Jewish God is our personal example and commitment as teachers; otherwise we cannot be successful. According to Jeffrey K. Salkin, who wrote the chapter “A Spirituality for Jewish Teachers: Working with God, for God, and through God” for the book *Teaching about God and Spirituality*, Jewish teachers are “people working for God and doing God’s work.” (Goodman & Blumberg, 2002, p.263) Since our work is sacred or holy, our tasks involve the whole child, including his or her spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and social needs.

Being uncomfortable about teaching God is a common problem for both Jewish teachers and Jewish parents. For many of us, God is absent; God is not a part of our days and nights. However, what we believe about God greatly affects how we view ourselves, other people, and our world. My goal in this thesis is to explore how I myself and teachers and parents in general can become comfortable talking about God in our classrooms and homes through every event of the Jewish year. The goal of this project is to create a tool for parents and educators that will aid them in talking with young children about God and bringing God into their lives.

Beliefs and feelings about God play important roles in Jewish education. Even though there are many ideas and methods for teaching God, I have always wanted to create my own approach and technique. I intend to design a year-long family education program for religious school that consists of lessons for elementary school children, adult

education classes to help young parents educate their children at home, and some family sessions. At the moment, the project for teaching children about God is my greatest passion.

II. Rationale:

A. Time to Start: When Do We Begin?

Jewish Children and Development of Faith

I will begin my discussion by presenting theories related to process of faith development in children. These approaches can help Jewish parents and teachers to guide religious growth and nurture each child's relationship with God. I will mention key points of the theories of religious development of Fowler and Oser and their practical application to teaching young children about God in Jewish settings.

The work of both Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg greatly influenced the work of James Fowler and Fritz Oser. The key concepts that Fowler and Oser incorporated into their own theories were: (1) the belief that development is a fundamental, natural process that distinguishes human life; (2) certain types of human development can be described in stages; (3) development is a process that can be discerned and described.

Oser was interested in answering questions such as: How do people perceive God in life situations? How do religious judgments help us to address real-life or hypothetical problems? What are the implications for religious education of focusing on religious judgment? Oser interviewed many people and found that people's religious judgment falls into a pattern characterized by five stages, each of which has implications for Jewish education.

Stage 1: individuals can distinguish between reality and fantasy and can attribute what happens either to human agency or to God. God is the cause of great, mighty, magnificent, miraculous things, many of which are wonderful and others are tragic. Stage 2: the individual perceives that another reason beyond the obvious, a hidden deeper meaning, explains why the event occurred. The relationship between humans and God becomes two-directional. People try to influence God's actions toward them. Stage 3: human beings have their sphere of influence and God has God's own sphere of influence. A tension exists between the individual's sense of free will and conformity with God. Stage 4: this stage continues the theme of life being based on human decision. God and human beings must relate to one another for the sake of the good and right in a plan or system for humanity. The individual must reach out to others to make the world a better place, to implement this larger plan. God enters our lives through signs that cause us to reflect. Stage 5: every person is a unique contributor to the ultimate environment. God and people are in solidarity with one another. Individuals are very open to experiencing God and finding God in their lives and in the world around them.

Roberta Louis Goodman in her article *Nurturing a Relationship to God and Spiritual Growth: Developmental Approaches* describes the implications of Oser's five stages for Jewish education. All of her suggestions in some way involve presenting dilemmas that come from three sources: (1) hypothetical situations, (2) people's own experiences, (3) the experiences of others. (2002, p.88) These dilemmas are used in different settings of Jewish education; including settings where we teach about God to young children.

Fowler outlines six stages of faith, ranging from the instinctive and innate faith of young childhood to a more individualized view and finally the faith that comes with increased wisdom and experience. Goodman applies Fowler's theory to the Jewish setting in her article *What We Know About ... Faith Development*. Goodman writes, "Finding a place for God and our own spirituality is a challenge that Jewish Education confronts directly." (1992, p.129) Is God implicit within Judaism and Jewish education by its very nature? The author is not sure. Sometimes God is nowhere in the offerings of Jewish education and some irrelevant to Judaism. Our daily actions, life-style, actions, and choices are separate from God. "The Jewish community needs to offer educational opportunities which nurture the human desire for addressing the sacred, for connecting all aspects of our lives, and for finding meaning in life." (1992, p.130)

Goodman focuses on four relevant themes. The first is *A Whole-person Approach to Human Development*. Knowing, feeling, and doing should be interconnected. The term "faith development" comes from Fowler's work (1981). "Faith is the process by which a person finds and makes meaning of life's significant questions and issues, adheres to this meaning, and acts it out in his or her life span" (Fowler, 1981). Faith guides one's life. Fowler writes, "we look for something to love that loves us, something to value that gives us value, something to honor and respect that has the power to sustain our being" (Fowler, 1981, p.5) Not only Torah and Israel, but also God can be placed at the center of people's loyalties, especially throughout childhood.

The second theme is *Experience Informs Faith Development*. Human beings continuously make meaning out of their lives. This is the way of being in world. The experience which parents and teachers interpret as encounters with God through the cycle

of each day, each week, and each year informs faith development. Family life cycle ceremonies, everyday occurrences, tragedies, accomplishments, relationships, first occurrences, decision making, and moral dilemmas are times of transition that offers many teachable moments and present fertile material for linking children's lives to God.

The third theme is *Meaning Making* or learning how to fulfill the responsibility of parents and teachers to help children to make commitments. Throughout life, we tell our children many stories: about who are we and what our history is. Each person constructs this story in relation to other people's stories (Fowler, 1981). Our stories interact with those of our parents, of our families, of other people, and, finally, of God. Goldberg (1985) speaks of a master story in the Biblical narrative that can offer young Jewish children "both a model for understanding the world and a guide for acting in it" (p.13). These stories also include God. In our case, the main task of parents and teachers is to create time and space for individuals to make connections between children's personal stories and the greater story of Jewish people (Groome, 1980).

The fourth theme is *Fostering Commitment*, which refers to creating for children experiences that turn knowledge into Jewish living. Unfortunately, the Jewish upbringing that a child receives does not automatically guarantee that he or she will carry on this Jewish affiliation. We as Jewish parents and teachers should provide young children with knowledge that will help them to make life choices.

When do we begin to teach about God? In my opinion, we should begin as soon as children begin asking questions about God. From the elementary grades, we start to present age-appropriate concepts and ideas. Why is the "experience of God" especially important at elementary school age? I think that if the first experience of understanding

about God is meaningful, children will relate to God subsequently. Religious belief is an emotional experience that affects our lives and gives meaning to our existence. A successful curriculum should teach about God by providing a combination of the rational and cognitive with the affective and spiritual. The linking of a child's experiences with the teaching of Judaic content helps personalize Jewish education and connects the child's faith formation to Jewish roots and experiences. Jewish education, including teaching about God, needs to nurture meaning making and to commit to Jewish living. Faith development theory is a wonderful tool that offers us a way of understanding children's meaning making.

B. Vocabulary to Use: Is God He or She?

Jewish Feminist Theology

How do we respond to children's questions about God's image and God's gender and help them better understand what we believe? Jewish feminist theology helps us to answer this question. Many female images of God have been drawn by Jewish feminist theologians from Jewish sources: God as Queen of the universe, mother, teacher, and friend, among others. Let us examine what various significant authors have said about these images, what central issues they explore, and what key arguments they present to support their points of view.

In *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (1991), Judith Plaskow argues that women's experiences are not recorded in Jewish literature and that in today's Judaism women are "Jews who do not define Jewishness." (1991, p.19) The author questions what might happen to God as women enter into the process of defining

God and reconstructing God from female perspectives. Plaskow tries to rethink this imaging of God through recovery of women's previously hidden voices and experiences.

Plaskow devotes considerable attention to the need to transform the traditional picture of God. Plaskow maintains that we should reshape Jewish memory in order to include women's lives and visions in the Torah.

As a Jew, one enters into relationship with God through membership in the Jewish people. Relationship with God is mediated through community and expresses itself in community. (1991, p.21)

Plaskow denies the traditional understanding of God as the giver of Torah while she retains that of God and Israel as covenantal partners. If women are full covenantal partners, our images of God will reflect the experiences of both men and women. One of the images she explores is a female image of Divinity (including that of Goddess). "God's maleness is deeply and firmly established as a part of the Jewish conception of God: It is simply a part of the lens through which God is seen." However, there are sources that use more feminine imagery for God. For instance, Plaskow mentions Isaiah as one of the several biblical writers who use images of God as a mother (42:14; 66:13). This is an important reminder that God is not literally male, and it provides resources for the construction of alternative imagery. At the time Plaskow first wrote her groundbreaking work, these images had virtually no impact on the dominant image of God. According to Plaskow, imaging God as Queen of the universe may be neither better than, nor even very different from, picturing God as King.

Images Jews use in speaking to and about God emerge out of and maintain a religious system in which men are normative Jews and women are perceived as Others. It is not simply male metaphors for God that need to be broken, but also the larger picture of who God is. (1991, p.128)

There have been several efforts to incorporate a gender-sensitive translation of biblical books. The Jewish Publication Society (JPS) commissioned Rabbi David E.S. Stein to prepare such a translation of the Five Books of Moses by adapting its New Jewish Publication Society (NJPS) translation (*The Contemporary Torah: A Gender-Sensitive Adoption of the JPS Translation*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2006). First appearing in 1962, the NJPS *Torah* was a fresh sense-for-sense translation of the Pentateuch from the Hebrew original. Its translator strove for a clear, precise, contextual rendering into the idiom of modern English. As such, NJPS remains popular in many Jewish circles and beyond. To represent the name of God, NJPS adopted a practice that dates back to the first translation of the Bible, the ancient Jewish version in Greek called the Septuagint. The name of God has long been translated unlike any ordinary Hebrew word, as something totally apart. The problem for Stein was to prepare a gender-sensitive version that remains a Jewish translation. The publisher presumed that most of the new version's readers would be seeking to reconcile the English translation with contemporary Judaism's concept of a non-gendered God. The publisher opted to Hebrew employ for the name of God Hebrew letters. Although the target audience for the book is largely monolingual, it was surmised that they would accept the presence of this particular Hebrew term throughout most of the book. As the result, *The Contemporary Torah: A Gender-Sensitive Adaptation of the JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2006) refers to God in gender-neutral terms, except where poetry employs gendered imagery. This new edition complements rather than replaces the NJPS translation. It is being used by the URJ Press' *Women's Torah Commentary* as well.

Going back to Judith Plaskow, it is important to consider another book of hers, *The Coming of Lilith*, (2005). The author discusses various aspects of God by mentioning a passage from *Pesikta Rabbati* (21.6) in which God speaks to the Israelites on Mount Sinai not “face to face” (Deut. 5:4) but “face after face.”

This *midrash* asserts that “multiple images of God are not a contradiction of monotheism but ways in which limited human beings apprehend and respond to all-embracing divine reality. The many faces of God are still male faces. The maleness of the dominant Jewish image of God is not the end of the feminist critique of God-language, but it is the beginning. The God-language of a religious community is drawn from the qualities and roles the community most values. (2005, p.121)

Melissa Raphael has published numerous articles and books in the field of gender and feminist theology. She is the author of *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz: A Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust*, a book is based upon published testimonies of women imprisoned at Auschwitz. Their memories of the women’s camp at Auschwitz suggest a feminist theology of divine and human redemption. Raphael interprets relationships of care between women as acts inviting God’s presence into Auschwitz, the place on earth that would most repel it.

The first chapter of the book examines the gendered factors of difference in interpreting the Holocaust, where the masculine voice is heard, while women are almost always silent. According to most post-Holocaust Jewish theologians, God was temporarily hidden from Jews and very often silent as well. Jewish feminist theologians revised the immanent God as the *Shekhinah*, a traditional female figure of God’s divine presence, according to Jewish tradition, always accompanying Israel into exile. Raphael thinks that God’s face, like that of the exiled *Shekhinah*, was not hidden in Auschwitz, but revealed in the female face turned as reflection of the image of God, in an act of

resistance to assailant. The second chapter implies that the hiddenness of God's face in Auschwitz was the hiddenness of the masculine face.

God's female face has always been occulted by refusal or subjugation of the female dimension in God. The trope of hiddenness is not entirely dispensable. It helps us to ask how God might have been present but concealed in Auschwitz because her female face was yet unknown to women. (2003, p.79)

In Chapter three, Raphael again points out that she believes in a heuristic key to the mystery of God's presence in Auschwitz. The chapter asks how post-Holocaust theology can read acts of moral and material purification in order to uphold the covenant with God. Chapter four suggests how relations of care could welcome God into the world, even the world as pit. Women's holding, pulling, and pushing others from death back into the slender possibility of life meant bringing God into Auschwitz under a shelter, an improvised place where women could meet God face-to-face. Women in Auschwitz were created in God's image and reflected God's face or presence onto the world. It was the *Shekhinah* – the presence of God among us in our exile - that mended the world and cleansed it of Auschwitz and brought Israel out to meet its future.

