

**THE RECALIBRATION
OF JEWISH EDUCATION
AS A TOOL TO CREATE, SUPPORT
AND SUSTAIN
JEWISH FAMILY LIFE**

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by
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THE RECALIBRATION OF JEWISH EDUCATION
AS A TOOL TO CREATE, SUPPORT AND SUSTAIN JEWISH FAMILY LIFE

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a candidate for Rabbinic Ordination, and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Rabbi Jeffrey Hoffman

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

THE RECALIBRATION OF JEWISH EDUCATION AS A TOOL TO CREATE, SUPPORT AND SUSTAIN JEWISH FAMILY LIFE

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Jewish education focused on children alone will not, and cannot, create a strong environment for Jewish life. Our task is not to "simply" reform Jewish education to meet the needs of Jews and the continuity of Judaism. Rather, it is to create age-integrated worship and learning communities that support unified and singular Jewish family and community life in which members are more fully engaged in Jewish life and learning and serve as role models for all ages - in short, recreating aspects of the closely-knit Jewish communities of old in which formal learning was reinforced by religious life experience. We must make a synagogue community a living entity in which every member, (and non-member) at every age, can find or create a means to explore his or her Judaism, enrich both family and synagogue life, create an integrated and active community that engages members of all age groups and strata simultaneously -- creating a large extended family in which generations learn with and from one another, sharing questions and experiences and building a supportive, intergenerational *chevruta*.

THE CURRENT STATUS OF JEWISH EDUCATION

The current status of traditional Jewish education can best be understood through the prism of demanding changes in Jewish demographics that raise crucial questions:

What is the goal of Jewish education? For nearly two thousand years, the concept of formal Jewish education for children was understood to be the foundations preparing the child to live a full life in the Jewish faith and tradition. Is that the current goal of formal Jewish education for our children; more importantly, should this be the current goal? If we look at current and projected demographics, we may think it is time for a change.

Our sages long understood the need to continue to learn and to struggle with the challenges of life in the context of text and tradition, and for nearly two thousand years, continuing adult education was a *mitzvah* - an ongoing commitment to Jewish life. As continuing adult Jewish education now seems to be an *a la carte* activity, rather than an ongoing and treasured pursuit, Jewish adults are increasingly less prepared and inclined to ask and answer their life questions in the context of Judaism. Are we doing enough to support and inspire searching adults of all ages?

And most crucially, are these basic approaches to Jewish education enough to sustain and support Jewish family life in these days and into the future?

THESIS

Jewish education focused on children alone will not, and cannot, create a strong environment for Jewish life. Our task is not to "simply" reform Jewish education to meet the needs of Jews and the continuity of Judaism. Rather, it is to create age-integrated worship and learning

communities that support unified and distinctive Jewish family and community life in which members are more fully engaged in Jewish life and learning and serve as role models for all ages - in short, recreating aspects of the closely-knit Jewish communities of old in which formal learning was reinforced by religious life experience.¹

We must make a synagogue community a living entity in which every member, (and non-member) at every age, can find or create a means to explore his or her Judaism, enrich both family and synagogue life, create an integrated and active community that engages members of all age groups and strata simultaneously -- creating a large extended family in which generations learn with and from one another, sharing questions and experiences and building a supportive, intergenerational *chevruta*.

Focusing on what is "wrong" with our members families and those who remain unaffiliated is alienating and counter-productive. It is not the families who are failing; we are failing to demonstrate that Judaism is a living and life-giving faith. Therefore, we must focus on how can we not only transmit, but instill in them the richness and depth of Jewish life so families will embrace it as a meaningful and, indeed, essential core of the family's life.

Most importantly, we must do it in such a way that we will awaken in the parents a desire to learn and embrace Judaism and be strong role models for their children, and that children will

¹ This paper will be confined to the effects of demographic changes in non-Orthodox Jewish life in North America and, in particular, to addressing the challenges they present for Jewish educators seeking to preserve and enhance not only Jewish continuity, but also meaningful Jewish religious life in America. Additionally, there are certainly many healthy synagogue communities with successful education programs. This paper is not intended to critique those synagogues and programs but, rather, to offer an alternative approach to Jewish education that extends beyond traditional approaches.

grow up with a deeper understanding of their faith and a desire to make it part of their lives into their adulthood and impart it to their future families.

If we do not respond to this need, our families will seek meaning elsewhere.

As Rela Mintz Geffen teaches:

A sense of belonging to a small group in which other members care about you as a person is critical to the maintenance of meaning and quality of life. Absent the perception that of the Jewish community as a source of emotional and spiritual support, some Jews seek the intimacy of needed by all human beings in other settings. After all, the need for intimacy and celebration does not disappear; rather, the perception of the Jewish community as a prime locus of meeting these needs is eliminated. Conversely, the presence of effective Jewish social circles supports the quality of life of their members, which in turn strengthens the larger community.²

Adults of all ages as well as children benefit from participating in intergenerational services and events. It is not sufficient for a synagogue to require children to attend Shabbat services as part of their formal education and expect them and their parents to automatically grasp the depth and breadth of Jewish teachings. Nor can we teach our children the same child-oriented Judaism their parents learned and expect that what may be recognized as a Jewish home will spring nearly *sui generously* into being when the children bring home the artifacts of their learning, no matter how treasured those artifacts may be.

² Rela Mintz Geffen, "The Jewish Family: Institution in Transition." *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, (Winter/Spring 1997): 119.

CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

Each family has its own familial, social and religious profiles that they have either chosen thoughtfully or have attained by default. While we, as educators, are deeply concerned and perhaps even desperate to maintain and enrich Jewish life in all of its richness and beauty and to support its mission, we must recognize the tension between our goals and the lives, assumptions and choices of the families with whom we wish to communicate.

Changes to the American Jewish family are all-encompassing. Nearly every aspect of what was at one time as accepted and expected in Jewish life as breathing seems to be in a constant process of re-evaluation. The larger concepts of the definition of the faith itself, the religion and what it represents in personal, communal and societal terms; the role of religion in personal and family life; the singularity of Jewish tradition; the role and power of God as Creator and an active force in human life; Jewish peoplehood; worship and personal spirituality; and the significance of religious exclusivity have all been called into question since the turn of the 20th century. In the last 50 years, each element has been critiqued not only for its own value, but against the backdrop of a heavily secularized host society.

Many members of the last generation (or two) of American Jews were raised with marginal involvement in Jewish life ("secular" and "gastronomic" and "holiday" Jews³). As intermarriage increases,⁴ many Jewish parents rely ever more heavily on synagogue religious schools to

³ While these terms are in common parlance they are also troubling symbols of an "us and them" philosophy. I use the terms here for their denotations, not their connotations.

⁴ National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01: Strength, Challenge and Diversity in the American Jewish Population. A United Jewish Communities Report In Cooperation With The Mandell I. Berman Institute – North American Jewish Data Bank 2003, updated 2004. 16

transcend their traditional roles and to provide the full scope of Jewish education that the parents are unable, for lack of knowledge, time or interest, to provide at home.

Families recognize that they can no longer rely upon institutions that had once been central to the socialization of young Jews: most Jewish parents have neither the time nor, in many cases, the knowledge to transmit learning to their children; extended families are now widely dispersed, so they cannot play an active role; and few Jews reside any longer in densely populated Jewish neighborhoods, where in past years Jewish mores and customs were internalized through osmosis.⁵

Often, in intermarried families, either the Jewish or non-Jewish parent takes the main responsibility for the child's Jewish education. While some parents have had strong, positive formal, informal and in-home Jewish education, others had little or no formal Jewish education. Some may have ambivalent or negative feelings about their own Hebrew school experiences. Parents in any of these groups may have had personal life experiences that left them wondering about the nature or even the possibility of God, and may find it difficult to engage in their own inner conversation on the subject, and still more challenged to discuss God or Judaism with their children.⁶

⁵ Jack Wertheimer, "The High Cost of Jewish Living," *Commentary*, (March 2010): 4.

⁶ Sylvia Barack Fishman, in her book, *Double or Nothing? Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage*, (2004 Waltham, Mass: Brandeis University Press) presents an extensive study on the challenges of interfaith family life and the predictors of continuity into the next generation.

DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

Over the past 50+ years, the signs that a tremendous change in Jewish life and American life would demand a change in organized Judaism's self-definition and the 'packaging' of the religion have been extremely apparent. Many individuals and families no longer feel bound by their parents' or grandparents' religion, even while they may feel a strong connection to family rituals. As in the experience of many immigrant cultures, each successive generation is farther from the foundation of those who carried the religion and peoplehood with them to these new shores.

When we examine the demographic, religious and social shifts of our day, we may find that the questions we need to ask are only tangentially linked to those asked by Jewish educators 50 years ago, when Judaism in the home may not have been a 'given,' but was certainly a more reliable assumption than it is today, and when families were more likely to have been engaged from the beginning of the lives together and remained engaged in Jewish life after their own and their children's *B'nai Mitzvah*.

When we combine this sociological reality with the desire to be accepted by the host society, the effects have been devastating not only on religious observance, but also on the central teachings of what Judaism is and offers, an awareness of sacred texts and their teachings, the social contract that Judaism brought to Western civilization and, most tragically of all, the beauty and wholeness that a life lived in faith and in community offers.

FAMILIES UNDER PRESSURE

Families may feel the tensions presented by the demands - and lure - of secular life, including economic, employment and child activity programming.

Interfaith families, if they celebrate each religion's holidays, may feel the tensions of the mixed messages the children receive, as well as pressures from their extended families.

Religious school teachers will also attest to "competition' with sports teams and dance lessons, attendance at which often seem to receive more respect from the parents than does religious education.

Our highly mobile society has also deeply affected the transmission of Jewish values through grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Many families do not have the benefit of sharing Jewish holiday celebrations or building on extensive Jewish traditions for themselves if they feel isolated in their practice or observance.

The effects of these challenges is broad and pervasive. According to Sylvia Barack Fishman:

American Jewish parents ... find it difficult to say to their children, "I really care that you should be Jewish because..." When saying to a teenager "I don't want you to date a non-Jew. I only want you to date a Jews," one must be prepared to add "It matters to be Jewish because..." Many American Jewish parents, however, say they have no desire to cast off their own Jewishness, but they do not know why it matters to them. And because they have difficulty articulating it, they often do not. ...Through its proactive responses -- or lack of them -- the American Jewish community itself can have an impact on the dynamic positive developments of the American Jewish population or, on the

other hand, on stagnation and possible shrinkage. Much depends on whether the community can find the communal will to take those actions that can enhance the future of American Jewish households.⁷

THE HIGH COST OF JEWISH LIVING

The high cost of Jewish life is taking a serious toll on Jewish life as fewer families can afford to pay ever-increasing synagogue dues and school tuition for their children.

In households and communities, the recession has brought to the fore an "affordability crisis" that has been gathering for decades. At the heart of this crisis is an unyielding reality: above and beyond what Jews spend on the usual necessities and conveniences, it costs a great deal to live an active Jewish life. Growing numbers of families worry that they will not be able to pay the ever-rising bills associated with full participation in Jewish life.⁸

In addition, according to the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) 2000-2001, the economic vulnerability of American Jewish households is not only a cause for increasing concern, but a reality not likely to change for some time.⁹ This data provides a clear message to American synagogues: we have to find ways to make not only membership, but Jewish education, affordable and available.

⁷ Sylvia Barack Fishman, "Transformations in the Composition of American Jewish Households," *American Jewry's Comfort Level: Present and Future*, Edited by Steven Bayme and Manfred Gerstenfeld, (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs 2010): Retrieved from: <http://www.jcpa.org/cjc/cjc-fishman-f05.htm> 151, 159

⁸ Jack Wertheimer, "The High Cost of Jewish Living," *Commentary*, March (2010). Retrieved from <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/the-high-cost-of-jewish-living/>

⁹ National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01: Strength, Challenge and Diversity in the American Jewish Population. A United Jewish Communities Report In Cooperation With The Mandell I. Berman Institute – North American Jewish Data Bank 2003, updated 2004. 3-23

THE STANDARD SYNAGOGUE MODEL CONSPIRES AGAINST JEWISH CONTINUITY

One result of these demographic, social and spiritual tectonic shifts is that families and individuals within those families may be disinterested, disenchanting, searching, devoted and dedicated to Judaism -- all at the same time. If we are to save, create and inspire Jewish life in our synagogues, communities and the country, we must immediately cease to see our members in neat, encapsulated demographic pigeonholes. Rather, we must address and serve each individual as a treasured member of a single community by addressing as many facets of the individual's and families' lives as possible.

In courageous attempts to welcome families into Jewish life, large and small synagogues are struggling to attract and hold young Jewish families through any number of lauded techniques. They may offer musical services, young adults clubs, free first year membership or free school for K-1 children, all with varying success. Small synagogues struggle even more as it is incredibly difficult to attract young families unless there is a critical mass in place already.

In addition, the American Jewish family is changing more quickly than some synagogues are prepared to recognize. Interfaith families, single parents and the large proportion of older Jewish adults living alone have altered the perceived landscape of traditional synagogue membership.

According to the 1990 NJOP, the most common type of household in the American Jewish community comprises one Jewish adult living alone; the next most common group is two adult Jews, and only then comes two adult Jews living with at least one

child under the age of 18 living at home. This last category makes up just 14 percent of the households in the survey.¹⁰

Some synagogues, in their efforts to hold and draw new members, may inadvertently work against their own survival and the fulfillment of members' needs. Some may find themselves leaning toward a type of apologetics about Judaism, and thereby blur or dilute the core mission of the synagogue and send mixed and confusing messages to members.

