

***OUR JEWISH JOURNEYS:***  
***REFLECTIONS & PROJECTIONS***

Senior Project

Presented for the fulfillment of requirements for Ordination at the

Academy for Jewish Religion

Enid C. Lader

December, 2009

Advisor:

Rabbi Dr. Jeffrey Schein

Director, Department of Jewish Education

Laura & Alvin Siegal College of Judaic Studies

Cleveland, Ohio

AJR Senior Projects Coordinator:

Rabbi Dr. Jeffrey Hoffman

Rabbi-in-Residence

Academy for Jewish Religion

Riverdale, New York

This project is dedicated to:

My parents, Maurice z"l and Sydel Coslow,  
who lovingly set me on my life's journey...

To my beloved, Harry,  
who is my life's partner on this wonderful journey...

To our children, Leah & Ananth and Abby,  
who will continue the journey to the next generation...

And to all the families with whom I have been privileged to assist  
on their Jewish journeys, whose lives have touched mine,  
and who continue to be a source of inspiration and joy to me.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Simchat Torah*, fall of 1993/5764. Our congregation's *sukkah* is filled with fall fruits and gourds, paper chains are hanging from its upper branches. The tablets of the ark's doors peek through; the shining brass Hebrew letters of the *Aseret Dibrot* catch the light of the overhead lighting. And 28 children – kindergartners and first graders are squiggling in front of the *sukkah*, on the steps of the *bima*, in anticipation of the Consecration Class pictures to be taken. Snap! Flash! Click! Whirr! Cameras clicking and flashing... Video cameras running... Proud parents encouraging smiles and straightening dresses and jackets and ties.

In their hands, the children are holding their miniature Torah scrolls that they have made in their classroom and with their parents' help. Long scrolls of cash register receipt paper covered with hand-drawn pictures of scenes from the stories of Creation... and Noah... and Sinai... and their own young lives. New pencils with large eraser heads have been spray-painted gold and the scrolls were attached to their "*eitzim*" and bound with strips of ribbon. At home each child made their Torah cover – with their mother's (and some with their father's) help: pieces of velvet adorned with gold and silver bric-a-brac and sequence arranged in *Magen David* shapes...

What conversations went on as those Torah covers were made? What were the parents thinking as they helped their child? What were the parents thinking as they saw their children march into the sanctuary clutching their little Torah scrolls and taking their places on the *bima* steps to sing "*Shema Yisrael...*"

What does it take to raise a Jewish child?

What does it take to make a Jewish home?

What does it take to make a Jewish self?

What are the values that informed our parenting? How did we see these values with Jewish eyes?

And, as the years have gone by, how do we now see those values with Jewish eyes... and what would we add? [As I write this, I am thinking, too, that at this point in our lives, many of us are wearing bifocals, even trifocals. Is this perhaps a metaphor for how we see ourselves in light of the majority culture in which we live?]

What follows is a series of sessions designed to reunite these parents to encourage them to explore their own Jewish identities and identify the values that are important to them, placing those values in a Jewish context, and share those values with their children [now college graduates making lives for themselves]. We will also have the opportunity to consider what is next: to learn, to experience – as they continue on their Jewish journeys.

But, in addition to the sessions, we will examine the conversations and responses of these parents as they came together to share their Jewish lives.

- **Part One: *Shehecheyanu, V'kiy'manu, V'higiyanu Baz'man HaZeh*: To explore our own Jewish journeys and how we have come to this time**

- Setting the context: How do we define ourselves as Jewish Americans?
  - Using the trigger film “The Tribe”<sup>1</sup> to facilitate this discussion

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<sup>1</sup> “ ‘The Tribe’ uses the pop culture icon, the Barbie doll, to unravel a 5000 year history of the Jewish people struggling with its identity. The 18-minute film threads together archival images, animation, Barbie dioramas, and slam poetry, sending viewers on an visual rollercoaster ride that