All human characterizations of God are metaphors drawn from familiar human experiences of nature and history. Those experiences are analyzed, interpreted, and recorded in the Torah and the other classical literature. They teach us what to look for, how to see, and how to interpret what we see. This is the only way we can think about God. Our tradition provides us with a rich kaleidoscopic system of metaphors for God. In her article *Female Imagery in the Book of Isaiah*, Andrea L. Weiss explores God's involvement in various aspects of the birthing process. Birth plays an important role in the book of Isaiah. In Isaiah 40-66, God is warrior, judge, king, husband, and father. God is a pregnant woman, midwife, and mother. In Isaiah 66:13 God says, "As a mother

comforts her son, so I will comfort you.” Weiss argues that female metaphors restore a full and balanced vision of God. She stresses the positive side of the birth experience in Exilic Isaiah. The author raises questions about the implications and dynamics of the language of pregnancy and parenting: How does this language give birth to a distinctive and unconventional portrayal of God? According to the author, the image of a woman in labor is not simply a metaphor focused on the gender of God or just a maternal metaphor; Isaiah uses the powerful breathing of a woman giving birth in order to transmit God’s potency. The poet modifies language and imagery to demonstrate God’s unparalleled power.

Viewed in a larger poetic context, maternal imagery functions as more than a metaphor for God’s compassion. Once again, this imagery emphasizes God’s power. God’s image in Isaiah 66:7-9 is the role of a midwife. God acts like the midwife immediately after birth. She cleans the infant and the mother, and then lays the newborn baby upon its mother’s consoling breast to be suckled and filled. In this passage, God is a type of nurturing caregiver. Birthing involves not only characteristics of maternal compassion, but also issues of power. By transforming language and imagery, these metaphors strive both to demonstrate God’s unparalleled control over the world and to prove God’s nurturing, eternal bond to the people of Israel. (1994, p.74)

A final source worth considering here is the article *I Believe* by Neil Gilman in the September 1993 issue of *Sh'ma* magazine. One of issues examined by Gilman is the nature of God. The author points out that the function of religion is to discern and describe the sense of an ultimate order which pervades the universe and human experience. He stresses that all human characterizations of God are metaphors, borrowed from familiar human experience. Through our lives, we discover God and invent metaphors which capture the variegated qualities of our experiences of God. Our tradition also provides us with a rich kaleidoscopic system of metaphors for God. We appropriate

some of them, reject others, and add some of our own which reflect our personal experience of God.

What is my reaction to the sources that I have read? Where do I stand on the issues and what are my reasons for thinking this way? I think that every person possesses his or her personal understanding of God's image. I agree with many feminist theologians that the image of God reflects life experiences of both men and women. In my opinion, it is also true that our images reflect the hierarchical order of society. However, I think that the greatest influence is our perception of the world around us, rather than the fact that we are men or women or have this or that occupation or social status. The most important fact is really personality. This is especially relevant for young children. I think that the image of God, even for the same person, may change gender through different stages of the person's life, and even from day to day in different life situations. This, in fact, is a good argument for using neutral God-language as metaphors in teaching children Jewish texts and in liturgy. In doing so, we also avoid hurting anybody's feelings. I do not see any contradiction between our being created in God's image and the impulse to attribute gender to God. To be created in God's image is not only to be men or women and boy or girl, but to possess creative ability and to be God's partners in the creation of a better world. I think that teaching young children not to be afraid to think about God and to become life-long learners in their search for meaning is a very important mission.

C. Nurturing a Relationship to God:

Why It Is Important? How Do We Create It?

Teaching your Children about God

As parents and teachers we usually find it hard to talk about God. If our children do not ask, we maintain a grateful silence. If they do ask, we give the briefest of answers and pass on to other subject. Children are very sensitive and quickly pick up our discomfort. They learn that to ask about God does not bring help, because adults do not have the vocabulary to talk to them about the subject and do not know how to answer. Why is it so hard to talk about God? What obstacles do we have to overcome as parents and teachers in order to create meaningful learning experiences that deepen our knowledge of theological matters and explore and develop our personal relationship to God?

We are adults, but we are still searching and growing as Jews. Having young children who ask questions is one of the important factors that motivate us to participate in learning experiences. We look for ideas that will engage our children and for language in which we can communicate with them about God. We have an interest in the subject and questions to pursue. However, we also have great differences in life experiences, Jewish learning experiences, levels of Jewish knowledge, experiences of thinking and talking about our ongoing relationships with God. These facts bother us when we study. Many of us are people who expect to find clear, correct answers as to what Judaism teaches about God.

The fact that there are no “right” answers, no one Jewish way to know God, can be a pleasant surprise to some, but a discouraging discovery to others. The awareness that it is the journey that is important in Judaism, not the arrival at a destination, can be exciting to one person and frustrating to another. The difficult questions surrounding theology and involved in examining one’s relationship with God can be obstacles to some and challenges to others. (R. Goodman & S. Blumberg, 2002, p.133)

As adults we often have psychological blocks when study and teaching about God. Some information and thoughts anger, frustrate, or confuse us. We hesitate to talk

openly about personal spiritual matters even with our children. Teaching about God is a unique aspect of Jewish learning. The real achievement arises from participating in the process itself. Maybe, despite being uncomfortable, we still teach our children about God, we will deepen and grow by sharing with them our journeys. Our own wanderings and our attempts to teach children about God, like those of our ancestors in the wilderness, enable us to feel the presence of God in our lives. It is a blessing be a parent or a teacher who has enough courage to teach children about God.

Many contemporary authors write about the necessity to teach young children about God. David J. Wolpe introduces his book *Teaching your Children about God* with the words of the famous Jewish teacher Rabbi Meir:

When the Israelites came to the mountain of Sinai to receive God's word, the Torah, they discovered that God was not willing to give it without proof that they would cherish this precious gift. The Israelites said to God: "If You will give us Your Torah, we will offer You our children." And God said: "Since you offer Me your children, I will give you My Torah." (Song of Songs Rabbah 1:4) (1999, p.1)

How can we offer God our children and why is teaching them about God significant? Teaching children about God can help them to feel a sense of the sacred, that someone always cares about them and really understands them. Teaching about God can teach children about goodness in the world and lead them to recognize that they are not alone. Jewish tradition asks us to believe in a God who wants us to be good to one another. Part of teaching children about God is teaching them to act in a way that shows respect for the bit of God in other people. We pay honor to God by behaving honorably to human beings.

Wolpe explores the role of parents in helping children finding their own faith. He also gives recommendations to parents and teachers about the right way to behave without bringing harm.

Finding one's own way to faith is the best possible beginning to helping children. The key is to take what you have – your own faith, questions, and ideas, even doubts and use them to enable the child to develop his or her own way. (1999, p.22)

Faith in God begins in wonder about the world. Noticing what is wonderful and allowing it to pervade our consciousness is the beginning of cultivating a sense of wonder. One of the ways of finding God and being comfortable with talking about God is by appreciating the artistry of the world together with children. We can be faithful to God when we are creative, but we should beware how much authority we have as adults. It is important to stimulate discovery, but not to abandon our own beliefs. Ideas do not stick unless children are prompted to uncover them for themselves. Riddles and mysteries do not threaten young children; they charm them.

The most important aspect of teaching about God is creating room for questioning without fearing that questions will undermine beliefs. When we stake too much on any single belief, we are inviting our children to find out we are wrong and so discredit all we believe in. As parents and teachers, we have not only to teach how to ask, but also to learn how to ask our children. In order to be successful in teaching about God, we also need to be able to be silent, listen to our children, and assure them that their ideas matter and are worthy of consideration. Wolpe pictures the uniqueness of every person as the sparkle that comes not from any genetic inheritance, but from God.

We give our children a sense of their own worthiness in many ways. None of those ways is more important than reminding them that they are created in the image of God. Being created in God's image makes a person invaluable. (1999, p.29)

We should teach children to look for God in many places in the world. For example, we can look for God in one another. Since we are the image of God, each person is a reflection of the Divine. God is also found in sacred moments, when we gather together to celebrate or even to grieve. God is found in the family. God is present in community. Building a community is bringing God's presence into the world. As Jewish teachers we are responsible for helping young children to find tools to function worthy members of their communities. How do we effectively do this? In his book, Wolpe offers a good solution. He suggests that we can move forward functionally by speaking of what God does rather than who God is. The best way to help children to look for God is by concentrating on God's actions rather than God's attributes.

We can teach children to practice belief in God is by offering blessings for special experiences. Jewish tradition contains blessings on seeing a rainbow or the ocean, upon encountering leaders or scholars, and many more. They are called "*Berchot Ha'Nehenim*" or Blessings of the Senses. By this action, we seek to connect not only to God, but to a specific part of ourselves. God becomes real through the beauty of the world and through the actions of people. In their early school years, children have a "show me" mentality and frequently ask us what God looks like.

Returning to the beginning of our discussion, I can conclude that there are two ways of bringing our children to God and opening up the possibility of sacredness in our lives: through people and through sacred moments. Children learn from models. They have to see their parents performing ritual actions. Rituals become one of the tools that help us to discover communication with God. Behaving in a certain way can change people and touch something deep inside them. If we want to change how our children

feel, we have to change what we do to approach God. In doing so, we allow God to become part of the inheritance of each home.

It is important to explain children that different people worship the same God, but they use a different religious language. Each faith has its own special relationship to God. In order to teach our children about God, we teach them to pray. Prayer establishes a relationship with others who pray and with God. If we teach our children about God, we must help them learn how to speak to God. The purpose of praise is not to please God, but to educate ourselves. We have to use prayer as means of instruction. By praising God, we remind ourselves that we did not make the world and that most of what we enjoy in life was given to us. By teaching children to praise God, we spur them to appreciate God's gifts. For example, when our children are good at something, as parents and teachers we have to remind them that such talents are gifts from God. When we use something of this world, we should thank God, who created it for us. When children discover that there is an address for the indebtedness they feel, it gives them a chance to pour out what is in their hearts. I believe that we also ought to make clear to our children that God does not rearrange the world to answer our prayers. Different religious teachers may answer this issue differently. Wolpe presents his own point of view on the subject:

My belief is that God hears our prayers, understands them, listens and cares but does not intervene in the world to change the way things work. There are specific reasons why God does not intervene. It is not that God cannot - God is omnipotent and can do whatever God chooses. But God does not. (1995, p.152)

Teaching about God, we should teach our children that we do not pray to get specific objects, but to change ourselves and others. Those who pray feel a change within themselves. When we teach our children to pray, we are teaching them to delve deeper into themselves. I personally believe that God listens to us and understands everything.

Being heard is one of the great comforts of life. Prayer is a tool for strengthening and understanding who we are by establishing a relationship with others and with God.

In *Becoming a Jewish Parent*, Daniel Gordis presents a very simple, but an enormously important reason for “God-talk.” He insists that when we teach our children to become comfortable talking about God, we have to create that comfort before the world teaches them that it is weird or wrong.

God-talk is not a matter of “teaching our children anything in particular. Nor is it about convincing them to “believe” that something about God is true or not. Rather, God-talk is about making our children comfortable with the word “God” as part of their regular vocabulary. (1999, p.76)

It is not easy talk about God, to wonder about God, and to accept the idea that we have many unanswered questions and still try to take God seriously. There is really no end to the questions about the world that children frame in terms of God. Sometimes we become too preoccupied with telling our children the truth: all the things we are unsure of and all the things that make us uncomfortable and angry at God. We have to make “space for God.” Our job as parents and teachers is to introduce our children to faith, to make God real to them, to help them be comfortable talking and asking about God, and to encourage them to think about the universe as a system where God is a part of the larger picture. When our children ask about God, they are often not in fact asking about God. They are really trying to make sense of the world. Their use of God is part of their way of constructing a world that makes sense, a world that is loving but not random or cruel. Speaking to children about God is not an easy task. There are some questions about God that young children are not yet ready to absorb. Is our job to give our children information, or is it to build a safe, secure, nurturing sense of the world, one in which

they can begin to make Jewish life a core part of who they are? Probably, different parents and teachers will probably answer differently. Gordis presents his opinion in his book.

When we talk to our children about God, we are not “information providers.” Rather, we are “world builders,” the people who are most responsible for the outlook on life our children will develop and carry with them for a lifetime. (1999, p.87)

When it comes to God, our job is to raise Jewish children for whom God is a reality, so that faith can be a possibility when they are adults. Our function as parents and teachers is not only to teach, but also to love our children. Love ties people to one another and all of us to God. I would like my daughter and my students to believe that the world is guided by a loving and caring God who values and treasures each and every human being, including them.

III. Letter to Teachers and Parents

Every parent and teacher encounters children’s questions about God. We should begin to teach about God as soon as children begin asking their questions. I have noticed that many youngsters have the capacity to ask questions about God (such as “where did everything come from?”) as early as the age of three. Refinement of the idea will come with age, but this initial learning experience helps establish a firm foundation for further growth. As a parent and teacher I often ask myself, “Why is the ‘experience of God’ especially important at young ages?” I think that most teachers will agree with me that if the first experience of understanding about God is meaningful, children will relate to God in the future. Religious belief is an emotional experience that affects our lives and gives meaning to our existence.