Adults without children may join for social and what is loosely defined as "spiritual" reasons, and looking at the low average percentage of any congregation that attends services, a synagogue may be tempted to offer more social events to bring members in the door. Yet, if we focus our efforts for adults primarily on social activities we will, in effect, be repeating the messages we inadvertently give to children: synagogue and religious life are basically social and are not closely linked to the core of Judaism.

Some interfaith families may be at ease in the synagogue community while others may be struggling or, worse, remaining disengaged. Among these families may be those who Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis describes as "interfaithless" couples... "neither fundamentalists nor liberals, nor believers nor atheists." ¹¹

¹⁰ Rela Mintz Geffen, "The Jewish Family: Institution in Transition," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Winter/Spring (1997): 118

¹¹ Harold M. Schulweis, *For Those Who Cannot Believe: Overcoming the Obstacles to Faith* (NY Harper Collins, NY 1994) 5. For an excellent discussion on existential Jewish challenges in interfaith families, see *Preserving Jewishness in Your Family After an Interfaith Marriage Has Occurred* (1995) by Alan Silverstein (Jason Aronson, Inc. Northvale, NJ).

At the same time, enrollment is dropping in both day schools and after-school programs, and many three-day-a-week schools are cutting back to two- or even one-day programs, because over-scheduled children (and parents) cannot cope with the time commitment.¹²

So often, we see and address our members in terms of the strata that simplify our approach and duties to them, and this is not lost on the members.

For example:

- Young parents are potential leaders and the financial support of the synagogue
- Middle aged adults are the leaders
- Infants to toddlers are potential school children
- Lower School children are pre-B'nai Mitzvah taught with a standard curriculum aimed at producing strong B'nai Mitzvah candidates
- Upper school children are prepared for what we actively (if unwittingly) affirm is a culmination of their Jewish studies.
- Seniors may be active or not; may be struggling with end of life concerns; may be seen as potential donors, etc.

While may be tempted to wring our hands while wondering how we could approach this work, given the incredible variety of members and their needs, interfaith marriages, *et. al.*, or, we could instead see a remarkable opportunity to change our approach by seeing each person as an individual filled with questions, longing, potential, experience, desires and needs.

¹² While the National Jewish Population Survey 2000-2001 (p 14-15) reported that enrollment on Jewish educational institutions was stable or increasing, the recent recession has had a marked influence on reduced synagogue membership and school enrollment.

An often overlooked group is adults well past age 60. Lisa D. Grant, Ph.D., describes Catherine Bateson's work about the "second adulthood" that is characterized by "the wisdom culled from long lives and rich experience," "combined with the energy and commitment brought about by the release of many kinds of daily responsibilities. ... This wisdom can enrich both the lives of older adults and the broader Jewish community. ... The question, then, that Jewish educators and religious leaders should be asking is: How can we provide learning contexts, content and settings that both honor and value older adults and motivate them to contribute to their communities in creative and active ways?"¹³

As stated so well by Cyd Weissman:

The family is central to raising a child's Jewish spirit and identity. Our families, in their changing make-up and in our shifting world overflow with essential questions of existence: How do we live meaningful and lovingly in today's mad rush and complexity? Effective models of education balance the "me" and the "we." Models that matter give voice to the choice of the individual (me), and create a community (we) that asks one another and our tradition, "How do we raise a child to fulfill his or her sacred promise?" Engaging the family, not just in how to light a candle, but in how to light a life, is a model worthy of pursuit.¹⁴

We speak with tenderness about the concept of passing Judaism *l'dor v'dor*. However, if we truly mean what we say we must be willing to do what may seem counterintuitive: we must be willing to break out of "the box" of tradition in order to keep the tradition alive.

¹³ Lisa D. Grant, Ph. D., "Older Adults Restorying Their Lives," *Sh'ma Magazine*, 41/677 (February 2011): 14

¹⁴ Cyd Weissman, "Seamless Learning: New Thinking About Congregational Education," *Sh'ma Magazine*, 41/677 (February 2011): 7

DAMAGING MESSAGES: DRIVE-BY JUDAISM

I can think of no force greater than that of frustrated or ambivalent parents that works against their children's delight in their Judaism.

When I served as Education Director for a traditional religious school, I was delighted to see many parents transmitting their Jewish knowledge to their children as a precious gift. Far more often, I saw ambivalent parents who made it very clear to their children that they were required to attend school "against their will," that sporting events were more important and that they were "not supposed to enjoy religious school. In fact, one parent told her children, right in front of me, that she hated religious school, that they would hate it, and that they would have to suffer just as she did. Judging by the attitudes of many parents and children, this message is often transmitted, either knowingly or unknowingly.

This attitude is exacerbated by traditional Hebrew school schedules that require an extensive time commitment for children and for parents who must often leave work early to transport their sometimes cranky children, who are often over-programmed and begging for "down time." Sunday family time is interrupted by class time, and resentment grows.

During this experience I coined two terms: "Pediatric Judaism" and "Drive-by Judaism."

"Pediatric Judaism" is created by default, rather than by applied practice. Parents who attended Hebrew school as children and left after their *B'nai Mitzvah* may well not have returned to synagogue membership until their own children were of school age. Their children, like their parents before them, receive similar instruction (even after pedagogical advances) concerning various Bible stories, holidays, etc. However, the children may not be engaged in a meaningful

way about the essence of Jewish teachings, their own personal theology and spirituality, Jewish history, philosophy, theology - -and the all-important concept of Jewish life as experienced through personal practice and community activity -- all of which would be addressed through intensive text study in a traditional *cheder* and in homes in which the parents were fully engaged.

"Drive-By Judaism" is evident in many synagogue parking lots when children are dropped off at the curb at the beginning of classes and picked up later while the parents are still chatting on their cell phones, rarely speaking to their children about the learning still fresh in their minds.

The results of both of these symptoms seems to be that both the children and the parents may see Judaism as a religion for children (and, possibly, old Jews).

Several strong messages to the children are indoctrinated at an early age, and include:

- Jewish learning is for children and they are going to have it whether they like it or not.
- Synagogue life is tangential to 'real' life.
- It's all about the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.
- The older people at the shul are somehow separate from the young families and have little, if any, role in their lives.
- Parents left the synagogue after their B'nai Mitzvah, and that is the expectation for the children.
- The concepts of faith and worship are decreasingly accessible (and decreasingly compelling) as a child becomes an adult.

We may contrast these messages with those of parents who are engaged in exploration of their own faith and who are prepared to discuss the topics with their children and reinforce a family experience of faith and purpose. It is crucial that we transmit not only the rituals, liturgy and stories... but the faith that is their foundation.

Parents who are at ease in their faith can transmit that faith honestly. In his remarkably accessible book, *Teaching Your Children About God*, David Wolpe addresses the need to reengage parents in the spiritual development of their children. He invites parents to reopen the parts of themselves long closed, to regain their sense of wonder, to re-engage in faith for their own sakes, and so they can engage their children in meaningful discussions about faith and spirituality. The result is an exploration of the parents' questions about their own faith that enhances and deepens the quality of parent/child dialogue.

He writes:

What is religion all about? Judaism is clear: Religion is about shaping our attitudes and actions towards ourselves, toward each other, and toward God. Religion should help us believe that we matter, that our actions matter, and that we are never alone.¹⁵

¹⁵ David J. Wolpe, *Teaching Your Children About God: A Modern Jewish Approach*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc. 1993): 11

CREATING A LEARNING COMMUNITY

As noted above, the current structure under which many synagogues operate unintentionally interferes with "natural" Jewish life by supporting the artificial stratifying of intergenerational interactions.

In addition to the real and compelling challenges mentioned above, there are others. It may be very difficult for synagogue leadership to be willing to reassess the effectiveness of the synagogue / school relationship. It may be more difficult still to bring parents to a new model, and may be most difficult of all to retool teachers who have been teaching their lessons in a traditional paradigm. We are compelled to support our educators as they retool to expand their grasp on the meaning and purpose of Jewish education and respond with creative approaches, the reach of which will extend far past the walls of the classroom. I posit that the smaller the synagogue, and the more forward-looking the leadership, the more effectively positive change can be instituted.

At the same Conservative synagogue at which I served as education director, the rabbi told me a story that inspired me to create a learning community. When a Jehovah's Witness temple was built across the street from his synagogue, he was given a tour. When he asked where the school was located, the elder looked at him directly and said: "We never separate our parents from our children." The rabbi, who had been raised in the tightly knit Chasidic community of Borough Park, Brooklyn, said he was immediately overtaken by a specific emotion: jealousy. Our standard model does not educate, motivate or inspire Jewish conversation, observance, theological learning, spiritual development or intergenerational experience. In short, we need to stop teaching *about* Judaism, and instead, learn to teach Judaism itself.

THE OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE A NEW SCHOOL FOR THE SYNAGOGUE

The synagogue at which I currently serve had not had school-aged children for many years. In the last few years we welcomed families with children now in the 9-12-year age range, and they had attended the local Reform synagogue's school. Both the parents and students found the school to be less than satisfactory in pedagogic and social realms. Our children were sometimes bullied and generally disrespected by students and teachers alike. As these families were not members of the Reform synagogue, they were charged twice the members' tuition rates.

At the same time, our adult members were asking for more adult education. As in most synagogue communities today, their backgrounds and Jewish knowledge base ranged from enriched to spotty, incomplete, or nearly non-existent.

Clearly, the time was ripe for action. My goal was to create a formal intergenerational learning environment to impart knowledge, support families and individuals in their Jewish lives, and create opportunities for personal and communal growth while addressing the challenges delineated above.

I formed a small committee consisting of myself, the cantor, the synagogue president (as parent representative) and two adult members dedicated to Jewish education.

After our initial meetings, I created a Motivational Analysis and a Needs Assessment to determine the scope of the need for the school and the positive benefits it could bring to our synagogue. See Appendices A, B.

I then created an analysis to determine the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats to the school (SWOT). See Appendix C.

After analyzing of the documents, I worked with the committee to articulate the proposed school's mission, vision and goals and initial strategies and a message to parents.

See Appendices D, E.

In April, 2012, we held a CHAI session for all interested members and non-members.

See Appendix F.

The sample session was so successful that we decided to move ahead to create the school.

The budget was set, policies and tuition were determined, registration forms created, and a marketing plan went into effect. See Appendix G, H.

THE CHAI CENTER FOR JEWISH LEARNING

CHAI is structured to address the challenges listed above and to meet the needs of individuals and families.

CHAI is an acronym for the philosophy of the school: Creative, Holistic, Alternative and Inter-generational. CHAI seeks to address the needs posed by demographic realities, the personal and family needs of my synagogue, and a personal abiding desire to reach past the standard models of Jewish education as a tool to create a synagogue community of educated, cohesive and committed families.

CHAI's MISSION

Through innovative, intergenerational, immersion-style Jewish educational experiences, CHAI aims to make Jewish life meaningful and relevant while supporting, enhancing and enriching Jewish life in the home and synagogue community,

CHAI'S VISION

Our vision is to engage children, families, members of Beth El and the larger Jewish community in stimulating and engaging interactive and inter-generational group experiences as well as age-appropriate learning and skill development.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF CHAI LEARNING

CHAI is designed not to teach *about* Judaism but, rather, to teach Judaism through Jewish learning, conversation and living. We believe that children and adults have unique insights and capabilities that can be nurtured and developed through a caring, supportive and creative learning environment.

Perhaps the most important aspect of CHAI is a holistic approach engages mind, body and spirit.

Text-Based Learning

In the words of Rabbi Larry Hoffman:

Sometimes we have conversations that are deeper (than hi), where we don't know the answers...about life, the universe and everything. People come to the synagogue knowing this is a place to have those conversations. A good educator is someone who knows how to keep those conversations going.¹⁶

In each adult CHAI session, an aspect of Jewish learning is taught through one or more traditional texts, elements of history, etc., as appropriate, and Jewish conversations are engendered through discussions about ethical and/or spiritual elements of the teaching (also supported by traditional and contemporary texts). Adult students engage in *chevruta* study. Subjects included are, for example, the Jewish Calendar as Life-Cycle, Shabbat, the Concept of a Messiah, and Jewish Concepts of Life after Death. Through these elements, students become aware of depth and richness of our tradition, the importance and relevance of texts and, most importantly, the relevance of Judaism to their lives.¹⁷

¹⁶ The Jewish Education Project, Retrieved December 2012 from <http://www.thejewisheducationproject.org/news/Highlight-Deepening-Jewish-Learning-through-Art-Conversation-0>

¹⁷ I had designed a basic curriculum outline but soon found that it would be wiser to allow the adult class to drive the subject matter to ensure that the teachings were not only relevant to the students in attendance, but also to create a culture in which they could see that their questions were considered to be important and respected. The result has been a remarkably fast cohesion in the classroom and a beautiful sense of respect for one another not just as learners, which they expected to be, but also as fellow searchers. This is the case even for those who did not profess to be searchers at the outset.

Multiple Modalities

Writing, music, journal-keeping, story-telling and hands-on projects such as cooking, bibliodrama, chanting, etc., engage each learner in various pedagogic modalities. This engagement increases confidence not only in learning, but also in their ability and desire to engage actively in expressing their Jewish ideas, innermost thoughts, heartfelt joys, questions, frustrations and more.

Minimal homework may be assigned to adults, for example, a journal entry, a few pages of background information for the next session, and for parents (or grandparents), a home project with their children.