- Placing ourselves within the larger “universe” around us – what does your life look like and where/how does Judaism fit in?
- This sets our individual selves into the broader context; so what are our individual stories? What is my story? What does it mean to think of our lives as a journey?
  - At first... then... then... then...<sup>2</sup>
  - Mapping the journey...
  - Are there random or critical incidents that propel us in certain directions, i.e. forward, backward, dead-end? Have there been surprises along the way?
  - Who are the people who provide a powerful spiritual influence over us?
  - What/ who made it “work” for you?
- **Part Two: *Chayim V’Eruchim Shel’li: My Life and Values***
  - As we examine our stories, can we identify values that are evident from the “text”?
    - Create a list... and hold them to the side for now
  - *Shema Yisrael... V’Ahavtah...* What does this text come to teach us about Jewish living and parenting? What values can we identify?
    - How does this list compare with ours?
  - *Pirke Avot 5:25* - He (Yehuda ben Taima) used to say, at five [one should begin the study of] Scriptures; at ten, Mishna; at thirteen [one becomes obligated in] the commandments; at fifteen [the study of] Talmud; at eighteen the wedding canopy; at twenty to pursue; at thirty strength; at forty understanding; at fifty counsel; at sixty

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mixes humor, history, irony and cultural context. Linking the past to the present, The Tribe speaks to young American Jews disconnected from traditional Jewish establishments, and conveys a new sense of understanding and pride in the richness and complexity of the Jewish people and its multiple identities. There comes a time when every new generation must struggle with some very old questions: who am I, where do I come from, and where am I going?”  
<http://www.tribethefilm.com>

<sup>2</sup> This question is based on the journaling technique developed by Ira Progoff, Ph. D., in his Intensive Journal Program for Self-Development, as taught by Rabbi Dr. Jeffrey Schein.

old age; at seventy fullness of years; at eighty spiritual strength; at ninety bending over; at one hundred it is as if he has died and passed on from the world."

- What values are evident in this text?
- Rewrite the text to fit your journey – and your values...

○ A Third Text: *When our children graduated from Religious School, what had been important to us...?*

- Review of personal values – past, present, and what we look forward to – in preparation for sharing them in a formal way with our children

• **Part Three: *L'Dor VaDor*: What is important to me that I want to pass on to my children?**

○ *L'Dor VaDor*: What do I value? -- A Letter to My Children

• **Part Four: *V'Ayechi HaYom*: And where am I today? What is important to me?**

○ What is next? What is on my "Bucket List" of Jewish Experiences? What do I look forward to doing? What skills and/or experiences would I include? How do my values inform my list?

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### **BACKGROUND**

How do we understand Jewish identity? Joe Kanter, of JESNA's Lippman-Kanter Institute, suggests that there is not one identity, but we have "multiple identities... We should not ask 'How Jewish are you?' but 'How are you Jewish?'" (Kanter, 2008) The individual does not simply inherit Jewishness as a whole self-contained package; rather s/he engages with and incorporates elements of Jewishness into the self through a process. These Jewish identities constitute a unique sense of self for each person. "The question of inheritance and [choice] lies

at the heart of our challenge as American Jews today. Each individual needs to integrate both sorts of experiences in order to discover a Jewishness of his/her own.” (Horowitz, 2002) We can catch a glimpse of how people are Jewish through listening to their stories – caring about the intricacies of what happens in their lives. In the process of listening, we can provide the storytellers with opportunities to be self-reflective and to engage them in identifying the patterns – the values – that inform their lives and that they hope to pass on to their children. There is power in adults telling their Jewish stories to one another; as they share their stories, they join the larger story that is the Torah of the Jewish people.

Many studies have been done to understand the Jewish identity of adults (Friedman, et. al., 2005; Semans and Fish, 2000; Horowitz, 2002... to name a few). To produce an accurate picture of where, if at all, being Jewish fits into people’s lives today and to portray how a person’s relationship to being Jewish evolves over the course of his or her lifetime, it is helpful to examine people’s journeys. “The term ‘journey’ encompasses how Jewishness unfolds and gets shaped by the different experiences and encounters in a person’s life. Each new context or life stage brings with it new possibilities. A person’s Jewishness can wax, wane, or change in emphasis. It is responsive to social relationships, historical experience, and personal events.” (Horowitz, 2002)

And context is very important. Being Jewish in America has produced many Jews with “dual templates through which they view the world.” (Friedman, et. al., 2005) As we listen to the voices of our participants discuss their Jewish identity, we must be mindful of the way in which this identity may or may not be shaped by their living context. (Semans and Fish, 2000). Jewishness, too, is seen as constituted by the individual living in a particular web of relationships within that particular context.