It is my goal through this project is to create a tool for parents and educators to aid them in talking with young children about God and bringing God into their lives. This curriculum guide is intended for religious school settings. It presents a year-long educational program that consists of nine sessions: three lessons for elementary school children, three adult education classes to help young parents educate their children at home, and three family sessions. By presenting age appropriate concepts and ideas, I hope to provide parents and teachers with necessary tools to help young children to acquire a notion of the presence of God in the world and their own lives.

My choice of techniques is guided by what will reach the students. Teaching about God should involve concrete ideas, stories, prayer, and personal example, all expressed in terms that are honest and that can be readily understood by the children. Enduring understandings, essential questions, assessments, and lesson plans are part of a single system. These elements are connected to one another. I hope that as the result of my curricula unit for teaching God, students can apply over time my big ideas.

Why is teaching about God so important for the intended learners and settings? If children's interest to seek, read, and learn about God and to "experience" God's presence is awakened, the curiosity that sparks their first attempts to study God continues for a lifetime. Teaching children about God is an important part of my vision of Jewish education and of religious school in particular. Through sharing their thoughts, feelings, and personal experiences of God, children will reflect onto the world around them a new type of thinking and consequently acting. In the future, this connection will bring children to belief, conviction, and commitment.

My program is meant to help Jewish children, parents, and teachers establish their relationship with God in a way that a 5th grade student from a *Tfilah* class described God as ‘a beacon that leads him through his life’ I believe that they will find such a relationship with God to be the most rewarding aspect of being Jewish. Parents and teachers lose little except a bit of time, but there is a whole world to gain. Our children are our hope and our legacy to the future.

IV. List of Resources for Teachers and Parents

1. Klaperman, L. M., *Bible Stories*, (New York, New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1963)
2. Sasso, S. E., *In God's Name*, (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Light Publishing, 1994)
3. Sasso, S. E., *God's Paintbrush*, (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Light Publishing, 1994)
4. Sasso, S. E., *God in Between*, (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Light Publishing, 1998)
5. Kushner, L. & K., *Where Is God?* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Publishing, 2005)
6. Kushner, L. & K., *Because Nothing Looks Like God*, (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Publishing, 2003)
7. Gold, A. & Perlman, M.J., *Where Does God Live?* (Woodstock, Vermont: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2004)
8. Bea, H., *Thank You, God* (Tiburon, California: H. J. Kramer Starseed Press, 2003)
9. Syme, D. S., *Partners*, (New York, New York: UAHC Press, 1990)
10. Cone, M., *Hello, Hello, Are You There, God?* (New York, New York: UAHC Press, 1999)
11. Cone, M., *Who Knows Ten?: Children's Tales of the Ten Commandments*, (New York, New York: UAHC Press, 1998)

12. Sturges, P., *Sacred Places*, (New York, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2000)
13. Gevirtz, G., *Partners with God*, (West Orange, New Jersey: Behrman House Inc., 1995)
14. Gevirtz, G., *Living Partners with God*, (West Orange, New Jersey: Behrman House Inc., 1995)
15. Yedwab, P., *The God Book: A Necessary Incomplete Guide to the Essence of God*, (New York, New York: UAHC Press, 2002)
16. Kadden, B. K., *Teaching Mitzvot*, (Denver, Colorado: A.R.E. Publishing, Inc., 2006)

V. Unit –by-Unit Outline Following the UbD Methodology

A. Curriculum Guide

1) September - Adult Session 1: What Can Parents Learn from Teaching Children about God?

2) October - Family Session 1: God Talk in a Climate of Openness and Trust

3) November – The Children's Session 1: Discovering God's World and God's Name

4) December - Adult Session 2: Creating a Relationship with God

5) January - Family Session 2: Discovering God's Role in the World

6) February – The Children's Session 2: Living as God's Partner

7) March - Adult Session 3: Introducing Children to Spirituality as an Essential Part of Jewish Parenting

8) April – The Children Session 3: Honoring our Covenant with God

9) May - Family Session 3: Jewish Home Sacred Places Hunt

B. Enduring Understandings

1. Teaching and learning about God does not consist of “right” and “wrong” answers; it is a long journey through the wilderness of ambiguity
2. Our wanderings and attempts to teach children about God enable us to feel the presence of God in our lives.
3. There is no end to the questions about the world that our children frame in terms of God.
4. To believe in God and in the worth of the world often comes more easily to children than it does to adults; the first meaningful experience of understanding about God helps children relate to God in the future.
5. We help children to look for God by concentrating on God’s actions rather than God’s attributes and by speaking of what God does rather than who God is.
6. Images of God can change gender through different stages of the person’s life and from day to day in different life situations.

C. Essential Questions

1. Why is it important to talk to our children about God?
2. What is the parents’ role in introducing their children to spirituality?
3. How do we teach children to communicate with God?
4. What does God look like?
5. What is God’s role in the world and in our life?

6. Why is One the name of God and how does this name create the potential for us to be united?
7. Can we find God and how can we feel God's presence in the world?
8. What does it mean to be created in God's image?
9. What does it mean to be partners with God?
10. How do we honor our covenant with God?

D. Cognitive and Affective Evidence of Learning

1) Adult Session 1: What Can Parents Learn from Teaching Children about God?

Parents will describe their own relationship to God and explain why it is important for them to teach their children about God.

Parents will define God's place in their families by drawing family emblems and performing creative exercises.

Parents will list possible actions that encourage children to ask questions about God and to search for God.

2) Family Session 1: God's Talk in a Climate of Openness and Trust

Families will list the "ingredients" of the "recipe" for making a community, a place where we talk to one another, where we feel comfortable talking about God and looking for God "in the between us."

Families will explain their potential to create harmony or disharmony in the places they find themselves, for example at school, and in each other by choosing colors for paintings.

By playing percussion-type musical instruments, families will demonstrate how musical harmony teaches us to bring an atmosphere of trust, freedom, and comfort and facilitates a sweet and holy journey into God's presence.

3) The Children's Session 1: Discovering God's World and God's Name

Students will perceive and explain why we do not know what God looks like and why we can only see what God creates.

Students will describe God's role as a creator of the world and demonstrate their creative abilities through exercises.

Students will develop new understanding of their role in creating God's name as "one", which has the potential to unite us all.

4) Adult Session 2: Creating Relationship with God

Parents will explain ways of validating their children's spiritual life.

Parents will develop a new understanding of their beliefs about prayers.

Parents will identify a successful way of teaching their children to pray and communicate with God.

5) Family Session 2: Discovering God's Role in the World

Families will list different characteristics of God.

Families will explain how Jewish understanding of God has changed and grown in every historical period.

Families will describe God's role in their and their children lives.

6) The Children's Session 2: Living as God's Partner

Students will develop an understanding of and an ability to explain God's presence in the world.

Students will describe and draw what God calls them to do in the world; they will paint the world with God's paintbrush.

Students will mention at least three things that they can do to reflect that they were created in the image of God and explain what it means for them to be partners with God.

7) Adult Session 3: Introducing Children to Spirituality as an Essential Part of Jewish Parenting

Parents will reflect on spiritual experiences of their childhood.

Parents will list experiences that they would like to provide for their children in order to awake their spirituality.

Parents will develop a new understanding of their active role in introducing their children to spirituality.

8) Children's Session 3: Honoring Covenant with God

Families will explain what *Brit* (covenant) with God means for Jewish people, describe their actions in keeping the Covenant, and interpret why actions speak louder than words.

Families will understand how studying Torah helps Jewish people to make good decisions in their everyday lives and demonstrate their understanding through a creative exercise.

Families will perceive that every Jew can make his or her own contribution to God's

world by fulfilling *Mitzvot* and apply their knowledge by answering questions and singing songs.

9) Family Session 3: Jewish Home Sacred Places Hunt

Children will explain what can make a place special and sacred and will give the examples of sacred places.

Parents will develop a new understanding of their role in helping children to bring God and holiness into their lives through different everyday actions.

Participants will identify their homes as places where they can find God on a day-to-day basis.

VI. Lesson Plans

1) Adult Session 1: What Can Parents Learn from Teaching Children about God?

Session Overview

Every generation of Jewish parents has continued to undertake a search for God with their children. This often involves changing not only our settings, but also our mind-sets. We have to take the normal occurrences of life and change the way we look at them. We have to turn them upward - refer them back to God. What is the meaning of “God” for us? This lesson is designed to enable the parents to identify their own relationship to God. The lesson combines textual study and personal sharing – so as to be able to help their children.

Core Concept

Questions about God are so important that they have been asked over and over again for thousands of years. Each generation has searched for answers and has added its own understanding of God.

Materials

Construction paper, markers, CD player

Questions for the Lesson

1. What does parental love involve? Which part of parental love is teaching about God? How may God as an idea and experience work in the lives of their children?
2. What were parents' images of God at their child's age? How did the help of their families and environment they were living in help these feelings to flourish or wither? How do parents define God's place in the family today?
3. How can parents behave in order to create a family atmosphere that has sacred moments and a feeling of warmth? How can we encourage our children to question and to search? How can we make sure that they learn how important it is both to be good and to feel that they matter?

Assessment

Parents will describe their own relationship to God and explain why it is important to them to teach their children about God.

Parents will define God's place in their families by drawing family emblems and performing creative exercises.

Parents will list possible actions that encourage children to ask questions about God and to search for God.

Approach

1. Begin introducing the central topic by proposing a question to the group:
“How is the following song connected to today's session?” The song is “Oh, my Curly Headed Baby” on *Lullabies from Jerusalem*. After listening to the CD for a few minutes, start a discussion with the group to see if anyone had a guess. Be able to focus the group on reasoning logically to answer the initial question based on clues in the song and their own thoughts. Avoid putting thoughts into their heads. In every historical period, in every culture, parents sing their children to sleep. No image is more powerful, more symbolic of parental love and protection than the hushed, melodious singing of lullabies. What is parental love about? Is teaching children about God also a part of parental love? How can knowledge about God help children in their lives?(10 min)
2. Divide the audience into small discussion groups. Ask the participants to recall their images of God and feelings about God at their child's age. How did the help of their family and the environment they were living in help these feelings to flourish or wither? (10 min)
3. Ask participants to draw family emblems (Attachment 1). Is God there?

Does God have a certain place there? Ask to explain. (10 min)

4. Hand out the lists of questions. Ask every participant to answer them individually.

Encourage the participants to share their answers in the small groups. (10 min)

How do you encourage your child to ask questions?

How carefully do you listen to your child's questions?

How often do you answer them?

How many times have you told a child something incorrect because you were afraid of not knowing the answer?

What questions about God has your child asked you?

Do you have any rituals at your home that involve mentioning God?

5. Introduce quotes of the day from the book *Teaching Your Children About God* that mention Jewish thoughts about teaching children about God written on big cardboard sheets; discuss them as a group.(10 min)

Rabbi Meir taught the following:

"When the Israelites came to the mountain of Sinai to receive God's word, they discovered that God was not willing to give it without proof that they would cherish this precious gift. So God said to Israel: "Give Me guarantors that you will treasure My Torah." The people of Israel said: "Our ancestors will be our guarantors." God answered: "They are not sufficient. I have found fault with your ancestors. They would need guarantors for themselves!" The Israelites spoke again: "If You will not accept our ancestors, accept our Prophets – they will vouch for us. "But God

answered: "I have found fault with your prophets as well. They too would need their own guarantors. You may try one more time." The Israelites, newly freed from the slavery of Egypt, looked up to the heavens and said to God: "If You will give us Your Torah, we will offer You our children." And God said "Since you offer Me your children, I will give you My Torah."

(Song of Songs Rabbah 1:4)

And so God's word is entrusted to our children. Our children are entrusted to us.

6. Lead the discussion to an open conversation about teaching our children about God. How can parents behave in order to create a family atmosphere that has sacred moments and feeling of warmth? How can we encourage our children to question and to search? How can we make sure that they learn how important it is both to be good and to feel that they matter? What are parents' own expectations of the program? Thank all the participants and give the preview of upcoming sessions. (10 min)

2) Family Session 1: God's Talk in a Climate of Openness and Trust

Session Overview

Effectiveness of learning begins with a community building process which will continue throughout the year. How can we make our participants feel free and comfortable, as at home? How can we teach them to treat one another with respect and love, like real family members? Trust, affection, honesty, humility, sensitivity, and ability to listen are qualities that are needed to maintain *Sh'lom Bayit* in our classrooms. We can

help our students to create a family society of different learners actively engaged in learning.

Core Concept

God's talk is only possible in a climate of openness and trust. It is in our hands to make our community a place where we can feel comfortable talking about God and looking for God's presence.

Assessment

Families will list the "ingredients" of the "recipe" for making a community, a place where they talk to one another, a place where they can feel comfortable talking about God and looking for God "in the between us."

By choosing colors for their paintings, families will explain their potential to create harmony or disharmony in the place they now find themselves and in each other.