Teaching Through Fowler's Stages of Faith

To the extent possible in this new and developing school, Jewish concepts and content to be taught at each age level will be informed by James W. Fowler's Stages of Faith, incorporating Piaget's Form of Logic, Selman's Perspective Taking, Kohlberg's Form of Moral Judgment, Bounds of Social Awareness.¹⁸

Grade School Skills, Text and Faith Development

Each grade-school session includes Hebrew reading skills practice, relationship with prayers being learned, their relevance to the children's lives, the children's relationship with God, story-telling, ethics, history as appropriate, and most importantly, the reasons we do what we do.

Homework includes 10 minutes of Hebrew reading per day, and may also include reading, research, on line learning game reinforcement, etc. Families are provided with a CD of all

¹⁸ James W. Fowler, "Table 5.1 Faith Stages by Aspects," *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, (HarperSanFrancisco 1981): 244-245

prayers to be learned in CHAI classes, translations, and transliterations with which parents who cannot read Hebrew can follow along as their children practice. Of course, this parent-partner practice is a step to empowering the parent to raise his/her voice in prayer and to inspire him/her to greater learning for themselves.¹⁹

Intergenerational Sessions

Children, parents and individual adults share the wealth of their learning and wisdom in engaging and exciting intergenerational sessions that serve several purposes.

- Children and adults serve as role models for one another.
- Hands-on projects translate theoretical concepts into theological and sociological responses.
- Adults raising children in relative isolation from their own parents, and adults whose children are grown, benefit from the growing bond between "instant adoptive parents" and "instant grown children."
- Adults who are otherwise isolated in nearly exclusively adult relationships and children whose grandparents and other extended family members do not live nearby enjoy "instant grandparents" and "instant grandchildren."

Extensive Benefits of Embracing Elders in an Intergenerational School

The benefit of learning from "gray" members of the community cannot be overestimated. And,

¹⁹ This year, the synagogue purchased *Eit Ratzon siddurim* (with Hebrew transliterations) so our members would be able to raise their own voices in prayer, and in acceptance of the reality that very few members were Hebrew literate or able to decode Hebrew text. While we would love to increase Hebrew literacy of all members, there is little chance to engage many in this pursuit. Therefore, while we insist that our children learn decoding and the basic Hebrew prayer vocabulary, we must support the parent and inspire him/her. It is hoped that their children, upon witnessing this new phenomenon, will also understand that Jewish learning is a life-long pursuit.

in intergenerational learning, elders have the opportunity to engage the challenge they feel to keep the tradition alive and pass on their accumulated Jewish experiences.

It is important to note that, according to Geffen, there is no consensus on the role of grandparents in the transmission of tradition. She notes: "Are they, or should they be, the keepers of the hearth and of tradition? In fact, grandparents are often part of the generation most removed from formal Jewish education and observance. And many of them had no grandparents when they were growing up and hence no positive role models of grandparenting."²⁰

This demographic reality, however, does not seem to overcome the desire for grandparent generation to want to take on the role of having close relationships with their own grandchildren and/or children in the community. In my experience, they may experience, especially in cases in which their children have intermarried, they may feel displaced or disempowerment in regard to their grandchildren's religious education.²¹

Because elders are in touch with the traditions and stories of the past, they can transmit a spark, a living flame of wisdom, to help young people meet the challenges of the present at the unfolding future. Without the continuity of tradition, young people fall prey to the excessive occupation with "nowness"... an attitude that invites a complete rupture with the past. ... When elders hand down a tradition, they transmit something

²² Geffen, Rela Mintz. *The Jewish Family: An Institution in Transition*, "The Journal of Jewish Communal Service, Winter/Spring 1996/97. p120

²¹ For an extensive overview of the changing Jewish family, see Rela Mintz Geffen's "The Jewish Family in America Today, Is It Jewish?" *A Reprint from Perspective on Jews and Judaism, Essays in Honor of Wolfe Kelman*. The Rabbinical Assembly, N.Y. 1978

timeless in its truth or universal beauty... the heirs of a tradition... must make the legacy bear new fruit, otherwise the tradition grows desiccated and eventually dies.²²

Younger adults and parents have the opportunity to learn from local/additional parent role models to help them understand how to translate their desires to learn so they can take their places as the next generation of transmitters of the faith.

As psychologist Gay Luce notes:

Elders have a greater capacity than younger people to see all of life and how it is connected. The wisdom that accompanies this wider vision cannot be acquired by reading books, listening to tapes, or attending seminars. Many young people seek to study with Eastern gurus, while their grandparents sit at home like Zen masters, dispensing wisdom that usually goes unnoticed.²³

Once per month, or more often if the lessons are so coordinated, all adults and children come together from 30 minutes to an hour for an intergenerational session. For example, adults may learn the Purim through the text of *Megilat Esther*, historical notes, and a discussion about the ethical and spiritual lessons we can glean from the story as children engage in parallel learning on their level. The groups would then come together to assemble *Shalach Manot* baskets for our members who are shut-in, local nursing home residents, and perhaps send a *tzedakah* donation for *Shalach Manot* for IDF Forces who are still carrying forward the mission of defending our people.

²² Zalman Schachter Shalomi and Ronald S. Miller, *Age-ing to Sage-ing*, (New York: Grand Central Publishing): 143

²³ Op cit. p 206

In another example, adults may learn about *kashrut*, *eco-kashrut* and ethical *kashrut* while children are learning about Jewish concepts of the ethical treatment of animals. The groups will then come together to cook with foods that take their learning into consideration, cook and bake for the local soup kitchen, and perhaps bake animal biscuits for the local no-kill animal shelter.

Teen *Madrachim*

CHAI looks forward to providing opportunities for “study-buddies” and teen “*madrachim*” assistants to encourage peer leadership and support skills-development of our students as well as reinforce to our students that Jewish involvement does not end with *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*.

Food

Every intergenerational CHAI session includes a 30-minute shared meal. The meal serves several purposes:

- to bond the community socially
- to provide an opportunity for additional learning such as blessings for food, sitting with the rabbi for an "Ask the Rabbi" session or with the cantor for a "*Shulchan Ivrit*" session.
- to make it easier for families and individuals to attend classes without rushing after work and, in some cases, to provide a nutritious meal for those who may need one.

CHAI Shabbat Services

Once per month, and on all holidays on which family-friendly services are offered, families must attend a CHAI service in which they participate according to their abilities. There are many benefits:

- Children and adults receive reinforcement from the clergy and fellow members.
- Children witness adults in prayer and develop a common spiritual language with the adults.
- In-classroom learning is translated to a holistic Jewish sensibility that extends past the walls of the classroom.
- Non-parent adults serve as role models of prayer and synagogue involvement for both the parents and the children.
- Socializing before and after the services bonds students of all ages.

Service participation may include the leading of prayers in Hebrew and/or English.^{24 25}

Choir members may sing or chant together or individually. Adults who do not yet read Hebrew may read passages in English from the *siddur* or their own writings. Eventually, some will be asked to join the rabbi's Guest *Darshan* program.²⁶

²⁴ By the middle of their 7th grade year, CHAI students will know all basic prayers common to both the Friday *Ma'ariv* and *Shabbat Shacharit* services. The Torah service and some preliminary prayers are learned in *B'nai Mitzvah* tutoring sessions.

²⁵ Many adults have not yet learned to decode Hebrew, and others may need refresher courses and practice. These sessions are offered twice each year at the synagogue.

²⁶ The monthly Guest *Darshan* program provides an opportunity for members to research Jewish texts, write and deliver a *drash* to the congregation on Friday and Saturday. This program is empowering to members who take part while they also serve as role models to fellow members.

CHAI MODEL TIME/IMPACT ASSESSMENT

In order to accomplish its many goals, CHAI classes meet for fewer hours per month than traditional Hebrew schools. This matter was given the deepest thought, weighing each benefit of CHAI against few hours of learning time. It is not yet clear whether it is wise to weigh CHAI's model "against" a standard model, because I am not convinced that the standard model is the benchmark to which we should strive. For the moment, however, we can quantify the time differences.

Hebrew School Hours Compared to CHAI's Schedule

When I served as education director in the past, I noted with some dismay the remarkable amount of time that was lost in each class session. Straggling in, hanging up coats and bags, settling down, greetings and bantering with classmates, etc., consumed a remarkable amount of time, as did snack break and ramp-down and preparation for dismissal - all tolled perhaps 30 minutes each day. Additionally, the rabbi of the synagogue led a very popular *Asefah* (assembly) session with the children for 45 minutes each Sunday, leading them in prayer and song.

Wednesday sessions actually yielded 1.5 hours of lesson time (1.5 x 26 sessions=39 hours).

Sunday sessions yielded just under 2 hours of classroom time. (2 x 26 sessions = 52 hours).

This totals 91 hours of serious class time per year.

CHAI's Schedule

CHAI will meet for 75 hours per year, which is 18% fewer hours than traditional two-day Hebrew school. While less material may be covered in a classroom context, it is hoped that the quality of the learning and intergenerational discussion and activities will provide a strong foundation for students of all ages.

CHAI meets twice per month for 2.5 hours. (2.5 x 20 sessions = 50 hours).

Children meet an additional 1.5 hours once per month (1.5 x 10 sessions = 15 hours).

All students attend Monthly CHAI Kabbalat Shabbat Services, in which they read, chant, sing and otherwise participate. (1.5 hrs x 10 services = 15 hours).

This totals 75 hours of serious experiential learning time per year.

Because we need to make every minute count, CHAI classes must be very efficiently run. On Hebrew skills days, children are expected to be in their seats, fully prepared, by the start of class time, therefore, parents must walk their children into the building 10-15 minutes before classes begin. On intergenerational days, adults should also arrive 10-15 minutes before classes are to begin and be ready to begin at 4pm. Transition time to supper and discussion is very short. It is not at all unusual for parents and individual adults to stay long past the end of supper to continue the discussion or the current project. While I admire the *Aseyfah* program mentioned above, I do favor the CHAI Shabbat services because the students -- both adults and children -- are not only applying their learning in context of a service, they also finding their places as active participants in the sanctuary and the congregation. I prefer this active effort to passive attendance at any number of services they may be required to attend.

LEARNING THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

Following is an excerpt from the extensive CHAI Technology Plan.

See Appendix I for the full plan.²⁷

Technology presents unprecedented opportunities for learning for students of nearly all ages. Baby-boomer parents raised without technology are working hard to keep in stride with their children's technological activity and savvy. Boomers, GenXers and NextGens have vastly different learning styles, expectations, understanding of a learning environment and experience. NextGens have been learning and interacting collaboratively since they were small through internet games and school projects. For all intents and purposes, nearly everyone else is in a constant state of catching up to them.

Parents may be apace, or may marvel and rely in their offspring to be the tech-heads of the family. While older individuals are certainly catching up with the young by means of increasing Internet use, a large number do not own computers.

These statistics, and the demographics of the synagogue, present CHAI with a challenge. How do we use technology to enhance our intergenerational educational experiences, supplement our limited class meeting times, and encourage creativity in learning and applying Jewish lessons in life - without leaving anyone behind? How can we build community between members of like and disparate ages? Also, how can we utilize technology without making the technology itself a focus of our learning?

²⁷ A PowerPoint presentation for synagogue leadership and parents is available upon request.

BASIC REASONS TO INCORPORATE TECH TOOLS

CHAI will meet twice per month. We need tools to keep individuals and families engaged between classes.

CHAI will not be held in standard classroom settings. Rather, grades 3-5 and 6-7 will meet with their teachers and learn through experiential activities. Adults will meet with the rabbi to learn through a combination of structured lessons, discussions, *chevruta* study and experiential activities. At the end of each learning session, ample time will be allowed for intergenerational exchange concerning the lessons just taught, and for activities that will reinforce the learning through the life experience of the adults and the natural spirituality and energy of the children.

Tech tools such as photography, Internet research, video and recording of singing and acting, etc. can add many layers of inter-play on an any subject, offer opportunities for several different learning modalities, as well as making some of our lessons, projects, and learning available to all through the Web. Collaborative projects can be carried out via document sharing in Google Suite and Wikispaces and via photography, video and sound recording.

Additionally, a record of all learning can be kept in Wikispaces for reference by the entire congregation, which will be invited to learn and participate on their own pages.

Of course, much of the learning can and will take place outside of the classroom setting through collaborative online projects, face-to-face team efforts, online research, blogging, video-recording, photography projects, personal history interviews and recordings, and more.

USING TECHNOLOGY TO ENHANCE AND CREATE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

CHAI's intergenerational student body presents certain challenges. While the younger generations are often more comfortable with certain aspects of technology, some of the older students are limited in experience, and some do not own computers, digital cameras or even cell phones. This challenge can be turned into an intergenerational learning opportunity.

Clearly, limited class time can be enhanced via existing on line educational materials, such as Behrman House's interactive sessions,²⁸ National Jewish Outreach Program's on line "Twebrew School"²⁹ Hebrew reading course for all ages, etc.

Example of Technology Engaging Students of All Ages and Enhancing and Increasing Learning

Adults may learn and do research on Jewish views on environmentalism and teach 4th- and 5th-graders. The children then create a lesson they wish to teach through a journal of photos they take and/or download from Snapfish.com or scan at home. Third- and fourth-graders can write poems or song and record them, and 6th- and 7th graders may make a video or PowerPoint presentation incorporating all these elements, learning the subject matter as they work. Additional digital photography and video can be made by members of all ages, and musically inclined students may write and record songs expressing the Jewish lessons they have learned. Planning can take place through Wikispaces.com exchange, and text can be written in collaboration on Google Docs. The photos can be posted on Snapfish.com and the entire presentation uploaded to YouTube, with links from Facebook.com, the synagogue website, etc.