This is important for Jewish professionals to keep in mind as they work with and plan for congregations, communities, and program participants: it can be quite problematic for Jewish professionals to make assumptions about their Jewish congregants/participants on the basis of their own identity and knowledge of Judaism. At a recent conference for Jewish professionals (“Mapping the Spiritual Lives of Adults Beyond Mid-life”, UJ-Federation New York, 2009) Rabbi Richard Address, of the Union for Reform Judaism, recently offered a wide array of programming ideas for congregants beyond mid-life. A participant at the conference commented: “We offered [such-and-such] program and no one came.” The general response included: “Did you offer programs that you were interested in? Were you aware of the needs or interests of your congregants? Have you engaged them in conversation to hear from them?” By being aware of our participants’ needs and interests, we can better offer a variety of Jewish-enhancing experiences to provide opportunities for Jewish growth and change.

As we listen to people’s stories, we also get a glimpse of what they hold dear – what they value... and what they hope to pass on to their children. “If young Jews are to be persuaded of the value of being and remaining Jewish, they will need to know that Judaism has something compelling – something truly counter-cultural – to say about what is most important to human beings: matters of life and death, questions of morality and ethics, the content of a proper education, the obligations of family members to each other and to their community.” (Wertheimer, 1994) When parents present a convincing case for their own values by providing a sound rationale, by demonstrating these values through their own behavior, and by exemplifying that sense of meaning and satisfaction that successful realization of the relevant values produces, their children are more prone to assimilate these values for themselves. (Knafo, 2007) When children feel that their parents respect their attempts to form values in reflective and exploratory

ways, the potential is increased for children to also experience their own striving for autonomy as compatible with their need to remain closely related to their parents, and to share their values. As well, by providing consistent value messages and models, parents provide positive role modeling of these values for their children. Clear expectations can be associated with the positive transmission of Jewish identity.

The transmission of Jewish identity and values takes on another layer when including parents who are converts to Judaism, as well as non-Jewish parents. Jews-by-choice do not have easy access to inherited memories of Jewish culture, holiday celebrations, or even “lox and bagels.” Many learn Judaism as a religion and often report feelings of alienation regarding its ethnic dimensions. “Fellow travelers” is a term developed (Harris, 2005) to find a new name for non-Jews who are part of the Jewish community. It is thought that this name expresses the complexity of their place as “insider-outsider.” They accompany the Jewish family – and the Jewish community – on its journey. The present study departs from the usual studies of Jewish identity and values, in that it includes “fellow travelers” (and converts) in describing their Jewish journeys; they have indeed become fellow travelers with their Jewish families, and feel that Judaism has become an important part of their lives.

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## METHOD

### *Participants*

Fourteen people participated in this study. All are members of a small, one hundred fifty member Reform congregation in Cleveland, Ohio. [The majority of Cleveland’s Jewish community is based on the eastern side of the city; this congregation serves the west side suburbs, and consequently many of the families are the only Jewish family in their

neighborhood.] Their children graduated from high school five years ago. These parents watched as their children stood on the bima with tiny Torah scrolls in hand and celebrated their Consecration. They formed a monthly Shabbat Club and gathered at each other's homes to celebrate Shabbat with family and friends, blessings and food, and songs and stories and laughter. They supported each other as their children became Bar and Bat Mitzvah, celebrated Confirmation, and graduated together from the congregational religious school's high school program. These parents participated in Family Education programs, parenting Jewish children discussion groups, adult education programs, congregational retreats, and served the temple and the temple's board of directors in various capacities. They include five men and seven women whose ages range from 49 to 61; all are college educated, and many have advanced degrees. Their occupations include research scientist, podiatrist, pharmacist, teacher, elementary school principal, social worker, sales and interior design, psychologist, hospital administration, diagnostic medical sonographer and "volunteer extraordinaire." Of the fourteen participants, ten were born Jewish, two are converts to Judaism, and two have become "fellow travelers" with their Jewish families.

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### *Procedure and Analysis*

Participants gathered together at people's homes in two groups for the purpose of this program. Seated around the dining room table, they shared their thoughts and insights, wrote their responses, reflected on their Jewish journeys and values they hold dear, wrote letters to their children, and projected into the future as to what Jewish things they look forward to doing.