By playing percussion-type musical instruments, families will demonstrate how musical harmony teaches us to create an atmosphere of trust, freedom, and comfort that facilitates a sweet and holy journey into God's presence.

Activities

Language Arts

Greet the families. Ask them to look around at the world that God has created. Is it peaceful and complete? Can we be God's partners and help God to take care of the world? In order to work on this task together, it is a good idea to learn a little

more about one another. Ask families to introduce themselves and optionally to explain the meaning of their last names. After the families introduce themselves, emphasize that “family” means something beyond parents and their children. Family is a group of individuals that experience feelings of connection to one another and feel responsibility for one another. Our class community is also our large family. We have common goals and common responsibilities. Today is a very special day. It is a day when the entire family gathers together and experiences a special atmosphere. Now we need your help. We will together create our family recipe and will “cook” together. (15 min)

Creating a Family Recipe

Let discover together a recipe for making a community a place where people can talk to one another and a place where we can feel comfortable talking about God and looking for God “in the between us.”

Put a white tablecloth on the table in the middle of the room. On the tablecloth put a big cooking pot, other cooking tools, flavoring, and spices. The facilitator puts on an apron.

Ask the families to discover their family ingredients. Give examples of ingredients, including respect, affection, good manners, and humor. Determine the relative value of the ingredients by deciding how much of everything to put in – in teaspoons, tablespoons, cups, etc. Ask: What is the most important ingredient? What other ingredients do we need? What ingredients are like spices (only a small amount is needed)? After a short discussion among family members, allow family representatives

one at a time to add their special ingredient to the group “recipe.” Each representative explains his/her ingredient. Ask: Does our recipe change at various times? If so, how?

Guide the process by explaining that harmony is in our hands. We say that everyone has an inclination to do evil or an inclination to do good. We can “incline” toward conflicts and negative feelings. We can create either harmony or disharmony. Ask families to add one colorful ingredient that represents for them “Harmony.” Ask people to explain their choice of color. Consider the idea that the potential to create harmony or disharmony resides in each of us. (20 min)

Relaxation Response

Our bodies can give us feedback as to how well we are doing in maintaining comfort. Is there a specific physical sensation associated with peace in our own self? Sometimes we may think we feel great, and do not even realize that our shoulders are tensed up, our stomach is tight, or our jaw is clenched. Our bodies can give us feedback as to how well we are doing in maintaining inner peace. It works the way other way, too - relaxing our bodies can stimulate our comfort or support our efforts to be more peaceful emotionally. Call out one body part at a time for participants to tense. Continue until the whole body is completely tense. Everyone then releases the tension and relaxes. Compare the feeling of release to feeling inner peace. Take the exercise one step further by creating knotted, tangled poses, then relaxing into calm positions. Compare the two types. Then move from one to the other, back and forth. Ask the participants to sit again in comfortable positions, close their eyes, and choose a word or phrase related to an experience that is calming and comfortable. After people open their eyes, discuss what

the participants liked about the relaxation exercise. Volunteers can share their words and phrases. (15 min)

Music

Hand out percussion-type musical instruments one at a time. One person begins. The next person continues. Discuss the experience. A different variation: Come up with a simple interaction scenario and improvise it on the instruments. How can musical harmony teach us to bring an atmosphere of trust, freedom, and comfort that facilitates a sweet and holy journey into God's presence? (10 min)

Thank all participants.

3) Children's Session 1: Discovering God's World and God's Name

Lesson Overview

Every generation of the Jewish people has continued to ask question about God. How do we know God? Where can we find him? How can we be God's partners? How can we know what God's name really is? What is the way to discover the true name? Now it is our turn to answer these questions. In this lesson, we will do so and develop images of God for six-to seven-year-old children through sharing experiences with a teacher and classmates, discussions, creative exercises, and exploring the book *In God's Name* by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso. The source on which the book based is *Pesikta de Rav Kahana* 12:25. We also explore Genesis 1, Genesis 2:1, 2:2, 2:3, 2:19 and "The Story of Creation" from *Bible Stories* by Libby M. Klaperman.

Core Concept

Questions about God are so important that they have been asked over and over again for thousands of years. Each generation has searched for answers and has developed its own images of God.

Materials

In God's Name by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, *Bible Stories* by Libby M. Klaperman, construction paper, markers, variety of stuffed animals, plasticine.

Questions for the Lesson

1. What does God look like? What would we compare God to? What images of God do we develop in different life situations?
2. What happened before we were born? What happened before all the people in the whole world were born? Who is the creator of the world? What is the role of the human being in the world?
3. Why are all our images and names of God good, and why is no name is better than any other? Why is One the name of God, and how does this name create the potential for us to be united?

Assessment

Students will perceive and explain why we do not know what God looks like and why we can only see what God creates.

Students will describe God's role as a creator of the world and also demonstrate their creative abilities through exercises.

Students will develop new understanding of their role in creating God's name as "one", a quality which has the potential for us all to be united.

Approach

1. Ask children to sit in a circle on a carpet. Ask the participants the following questions and encourage them to listen to one another's answers.

Have you ever wondered what God looks like? Or whether God gets wet when it rains or warm when the sun shines? Do you think God has ears to hear your prayers or a mouth to answer them? Or maybe you have chanted a blessing in which God is called King, and you thought it meant that God is a powerful ruler with gray hair and long flowing robes.

Not everything that is real can be seen. The wind is real but it does not have a shape. Love is real but it does not have form or body. There are signs that help us know that the wind is blowing and that people are feeling a certain way. For example, when we see a person smile, we know that person feels happy. What might we see in the morning that tells us that it was rainy during the night?

Ask the children to complete the following sentences:

When I see -----, I know someone feels sad.

When I see ----, I know it is someone's birthday.

When I see -----, I know God is present.

Ask the participants to complete following creative exercise:

What kind of word association or pantomime would you create to show your relationship with God? (10 min)

2. Do you remember when you were little, too little to go to school? What happened before you and all the people in the whole world were born? Who created the world? How can God's goodness be seen in the wonders of creation? Who gave a special name to the living things in the world: the plants, the trees, the animals, the fish, and the first people? Study with the students Genesis 1, Genesis 2:1, 2:2, 2:3, 2:6, and "The Story of Creation" from *Bible Stories*. Show pictures from the book. (10 min)
3. Read to the students Genesis 2:19, the account of the naming of creatures by the first human being. Bring to class a variety of stuffed animals. Ask the students to pretend that they were the first human being and had the opportunity to name the animals. Show the stuffed animals one at a time (without mentioning their names) and ask the students to come up with an appropriate name for each animal. Guide students by asking them to use a word that describes the animal in deciding on the name. For example:
"humpy"- camel, big-eyes – deer etc.... (10 min)
4. Create animals from plasticine with the children. Ask the children to name them. Play a Hebrew game about animals involving movements. (10 min)

5. Ask the participants the following questions:

Why is the role of a human being in the world special?

How do we care for God's world and for one another? (10 min)

6. Study the book *In God's Name* together with the students. Why does God have so many faces for us? Why are all the people of the Earth, who have so many different roles, still looking for God's name? What does the book teach us about ourselves and about God? Tie the text discussion into the opening conversation about one's own personal name for God and One as the name of God. Emphasize the fact that God's name as "one" creates the potential for us all to be united. (10 min)

4) Adult Session 2: Creating Relationships with God

Session Overview

Young children approach the world with a sense of awe and wonder. God and prayer are subjects that they handle with ease, given the opportunity. This session was originally developed to help parents to draw their children into the joy of prayer. When we strive to nurture the spiritual side of children, we enable them to build a meaningful and life-long relationship with God. Prayer is a way of acknowledging the importance of this relationship to God in our lives.

Core Concept

In helping children to value their rich inner life, building on their curiosity and early experiences of wonder, and developing a language for articulating feelings and

interpersonal sensitivity, we prepare them for adult spiritual life. There are things we can do.

Materials

Book *The Spiritual Life of Children* by Robert Coles, construction paper, markers, CD player

Questions for the Lesson

1. How do we validate our children's spiritual life?
2. What is our own prayer belief? What is our own way of communicating with God?
3. What do we teach children to pray for? How can we successfully teach them to communicate with God?

Assessment

Parents will explain ways of validating their children's spiritual life.

Parents will develop a new understanding of their own prayer belief.

Parents will identify a successful way of teaching their children to pray and communicate with God.

Approach

1. Introduction

As participants come into the room, play background music such as “*Shehecheyanu*” and “*Y'did Nefesh*”. Welcome parents and introduce them to the

quotation of Robert Coles, professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and author of the book *The Spiritual Life of Children*: “Boys and girls are attuned to the heart of spirituality and have a natural ability to look inward in search of meaning and purpose... Children pursue their questions while drawing pictures, stories, and poems, while indulging in the exploration of this wondrously enchanting planet.” (Coles, 1996, p.118) Begin by posing the following question to the audience. How do you validate your child spiritual life? Ask people to think of specific examples from their family life. (10 min)

2. Communicating with God: A Prayer Experience

Help the participants to examine their own prayer beliefs by performing a creative exercise adapted from Steven M. Brown, *Higher and Higher: Making Jewish Prayer Part of Us*. New York: United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 7th printing, 1996.

Prayer Beliefs

	Yes	No
- I believe that God directs what happens in the world.	___	___
- I believe that God is aware of what I do.	___	___
- I believe that God listens to prayer.	___	___
- I believe that God can answer prayer.	___	___
- I believe that prayer is an attempt to talk to God.	___	___
- I believe that prayer makes me more aware of God in the world.	___	___
- I believe that prayer makes me more aware of the needs of others.	___	___
- I believe that God can benefit the person who prays, even if God		

- does not listen. _____
- I believe that prayer can have an effect on people's lives regardless of what they think about God. _____
- I believe my concepts about God are different from the Siddur's (prayer books) concept of God. _____
- I believe that praying helps make me more aware of blessings in my life _____
- I believe that praying can help me cope with the challenges of my life _____
- I believe that God needs my prayer. _____
- I believe that the community needs my prayer. _____
- I believe that God's presence can be felt in a community that prays together _____
- I believe that prayer makes me a better person. _____

Ask the participants to reflect on the answers to the questions in small groups. (10 min)

3. Communicating with God in Our Own Way

Sing a *niggun* (a melody without words). Encourage the participants to use their bodies when singing the *niggun*. Explain that this is another way to communicate with God without using words.

Ask the participants to take a few moments and to imagine how their children can communicate with God by writing down a prayer or poem to God. As another option, the

participants can come up with a *niggun* or a dance. Those who do so may share what they wrote with the entire group. (10 min)

4. Keeping My Prayer Diary

Introduce the parents to the idea of keeping a *My Prayer Diary* with children – keeping track of when the children communicate with God or when God is reflected in their children's lives. Many people keep a journal of their thoughts and experiences. *My Prayer Diary* is about keeping a diary of the child's prayer. Encourage your children to note the sorts of things they pray for. Did they pray today to do well on a test? Did they pray to have a certain boy or girl as a friend? Did they pray for someone's health? (10 min)

5. Types of Prayer

Divide the audience into several small groups. Provide each group with information about different types of prayer in Jewish tradition and examples from the siddur *Mishkan T'filah* (*The Siddur for Reform Jewish Prayer*) (2004, Central Conference of American Rabbis).

Prayer of Praise: When we teach children to praise God, we are educating them in appreciation. The purpose of praise, however, is not to please God. It is to educate ourselves. By praising God, we remind ourselves that we did not make the world, and that most of what we enjoy in life was given to us. The majesty of the world reflects back on God. In praising God, we help our children to understand that all we can offer to God

is what God has given us: voice, heart, soul. That is why our praise of God also leads to thanks.

Example (2004, p.140): Psalm 150 HAL'LUYAH is the last psalm of *Book of Psalms* - "Praise psalm". This psalm is a concluding prayer of *Psukey Zimra*.

Prayer of Thanksgiving: Along with appreciation come thanks. No single attitude is more important to cultivate in our children than that of gratitude. When a child finds that he is good at sports or she excels at acting, we have to remind them that they should be pleased and proud, but that such talents are gifts. When we use something of this world, we should thank God, who created it for us. Prayer is the expression of gratitude that we offer to God for all we have been given. It is recognition of how much in this world that we care about, value, and take pride in is truly a gift of God.

Example (2004, p.182): MODIM. We gratefully acknowledge that God are the Rock of our life and the Power that shields us in every age. We thank God for our lives and our souls, for the signs of God's Presence that we encounter every day, and for God's wondrous gifts.

Prayer of Petition: Children learn early that there is no direct answer to prayer. We ought to make clear to our children that God does not rearrange the world to answer our prayers. We can tell our children that God hears our prayers, understands them, listens, and cares, but does not intervene in the world to change the way things work. We do not pray to obtain specific goods, but to change ourselves and others. (10 min)

Example (2004, p.174): R'FA-EINU. We ask God to heal and save us and to grant full healing to all our wounds, our illnesses, our pain.

BAREICH. We ask God to bless us with this year, let all its harvest be for good, grant blessings throughout the earth, and satisfy us with goodness.