²⁸ Behrman House. Retrieved December 2012 from: <http://babaganewz.com/>

²⁹ National Jewish Outreach Program: Retrieved December 2012 from: <http://njop.org/resources/hebrew/twebrew-school>

A final presentation may be presented at the synagogue dinner at which the synagogue's "green team" presents their recommendations for a synagogue environmental policy.

ON-LINE LEARNING AND COLLABORATION

While there are numerous Web 2.0 tools available, CHAI will need to be somewhat conservative in its use of technology until all hardware is purchased, the tech staff is trained, and individuals and families become accustomed to and comfortable with using these tools. It is also important not to overreach for two reasons. First, the plan has to be manageable with a small group of volunteers and, second, the clergy is part-time and must be mindful in the use of their time applied to the tech planning and learning.

PRACTICAL MATTERS: MEETING THE NEEDS OF FAMILIES AND INDIVIDUALS

Reduced Schedule to for Over-Programmed Families

CHAI meets far fewer times per month than traditional schools to ensure that parents and children do not see religious school as a burden (or transmit that message to their children) and to ensure that the children who are already highly programmed are in the best frame of mind to learn. See Appendix J.

Children receive Hebrew skills training for 90 minutes one afternoon per month, and also meet twice each month for 2.5 hours for reinforcement of liturgical skills, in-depth understanding of prayer, general Jewish knowledge through texts, and hands-on activities and projects that reinforce their lessons.

Adults of all ages are welcome to attend CHAI. At the same time, since Judaism must be embraced by and flourish in the entire family, at least one parent must attend CHAI classes concurrent with their children's twice-monthly 2.5 hour sessions.

CHAI grade-schoolers (currently 4th-7-th graders) meet for 90 minutes once per month for Hebrew skills reinforcement.

Welcoming and Supporting Interfaith Parents

While at least one parent must attend CHAI, we encourage, but do not require, both parents to attend. The adult curriculum is carefully written to be informative and inclusive of those of all levels of learning and various backgrounds. It is hoped that the education of Jewish parents, and their increasing involvement in synagogue life, will inspire non-Jewish spouses to attend

services and events in which their family members participate and perhaps to enroll in CHAI in coming years. Non-Jewish parents are also specifically invited to participate in rituals and events such as helping to coordinate planning for the social aspects of a holiday celebration (e.g. catering, room set-up, decor, *sukkah* building), etc. and to participate in all intergenerational learning and hands-on sessions.

Responding to Financial Considerations

CHAI is designed to run on a shoestring budget to ensure that attendance would be affordable and attractive to members and non-members. Tuition for children is half the cost of local traditional religious schools, and parents whose children are enrolled in the school are not for their participation. Individual adults (who do not have children enrolled in CHAI) are charged a nominal fee. There is a tuition structure of individuals and families of non-members that is still considerably lower than traditional religious school. Fees for supplies and meals are charged on a per-person basis. See Appendix H .

The rabbi and cantor are currently the only paid educators. As CHAI grows, there will be a need to hire additional educators. This expense should be met by increased tuition income. See Appendix K.

Personal Theology

All students have their own personal theology, whether they are actively engaged in seeking connection and understanding, ambivalent about what they think God is or could be, feel embraced, forgotten or any number of other emotions. Adult CHAI classes are taught with not only respect for each student's concept of God, be it God as creator, parent, "clockmaker," all

of the above, none of the above, or no belief in God at all - the development of personal theology is a major goal of the enterprise.

If adults are ambivalent about their personal theology, they may not be comfortable with their Judaism or be able to create a peaceful and supportive Jewish home. Therefore, personal theological discussions are important elements of each class discussion. Students are asked to keep a journal of thoughts, questions and reactions to each class session.

Outreach

We perceive that there are many unaffiliated Jewish individuals and families in our area who may be interested in Jewish life and synagogue affiliation if it could be attractive, meaningful and affordable. Therefore, we do not required membership for the first year of CHAI for individual adults or families.³⁰

³⁰ However, families with children in the 6th and 7th grades must be members of the synagogue.

MODELS IN PRACTICE

SHALOMLEARNING

ShalomLearning is a new enterprise that sells its intergenerational curriculum to religious schools. Parents and children learn on parallel tracks and come together for parent/child activities. Additionally, they incorporate technological tools such as on line learning to support elements of the curriculum. The founders and directors are established Jewish educators whose vision will make parent/child learning far more accessible to synagogues.

The major difference between CHAI and ShalomLearning is that CHAI incorporates older individual adults in order to reinforce three generations of learning and teaching one another side-by-side. See Appendix L.

THE JEWISH EDUCATION PROJECT

The Jewish Education Project (JEP) (formerly BJENY-SAJES) is also pioneering intergenerational learning. Their powerful network, including the resources of the Experiment in Congregational Education (ECE) of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles and the Leadership Institute of Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion and the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education at the Jewish Theological Seminary positions them well to form coalitions of educators, congregations and learners. Their extensive network and funding enable their success in dozens of congregations.

According to their website:

The Jewish Education Project helps congregations create new models of learning to enhance children's and families' ability to construct meaningful and purposeful lives

rooted in Jewish practice and community. Our networks bring professionals and lay leaders from different congregations together to collaborate and support each other, and our educational consultants identify strategies to enable congregations to reach their goals. By connecting innovators and supporting bold approaches, The Jewish Education Project strengthens congregations' abilities to create impactful and inspiring models of Jewish learning.³¹

The JEP is employing many of the elements of CHAI, including the balance between secular activities and religious life and using meals for social and bonding time.³² Their "EdJewTopia" newsletter provides timely and relevant insights and inspiration for educators.³³

JEHOVAH'S WITNESS MODEL

Jehovah's Witnesses, mentioned earlier, do not have congregational schools. Rather, they place the responsibility of the spiritual development of their children in the hands of the parents and community. Their website clearly explains their philosophy:

"Fortunately, parents have a wonderful role model in Jesus and the way he dealt with his disciples. Jesus was not a literal parent. But his goal in choosing and training his disciples was to empower them to carry on the work, even after he was gone. (Matthew 28:19, 20) What Jesus accomplished is similar to the goal each parent hopes to reach in raising responsible children. Consider just three aspects of the example Jesus set for

³¹ The Jewish Education Project. Retrieved December 2012 from: <http://www.thejewisheducationproject.org>

³² The Jewish Week. Retrieved December 2012 from: http://www.thejewishweek.com/special_sections/jewish_family_now/overscheduled_jewish_child

³³ EdJewTopia. Retrieved December 2012 from: <http://us2.campaignarchive1.com/?u=524d2abf6965df545331370dc&id=12ca8f2c47>

parents: "Set the Pattern" for Your Child. ...Have Reasonable Expectations. ... Provide Specific Instruction."³⁴

Children and adults worship and develop their religious and spiritual understanding together. Therefore, parents guide their children through their experiences and children are taught that their faith will be relevant throughout their lives.

STANDARD CATHOLIC MODEL AND ST. THOMAS THE APOSTLE CHURCH, OXFORD, CONN.

According to CatholicEducation.org, an on line Catholic education resource center, their stated goals are far loftier than those of the standard Jewish education model:

"The Church sees education as a process that, in light of man's transcendent destiny, forms the whole child and seeks to fix his or her eyes on heaven. The specific purpose of a Catholic education is the formation of boys and girls who will be good citizens of this world, loving God and neighbor and enriching society with the leaven of the gospel, and who will also be citizens of the world to come, thus fulfilling their destiny to become saints."³⁵

While the standard Catholic Catechism still calls for children to be taught in religious schools, they are involving parents to a greater extent than in the past. However, the parents are not involved in formal education, but rather, for feedback on the success of the school model.

³⁴ JW.org. Retrieved December 2012 from: <http://www.jw.org/en/publications/magazines/wp20100501/raising-responsible-children/>

³⁵ Catholic Education Resource Center. Retrieved December 2012 from: <http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/education/ed0395.htm>

St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Oxford, Conn., has given up the standard model in favor of a once-monthly family educational session (also employing a meal for community development). The children have no regular religious school. However, all adults in the congregation are encouraged to take part of their ongoing spiritual formation program.

INTERIM ASSESSMENT: SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER 2012

The CHAI Center for Jewish Learning opened its doors in August, 2012 for a student body consisting of four grade-schoolers, four parents and six individual adults. Attendance has been strong and feedback has been positive.

As a start-up school in a synagogue that is just beginning to attract younger families, we forged ahead with few children in the hope that once we have established the school and a good reputation among parents who are well-connected in the community, we will be able to attract more students in the coming 2012-2013 school year.

The children and adults have been deeply engaged in learning in their separate classes and enjoying their interactive sessions, including activities such as learning about Chanukah and learning and reciting candle blessings and synagogue community candle lighting. They have learned prayers and led them at our monthly Soup, Song and Story Shabbat, and the children have taught the adults several Hebrew letters and words.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the adult learning sessions is the desire of all of our learners to engage in Jewish conversations encompassing historical, theological, philosophical and ethical aspects of Judaism. As the weeks progressed, their willingness to articulate and share aspects of their personal theologies also increased.

In our initial sessions all adults were guarded in speaking about their theologies and God. We concluded the pre-Chanukah session about miracles and the role of God in our personal lives and the world by writing prayers inspired by their learning.

A sampling of their prayers illustrates how deeply they needed to engage in open conversation about God in order to express their heartfelt thoughts and emotions:

"May we be reminded through the lights of Chanukah of our rededication to God, and of making our shared Jewish past an eternal guide to an enlightened Jewish future. May I begin with my family and extend this rededication to the larger Jewish community throughout the world."

"I try to make my life a miracle like the lights of Chanukah. I will try to live my days as a miracle and dedicate my days to living an illuminating and Jewish and righteous life."

"Dear God, Help me strong enough to do what is right, to be a role model for my children and to discover Your light in my life and keep it glowing."

"On this Chanukah, let me be aware of the blessings and of the miracles all around. Let me shine with the light of Adonai and spread the story of rededication."

"Dear Lord, thank you for my time, and my health and allowing me to participate in the relearning experience of my religion and its meanings and holidays. Only You recognize where I am coming from and where I want to go!"

The children, ages 9 through 12, learn together in one classroom and are given age appropriate lessons and homework. There is an emphasis on the meanings of the liturgical prayers as two of the students are preparing for *Bat Mitzvah*.

The children are also engaged in Torah study to examine the ways their lives are reflected in the text, especially through discussion of some of the ethical questions raised in *Bereshit*. They have written prayers and blessings to express their own thoughts and feelings.

Parents and children are drawing on their learning to respond to their children's questions about life and death, why bad things happen and any number of daily events, and the benefit of faith and hope and community.

This enhanced aspect of parent/child conversations, and the open dialogue of all adults in the class, have been of great help as our community struggles with the Newtown, Connecticut massacre on December 14, 2012. Several of our members and students live in Newtown and are struggling with losses of their dear friends and their friends' children. Discussing this horrible sadness through a Jewish prism has provided a great deal of healing in a setting of trust and searching that would not have been otherwise possible.

SHABBAT SHALOM PROGRAM

In January, 2013, we launched a Shabbat Shalom program for children ages seven and younger. These once-monthly sessions family sessions will take place during adult Torah Study sessions on Shabbat morning. Recently, the local Federation asked our cantor to run a musical session at a PJ Library program. She floated the idea of the Shabbat Shalom session to the parents. Several registered on the spot and several more called the next week. The program is free and open to all parents and grandparents who wish to introduce their children to Jewish learning.

Of course, we hope that they will affiliate strongly with the program and enroll their children in CHAI next fall. If we attain a critical mass of students in grades K-2 and/or grades 4-5, we will hire an additional educator (or two) to teach those classes.

CHALLENGES

All of these successes having been noted, we have been presented with many challenges in these first few months. Because our projected source of funding did not materialize as

expected and alternative funding needed to be secured at a late date, our ramp-up time was even more truncated than originally imagined. In addition, the classroom space we had secured and confirmed was withdrawn from use one week before the school was to open. From September through November, we met at a member's home. While the offer was generous, the space was not entirely conducive for type of learning we had planned. Finally, in December, after changing meeting days and times several times, we have settled into newly available space at the facility in which the congregation rents sanctuary and office space. We meet on Wednesdays from 4:00pm - 6:00pm, and enjoy dinner from 6:00pm - 6:30pm. This time was chosen to fit the needs of families and individual adults, especially those who have other responsibilities during the day. Those who do drive at night have volunteered to drive those who do not.

Because funding is limited, and because a certain amount of individual and intergenerational class time was lost due to changing circumstances, we have not been able to implement the technology plan in the fall, nor certain intergenerational sharing times.

POSITIVE FEEDBACK AND SELF-PROMULGATING SUCCESSES

CHAI has received a great deal of enthusiastic feedback from parents and individual adults who are happy to have been empowered to pursue their own learning, are building their own vocabulary of Judaism and theology, have greater grounding and background to have meaningful discussions with their children (and for individual adults, with their grown children and friends).

At Beth El, children are prepared for B'nai Mitzvah by both clergy members. The cantor teaches them chanting and prayer. I meet with them individually, twice each month, to talk about God,

their theology, their role in bringing God and Jewish teachings into the world, their concept of their roles in the Jewish community, Torah, Israel, and the role of their faith in their lives.