Transcripts of participants' conversations were made. Their written and verbal responses were analyzed and coded for keywords and values evident in the texts. As the data from their

responses was collected, patterns began to surface. [Even as they spoke among themselves, specific themes became evident – and although the themes might have been similar for each of the two groups, they were explored from two very different points of view by the participants.]

Participants' letters to their children were retyped for presentation. As well, the text of each letter was used to create "word balloons" using the website <http://www.wordle.net>. In the process of using the text, the program creates word pictures that give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in the source text. This, in turn, creates another way of highlighting the keywords/values from each participant. Each "word balloon" was then copied and framed for each participant.

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## COLLECTIVE DESCRIPTION OF BOTH GROUPS' PROCESS AND RESULTS

*Participants – R.A., V.A., J.P., M.P., A.C., L.C., H.L., M.L., R.F., J.F., M.B., S.C., B.K., E.K.*

As we assembled together, each couple arrived with another part of the breakfast we would share. We sat around the large kitchen/dining room table, chatted, ate, I explained my project, and we began the program. We began with reciting the *Shehecheyanu*, in Hebrew and in English, giving thanks for us all being able to come together, and continued with Debbie Friedman's "Journey Song." In response to the concluding text of the song<sup>3</sup>, the participants focused on the changes in their lives: V.A. – "What changed? Our thoughts... Our paths..."

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<sup>3</sup> "Where does the journey begin? Where will we go?/Hours pass, the answers might change... As we keep moving along./ Days pass, the answers can change... As we keep moving along./ Years pass, the answers have changed...As we keep moving along." "The Journey Song" Lyrics by Debbie Friedman and Tamara Ruth Cohen; music by Debbie Friedman.

M.P. – “Our questions changed.” They commented about the passage of time: R.A. – “It has left a void... and now we have to figure out how to fill it.”

And they talked about getting older:

A.C. – “This is not necessarily easy to accept...”

H.L. – “What kind of legacy will I leave for my children?”

M.P. – “The wish not to be forgotten? You don’t want to be forgotten...”

H.L. – “I’ll never forget what Marvin Goldberg said after he had been so ill: ‘Does anyone remember me?’”

A.C. – “I don’t think of these things.”

R.A. – “I’m too busy living life. I throw away the AARP magazines!” ...

J.P. – “Times are changing for us... and for our kids... it’s another progression – until you do it, you only know from what people tell you... now we have insights we didn’t have before...”

M.P. – “There’s a sector of the Jewish people who are not ready to change; they want to remain in the 1800’s. I think Torah has allowed us to change. Our generation is the one in the flux, pulled in two directions... and I want to move forward and also keep Jewish life alive...”

It was time to move from the general picture of our lives to the Jewish picture of our lives: how are we Jewish? What defines us as Jews? And we moved to watch “The Tribe” and then discussed how the film spoke so much to the cultural nature of being Jewish. This indeed reflected how many felt the challenge of living Jewishly and in awareness of God... and how, as R.A. put it: “... we seem to go in and out of active awareness.”

J.P. asked: “What does it really mean to be a ‘Member of the Tribe’ – what’s the identity? How do we identify?”

A.C. – “One quarter of one percent – but look at all we have achieved!”

H.L. – “There are times when I am not Jewish enough – for my Orthodox cousins... and then in other places – I’m too Jewish!”

L.C. – “When I was newly Jewish it was horribly difficult for me... and now I am so comfortable!”

M.B. – “I had no idea what it meant to be Jewish until I became Jewish. I was a Jewish mother to my children... and now that my children have grown and are out on their own, where does that leave me? What am I now?”

What does it mean to be Jewish today?

J.F. – “I feel Jewish deep in my heart. It is a feeling of belonging, of the need to be an advocate

for our people both here and abroad.”

S.C. – “It’s a way of life, a way of thinking. It’s being a role model for what is Jewish.”

R.F. – “Being Jewish means ‘being a good person.’”

E.K. – “For me being Jewish means supporting Israel and living Jewishly – with Jewish values that help me help others in this world and make a difference in people’s lives.”

They connect to Judaism through their children, through their temple friends and community, through family and in-laws, and through “my Hebrew name.” They feel a special connection to their congregational Jewish community as, for all of them, they are one of a few Jewish families in their towns. “We know the temple will be here for us, and that is a comfort.”... “It’s like family.”

Their connection to God is not quite so simply put. They struggle. They continue to search. And they want to feel connected.