6. Checking My Prayer Diary

The second step is to look back over the diary and evaluate what our children pray for. This is one of the ways to learn what our children consider truly important.

Gratitude: While checking My Prayer Diary, see if it includes not only requests, but thanks. What sort of things has the child thanked God for in the past week or month?

Example (2004, p.183): MODIM. We give God thanks for the gift of life; for awareness of soul; for the world around us filled with beauty; for the richness of the earth that day by day sustains us; for all these and more, we offer thanks. Prayer AMIDA is divided into three part: introduction, *hoda*, and *tfila*. Saying *hoda* we thank God.

Requests: What requests has the child made in his or her prayer diary? Do they change over time as we examine them?

Use the same Example (2004, p.174) as for the prayer of **Petition:** R'FA-EINU. We ask God to heal and save us and grant a full healing to all our wounds, our illnesses, our pain.

BAREICH. We ask God to bless us with this year, let all its harvest be for good, grant blessings throughout the earth, and satisfy us with goodness.

Lead the discussion to an open conversation about creating ways of praying with young children. If the participants do not mention it by themselves, offer them the opportunity of Bed-time Prayer.

Bed-time Prayer: A nightly prayer of few words can mean a great deal to a child. Recite a traditional prayer such as the *Shema* or a prayer simply enunciating love for God. In time, children become accustomed to nightly prayer and pray even when their parents cannot be with them.

Example (2004, p.20): HASHKIVEINU is an evening prayer. We ask God to spread over us the shelter of peace. We ask to guide us with good counsel and be our help, shield us from hatred and plague, keep us from war and famine, and subdue our inclination to evil.

Thank the participants. (10 min)

5) Family Session 2: Discovering God's Role in the World

Session Overview

Throughout history Jews have wrestled with various concepts of God – wondering, confronting, seeking, and finding God in many different ways. Which conception of God and which way of relating to God do we present to our children while helping them to discover God's role in their own lives?

Core Concept

The Jewish people's search for God is not new. Exploration of various concepts of God helps children to discover God's role in their own life.

Assessment

Families will analyze different concepts of God related to the different periods of Jewish history.

Families will explain how Jewish understanding of God has changed and grown in every age.

Families will describe God's role in their and their children's lives.

Activities

1. Throughout Jewish history, Jews have had different ways of relating to God.

Provide the families with the following passages. Ask the families to define a concept of God related to their passage. (20 min)

The Story of Abraham: During Biblical times, Jews first encountered God who told Abraham to leave his birthplace and to set out for a new land. As the new leader of a new people, Abraham came to know God as a judge who could not act unjustly.

Jacob's Dream: God appeared to Jacob in dreams, enabling him to become a better person and a stronger leader of his growing tribe.

Moses and the Burning Bush: God directed Moses in his actions, redeemed the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery, and gave the Israelites the Torah on Mt. Sinai.

Joshua and Entering the Promise Land: Through Joshua, God brought the Israelites back into the land that was promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Prophets of the Bible: God's relationship with Israel demands that Jews act according to God's Torah. God rewards and punishes all other nations on the basis of the moral behavior.

Rabbis of the Talmud: God is all-powerful, all-knowing, awesome, and removed. He is everywhere at once, all-spirit, and without beginning or end. God's *Schechinah* (indwelling spirit) lives within every one of us.

Ask the families to create a chart where they could see how Jewish understandings of God have changed and grown in every age. . Now is our turn to participate in the evolutionary process. How would you complete the chart?

God	Characteristics of God
Abraham	Judge
Jacob	Challenger
Moses	Redeemer, Lawgiver
Joshua	Restorer of People to the Promised Land
Prophets of the Bible	Rewarder /Punisher
Rabbis of the Talmud	<i>Shechinah</i>
Us	_____

2. Separate parents and children and challenge them with different activities. (30 min)

Adults:

What is important to a culture often has many different names or descriptions. Jews have more than seventy names for God. Help the participants to examine their own conceptions of God by performing a creative exercise: “I Need You God, Why?” adapted from Roberta Louis Goodman & Sherry H. Blumberg, *Teaching about God and Spirituality*, Denver, Colorado: A.R.E. Publishing, 2002.

Ask the participants to list names for God they know (ADONAI, ELOHIM, EL SHADDAI, HACADOSH BARUCH HU, EHYEH ASHER EHYEH, HASHEM, HAMAKOM, TZUR YISRAEL, AVINU MALKAYNY, SHECHINAH, THE ETERNAL, THE JUDGE, THE MIGHTY, THE AWESOME ONE, THE COMPASSIONATE, THE KING, THE REDEEMER, THE SOURCE OF LIFE, THE CREATOR OF LIGHT, THE SHEPHERD, THE MAKER OF PEACE, MY ROCK, THE ANCIENT ONE, THE COMFORTER, THE PARENT, THE FRIEND, or other). Ask them to mark the names that seem scary to children with a green marker and names that children would relate to more with a red marker. Tie the discussion into an opening conversation.

Offer the participants the following quotes by putting them on the walls in the different places. Ask each family to discuss the quotes, choose one that works best for them most, and sit near the quote. Ask each group to explain their choice.

THE MANY FACES OF GOD

“*God, to me, it seems, is a verb, not a noun, proper or improper.*” (Richard Buckminster Fuller)

“God has editing rights over our prayers. God will... edit them, correct them, bring them in line with God’s will and then hand them back to us to be resubmitted.” (Stephen Crotts)

“Of all created comforts, God is the lender; you are the borrower, not the owner.”
(Samuel Rutherford)

“Any fool can count the seeds in an apple. Only God can count all the apples in one seed.” (Robert H. Schuller)

“Clearly, God is a Democrat.” (Patrick Caddell)

“God: The most popular scapegoat for our sins.” (Mark Twain) “

”You found God? If nobody claims him in thirty days, God is yours!” (Author unknown)

“We strive to be God’s worthy audience.” (Candea Core-Starke)

In order to understand God’s role in our and our children’s lives, try to describe God’s role in the life of your family. If people want, they can share their family stories.

Children: Ask the children to draw pictures of their family. What is the role in your family of each person in the picture?

3. Invite the children to join their parents and bring their family pictures. Finish the session by creating an exhibit of the charts of God’s roles that each family has compiled and pictures drawn by the children. Thank the participants. (10 min)

6) The Children's Session 2: Living as God's Partner

Lesson Overview

We have already tried to answer some questions about God's images and God's name. In this lesson, through fantasy, involvement, and imagination, we teach six-seven-year old children how to find God's presence in the world, to follow God's way, to understand being created in God's image, and to be partners with God through fantasy. We explore another wonderful book, *God's Paintbrush* written by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, and do several creative exercises.

Core Concept

Children speak about God in ways that are different from those of adults. They ask many questions that often are startlingly direct. It is our responsibility to help our children to find God's presence in the world and to teach them to follow God's ways.

Materials

Book *God's Paintbrush* by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, a beautiful photograph of a sunset, paper, pencils, and mirrors

Questions for the Lesson

1. Where would you look for God? How can you feel God's presence in the world? What can you do next time to help yourself to pay attention to God's presents? When do you feel closest to God?

2. What does God want us to do and what does it mean to follow God's way? What is the role of the human being in the world?
3. What does it mean to be created in God's image? What special ability was given by God to human beings? Why does this ability make us so special in the world? Why does God allow us to make choices? What does it mean to be partners with God?

Assessment

Students will explain God's presence in the world.

Students will describe and draw what God calls them to do in the world, to paint the world with God's paintbrush.

Students will mention at least three things that they can do to reflect that they were created in the image of God and will explain what it means for them to be partners with God.

Approach

1. Show students a photograph of a beautiful sunset. Ask the students if the sight of the sunset turns the ordinary world into something that seems quite extraordinary. Do snowy days sometimes make them shiver on the outside but smile on the inside? Does the sound of thunder crashing through the sky fill their hearts with awe and wonder? Are they always aware of their feelings, or only when they pay attention? Show students a black and white picture (Attachment 2). Ask the students the following questions: What do you see in the picture? Do you see a wine glass or two faces looking at each other? Can you see both? It all depends on whether you look at the white shape or at the black shapes. In

the same way, we can become more aware of God's presence when we pay close attention to the world around us. (10 min)

2. Study the book *God's Paintbrush* together with the students. Ask them to pay attention to situations from everyday life that are filled with God's presence. Tie the text discussion into the opening conversation through the questions in the book. What would make God cry or laugh? What makes God feel hurt? How can you be God's friend? How can your hands help God's hand? Where would you look for God? What kind of words and music does God's breath make? What does God's touch feel like to you? How can you help God touch the world? Can you dance God's dance? What would the dance look like? How do you play in God's playground? If you saw the world through God's eyes, what would you see? What does God call on us to do? Ask students to answer these questions not only in words but also by painting a picture of the world around using God's paintbrush. (20 min)

3. Explain the term *b'Tzelem Elohim* (in God's image) through the following exercise. . Discuss with students the term "family resemblances." Did anyone ever tell you that your behavior reminds them of the behavior of your family members? Explain to students that all people have family resemblances: common abilities we have because all people were created by God. Remind students of the creation of the first people by *b'Tzelem Elohim* (in God's image) with the ability to follow God's way, understand between right and wrong, make choices between doing good and doing evil. Ask the students what it means for them to be partners with God. (10 min)

4. Do the exercise called "Nature's Mirror." Show the students the pictures of part of the city skyline reflected in the river (attachment 3). Ask the students, using the reflection as

a guide to draw the buildings at the water's edge. How can we who were made *b'Tzelem Elohim* be like a mirror that helps others see God's presence in the world? What can we do to reflect God's presence? How can our behavior guide others to follow in God's ways? (10 min)

5. We all were created in God's image. Our actions can reflect God's way. Ask the children to list three things they can do this week to reflect that they were created in the image of God.

I can _____.

I can _____.

I can _____. (10 min)

7) Adult Session 3: Introducing Children to Spirituality as an Essential Part of Jewish Parenting

Session Overview

We will develop some general practical guidelines for Jewish parenting through sharing experiences, performing exercises, and exploring quotations from the book *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee* by Wendy Mogel. The book is based on Jewish thoughts and the Talmudic perspective on raising Jewish children. There will be both a general discussion and creative exercises.

Core Concept

Jewish parents have continued to question Judaism's attitude toward children's spirituality. Adults have an active role in introducing their children to spiritual life.

Materials

The book *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee* by Wendy Mogel, Ph.D., paper, markers

Questions for the Lesson

1. What is Jewish parenting about? What is the parents' role in introducing their children to spirituality?
2. What religious family experiences did the parents have as children? In what ways did these experience enriched their lives?
3. What aspect of their childhood religion do parents want to pass along to their children? What was missing from their childhood experience that they would like to provide for their children? What is the role of parents in introducing children to spirituality?

Assessment

The parents will reflect on spiritual experiences of their childhood.

The parents will list experiences that they would like to provide for their children in order to awaken their spirituality.

The parents will develop a new understanding of their active role in introducing their children to spirituality.

Approach

1. Introduction

Begin introducing the central topic by posing questions to the group. What is spirituality? Why is spirituality a necessary part of Jewish existence? What is a spiritual path and how does it differ from other paths our children might take in their life?

Introduce a quote that mentions Jewish thoughts about Jewish parenting, taken from the book *The Blessing of the Skinned Knee*. The quote should be written on a big sheet of cardboard. Ask the participants to reflect on the quote. Do they agree or disagree? Be able to focus the group to reason logically and to try to answer based on clues in the quote and on the participants' own thoughts. What is Jewish parenting about? Is introducing a child to spirituality a necessary part of Jewish parenting? What is parents' role in this process?

"If you truly wish your children to study Torah, study it yourself in their presence. They will follow your example. Otherwise they will not themselves study Torah, but will simply instruct their children to do so."

(Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotsk)

(10 min)

2. Reflection Assignments

Divide the audience into small discussion groups and ask the participants to perform the following reflection assignment. Ask parents to recall themselves as children at their children's age.

What activities did their families do together that they enjoyed?

How much time did they have to reflect on these activities that they participated in with their parents?

What opportunities for religious education and worship did they have as children?

Did they sometimes feel frustrated and oppressed by these experiences? Why?

In what ways did these experiences enrich their lives?

Does lack of skill or self-consciousness prevent them from taking part in religious rituals with their children? (10 min)

3. Discussion Questions

Ask the participants to answer the following questions based on their reflection assessments:

What aspect of their childhood religion do they want to pass on to their children? (a predictable cycle of ritual events and celebrations; a lens on right and wrong, fate and justice; sounds, odors, tastes, and beautiful images; etc.)

What was missing from their childhood experience that they would like to provide for their children?

What was the role of their parents in introducing them to spirituality?

Do they have today any obstacles in the way of finding a community that shares their religious and spiritual beliefs? What are they? (Geography, snobbery, shyness, finances, etc.) (15 min)

4. Introducing to Spirituality

Discuss one more quote, written on a big cardboard sheet, from the book *The Blessing of the Skinned Knee*, about parents' responsibilities to their children to set an example of spirituality.