At a recent meeting, one of our students listed 10 of her ideas about Judaism, all of which were important. However, she chose "Jewish community" as a high priority. She said she is happy at Beth El because it is smaller and more intimate than her last synagogue, where she had been frustrated because in her estimation, the people didn't know or care much about one another. She also reported that many students in her Hebrew school didn't come to class much and didn't really care about God, and therefore classes were unruly and not very good. She said she loves CHAI "because the people there care about each other and understand God and want to talk about God in their lives." Because her parents are students as well, Jewish conversations are taking place in their home as a matter of course. Her experience of CHAI is exactly what I had been praying, hoping and working for.

Additionally, because the intergenerational community was successfully established as a community of adults seeking answers, I was able to respond, through CHAI, in the aftermath of the Newtown massacre. Several members of our congregation live in Newtown, including CHAI parents and students. Some of the children's friends were killed, and all of the Newtown adults' friends lost children. Parents felt supported as they strived to grasp this nightmare through a Jewish prism while being comforted in this new extended family. This response perfectly illustrated the incalculably vast importance of a setting in which adults (and children in their own class) have the opportunity, support and *desire* to approach their very personal and urgent needs and dilemmas through a Jewish perspective -- *and through Jewish texts* -- a concept I

believe would have been outside the realm of their consciousness before they participated in CHAI.

This event also demonstrated the critical role of older members' presence and wisdom for the younger adults and children, and the importance of fostering close intergenerational relationships in the congregation.

CONCLUSION

We are looking forward to a wonderful spring semester with a reorganized schedule and in a stable and appropriate setting. In fact, the fall semester was so well received that we have opened registration for the spring semester so adults and families who were not able to commit to the previous time frame will have an opportunity to join the classes.

I expect to carry forward with the above-mentioned lessons about environmentalism in January (for *Tu b'Shevat*), *Purim* in February, *Pesach* workshops in March, and *kashrut/cooking* in April.

These lessons will ensure excellent intergenerational dialogue and activities and will incorporate several aspects of the technology plan including on line research and social networking regarding environmentalism; personalized cards created and printed for IDF soldiers; photography and life-story telling about the adult's and children's childhood memories that will illustrate an on line synagogue cookbook of the recipes we make in our classes; and the creation of a "CHAI / Beth El All Things Passover Database" to be compiled with the submissions from all members and which will be taught in CHAI classes.

Influenced by the sociological adage that "what the grandparents strive to forget, the grandchildren strive to remember," we will continue to bring the wisdom and inspiration of all three generations together so it will be passed *m'dor l'dor* - developing hope, meaning and faith

in current and future Jews, and ensuring that our precious tradition is not lost in the dusty recesses of time.

I feel strongly that with our hard work, use of ready resources such as those described above, increased commitment of our parents, and reinforcing strength of our older adults, we will succeed in our mission of providing a Creative, Holistic, Alternative and Intergenerational Jewish education to our community.

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APPENDIX A

MOTIVATIONAL ANALYSIS FOR LAUNCHING A NEW SCHOOL

A Build / Retain Membership

1. The best and only way to grow our synagogue for the long term is to attract new families.
2. Families will be motivated to join the synagogue and participate in the school in order to educate their children.
3. A school provides long-term membership and retention.
4. There are dissatisfied and disenfranchised families in the area who we believe may be seeking a new synagogue and school.
5. New engaged members provide potential leadership sources.

B Provide Excellent Learning and Engagement in Jewish Life

1. Responsibility to teach our children - *v'shinantan l'vanecha*
Participants will engage in experiential learning with multiple pedagogical modalities
 - a. Small size is a benefit.
 - b. The best way to engage families is through alternative education.
 - c. Traditional frontal classroom teaching does not engage mind / spirit of children.
 - d. Traditional schools are not as effective in life-long engagement in Jewish life.
2. Responsibility to offer educational opportunities to our adult members
engage all members, not just children in inter-generational learning that deepens education and commitment.
3. Responsibility to provide safe learning environment - several disturbing issues in current school situation
 - a. Bullying
 - b. Punitive (double) tuition rate for our members
 - c. Lack of responsibility on part of teacher, principal
 - d. Families and adults not engaged

Collateral Benefits

1. Increased service attendance - children / families required to attend
2. Engage participants in learning to read Torah and lead services

Why An Alternative School

1. Meaningful Jewish experiences in youth and teen years are the greatest factor in retaining them in Jewish life for the rest of their lives
2. Statistically, If our children are not engaged in *useful* Jewish education, Judaism will lose the children forever
3. We can offer an excellent educational program for all members for a very attractive tuition
4. Our parents dissatisfied. Our children distressed
5. Our children are not in safe learning environment
6. An alternative school engages the whole child and whole adult. Not compartmentalized learning. Traditional frontal classroom teaching does not engage mind / spirit of children
7. Inter-generational experiential education best duplicates home/ family learning and engagement

APPENDIX B NEEDS ANALYSIS

Participation

1. Students - minimum three, plus parents
2. Adult learners - as interested

Space

1. MUST be outside the building
 - a. No space for us in the building
 - b. Those no longer in local traditional school will not be comfortable in that space
2. Looking into alternative space in Tri-bury area
 - a. non-classroom space if possible
 - b. kitchen space if possible
 - c. yard and garden space if possible

Educators

1. Rabbi and Cantor to begin
2. Parent and adult volunteers

Insurance

1. for off-premises activities
2. for rabbi and cantor as educators

School Supplies

1. to be determined

APPENDIX C

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS (SWOT)

STRENGTHS

1. Highly trained clergy educators
2. Rabbi highly trained in changing structure of Jewish life, families, outreach technologies, collaborative planning and learning, etc.
3. Opportunity for highly creative programming and curriculum
4. Small group of dedicated parents
5. Some funding has been secured and additional grants available from local and national sources
6. Nothing to disassemble and recreate
7. Nothing to lose - whatever we do will be better than doing nothing
8. Base of adults seeking Jewish education

CHALLENGES - WEAKNESSES

1. Small Grade School Student Base
 - possible responses: massive outreach efforts, heavy marketing, open house, social networking, financial incentives (low dues and tuition). Possible mailing to Federation's vetted unaffiliated list
2. Procuring Appropriate Meeting Space(s)
 - possible responses: call local clergy regarding the securing of space in their schools, Southbury library, city hall for other suggestions. Last resort: Southbury school board.
3. Short Ramp-Up Time
 - possible responses: create mission and vision statements, draft a holistic plan, break it into steps that will, over the course of a determined time, bring the mission and goals to fruition

OPPORTUNITIES

1. Synagogue and community need alternative school. BI School failing its students / employs old educational methodology not developed for the current generation of kids or parents
2. engage members of each generation in creative experiential learning
3. tapping into social networks and technology for marketing
4. utilizing technologies for all manner of collaborative learning and experiences
5. many unaffiliated Jews in the community - potential Beth El members
6. provide opportunities for members and potential members to become active in synagogue, community and Jewish life and learning

THREATS

1. Established local religious school
2. Small start-up time
3. Few active board / committee members
4. Little internal member networking
5. Explaining non-traditional model - building confidence in concept
6. Uncertain funding

APPENDIX D

CHAI'S MISSION, VISION, GOALS AND INITIAL STRATEGIES

Mission

The CHAI Center for Jewish Learning is a refreshing alternative for Jewish education. Through innovative, intergenerational, immersion-style Jewish educational experiences, CHAI aims to make Jewish life meaningful and relevant and to support, enhance and enrich Jewish life in the home and community.

Vision

Our vision is to engage children, families, members of Beth El and the larger Jewish community in stimulating and engaging interactive and inter-generational group experiences as well as age-appropriate learning and skill development.

Goals

- Prepare students of all ages to be competent in Hebrew reading, comprehension, prayers and liturgy.
- Inspire participants to embrace our rich heritage, culture, rituals, history and traditions.
- Cultivate a caring community based on a foundation of Jewish ethics, morals, values, and teachings.
- Deepen spiritual awareness and faith
- Provide tools to build Jewish identity and pride, and empower participants to develop their leadership potential.

Initial Strategies

- Experiential and participatory learning style supplemented with peer and teen *Madrichim* leadership programs
- Multiple modalities incorporating arts, music, drama, and collaborative technologies.
- Meals and snacks as part of community building and Jewish learning
- Sociological data to engage all levels of learners at all ages, taking into account all modalities and constructs to engage all participants in their sociological, as well as pedagogical level
- Capitalize on all sociological constructs include the needs of Boomers, GenX, GenY and NextGen - all of whom see the world, their places in it, and their interaction with it very differently from one another
- Providing knowledge, tools, experiences and opportunities for all to develop their understanding of our rich tradition and its relevance to every family member, to inspire them to experience its relevance and meaning and incorporate it into daily life and to participate in the Jewish community.
- Create multi-level curricula for youth, parents, joint experiences and other adult members of the congregation
- Incorporate the needs of interfaith families and inclusion of non-Jewish parents.
- Bar / Bat Mitzvah must never be a stated goal. Participation and education is the stated goal.

APPENDIX E MESSAGE TO PARENTS

CHAI is a family-oriented learning program. By enrolling your child(ren) in the CHAI Center for Jewish Learning, you are taking an active role in enriching their Jewish lives - and your own as well! At CHAI, we believe that it is not enough to teach students *about* Judaism. Rather it is critically important to teach the amazing depth and breadth of our tradition and faith and give them life-long tools to guide them through their Jewish lives. Students of all ages will not only gain knowledge about important subjects; they will be engaged in acquiring a deeper understanding and Judaic connection through interesting and informative sessions designed to bring out the best in every student.

Today's Jewish families face real challenges. Jewish children are a distinct minority in local schools; and at home, many children are brought up in interfaith families. CHAI offers a unique and safe setting where parents can meet and learn with other parents facing similar issues. Moreover it will provide an opportunity to encourage an appealing distinct Jewish spin to their children's current life situations and inclinations.

CHAI will help provide a foundation of personal strength and faith for an often challenging world. As you explore the richness of Jewish history, traditions, folklore, values, laws, customs and prayers connected to this 5000 year-old faith, we hope it will instill a greater sense of pride and identity. Our educators will guide and support you and your children on this remarkable journey, making the beauty and relevance of Jewish traditions spring to life!

APPENDIX F

CHAI INFORMATION DAY FORMAT

CHECK-IN: Greeters both front and side doors

10:30-10:45 - check in / name tags

Folder containing forms, handouts, etc, distributed at sign-in

Name tags

Beth El t-shirts for committee members

Greeter welcome handicapped people at youth lounge entrance

Greeters need

clip board

rsvp list

pen

pad for writing questions

10:45-11:15 brunch with *motzi* blessing and *brich rachamana*

adults fill in information intake forms - need pens on tables

11:15-11:30 intergenerational ice breaker

11:30-12pm separate groups - children in alcove, parents in youth lounge

12:00-12:10 kids present learning

12:10 - 12:30 refreshments, informal Q & A with rabbi / cantor speaks to parents about how child program works
children create *hamsa* craft with 2 adult helpers

need: *hamsas*, card stock, coloring markers and crayons, scissors, ribbons
Committee members to collect information intake forms during Q & A

Possible Questions

- what will the curriculum cover?
 - adults
 - topics are conceptual - via Jewish tradition and texts
 - work for all levels - not to be intimidated - and to be aware of all learning levels in the room
 - some Hebrew conversational skills - organic via environment
 - children will learn the skills in Sunday classes, supplementary class, on line learning, interactive online learning for all ages
 - at-home practice will be required for parents and children/supplemental available for those who wish
 - this is year-one curriculum, an innovative program that will grow organically that the students will help us develop

APPENDIX G

ENROLLMENT POLICIES & SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

Enrollment Policy

Beth El expects all Beth El member families to enroll their children in CHAI.

Halachically Jewish children (according to Conservative practice) or those who will be converted within one year.

Service Requirement

Adults encouraged to attend and participate in the monthly CHAI service.

Parents and children are required to attend services on the following schedule.

Grades 3-5 - two Friday per month, including monthly CHAI service

Grades 6-7 - three services per month, including monthly CHAI service

(Bar / Bat Mitzvah training is expected and is additional to CHAI school.)

APPENDIX H

SCHEDULE, TUITION AND POLICY INFORMATION FOR POTENTIAL STUDENTS

The CHAI Center for Jewish Learning understands the demands of a busy family calendar. CHAI packs a full year of meaningful Jewish education into just 16 engaging sessions for adults, and 25 sessions for children.

CHAI FOR ADULTS

Engaging Sunday classes (two per month) include sessions on a wide variety of Jewish subjects from the basics to beyond while encouraging and supporting each student's personal spiritual and intellectual growth.

CHAI FOR CHILDREN

We believe that children have unique insights and capabilities that can be nurtured and developed through a caring, supportive and creative learning environment. Additional class time (one weekday session per month) focuses on requisites of Jewish learning. Opportunities for “study-buddies” and teen *madrachim* assistants encourage peer leadership and support skills-development of our students.

INTERGENERATIONAL CLASS SCHEDULE

Two Wednesday afternoons per month from September through May from 4-6:30pm. This allows people to drive home in daylight for most of the year, for families to fit class time into their schedules, and to ensure that families can spend precious time together on the weekends. Each Sunday session includes a light supper for the entire CHAI community.

Grade School Skills Class Schedule

One supplemental skills class for 3rd- 7th graders held one Wednesday afternoon each month from 4- 5:30pm.

AFFORDABLE TUITION

CHAI welcomes Beth El members and non-members!