J.F. – “I struggle with why bad things happen to good people; but I also know there is a higher power.”

B.K. – “I felt closer to God when the kids were young. I feel more distant from God as I age. Yet, God inspires me to be a better person.”

R.F. – “God’s presence is in each person... God is an intimate, sustaining Life Force.”

S.C. – “I need to find a connection for myself.”

R.A. – “Religion is necessary in order to live with others in this world. Where is God in it all? God provides the framework for seeing the world through our own selves.”

A.C. – “I feel that religion is the biggest curse, but I still feel quite Jewish. But I struggle with being a clearly thinking person and religious at the same time.”

R.A. – “The miracles of science are beautiful... and lead to God.”

J.P. – “The scientific need to question... it’s so Jewish!”

All the Jewish participants had some kind of childhood Jewish education. Most did not continue after becoming bar mitzvah or celebrating Confirmation. Their experiences ranged from growing up in the Israeli school system to attending a six-day-a-week Orthodox Hebrew school to going weekly to “Sunday School” in a Reform congregation to Workman’s Circle Yiddish school to soaking it up at home, as expressed by E.K.: “I think my parents believed in osmosis: I got my Jewish education from my father, and my ritual education from my mother.”

Many of participants said they continued to learn through – and with – their children.

When it comes to *Tikkun Olam*, participants describe helping to make the world a better place as: “giving back” and “helping people” and “repairing and caring for our environment” and “doing... and doing more”. S.C. sees *Tikkun Olam* as “a way of life... how I serve as a role model for others.” It is B.K.’s “...job to help people everyday. I make a difference one person at a time, but I am also on the Red Cross’ Mental Health Community Disaster Response Team – and that broadens my range.” M.B. is now retired and is “... trying to figure it out. What can I do to give back to a world that’s been pretty good to me?”

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We then moved on to mapping our Jewish Journeys. Participants were very comfortable in sharing and even if not Jewish, all saw their Jewish family (present family or birth family) as a very important and fundamental part of their lives. “We were given the freedom to be Jewish in our own way – and so hope that our children will feel it’s important enough to find their own comfort in their Jewish lives.” (V.A., “fellow traveler”)

“I really left Judaism after my bar mitzvah and it wasn’t until I was in graduate school that I read a book about the Holocaust and realized my parents were in that. That’s what brought me back.” (H.L.)

To this, A.C. responded: “I knew (as he points to the inside of his arm) ‘never again.’ That’s why we had an Uzi – I felt Israeli, not Jewish.”

R.A.’s journey map begins at Sinai: “I feel like I stood there with everyone else and then marched forward through history. I didn’t have a rigorous Jewish education, but I have always felt a connection to Jewish history, and as an adult, have enjoyed learning from rabbis and teachers...” R.A. proudly adds: “I’ve gone back to Hebrew School, and this time will have a bar

mitzvah!”

S.C. grew up “feeling stuck between two worlds. I loved my Judaism, but not the people who represented Judaism. My father was a soldier during World War II and met and married an Italian Catholic woman. My mother converted to Judaism, but neither family accepted her... and when my father died, his family was not supportive... But, I loved the learning – it was invigorating to me. I am culturally tied to Judaism, but there is much that is a big question mark for me.”

L.C. never knew anyone Jewish until she went to college. “There was a student in my elementary school whose family changed their name from ‘Perlman’ to ‘Palmer’ and I asked my mother why people would do that; she said they were Jews and weren’t comfortable with their Jewish-sounding name... I saw ‘Anne Frank’ in junior high school and it rocked my world for weeks after; I couldn’t understand how that could happen... And I went off to college and met Arnon. A year later we discussed conversion; I wasn’t sure I wanted to, but knew my mother would be okay with it (she had passed away eight years before).” L.C. went through conversion about four years later, “... because her husband was Israeli and this would make it easier for him and his parents to accept.” Her family joined the congregation over twenty years ago and L.C. was very involved in the temple and very supportive of the Jewish education of her children. “Today, with both children graduated from college, I have not been as involved. I continue to feel Jewish, try to behave as a ‘good Jew’, but am not as involved.”