"Your child is not your masterpiece. Your child is not even truly "yours." In Hebrew there is no verb for possession; the expression we translate as "to have" (yesh li) actually means "it is there for me" or "there is for me." Although nothing belongs to us, God has made everything available on loan and has invited us to borrow it to further the purpose of holiness. This includes our children. They are a precious loan, and each one has a unique path toward serving God. Our job is to help them find out what it is."

(15 min)

5. Conclusion

Lead the discussion to an open conversation about the necessity of discarding the fear of God's world that parents tend to have when they overprotect their children, and their responsibility to introduce their children to spirituality. (10 min)

8) Children's Session 3: Honoring our Covenant with God

Lesson Overview

Jewish people are sometimes described as "wanderers" through the world searching for a place to live according to God's laws. We are not lost because we are guided by our spiritual map, the *Brit*, and by holiness to the world through the *Mitzvot*.

What does *Mizvah* mean? How many *Mitzvot* do we have? What are the *Mitzvot* between one person and another? In this lesson, we employ different techniques to develop an understanding of *Mitzvot* between ADAM LE-HAVERO for six-to seven-year old children. We also explore Exodus 20, 24:7 and “The Ten Commandments” from *Bible Stories* by Libby M. Klaperman.

Core Concept

Jewish people are not lost in the world because of the *Mitzvot*, the foundation of Jewish practice. By honoring our Covenant with God we make the dream of a better world come true.

Materials

The book *Bible Stories* by Libby M Klaperman, clay, paper, markers.

Questions for the Lesson

1. What does *Brit* (covenant) with God mean for Jewish people? What are the *Ten Commandments*? What promise did the Jewish people make to God near Mount Sinai?
2. Why do we associate our Torah with A TREE OF LIFE? How does Torah help us? How many commandments does the Torah include?
3. How do we understand God’s instructions? (Use as examples a number of *Mitzvot* appropriate for six-to seven-year-old children).

Assessment

Students explain what *Brit* (covenant) with God means for Jewish people, describe their actions in keeping this Covenant, and interpret why actions speak louder than words.

Students will understand how studying Torah helps Jewish people to make right decisions in their everyday lives and demonstrate their understanding through a creative exercise.

Students will perceive that every Jew can make his or her own contribution to God's world by fulfilling *Mitzvot* and will apply their knowledge by answering questions and singing songs.

Approach

1. Define *Brit* as an agreement of Jewish people to live in partnership with God. Tell the students the story about the mountains that wanted to be chosen by God for giving Torah and God's choice of Mount Sinai. Study with the students Exodus 20 and "The Ten Commandments" from *Bible Stories*. Explain to the students The Ten Commandments, referring to a copy written on oak tag paper (Attachment 4). Ask the students to make the tablets out of clay. (20 min)

2. Study with the students Exodus 24:7. "Everything that God has spoken, we will do and we will obey!" Emphasize that when the children of Israel made the Covenant with God, they made it for themselves, their children, their children's children, and all the generations after them, now and forever.

What would it mean to live if we had not received the *Mitzvot*?

What promise did the Jewish people make?

How do we honor the Jewish people's Covenant to live in partnership with God?

Being human, we sometimes talk about the commandments we plan to observe but fail to take the actions. What do you think the expression “actions speak louder than words” means? Write two actions that say, “We are keeping the covenant between the Jewish people and God.” When an agreement is made, there are sometimes special signs that become reminders of it. Imagine that you were to enter into a *Brit* with your family to make your home a more perfect place. What might you each agree to do? Describe or draw a picture of the sign you might use to remind one another of your agreement. (20 min)

3. Why do we call Torah a TREE OF LIFE? How many commandments (*Mitzvot*) does Torah include? What do they help us to understand? What kind of person would you like to be? How can studying Torah help you become such a person? You can learn to do many things by studying. Complete the sentences below.

By studying math, I can learn to_____.

By studying music, I can learn to_____.

By studying Torah, I can learn to_____.

Show students a big picture of an apple tree (Attachment 5). Write on each apple one *Mitzvah*. Explain that when we follow the commandments, or *Mitzvot*, of the Torah, it is like tasting the fruits of the TREE OF LIFE. Read the list below. Then write each item that is a *Mitzvah* on one of the fruits. Be prepared to discuss why it is a *Mitzvah*. There are extra fruits for you to write on an additional *Mitzvah*. Honoring Parents; Welcoming the Strangers; Playing Video games; Forgetting Homework, Keeping one’s Word.

Explain each *Mitzvah* to the students by doing a short activity. (20 min)

Welcoming the Stranger (*Hachnasat Orchim*)

- a. Discuss the various meanings of the word “*shalom*.” Create a mosaic with the word in Hebrew and English. Embellish it with some designs.
- b. Teach the students the Hebrew phrase for welcome - *B'ruchim Haba'im*.
- c. Discuss how the students like to be treated when they are in a new place, and how they think newcomers should be treated.
- d. Learn the song “*Shalom Chaverim*.” The students can sing this song whenever a guest comes to their classroom.

Keeping one's Word (*Nederim*)

- a. Pose the following questions to the students: Did you ever make a promise you knew you could not keep? How did this make you feel? What happened to the others involved?
- b. On the backboard write the following promises:

I promise always to tell the truth.

I promise to keep my room clean.

I promise to try hard in school.

I promise to do all my chores.

I promise to be kind to animals.

Read each of the promises to the children. Discuss whether these are promises they might make. Point out that Jewish people are asked to make only those promises that they can keep.

9) Family Session 3: Jewish Home Sacred Places Hunt

Session Overview

While God often seems to be hiding or hidden, Jewish parents, together with their children, will learn to discover in their daily lives the places where God dwells in their homes. This session helps participants view their homes as holy places and their everyday activities as potentially holy activities. By identifying the places where actions that reflect Jewish values take place, godliness can be brought into people's homes and people's lives.

Core Concept

Jews have always searched for God in the everyday life and identified the holiness of different actions. Let us go now to explore our homes and find where God dwells.

Materials

Book *Sacred Places* by Philemon Strurges, construction paper, markers, CD player

Questions for the Lesson

1. Are there special places where God is hiding or is God all around us?

What makes a place sacred?

2. What are our Jewish treasures? What is the most important Jewish treasure in our homes?

3. Where can you find God in our homes? What is our role in creating sacred places and bringing God there?

Assessment

The children will explain what makes a place special and sacred and give the examples of sacred places.

The parents will understand how to help children to bring God and holiness into their lives through various everyday actions.

The participants will identify their homes as places where they can find God on a day-to-day basis.

Approach

1. Introduction

Welcome the families and introduce them to the theme through the song by Julie Silver “I Am All Around” (on the album *Together*) from *The Julie Silver Songbook*.

Begin introducing the central topic by proposing the following questions.

- Are there special places where God is hiding?
- Is God all around us?
- Do we have special sacred places also in our houses? Where are they?
- Do we need to do something to bring God in?
- As we read in *Parashat Terimah*, God said, “Let them build for me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among them.” Is God living among your family members in your home? (5 min)

2. Creating Holy Spaces

Children

Study the book *Sacred Places* by Philemon Strurges together with the students.

Ask them to pay attention to the fact that there are many religions in the world. People of every religion have built sacred places where they go to pray, study, and celebrate great events in their lives and the lives of their holy people. Some are decorated with symbols or images, either in the form of sculptures, or made of paint, colored glass, or patterned tile. Others speak with the quiet beauty of pure geometry. Some sacred places are not made by people at all. Tie the text discussion into the opening conversation. Help the children to find answers to the following questions: What makes a place sacred? What is our role in creating sacred places and bringing God there?

Adults

Divide the audience into three groups. Provide each of the groups with a text about a place or time where God dwells. How can we feel God's presence in a certain place? What makes a certain place sacred? After discussions in small groups, ask the participants to present their texts and the outlines of their discussions. (15 min)

Ya'akov awoke from his sleep and said: "Surely Adonai is present in this place, and I did not know it. "Shaken, he said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than God's dwelling, and it is the gateway to heaven!"

(Genesis 28:16-17)

And God said, "Do not come closer. Remove your shoes from your feet, because the place on which you stand is holy ground."

(Exodus 3:5)

God spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to the entire community of Israel, and say to them: You shall be holy, because I, the Lord your God, am holy. You shall each revere [your parents], and keep my Sabbaths. I am the Lord your God."

(Leviticus 19:1-3)

2. The Most Important Jewish Treasure

Gather

the children and adults together. Provide each family with a picture of a "Jewish Home Sweet Home" designed by Debra Barnet (attachment 6). This house is filled with Jewish treasures. How many can we find? Circle all of the Jewish objects. Draw your family in the window at the top of the house. Can Jewish objects help to create sacred spaces in our homes? If so, how? Remember, we and our families are **the most important Jewish treasure** in our homes. Only we can bring God into our everyday life. (10 min)

3. Jewish Home Sacred Places Hunt

Ask the families to draw plans of their apartments or houses with the names of the rooms. Now we start a Jewish Home Sacred Places Hunt. Each group receives a list of twelve Jewish values. Each one can be found in a different place where God is dwelling in our apartments or houses. When the participants finish, ask them to be ready to explain the evidence of God's

presence in the room or the place. Mark the places on the plan and complete the following chart.

List of Jewish Values	Place in Your Home (by the participants)
<i>Ahavat Shalom beyt Adam L'chavero</i> - Bringing peace between people	Options: Sofa-bed in the living room
<i>Malbish Arumim</i> – Clothing the naked	Closet
<i>Ma'achil Re'ayyim</i> – Feeding the hungry	Kitchen
<i>Bal Tashchit</i> – Do not destroy needlessly or waste	Recycling garbage can
<i>Shmirat HaLashon</i> – Guard your tongue and what you say	Telephone
<i>Tza'ar Ba'alay Chaim</i> – Kindness to animals	Dog-house
<i>Talmud Torah</i> – Studying Torah	Study
<i>Hashnasat Orchim</i> – Welcoming Guests	Living-room
<i>Shmirat Kashrut</i> – Keeping Kosher	Dining-room
<i>Refuah Shlaymah</i> – Caring for the Sick	First Aid cabinet
<i>Ahavat Zion</i> – Love of Israel	Bookshelf with books

As soon as participants have their charts of a Jewish Home Sacred Places Hunts filled out, ask them to take a few minutes to answer the following questions:

a. What were all the places in your homes in which you found God?

- b. How does doing actions that fulfill these values – feeding the hungry, guarding your tongue and what you say, etc. – bring God into your life and your home?
- c. What values would you find in each room of your home?

Lead the discussion to an open conversation about creating sacred spaces in a Jewish home. (20 min)

6. Closure

Today we searched for God in our homes. We have come to these places countless times. Our Sacred Places Hunt has reminded us that what we do in these places on a day-to-day basis brings God into our lives. We can find God in every single place of our homes. God is near to us.

Play the song “I Am All Around” by Julie Silver. (5 min)

7. Family Education Program Evaluation Form

If it takes a village to raise a child,
Then parents, as first teachers,
Are needed as educational partners within schools...

We would appreciate your feedback on the Family Program that you have just attended. Your feedback is important for us to build meaningful Jewish family programming that is fun, engaging, educational, and geared to meet the interests and needs of our families. Thank you so much for taking the time to be part of the process of building this program. (5 min)

1. Program Content/Quality	1	2	3	4	5
	Fair		Good		Excellent

2. Project/Activities	1	2	3	4	5
	Fair		Good		Excellent

Comments:

3. Program Materials	1	2	3	4	5
	Fair		Good		Excellent

Comments:

4. Other (please specify)	1	2	3	4	5
	Fair		Good		Excellent

Comments:

Suggestions for further programs:

(15 min)

THANK YOU

VII. Annotated Bibliography

1. Goodman, R. L. & Blumberg S. H., *Teaching about God and Spirituality*, (Denver, Colorado: A.R.E. Publishing, Inc., 2002)

Teaching about God and Spirituality presents many theories and theologies through discussions, speeches, classes, workshops, and writings. The book consists of professional development programs, teacher training sections, lessons, and curricula for teaching about God and spirituality. The authors present Jim Fowler, John Sharey, Romney Moseley, Sharon Parks, Ken Stokes, Joel Lurie Grishaver, Jeffrey Schein, Machael Shire, Eugene Borowitz, Leonard Kravitz, Bill Cutter, Gabriel Morgan, Maria Harris, and Gloria Durka. Every chapter concluded with an annotated bibliography related to the subject. *Teaching about God and Spirituality* is an excellent resource for Jewish teachers, parents, and students. The book contains much wisdom and many insights into God and spirituality.

2. Fowler, J. W., *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest of Meaning*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1995)

Stages of Faith is Fowler's seminal work in which he describes his faith development theory and the stages in the development of faith. Faith, as approached in the book, is not necessarily religious, nor is it to be equated with belief. Rather, faith is a person's way of learning about and making sense of life. More verb than noun, faith is the dynamic system of images, values, and commitments that guides one's life. The book is based on the work of theorists like Kohlberg, Erickson, and Piaget. Building on the contributions of the key

thinkers, Fowler draws on a wide range of scholarship, literature, and firsthand research to present expertly and engagingly the six stages that emerge in working out the meaning of our lives – from the intuitive, imitative faith of childhood through conventional and then more independent faith to the universalizing, self-transcending faith of full maturity. *Stages of Faith* helps us to understand our own pilgrimage of faith, the passages of our own quest for meaning and value.