Tuition for Children and Families

Beth El Members: \$500 tuition includes one child and parent(s); \$350 per additional child

Non-Members: \$700 includes one child and parent(s); \$500 per additional child

(Families of 6th and 7th-grade children must be members of Beth El.)

Tuition for Individual Adults

Beth El members: \$150

Non-members: \$250

Fees and Supplies

\$75 per person, includes a communal meal at each intergenerational session.

Please note

Beth El membership is not required for the first year of enrollment, with the exception of 6th- and 7th-grade families.

Beth El membership is required in the second year of enrollment.

Beth El membership dues are affordable. No one is turned away for lack of funds.

For more information on membership, please call the Beth El office at 203-264-4500.

APPENDIX I

TECHNOLOGY PLAN - CHAI CENTER FOR JEWISH LEARNING

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The CHAI Center for Jewish Learning will be an intergenerational school meeting twice per month on Sunday afternoons. Children will meet an additional weekday once per month. It is an alternative educational offering and there is no religious school currently in place. Children attend CHAI with at least one parent.

The following background information was edited in Google Docs by the CHAI committee, as was the SWOT analysis that focused our thoughts and helped turn our concepts into useful plans.¹

Our Mission

The CHAI Center for Jewish Learning is a refreshing alternative for Jewish education. Through innovative, intergenerational, immersion-style Jewish educational experiences, CHAI aims to make Jewish life meaningful and relevant while supporting, enhancing and enriching Jewish life in the home and our community.

Our Vision

Our vision is to engage children, families, members of Beth El and the larger Jewish community in stimulating and engaging interactive and inter-generational group experiences as well as age-appropriate learning and skill development.

Our Goals

- Engage students of all ages in Jewish life and inspire participants to embrace the rich heritage, culture, rituals, history and traditions of Judaism and Jewish life
- Prepare students for competence in Hebrew reading, comprehension, prayers and liturgy
- Cultivate a caring community based on a foundation of Jewish ethics, morals, values, and teachings

¹ *The Future of Nonprofits: Innovate and Thrive in the Digital Age*. David J. Neff and Randal C. Moss. John Wiley and Sons, Inc. Hoboken, NJ 2011.

Utilizing the general SWOT model, we also incorporated Step 2 of "Mike's Model Innovation Process" (p153). Give the concept an initial review against its funding criteria: Scalability, Sustainability, Cost Basis, Tie to Organizational Mission, Capacity for Execution." The tech plan is at once far-reaching for us because we are novices working with a new school concept, and at the same time it is limited for the same reason. That is, anything we do will be new. We will begin with small scale projects to test the waters and increase participation with these tools as comfort levels increase. Fortunately, the costs of the limited amount of hardware we will need to begin are all within the budget.

- Deepen spiritual awareness and faith
- Provide tools to build Jewish identity and pride, and empower participants to develop their leadership potential

Message to Parents

At CHAI, we believe that it is not enough to teach students *about* Judaism. Rather it is critically important to teach the amazing depth and breadth of our tradition and faith and give them life-long tools to guide them through their Jewish lives. Students of all ages will not only gain knowledge about important subjects; they will be engaged in acquiring a deeper understanding and Judaic connection through interesting and informative sessions designed to bring out the best in every student.

Today's Jewish families face real challenges. Jewish children are a distinct minority in local schools; and at home, many children are brought up in interfaith families. CHAI offers a unique and safe setting where parents can meet and learn with other parents facing similar issues. Moreover it will provide an opportunity to encourage an appealing distinct Jewish spin to their children's current life situations and inclinations. CHAI will help provide a foundation of personal strength and faith for an often challenging world. ²

As you explore the richness of Jewish history, traditions, folklore, values, laws, customs and prayers connected to our 5000 year-old faith, we hope it will instill a greater sense of pride and identity. Our educators will guide and support you and your children on this remarkable journey, making the beauty and relevance of Jewish traditions spring to life!

HOW TECHNOLOGY WILL HELP CHAI TO REACH ITS GOALS

The demographics of American Jewish families is changing rapidly. Boomer parents raised without technology are working hard to keep in stride with their children's technological activity and savvy. Boomers, GenXers and NextGens have vastly different learning styles, expectations, understanding of a learning environment and experience. NextGens have been learning and interacting collaboratively since they were small through internet games and

² **IBID.** Neff and Moss clearly define what innovation is *not*. It is not reviewing old ideas and making small improvements. It is based on the concept that there will be "authentic, durable economic gains." (p23). CHAI is, in itself, an innovative approach to Jewish education and its goals will not be accomplished by the same ho-hum activities that occur in the average Hebrew school classroom and Lunch and Learn with the rabbi. Therefore, it must look, act, feel and taste different, and digital tools can not only expand the formal learning experience, but also greatly enhance what will be taught in informal sessions.

school projects. For all intents and purposes, nearly everyone else is in a constant state of catching up to them.

Parents may be apace, or may marvel and rely in their offspring to be the tech-heads of the family. While older individuals are certainly catching up with the young by means of increasing Internet use, a large number do not own computers.

These statistics, and the demographics of the synagogue, present CHAI with a challenge. How do we use technology to enhance our intergenerational educational experiences, supplement our limited class meeting times, and encourage creativity in learning and applying Jewish lessons in life - without leaving anyone behind? How can we build community between members of like and disparate ages? Also, how can we utilize technology without making the technology itself a focus of our learning?

BASIC REASONS TO INCORPORATE TECH TOOLS

CHAI will meet twice per month. We need tools to keep individuals and families engaged between classes.

CHAI will not be held in standard classroom settings. Rather, grades 3-5 and 6-7 will meet with their teachers and learn through experiential activities. Adults will meet with the rabbi to learn through a combination of structured lessons, discussions, *chevruta* study and experiential activities. At the end of each learning session, ample time will be allowed for intergenerational exchange concerning the lessons just taught, and for activities that will reinforce the learning through the life experience of the adults and the natural spirituality and energy of the children.

Tech tools such as photography, Internet research, video and recording of singing/acting, etc. can add many layers of inter-play on an any subject, offer opportunities for several different learning modalities, as well as making some of our lessons, projects, and learning available to all through the Web. Collaborative projects can be carried out via document sharing in Google Suite and Wikispaces and via photography, video and sound recording.

Additionally, a record of all learning can be kept in Wikispaces for reference by the entire congregation, which will be invited to learn and participate on their own pages.

Of course, much of the learning can and will take place outside of the classroom setting through collaborative online projects, face-to-face team efforts, online research, blogging, video-recording, photography projects, personal history interviews and recordings, and more.

USING TECHNOLOGY TO ENHANCE/CREATE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

CHAI's intergenerational student body presents certain challenges. While the younger generations are often more comfortable with certain aspects of technology, some of the older students are limited in experience, and some do not own computers, digital cameras or even cell phones. This challenge can be turned into an intergenerational learning opportunity.

For example, adults may learn and do research on Jewish views on environmentalism and teach 4th- and 5th-graders who will create a lesson they wish to teach through a journal of photos they take and/or download from Snapfish. Third- and fourth-graders can write poems or song and record them, and 6th- and 7th graders may make a video or PowerPoint presentation incorporating all these elements, learning the subject matter as they work. Additional digital photography and video can be taken / made by members of all ages, and musically inclined students may write and record songs expressing the Jewish lessons they have learned. Planning can take place on Wikispaces, and text can be written in collaboration on Google Docs. The photos can be posted on Snapfish and the entire presentation uploaded to Youtube, with links from Facebook, the synagogue website, etc. A final presentation may be presented at the synagogue dinner at which the synagogue's "green team" presents their recommendations for a synagogue environmental policy.

In addition, limited class time can be enhanced via existing on line educational materials, such as Behrman House's interactive sessions, NJOP's on line Twebrew School Hebrew reading course for all ages, etc.

ON-LINE LEARNING AND COLLABORATION

While there are numerous Web 2.0 tools available, CHAI will need to be somewhat conservative in use of technology until all hardware is purchased, the tech staff is trained, and individuals and families become accustomed to and comfortable with using these tools. It is also important not to overreach for two reasons. First, the plan has to be manageable with small group of volunteers and second, the clergy is part-time and must be planful in use of their time applied to the tech planning and learning.

- **Wikipages:** The pages will be viewable by all synagogue members. When a reasonable amount of content is posted and the tech members are comfortable, some pages will be made available to non-student members who can share their drashes, personal stories and photos of their Jewish experiences and memories, recipes, ideas, new things they have learned, etc. It is not important how many non-student members participate in this activity. Rather, it is important that the option is available and the seed of on-line sharing in this space be planted, as over time it will build community and pride.
- **Google Docs:** This powerful tool will be used by the CHAI committee to collaboratively plan everything from the SWOP analysis, mission and vision statements, marketing plan, forms,

and policy documents to lesson and event evaluation, and budget/expenditures tracking. Educators can submit and share their lesson plans, request input or help and communicate successes to the CHAI committee. While this collaboration will not replace meetings, it will reduce the number of meetings required and make the information available to all in real time.

- **Delicious.com** can serve as an interactive resource for students grades 5 and up and adults, and be particularly helpful to the team that seeds the Facebook page with engaging educational information. The rabbi and cantor can help by adding links to various stacks and making them available to various groups as appropriate.

INITIAL MARKETING PLAN

While CHAI will be advertised through print media, collateral materials (flyers, posters), mailings and possibly local radio announcements, social media will play an important role in attracting younger families - especially those who are not involved in the local Jewish community and are, therefore, not accessible through common avenues such as the local Jewish Federation's mailing list.³

Facebook: CHAI's Facebook page will incorporate links to synagogue website on which all relevant school materials will be posted (mission, philosophy, overview, certain policies, application form, academic calendar, etc).

The Facebook page will be seeded with helpful articles on Jewish parenting, recipes, tidbits about Israel, games, Hebrew phrases, etc. that individuals can read for their own benefit, comment on, "Like" and also "Share" with friends and families. Updates should be made on a weekly basis to keep interest fresh. A CHAI tech committee member will work with the rabbi and cantor and some members to seek and "Share" external info from a wide variety of sources. Of course, open house information, links to registration forms, etc will be incorporated.

Each month a new story by a student or class should be posted to demonstrate the vibrancy and relevance of the school and the learning that takes place there. ⁴

³ **IBID.** Moss and Neff say definitively: "Get Public, Get Loud" (p160). As we are a Jewish Learning Center, our audience is limited, but our marketing must be broad as there are many 'hidden *Yidden*' in the area. Some who are involved in Jewish life certainly know others who are not, and every non-Jew knows a Jewish adult of family to whom they may spread the word.

⁴ ***The Nonprofit Marketing Guide.*** Kivi Leroux Miller. Jossey-Bass. A Wiley Imprint. San Francisco. 2010. In the section entitled "Help Fans See Their Story in Your Story" (p158). Miller speaks of the importance of storytelling to engage the reader and help them realize not only the mission of the organization but also the way it relates to their lives. CHAI will invite students and on-students alike to submit stories that resonate with Jewish content to help make CHAI a hub of Jewish sharing and learning.

Current members and the synagogue "Friends" list (individuals and families who have attended and shown interest in one or more synagogue activities on the past three years) will be invited to the page. Members will be asked to share and publicize CHAI postings to the best of their ability by "Liking" and "Sharing" content.

The rabbi, cantor and others will add comments, weekly spiritual and secular Jewish postings each week and encourage sharing of postings, etc, to build community via the page.

Twitter: Few, if any, members use Twitter, however, we will ask those who do to support the marketing efforts via their tweets. The rabbi, cantor and committee members will tweet at least once per week to stir interest in registration and, later, tweet once per week or so to drive users to the Facebook page or website, or simply to inspire Jewish thinking.

Website: CHAI will be featured prominently on the synagogue website home page and have designated navigation button leading to the pages mentioned above and to the Facebook page as well.

Synagogue and community events, social action projects and community involvement will be posted to Facebook, the website and tweeted as appropriate. (Please note that CHAI students will be involved in these events and projects.)

TECH COMMITTEE

A Tech Committee will oversee several activities.

- **Facebook:** The committee will oversee and generate Facebook and Web postings and a calendar for postings, incorporating external links, stories, etc, as mentioned above, and ensure that photos from events will be posted on Facebook and the website with appropriate captions and stories. Each tech committee member may be responsible for generating either one type of content (e.g. photos, games, etc) or for all postings for a specific length of time.⁵ Either way, the committee members will learn new content without being overwhelmed by responsibility.^{6 7}

⁵ **OP CIT.** Fortunately, as Kanter and Fine point out, many of the younger families and members are already using these tools for their personal lives, and can easily transfer their skills to the school's page. (p51). They must be provided clear social media and privacy policy guidelines to be successful.

⁶ ***The Future of Nonprofits: Innovate and Thrive in the Digital Age.*** David J. Neff and Randal C. Moss. John Wiley and Sons, Inc. Hoboken, NJ 2011.

Moss and Neff give a great deal of attention to staffing issues. Hiring the right person for the task is crucial (p135), however, it staffing with volunteers can be a challenge. Even the most well-meaning and talented people can be pushed and pulled by their various obligations. As the school's budget is limited, we still need to rely on volunteers. It is more cost-effective for us to train and cross train a number of volunteers and make use of their skills, talents and willingness to learn than to hire someone to do the task. If it is well-directed, it will also have the secondary

- **Wikipages:** Tech committee chair and one additional committee member will create a Wikipage for the CHAI student community where they can brainstorm for projects, post photos they take and videos they create.
- **Synagogue Website**
The synagogue needs an upgraded website. It is currently accessible only through HTML programming. A new site is being built in Yahoo Sitebuilder. The tech team will be given guidelines and website policies and taught how to manage and upload images, videos, recording and text into templated pages. The homepage will have links to the Facebook page, Twitter, the rabbi's blog, the cantor's MP3 recordings, and a page of Youtube links for timely and current learning (anything from a "How to Braid a Challah" to the USCJ's *Heckshire Tzedek* for socially and environmentally responsible food and products. The site will also incorporate PayPal for donations dues payment, ticket orders and dinner reservations and the like.