V.A. is a fellow traveler with her Jewish family and relates that living in a non-Jewish community, “...our children felt unique – and me, too. We ended up surrounding ourselves with Jewish families [from the temple] giving us all confidence, Israel, camp... I can’t imagine our son without his camp experiences. And the temple supported him so. I know that, for him,



wherever life takes him, he's still a Jew."

As we shared our journey stories, as people made their way through their Jewish lives and came to be part of the congregation, phrases were heard over and over: "the support of the temple community", "learning with our children", and "feeling connected." Congregational clergy and lay leaders offered guidance and support and often helped to give a "push" to participants, helping them feel confident in taking on congregational leadership roles themselves. In this group included past congregational president, vice-presidents, treasurers, adult education chairs, service leaders, teachers in the religious school, Judaica shop manager, designer and builder of our congregational Sukkah, members of the congregational long-range planning committee. These people were involved in the congregation – as individuals and with their families.

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The text of the *Shema* provides a base for how Torah views what is important in living a Jewish life. The group read the *Shema* together in Hebrew and in English and then reflected on what it means to them. V.A.'s comment: "Learn it, do it, be it" succinctly stated the values of the text from her perspective.

J.P. was impressed with reading it as a "text of its time... What does it mean to 'bind to your arm' and 'as a *tosafot* between your eyes'? Could this be a rallying cry?" He went into the possible historical military nature of the text, an interest reflected in his desire to learn the "real history" of the Jewish people before the Torah was written.

B.K. continued: "This is about the Oneness of God. We are chosen for a special role – and if we are like the others, there will be no one to fulfill the role."

J.F. added: "This is about *L'Dor VaDor* – we have to teach the next generation so that they will carry on."

S.C. concluded: "And this isn't just something you put on your doorposts or bind around your arm – it is deeper than that. This is what you do each day – how you live your life in your home and out in the world."

As we read through Yehuda ben Taima's text on the stages of one's life, the participants

spoke of how one first needs to learn, and then apply that learning to one's life. They spoke of the changing roles of grandparents – today and two generations ago – and how our times have changed so. M.P. saw that "... life is a journey; our roles are different as we enter different times in our lives."

As a third text, it was time to turn to their own writings, commenting on what was important and meaningful to them as a family five years ago when their children had graduated from high school. What is the same? What is different? Community, traditions, and family continue to be important keywords and values. As they read through their original list of keywords, it was evident that they were reading with new eyes and used the words to redefine for themselves at the present time.

- A.C. – "**Identity** is still number one. And **family** and **Jewishness** – it's an integrated identity... **Friends** – that's perhaps the strongest underlying reason to keep going and belonging."
- L.C. – "Yes, **friends** are a huge part of our life... And **calendar** – I think of life cycle events and holiday traditions. I would add **giving back** or **volunteering** to the list."
- R.A. – "**Home** – ours was not a home with a Jew in it; ours is a Jewish home – V. has always made this a Jewish home... And **light Shabbat candles** – we still do..."
- V.A. – "**Encouraged** – we have encouraged the building of independent thinkers; it's up to the next generation to make their way... And **home** – we created our own Jewish home. The temple gave us the confidence to make it Jewish in our own way... And **traditions** – we created our own traditions with extended family and friends... And **incorporate** – we incorporate Jewish thinking into everyday life."
- J.P. – "**Memory** – we have built memories for ourselves and our kids. [J.P. is the fellow traveler dad who designed and builds each year a sukkah for his family, and is the congregation's calligrapher of inscriptions for the b'nai mitzvah certificates and gift copies of the *Torah: a Modern Commentary*.] And **sharing** – with our friends from temple... And **celebrate and learn** – our group still does this together."
- M.P. – "**Service** – it's important to give back to the community... **Together** – both as a family and with our congregation... **Sharing** – with family, friends, and community... **Education and eating**..."
- H.L. – "I still feel that **connection to the past** and **understanding my Jewish roots** is very important to pass on to the next generation. **Community** – being around other Jewish people is important to me and gives me comfort... **Traditions**... **Generation**... **Connection**... and **Parents**..."
- M.L. – "**Parents** – our responsibilities are different now, but our presence is still so important... **Community** – as much as I feel it has changed, our congregational community is still important to me... **Traditions** – important to continue... **Chain** – we continue to see

ourselves as a link in the chain – and have added a new link to our family; how will that affect the Jewish future of our family?”