3. Goodman, R. L., “What we Know about...Faith Development.” In *What We Know about Jewish Education*, Kelman, S., ed. Los Angeles: Torah Aura Production, 1992, pp. 129-135)

This chapter reviews the major work and research in faith development and identifies the implications of this theory for Jewish education. Faith development offers a way of thinking about how Jewish education can affect the lives of Jews. The book is a tool which offers possibilities for addressing the needs and concerns of Jews and Jewish educators alike. Goodman, a student of Fowler, the pioneer in this work, explores the current research and applies it to Jewish settings.

4. Wolpe, J. D., *Teaching your Children about God: A Modern Jewish Approach*, (New York, New York: First Harper Perennial, 1995)

Wolpe provides practical advice to parents and teachers about how to bring God into the everyday life of their children. He encourages adults to rediscover their spiritual roots and describes how children view the world and God. Each chapter includes spiritual exercises or activities for adults and discussion questions that heighten awareness of God in our lives. There are no certain or absolute answers to the questions. There are, however, responses that seem more helpful and

encouraging than others. *Teaching your Children about God: A Modern Jewish Approach* is the result of years of speaking about God to adult and children in synagogues, churches, summer camps, and schools. The book contains many of the questions, answers, and stories that arose during these talks.

5. Gordis, D., *Becoming a Jewish Parent: How to Explore Spirituality and Tradition with your Children*, (New York, New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999)

Even as he addresses customs and traditions, Gordis orients these rituals and symbols toward larger questions about God and spirituality. How do we talk to our children about God? Raising Jewish children in today's secular culture poses unique and serious challenges. *Becoming a Jewish Parent: How to Explore Spirituality and Tradition with your Child* offers guidance on talking about God when we have our doubts. The book shows us how to enrich our children's lives with Judaism in general and knowledge about God in particular, from the moment they wake up to the moment they fall asleep – and everything in between. He recommends that parents be worldview builders, helping develop their children's outlook on life, rather than thinking of themselves as information providers responding to questions about God. Gordis provides stories and suggestions for following this approach.

6. Kushner, H. S., *When Children Ask About God: A Guide for Parents Who Don't Always Have All the Answers*, (New York, New York: Schocken Books, 1989)

This book is particularly good for parents and teachers who are trying to figure out how to talk to children about God. We do not always have all the answers and are often dissatisfied with the answers that we received as children. "Who made

God?” “Can God hear my prayer?” “Can God see me?” These are questions that children will always ask. The book advises parents and teachers on talking to children about their fears, fantasies, hopes, and questions. Kushner offers general commonsense advice from a liberal Jewish perspective, Kushner presents an alternative understanding of what we mean by “God.” In reading this book to find guidance for their children, many parents and teachers may find their own questions answered by the author’s straightforward approach to religious faith.

7. Kushner, L., *The Book of Miracles: A Young Person’s Guide to Jewish Spiritual Awareness* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997)

Many beautiful and mysterious events occur every day. The goal of spirituality is the bringing together of seeing, hearing, and doing onto one whole person. To be aware of God’s presence and God’s purpose sounds like a beautiful idea, but who can remember it even most of the time. There are so many distractions and other matters competing for our attention. At the time each one of them seems important. How to remain spiritually aware every day? *The Book of Miracles: A Young Person’s Guide to Jewish Spiritual Awareness* offers its ways to answer this question. Our people have created a tradition filled with songs, stories, legends, and laws to help them remember. That ancient, mysterious, and holy tradition is designed to help us remember God’s presence in our lives and God’s purpose for our world. The author uses *midrashic*, Talmudic, and biblical stories as a basis to present his own comments on the importance of maintaining awareness of the world around us.

8. Gellman, M. & Hartman, T., *Where Does God Live: Questions and Answers for Parents and Children* (New York, New York: Triumph Books, 1991)

This book might be appropriate for a child to read alone. Parents and teachers might also read it to children, or read it alone, for themselves. When children want to talk to their parents about God, parents often do not know what to say. God is not like anything else in the world; God cannot be seen and cannot be smelled. However, as long as children are asking questions about God they are on the right track. The book *Where Does God Live: Questions and Answers for Parents and Children* helps find the right answers. A Rabbi and a Monsignor answer common questions about God and demonstrate that Jews and Christians, although they worship differently, nonetheless worship the same God. Life will be better and bigger, more loving and more helpful, if a child takes God with him or her when he or she leaves synagogue and goes home.

9. Gellman, M. & Hartman, T., *How Do you Spell God?: Answers to the Big Questions from around the World*, (New York, New York: Morrow Junior Books, 1995)

The book provides a unique perspective on questions every child asks about God, faith, and their place in the world. Each chapter begins with a universal question. For instance, chapter four of the book speaks about God's name. Why does God have a name? God does not need a name, but *we* need to give God a name because we want to talk about God. In the book, answers to questions are explored from the perspectives of different religious traditions. The book provides

an examination of the world's religions through their holidays, philosophies, wisdom, stories, and approaches to God.

10. Bial, M. D., *Your Jewish Child*, (New York, New York: Union Of American Hebrew Congregations, 1978)

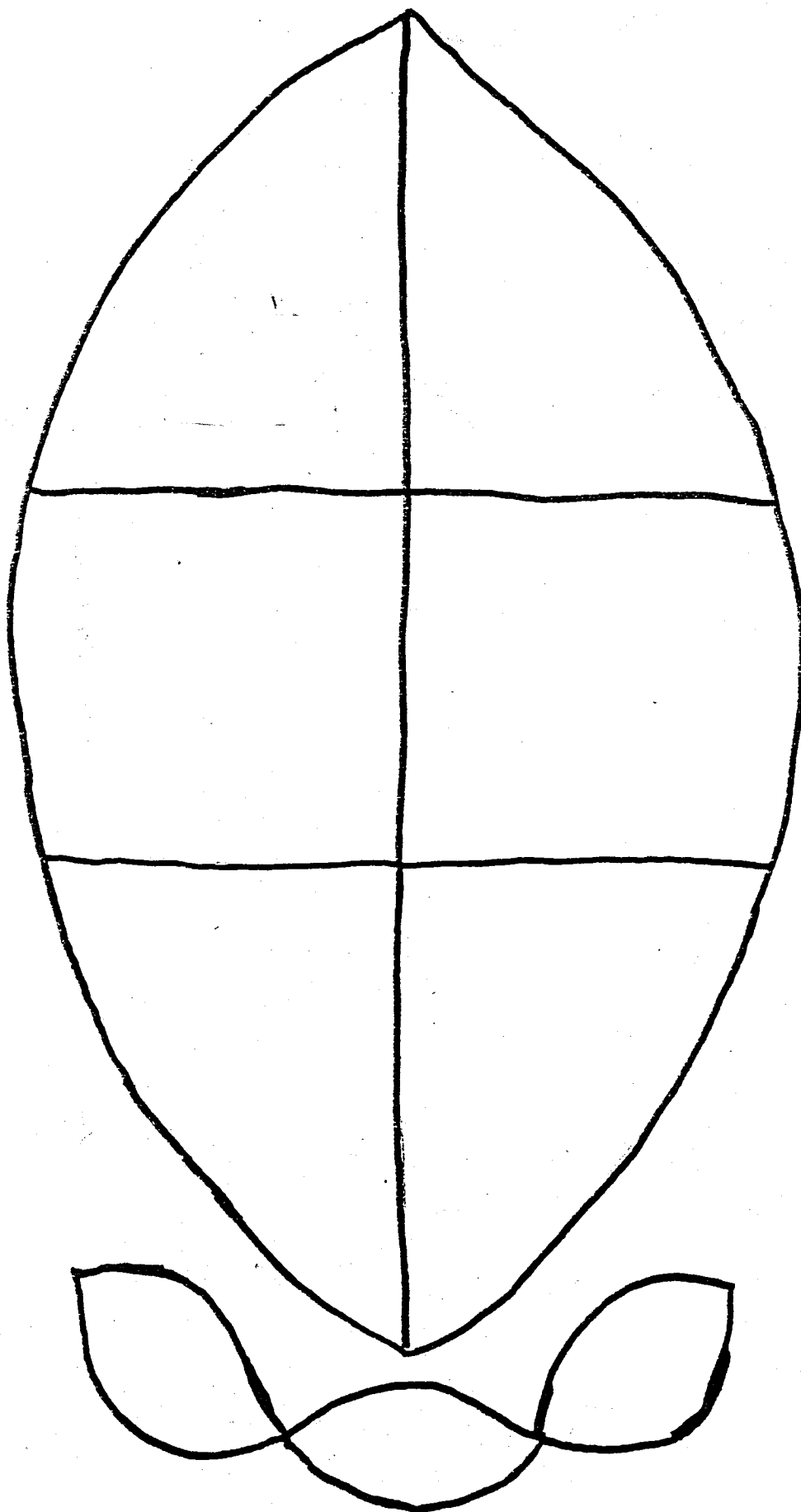
This handbook for Jewish parents constitutes a beginning primer for parents or parents-to-be in many key areas of Jewish concern. The book is of great value in approaching and understanding teaching young children about God. *Your Jewish Child* is an important first step in a lifetime of Jewish study and experience. Teaching about God involves concrete ideas, stories, prayer, and personal example, all expressed in terms that are honest and that can be readily understood by children. All of these elements will be crucial in establishing a basis for spiritual and ethical growth. The book helps to make a Jewish home a true center of Jewish learning, identity, and living with God.

11. Levin, M., *What Every Jew Needs to Know about God* (Hoboken, New Jersey: KTAV Publishing House, Ink., 1997)

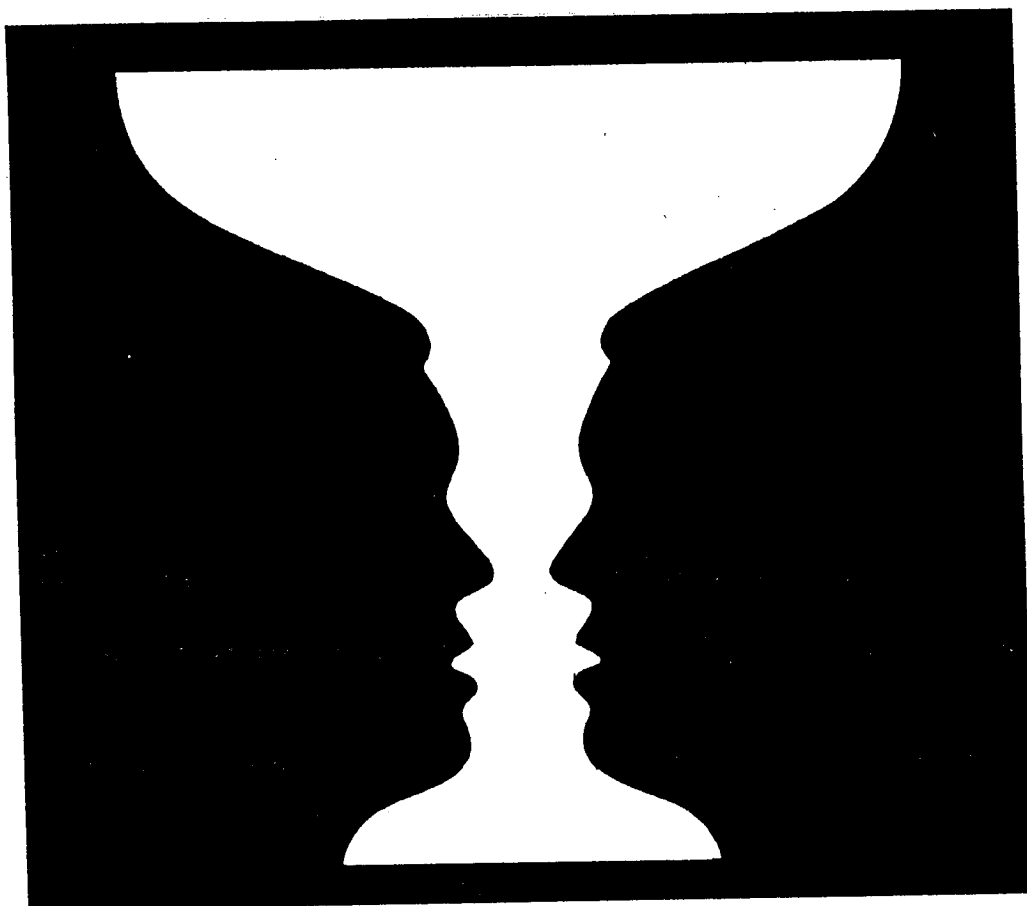
How can one really write a book about God? How can one reach conclusions about Jewish theology, history, mysticism, and sociology when one is an expert in none of these fields? It is very hard. The author describes his personal journey to Jewish knowledge and God. He wrote *What Every Jew Needs to Know about God* out of a sense of love for the subject and awareness of the crisis currently facing Judaism. This book is a starting point, an awakening, and a presentation of ideas that the reader might not have seen elsewhere.