The website should include links to Jewish learning sites, Israeli news, etc, and an "Ask the Rabbi" link that will generate an email. This will engage members and non-members and help build an email database for general use but also specifically for CHAI learning events.

- **SEO:** While the synagogue is small, the community is always welcoming new families and individuals. We need our web pages to be SEO-friendly, especially as families new to the area, or considering moving here, will likely search for a school. The Website needs to incorporate search words and strings that will help create contact.
Tags: CHAI, Jewish learning, Hebrew school, Hebrew, Religious school, Jewish, grades, classes, intergenerational, Jewish children, bar and bat mitzvah, creative, holistic, alternative, intergenerational, experiential, alternative
- **Database** updates (contact info) will be managed through synagogue office.

BLOGS and PODCASTS

As there will be limited time for writing and recording blog entries and podcasts, they will be used judiciously, especially in the beginning. The rabbi will use her blog to communicate with adult members, and invite comments and guest postings.

Podcasts will be used to teach specific content related to the lessons at hand, and posted on Youtube or, when appropriate, on the Wiki, where additional external links will also be posted. It is hoped that, in time, and as students become used to this type of communication from the clergy and teachers, that their use can be expanded.

bonus of building a micro-community of do-ers who will be learning Jewish content as they work. That's the hope, anyway.

⁷ **OP CIT.** While Kanter and Fine discuss the benefits of mapping a potential social network, it seems to be too great an effort for a school that is likely to begin with 20-25 students. It will be more worthwhile to put limited volunteer effort to school administration and the tech committee.

It is important, however, not to build expectations concerning frequency that cannot be fulfilled.

EMAIL MARKETING - ONGOING

Marketing CHAI and the synagogue and building community are deeply linked. To make better use of time, get more news to the community, enhance learning, and build pride in the school land interest for involvement, the synagogue needs to switch from standard blind-copied group emails to Constant Contact or a similar product to ease management of news and information sent to targeted audiences. This change will also help us track the effectiveness of the communication, and improve it on a regular basis. While the current weekly email lists upcoming services and events, an improved letter could include links to the articles and postings on the website and the CHAI Facebook page. Emails may be enhanced on a schedule, e.g. first week of the month: a student story and project photos; second week: video / vlog entry; third week: a Hebrew blessing or lesson taught by the rabbi; fourth week: an MP3 of a new setting the cantor wishes to teach. Every email must include good news and perhaps celebratory announcements such as birthdays, anniversaries, births, etc. as well as a call to

action to encourage greater participation, from attending services or lessons or volunteering or even clicking on a link.⁸

Target groups for different email content and frequency include: families with children, adult students, non-student adults, the synagogue "Friends" list mentioned above, realtors, local journalists, interfaith clergy.⁹

HOW ARE WE DOING? USE OF ON-LINE SURVEYS

Because CHAI is a new concept, the committee will need regular feedback to identify strengths and needs for improvement. Because it can be difficult to get feedback in face-to-face discussion and sometimes challenging to get paper evaluation forms completed, CHAI will send an online survey each of its first several months to evaluate how well the school concept is working, if learning is happening, if learning is engaging, to ascertain our strengths and

⁸ ***The Nonprofit Marketing Guide***. Kivi Leroux Miller. Jossey-Bass. A Wiley Imprint. San Francisco. 2010.

A clear call to action does not have to be a fundraising pitch. For CHAI, a call to action may be a request for volunteers for a specific event, or even a call to click on a link with Jewish content. (p57)

⁹ **IBID**. Miller discusses the merit of "building your own media empire" (p5). It is critical to self-publish CHAI's accomplishments and to invite local media to events and share successes via CHAI's Facebook page, Twitter, emails - whatever it takes - to be on their radar. The same is true for building relationships with interfaith clergy and their members for the sake of community cooperation, and also to be known to the interfaith families attending church instead of synagogue.

weaknesses, and ask for idea. Those who do not use email will be sent a questionnaire with a self-addressed stamped envelope to facilitate response.¹⁰

SURVEY MONKEY AS A TEACHING TOOL

Survey Monkey can be used for friendly Jewish knowledge quizzes generated by the clergy, teachers, or students themselves. The quiz can be emailed to the congregation, and the "winners" will be acknowledged in the weekly email and in services.

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

COMPUTER HARDWARE (see *BUDGET* below for details)

- The synagogue computer is capable of serving as a storage drive for all photos, Word docs, etc, however, a travel drive is required for external back-up.
- Need to purchase dedicated CHAI laptop with webcam
- Need to purchase webcam for loan to students as required
- Need to purchase video/still camera with voice recording capability
- Those who do not have a computer at home can use the CHAI laptop between classes for individual or group learning.

PRIVACY / SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

- The Privacy Policy used to guide CHAI's Facebook page and website must be consistent with the synagogue's general policy.
- Photo releases will be signed by all CHAI participants.
- No children will be identified by name.
- Events at members homes will not ID the member or the address.

COPYRIGHT POLICY

All information and educational links and downloads posted on the synagogue website, and referred to on the CHAI Facebook page, must be properly attributed to the author or copyright owner. All materials created by CHAI clergy, teachers, students and synagogue members will be likewise attributed and will be copyrighted by the synagogue.

¹⁰ *The Networked Non-Profit*. Beth Kanter and Allison H. Fine. Josey Bass, A Wiley Imprint. San Francisco, CA. 2010. Kanter and Fine discuss (p82) creating a transparent plan for the future (p83). The school was conceived to meet the known needs of the community, and our surveys and various forms of feedback will help us make adjustments wherever and whenever required. It is hoped that as social networking takes a toe-hold that comments and "Likes" will help us gain an understanding of the CHAI experience as well as the way the school is being perceived by non-students.

BUDGET

Laptop with webcam \$600

Travel Drive (16G) \$40

to serve as back-up drive

A. Four (4) Polaroid 4GB MP3 Player (PMP281-4) with Video Playback and 2.8" Touch Screen

built in video camera, and still camera, voice record, Internet access \$50ea \$200

II. *for use by those who do not have digital cameras or recorders or cell phones or the ability to download / upload their photos and videos, and recordings. Also for use in Hebrew song, blessings prayer and chant for enrolled students and for common access via the website.*

DVDs RW 50-pk \$45

for recording multiple elements of projects .

RW disks may be passed from one student to the next to add or edit content

Logitech Webcam \$25

for recording of personal stories, etc recorded by students. Rabbi's and cantor's messages will be recorded and uploaded to website, Youtube and for vlog use. This cam will be loaned to students as required or used in the school setting.

Two (2) Vivitar 12mp Digital Cameras \$50ea \$100

Lynda.com three-month subscription \$35pp per month \$315

for three key tech team or CHAI committee members to learn Web 2.0 skills and teach them to others.

Total Tech Budget: \$1325.

APPENDIX J
CHAI SCHEDULE/CALENDAR



2012 CALENDAR

Sundays - 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. / Wednesdays- 4:15 to 5:45 p.m.

Wed. Sept. 5 (Grades 3 to 7)

Sun. Sept. 30 (Erev Sukkot)- **5:30 to 8:00 p.m.**

CHAI opening session for all students.

Evening session with fall harvest dinner (no charge). Dessert in the sukkah, weather permitting.

Wed. Oct. 10 (Grades 3 to 7))

Mon. evening, Oct. 8 (Simchat Torah & CHAI dedication service)

Beth El celebration open to all.

*Pizza dinner at **5:45 p.m.** Reservations required. Cost for dinner: TBD.*

*Service from **6:30-8:00 p.m.***

Sun. Oct. 21 (All students)

Sun. Oct. 28 (All students)

Wed. Nov. 7 (Grades 3-7)

Fri. Nov. 9 (CHAI-led Shabbat service)- 7:30 p.m.

Sun. Nov. 11 (All students)

Sun. Nov. 18 (All students)

continued...

DECEMBER

Sun. Dec. 2 (All students)

Wed. Dec. 5 (Grades 3-7)

Sun. Dec. 9 (All students)

Fri. Dec. 14 (CHAI-led Shabbat service)- 7:30 p.m.

Sat. Evening, Dec. 15 (Beth El Chanukah Party)- Time TBD

JANUARY

Wed, Jan. 9

Grades 3 to 7: 4-5:30pm

Fri, Jan. 11: Shabbat Services at River Glen Health Care Center - 6pm

This is not a CHAI service, however, it may be of interest to our families.

Wed, Jan. 16

All Students: 4-6pm / Group Dinner 6-6:30pm

Fri, Jan. 25: CHAI Soup, Song and Story Shabbat - 6:15pm

Wed, Jan. 30

All Students: 4-6pm / Group Dinner 6-6:30pm

FEBRUARY

Wed, Feb. 13

Grades 3 to 7: 4-5:30pm

Fri, Feb. 15 - CHAI Shabbat Service - 7:30pm

Wed, Feb. 20

All Students: 4-6pm / Group Dinner 6-6:30pm

Sat. Evening, Feb. 23 - PURIM CELEBRATION!

Wed, Feb. 27

All Students: 4-6pm / Group Dinner 6-6:30pm

continued...

MARCH**Wed, Mar. 6**

Grades 3 to 7: 4-5:30pm

Fri, Mar. 8 - CHAI Shabbat Service - 7:30pm**Wed, Mar. 13**

All Students: 4-6pm / Group Dinner 6-6:30pm

Wed, Mar. 20

All Students: 4-6pm / Group Dinner 6-6:30pm

APRIL**Wed, Apr. 3**

Grades 3 to 7: 4-5:30pm

Wed, Apr. 10

All Students: 4-6pm / Group Dinner 6-6:30pm

Fri, Apr. 19 - CHAI Shabbat Service - 7:30pm**Wed, Apr. 24**

All Students: 4-6pm / Group Dinner 6-6:30pm

Sun, Apr. 28 - CHAI Lag B'Omer Celebration - time TBA**MAY****Wed, May 8**

Grades 3 to 7: 4-5:30pm

Friday, May 10 - Erev Bat Mitzvah of Tara [X] - CHAI Shabbat Service - 7:30pm**Wed, May 15**

All Students - Last Day of Classes and Shavuot Celebration - time TBA

Fri, May 17 - Erev Bat Mitzvah of Jenna [X], CHAI Graduation and Step-Up Service - 7:30pm

APPENDIX K

CHAI EDUCATORS

Eliana Falk, Student Rabbi

Rabbi Falk is dedicated to revealing the depth and beauty of Jewish life to all who seek it, and to the pursuit of intellectual and spiritual growth through the prism of Jewish teachings. In her studies at the Academy for Jewish Religion, a pluralistic seminary, she has learned the most compelling elements of all Jewish movements and traditions and incorporates the wisdom of our ancient and contemporary sages in her teaching. She was the recipient of the 2010 Rabbi Herschel J. Matt Liturgy Award, a national prize conferred for creative liturgy.

In her training as an art educator, she learned to engage the innate creative spirit of every student, and her background in communications enhances her ability to teach complex concepts, and to facilitate interactive and cooperative learning in the synagogue, classroom, and experiential learning environments. She welcomes discussion in every Shabbat service and welcomes guest sermons by members. She has energized Jewish learning at Beth El by initiating learning sessions that reveal the wealth of Jewish wisdom that our tradition - and our participants - have to offer. She has taught several adult Beginning Hebrew classes to empower students to become more confident and active in services.

Rabbi Falk served as the Education Director of Congregation Or Shalom Hebrew School in Orange, Conn., for three years. She worked closely with the rabbi to update the curriculum and administered all aspects of the 105-student school where she also taught upper grades. She taught Jewish history for two years at MAKOM Hebrew High School in Woodbridge and has prepared many students for their B'nai Mitzvah, personalizing goals and learning to the needs of each student, and ensuring a meaningful life-cycle journey designed to awaken each candidate to his/her Jewish life, identity and pride.

Rabbi Falk has served as Beth El's spiritual leader since 2008. She expects to receive her ordination at the Academy for Jewish Religion in May 2013.

"It is my absolute belief that the time for teaching about Judaism has passed. Rather, when we experience our tradition, we nourish ourselves with the astonishing wealth of wisdom that is relevant to children and adults each and every day. CHAI offers youth and adults a truly unique opportunity to experience and share Jewish learning and to find greater meaning, perspective and fulfillment."

Sharon Citrin, Cantor

Cantor Citrin is passionate about Jewish education as a means to engage and empower students of all ages, build a positive Jewish identity, and develop the potential for leadership. She has extensive experience teaching students from pre-schoolers to seniors.

Her professional career began as a Hebrew teacher while still an undergraduate student at Hamilton-Kirkland College. Following college, she was awarded the prestigious Mailliard Teaching Fellowship at The Taft School in Watertown, Conn., to teach art. She then taught elementary school art at the Hebrew Academy of Nassau County. Additionally, she instructed Jewish seniors, as well as children, in arts and crafts at enrichment programs and summer camps.