- J.F. – “Fighting against **prejudice** – by accepting people for who they are... **Middle East** – conflicted about the land; will a resolution ever promote lasting peace? **Grow** – together as a **family**... ‘**Community**’ – maintaining a strong Jewish community and not losing our **identity**...”
- R.F. – “**Communicate** – key to understanding and avoiding/resolving conflicts... **Living** – in harmony with people and nature... **Prejudice** – based on fear of differences... **Middle East** – too much attention paid to this place! **Better** – always leave everything and everyone better because of your (God’s) presence...”
- M.B. – “**Time** – moving quickly... **Spirit** – needs nourishing... **Community** – building new ones and welcoming new **friends**... **History** – personal and multi-cultural...”
- S.C. – “**Family** – do for my family things that are Jewish in a moral sense... **Education** – continue my education, growth, and seeking... **Children** – and now grandchildren, my being a **role model** as mother and grandmother... **Community** and **impact** – be involved through volunteerism regardless of religious affiliation...” **Seeking and questioning** – still looking for **connections**...”
- B.K. – “**Children** – stay Jewish and make more Jews... **Stories** – Holocaust survivors surviving adversity... **Traditions** – rituals that unite Jews... **Sharing** – Jewish values and heritage with others and with Jews... **Community** – sense of connection to other Jews, even strangers...”
- E.K. – “**Heritage** – I feel an awesome sense of responsibility to carry on our faith heritage... **Stories** – fear of losing family stories... **Challenges** – maintaining connections to temple... **Jewishness** – helping our children maintain their Jewishness... **Family** – holding on to family relationships with both parents gone... **Traditions** – trying to maintain what was so easy when the kids were young... **Strengthening friendships** – against the challenge of time and distance... **Participation** – hope for more time to participate in Jewish causes...”

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Each activity provided an opportunity for participants to consider and build their list of values. This was then shared in a letter each wrote to their children. I made a distinct choice not to call this an “ethical will” because of the weight of the word “will” and its relation to end of life concerns. The intent was for participants to consider at this point in their lives what is important to them – what they value – and what they would want to share with their children. Their responses included some of the values from their previous writings, but also moved in new directions as they thought about the future and their children creating Jewish lives and homes

and families for themselves. Highlights include:

A.C., who continues to struggle with his sense of science and rationality on the one hand, and being Jewish and trying to feel connected to God on the other hand, spoke to his children about the importance of being part of the Jewish people:

*There is no Jewish individual – there is only a Jewish people, and you are part of it, as important and as insignificant as anyone else... On the way, remember what you learned, how you felt, and what you would like your own kids to know about you, about us, about how you figured what's important in life, and about how you want them to be.*

For his wife, L.C., who converted to Judaism to help her Israeli husband and his parents feel comfortable with their marriage:

*You children are the best that my life has given me. I hope that you are always true to who you really are – if you don't know, then keep searching... Life is a process. Trust yourselves, and believe in your own good judgments... Don't be afraid to take risks... life is a process... I know that you feel Jewish, identify with Jewishness, but perhaps aren't as observant as you once were. It's OK, but be opened to "giving back", to experimenting with your own children or on your own.*

R.A. was succinct – and truly loves and appreciates the his wife (a “fellow traveler”) and the role she has played in making a Jewish home for his children:

*I want you to have the love and joy that your mother and I share. All else springs from that.*

V.A. is a true fellow traveler. She has always been supportive of her Jewish family and projects that into their future:

*As young parents, we created a Jewish home for you. We lit Shabbat candles, created our own traditions and learned together what it meant to be Jewish... We widened our circle to include the temple community of friends and mentors that encouraged our learning and were influential in shaping our lives... You have taken that background to become independent thinkers and leaders. You have taken opportunities to give back to your community and make a difference in other people's lives... Keep learning, keep giving, keep doing. Now it's time to do it your way...*

J.P., also a fellow traveler, felt like “an outsider looking in” when he first met his wife

and became a part of her family. Today he marvels at how so many people think he is Jewish, and realizes that – in all the ways he can see the world – he is most comfortable with seeing the world through Jewish eyes. His letter to his children is more general:

*I hope you'll always learn new things, concepts, and ideas; will consider various points of view; and will think critically of issues important yourself, your friends, and your communities (for you are always part of many)... Please help others – because you can... Mom and I have given you a view of ways to participate in our various communities – not because we had to, but because it is rewarding personally and makes the world a better place...*