12. Mogel, N., *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee*, (New York, New York: Penguin Group (USA) Ink., 2001)

Parents today find it harder than ever to uphold their own values within their families when the values seem so at odds with those of our current culture. We seek security in a society that seems more and more dangerous, grace in a culture that thrives on competition, and gratitude in an age of ever-increasing materialism. How can this generation of parents raise self-reliant, compassionate, and ethical children? Drawing on the wisdom of the Torah, the Talmud, and important Jewish teachings, *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee* provides the answer. Using a framework of nine “blessings,” Mogel provides parents with a new set of priorities, helping to ease apprehension while creating a positive feeling about the future. “Losing Your Fear of God’s World and Introducing Your Child to Spirituality” is one of the blessings.

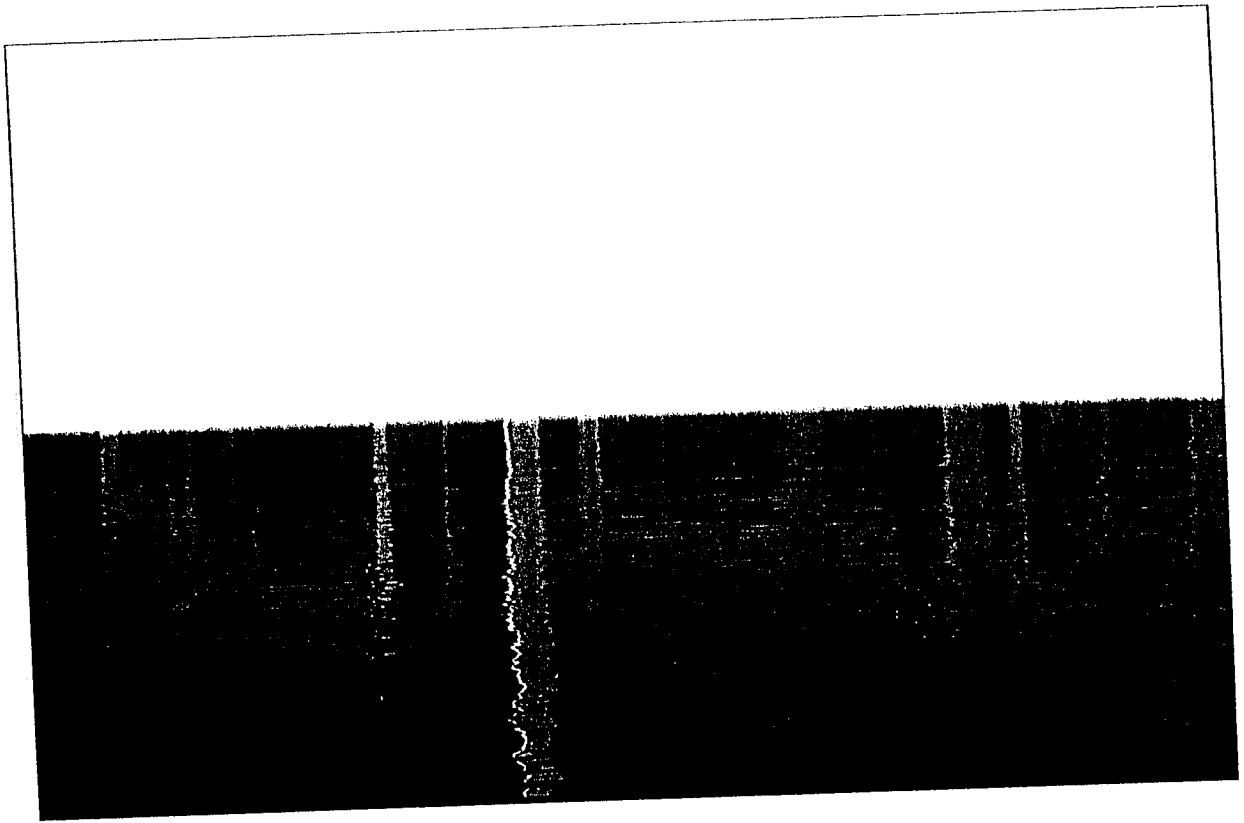


Attachment 2



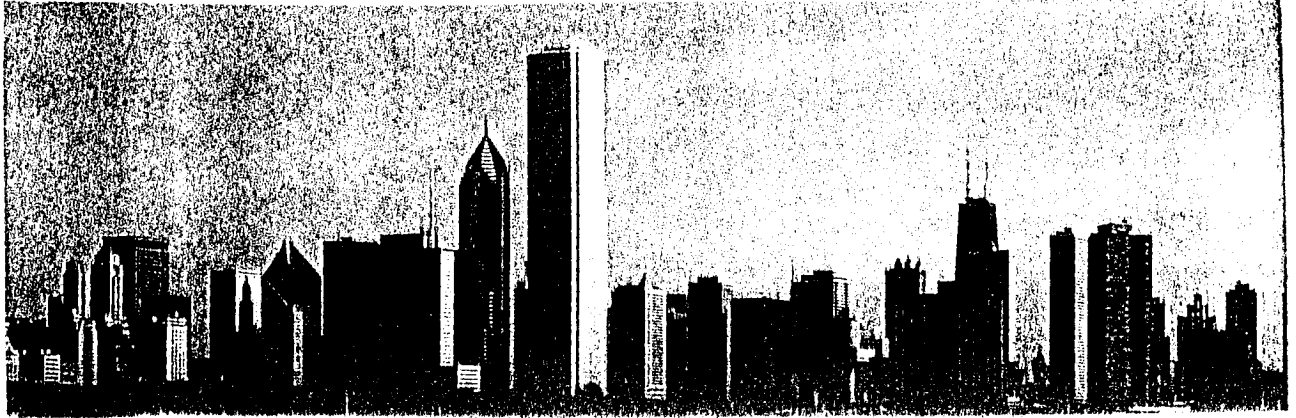
Attachment 3a

NATURE'S MIRROR

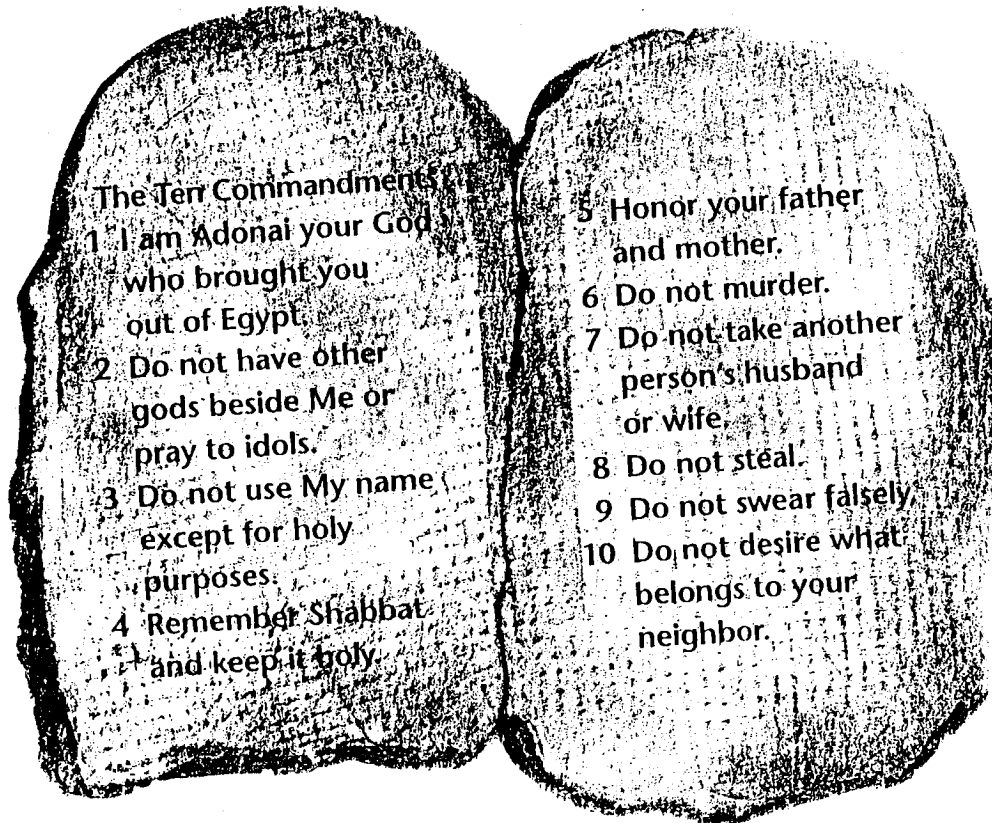


Attachment 3b

DID YOU RECOGNIZE THE CITY OF CHICAGO REFLECTED IN THE WATER?

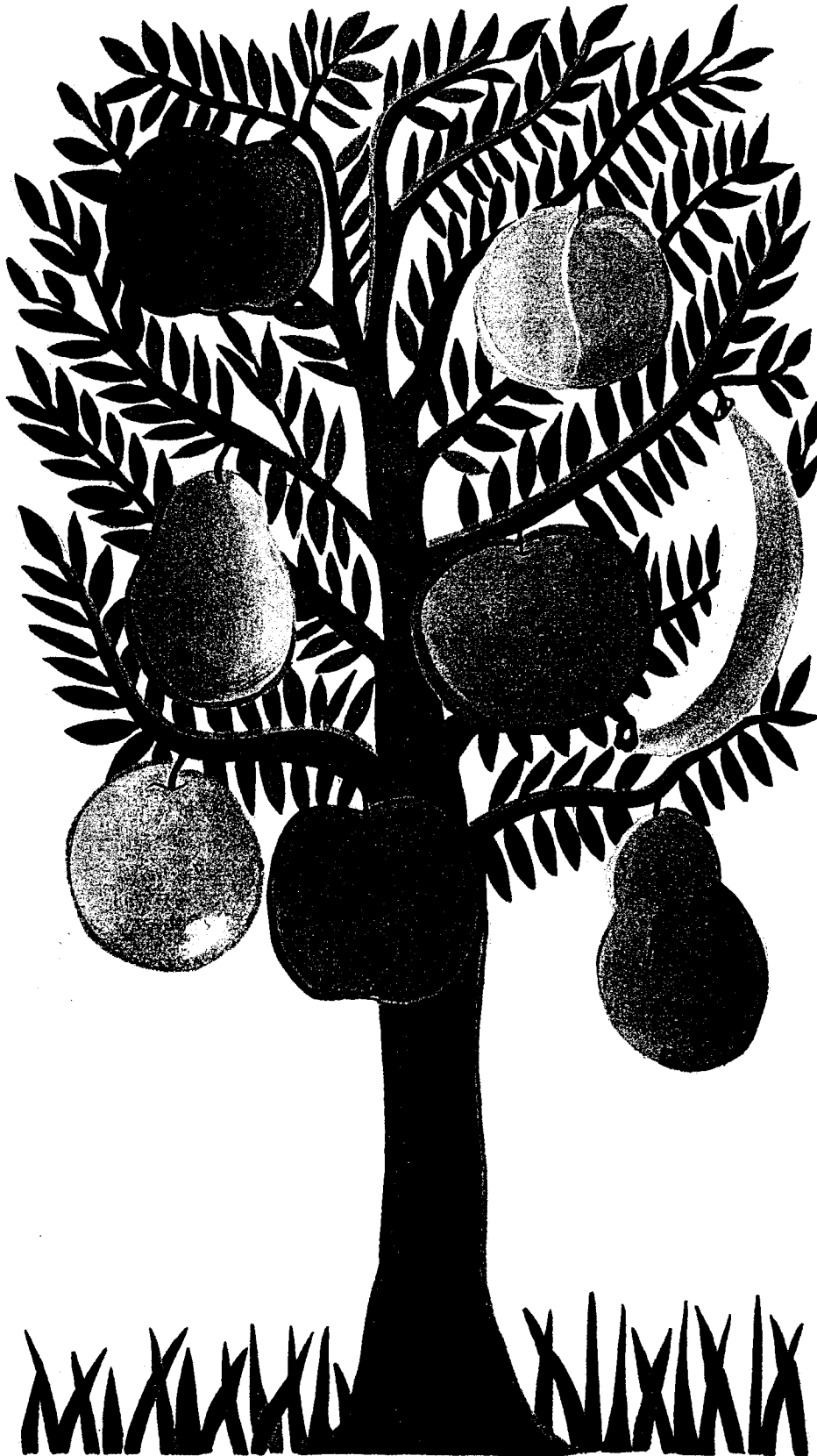


THE TEN COMMANDMENTS



Attachment 5

THE TREE OF LIFE





Designed by Debra Barnet

"Jewish Home Sweet Home"



Designed by Debra Barnet

"Jewish Home Sweet Home"