After an interim career in the business world, she returned to teaching as director of the music program at Alef Bet Preschool for five years and for many years as a Hebrew school teacher and B'nai Mitzvah tutor at B'nai Israel in Southbury, Conn. She received a grant from the Jewish Communities of Northwestern CT to develop an innovative religious school curriculum based upon thematic, experiential learning for grades K through seven. This curriculum, which integrated the arts, Hebrew language and Jewish culture into all subject areas, was implemented school-wide at the Azoree Regional School for Conservative Judaism- a merged school for the Jewish communities of Waterbury and Meriden- where she served as the founding Education Director.

Since 2001, Cantor Citrin has directed the Confronting Anti-Semitism Program for the Connecticut Regional Office of the Anti-Defamation League conducting interactive educational workshops for Jewish students and parents. She is especially proud of the Teen Trainer program she initiated, where young targets of anti-Semitism present their personal stories to audiences across the state as role models of Jewish pride, empowerment and leadership.

Cantor Citrin earned a Masters in Jewish Education and Cantorial Ordination from Hebrew College in Boston. She has served as Beth El Synagogue's Cantor since 2009.

"I'm excited about this opportunity to make Jewish learning dynamic and stimulating for all ages. Not only is there so much to learn; but there is so much we can teach each other! There's no better way to create meaningful bonds between the generations than to share experiences that strengthen our common identity and heritage. We welcome you to be part of it!"

APPENDIX L

SHALOMLEARNING SAMPLE CURRICULUM



Why ShalomLearning?

An introduction to the ShalomLearning Curriculum

Philosophy of ShalomLearning

The best Jewish learning engages the whole child, including social, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual development. The ShalomLearning curriculum blends technology, developmentally appropriate content and teaching methods to reach students on their terms in order to build understanding, impart critical skills and forge a lifelong love of Judaism and Jewish learning. The ShalomLearning curriculum and approach to teaching will encourage families to see the consonance between a set of key Jewish values and the secular world where they live their lives.

ShalomLearning Teachers expose students (and their parents) to a wide range of engaging content and media in the classroom, through self-directed learning, online group discussions and family havurah activities.

The ShalomLearning curriculum has been developed by experts using Understanding by Design (UBD) principles. **If you are unfamiliar with the concepts of Understanding by Design, see [Appendix 1A](#) and [1B](#) at the end of the unit plans.**

Values-based Curriculum

The ShalomLearning curriculum is organized around seven core Jewish values that infuse our traditions (both ancient and modern) with wisdom and meaning. Students think about the ways these values inform their daily choices, and how the stories and traditions associated with these values can enrich their lives.

In true UBD backwards design process, the content selected in the ShalomLearning curriculum was selected based on what best uncovers the enduring understandings and essential questions. The selected content is intended to spark conversation and learning that will connect deeply with students' experiences in the secular world. For this reason, much of the content found in the ShalomLearning curriculum does not reflect all of the most common or popular content found in commercial curriculums.

Special care has been taken to ensure that the units are developmentally appropriate, and that they relate to the ideas and issues that are important to the participants in other areas of their lives. The seven core values are:

- **Teshuvah.** Taking responsibility for the effect your actions have on others.
- **B'Tzelem Elohim.** Honoring the image of God in ourselves and others and how that effects the way we behave in the world.
- **Gevurah.** Using one's inner strength to do what's right.
- **Achrayut.** Recognizing your responsibility to make the world a better place.
- **HaKarat HaTov.** Seeking joy and being grateful.
- **Koach HaDibbur.** Understanding the power of our spoken words.
- **Shalom.** Helping to create a calmer, more *wholesome* and peaceful world.



These values were chosen as the foundation and the directive for this curriculum because of their universal value and application. They are intentionally broad and encompass many other values we often consider central to Jewish tradition (such as *Tikkun Olam*, *Derech Eretz*, or *Shalom Bayit*). These seven core values are overlaid with the Jewish calendar in order to add additional depth to the students' experiences with the Jewish holidays.

The ShalomLearning curriculum is "laddered" across grades 3-6, so students revisit the same values each year from a new, age-appropriate perspective. Each grade has a particular lens through which the learning is viewed and experienced:

Grade	Developmental Lens
3 rd	Family
4 th	Self
5 th	Peers
6 th	Self-Empowerment

This incrementally deepens students' knowledge and understanding of Jewish values, history, language and customs, laying the foundation for a strong Jewish identity. It creates a "spiral" curriculum, where repetition features important nuances for review and the expansion of concepts.

Family

In order for ShalomLearning to be both effective and successful, parents/families must be fully integrated into the learning experience. ShalomLearning will provide many opportunities to bring Jewish Education into the home. These experiences (havurah, self study and at-home questions) are as important as the virtual and in-person class experiences. ShalomLearning sparks conversations that extend the learning process beyond class time and integrate the views and values of parents and other family members.

Technology

An important goal of the Shalom Learning curriculum is to raise students' level of Jewish engagement so that Judaism becomes a cherished touchstone in their lives. While ShalomLearning teachers use technology as a tool for guiding the individual learning process and for providing access to a myriad of digital content, it is not an end in itself. Technology and the ShalomLearning model allow Jewish Education to become mobile. Students can access learning materials, connect online and control when and how they learn. Blending classroom instruction with online learning activities will help students learn faster and stay engaged.

Prayer-Tefilot

True to the foundation of this curriculum, the prayers selected for the *Tefilah* curriculum are organized by the seven values. The selections are often mainstream core prayers, but there are some outliers. Prayers were selected based on the time of year (on the Jewish calendar), the most authentic connection to the value and the age appropriateness (skill level) of the students.

ShalomLearning believes that through this intentional approach to Jewish Education students and families be able to approach the world with a Jewish lens. They will gain a strong sense of Jewish identity, community and a renewed sense of responsibility to the world.

With that said, *b'hatzlacha* (good luck) and let's begin!



Unit 1: Teshuvah (4.1)

Developmental Lens: Self

Overview

Enduring Understandings

We can forgive ourselves because mistakes are learning opportunities, a natural part of growing. *Mitzvot* help guide your choices, and *teshuvah* is a process that can guide us back to desired behaviors.

Essential Questions

When you have made a mistake in some aspect of your life, what path does Judaism provide for correction and repair?

Unit Learning Goals

By the end of this unit, students will:

- Know:** Students will be able to apply the four steps of *teshuvah* as a way to learn from their mistakes. They will be able to explain the role of *mitzvot* and ritual objects as ‘coaches’ to help make good behavior choices.
- Feel:** Students will feel confident that there is a way back (*teshuvah*) from mistakes without stigma or trauma.
- Do:** Students will use the steps of *teshuvah* as an opportunity to learn and grow, and will be able to use these steps during the entire year when they need to “let go” of something they did.

Unit Vocabulary

Hebrew	Transliteration	Translation
תשובה	<i>Teshuvah</i>	Return, “repentance”
חטא	<i>Chet</i>	Miss the mark
תשליך	<i>Tashlich</i>	To send out
מזוזה	<i>Mezuzah</i>	Case and scroll we place on our doorposts
חשבון הנפש	<i>Cheshbon hanefesh</i>	Inventory of the soul
מצוה	<i>Mitzvot</i>	Commandments, “deeds”

Kickoff Questions

The students should take the Kickoff Questions survey online



Week 1: Teshuvah Havurah (4.1.1)

Teshuvah can help us use our free will to repair our wrongs and return to the right path.

Suggested Settings

An orchard with areas for apple picking, areas for holding discussion groups, and set-up for a New Year's party.

Learning Goals

- A result of having free will is that people will sometimes make bad choices even as they try to do what is right. (*Chet* literally means missing the mark.)
- In a system with free will, it is not unusual to make some bad choices on the path to growing older and, hopefully, as a result wiser. Students will be able to explain why the process of *teshuvah* is so important when they inevitably make mistakes.
- Students will illustrate how the process of *teshuvah* can be a tool to learn from mistakes instead of denying that mistakes were made.
- Participants will relate some of the ways that Judaism attempts to keep us "aiming straight and hitting the target" of good behavior instead of "missing the mark."

Activities & Guiding Questions

1. How does a GPS help us travel in the right direction along the correct path? Does using a GPS mean we never make a wrong turn or drive past the exit? When we mess up, what do you hear from the GPS? [When the GPS says "recalculating", it means "I will try to understand where you are now, and plot a path to return you to a right path to your destination."]
2. Have you ever been on an antique car ride or those kiddie carousels with boats or racecars? You were moving but were you really steering and controlling the ride? Did you have any choice? Will that ride ever make you a better driver? That is why God gave us the gift of free will so we *can* be in charge and learn to steer and get better at driving our lives. However, a part of that free will or free choice is that we can crash or steer off the road. That is why in Judaism we see the idea of *teshuvah* as another gift that helps balance or repair the potential pitfalls that come with free will.
3. Study the definition of *teshuvah* found in Maimonides' Mishneh Torah 2:1 - "What does it mean for a person to do complete *teshuvah*? It is when a person faces the same situation in which he or she has done wrong and has the chance to repeat the wrong action- and doesn't." Relate the definition of the Hebrew *teshuvah* to the idea of an internal, personal GPS that helps you recognize when you make a "wrong turn" and works to keep you from repeating the same "wrong turn" again. We may repeat the same mistake because of "free will," and that is a part of being human. Using *teshuvah* as our personal GPS will reinforce the right path and help you to grow and to learn from each mistake.
4. Continue with a further definition from Maimonides 7:3 "Do not think that *teshuvah* is limited to sinful actions such as robbery and theft. Just as a person must repent from doing these, so too a person must do *teshuvah* for such traits as anger, hatred, envy, scoffing, greed, vanity, etc. These are worse than sinful actions because they are addictive and very hard to stop." Help students define and illustrate each of the traits listed. Ask if they apply only to the High Holiday season or all year round.

5. Ask students to design a personal GPS (Goodness Positioning System) as a tool for learning from mistakes and growing in wisdom all year long. What would it look like and how would it work? Compare their personal GPS to the four steps of *teshuvah*: (1) Recognize your mistake; (2) Regret what you have done (3) apologize/ confess and try to make it right; (4) make a plan so you will not to do it again.
6. Discuss how people learn by repeating things, so it makes sense to repeat things the right way. That is why we have lists and reminders called *mitzvot* and *minhagim* (ritual traditions) to help us repeat things in the right way until they become natural and part of who we are. Teach the song [Mitzvah goreret mitzvah... aveirah goreret aveirah](#) [with sign interpretation to reinforce words and idea] and explain the idea of good and bad habits and patterning.
7. Introduce the ritual of *tashlich*, making it clear to students that it is a “reminding ritual” and not a magical way to get rid of sins. Rituals are actions or objects that grab our attention so we can pay more attention to the real problem. Read the *ashamnu* list of how we “missed the mark” in our behavior [good translation of *vidui* penitential prayer in Silberman’s “Tiku Shofar” page 122]. Reading the list is a “reminder ritual”. Actually role-playing throwing these bad behaviors away is also a “reminder ritual”. Have students copy the words onto small note cards. Pass along a trashcan and have students declare their goal to change their behavior, learn from mistakes, and throw the cards in as they recite the words.
8. Join the New Year party with the symbolic foods (another reminding ritual!). If possible, pick apples and dip in honey as a positive reminder for having (and helping to create) a sweet new year.



Week 1: Teshuvah Havurah Parent Education (4.1.1)

Learning Goals

- Parents will review the texts and ideas behind the Jewish definition of *teshuvah* as self-improvement
- Parents will design ways in which they can engage in their own self-improvement (admitting errors, repairing damaged relationship...) with their children watching. They will formulate ways to create “teachable moments” with their family.
- Parents will examine a few rituals to discover the way they serve as reminders for us to change/improve/strive for better behavior.

Activities & Guiding Questions

1. Teach the Maimonides texts on repentance from the student activities #3 and #4 above. Add the following texts as well: “One should not say: that which God has created is unchangeable, nor should one say that if God has planted within me bad character, how can I hope to uproot it? This is not so. The character traits of a person can be conquered and even changed. We find that animals can be tamed, their nature changed and their evil roots uprooted. So too, mankind has the strength to conquer evil nature and even change it to good through study and habit.” – Rav Yisrael Salanter (1810-1883) in “Birurei HaMidos”. Share your personal theories of change; do you believe that humans can learn new behaviors? Is everything forgivable, or are there certain red lines? Does this apply to children? How can you create and encourage the “study and habit” for your family so they can learn from mistakes and “move on” in healthy ways from past actions?
2. Read and discuss the *unetaneh tokef* prayer (Shoshana Silberman’s “Tiku Shofar” p.74-76.) and use the questions on page 76 and the reading at <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/elcms/jewniverse/unetaneh-tokef.shtml> to discuss repentance and free will. How can our understanding of the Jewish system which attempts to balance free will with the tool of repentance be applied to better dealing with our own and our children’s behavior?
3. Ask participants how they would craft the process of teshuvah. Compare their answers with the four steps of teshuvah: (1) Recognize your mistake; (2) Regret what you have done (3) apologize/ confess and try to make it right; (4) make a plan so you will not to do it again. (See Maimonides Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah 2: 3-4) How can the *teshuvah* process enrich their family life?
4. Talk about the *mezuzah* on the door as a “filter” to remind people that they have “free will” in terms of what they allow to pass through their doors and into their homes (and what they allow themselves to do and be when they leave their homes) Discuss the way Jewish ritual objects can be props and reminders for better behavior and personal change. Note: this will foreshadow the *mezuzah* and post-it note activities that the children will do at home and in class.
5. Do the *tashlich* activity as stated above and join all for the New Year’s party.

Car Talk

How can we use the four steps of *teshuvah* to help with a problem at home or at school?