M.P. feels a strong connection to family and friends and has always appreciated the intergenerational dynamic at play within the temple community. And Shabbat continues to be important for her:

*Surround yourself with layers of family, friends, and community... Share good times and bad with each other... Light candles every Friday night because each flame adds more light to the world and you connect with tradition that has been passed down from generation to generation...*

H.L. feels a strong connection to his Jewish roots – and hopes his daughters will continue to forge new links in his family's Jewish chain of tradition:

*Understand and never forget your roots, which set a basis for your future. The autobiography of grandma and grandpa is an example of what they went through that shaped their lives, which then shaped my life, which in turn has shaped your lives. Judaism is the source of our strength that, with the help of community, will sustain you in the future.*

For his wife, M.L., the themes of hope and pride and Israel are included in the values she entrusts to her children:

*Treasure your family and your links to Judaism; each of you is an important part in helping to keep our people "alive and well" into the future. And treasure your links to the past – whose shoulders you stand upon... Treasure your fellow human beings in our world. All are carriers of God's divine spark and likeness and being. Practice Godliness and goodness with acts of loving*

*kindness... Celebrate your Jewish lives with pride... Keep Israel in your thoughts and prayers – it's too important to let only others be interested... Value family and friends-and I hope you can find the Jewish community that is as supportive and caring as the one in which we made our home.*

J.F. has been very active in fighting prejudice and being an advocate for all voices to be heard around the table – and in the community. Her letter to her children focuses on giving them the support they need to move into the future as Jews with open and listening hearts:

*You both approach your Judaism in a different way, but I hope what I've modeled for you is what will follow you as you navigate through your adult lives. Life is full of amazing challenges and what I want most is for you to follow your hearts... What I want most for you to value and to carry to the next generation, our grandchildren, is Tikkun Olam. You already know to treat others the way you wish to be treated, and if you do that, life will maintain its sweetness, even during times of darkness... I know that deep in your hearts, you are proud to be Jewish. Let that pride carry you and remain strongly based in your heart.*

Her husband, R.F., seeks a world where all are treated fairly and is able to settle their differences through open lines of communication:

*Be a good person. Do what is right for all people, not just a select group...Do not speak ill of any person. Do not judge other people... Make everyplace you go, everything you touch and every person you meet better because you were there and the presence of God in you shown through you...*

M.B. converted to Judaism to raise Jewish children. She has done that and as she sends her children into the future, she shares her values of family and God, heritage and diversity:

*I value my family, each of you, more than you know. God has been an important part of my life and I value my journey to establish a relationship with God and to come to an understanding of who God is and what the concept of God means to me... I value education – the formal and informal education we get through learning and sharing what we've learned... I value my heritage's diversity so I can be a link to others...*

S.C. hopes that though her living as a good person, she has been and will continue to be a good Jewish role model for her children and grandchildren, and hopes the next generation will

continue that role:

*As you venture forth in this world as young adults, remember that being the best you can be, a good person, is what is most important. Treating others as you would want to be treated are truly the words to live by. A balance in life is so important... Be honest in the work you do and take pride in it and love and value your family. Be generous and kind.*

B.K. is the son of Holocaust survivors and sees the continuity of his children's Jewishness as the purpose of his parents' survival. He values include community, the role of the Jewish people, and connection to history... along with being a good person, and acknowledges the possibility of his children not marrying another Jewish person:

*Remember, Jews are supposed to stick together and help each other; that's how we've survived for so long. We have a history that we can be very proud of. We brought the idea of one G-d to the world and the concepts that being a good person was more important than anything, including wealth, power, fame, etc. That's also why we continue. Keep the rituals and traditions since they are part of our history and bond us to Jews who have lived thousands of years ago. If you can, try to raise children who will feel Jewish in spirit, if not in identity. They should, at least, know our traditions and history, even if they choose to worship G-d in another way... Always support Israel and make sure it remains safe. ..Remember that your grandparents survived as Jews so you too could be Jewish.*

E.K. focuses on Jewish pride and one's role in this world to make it a better place for all. She values family and keeping the lines of communication open:

*I hope that you will always treasure the "messages" over the years that you got from your parents and grandparents – The pride in being Jewish, which for us has meant to teach others, to struggle against prejudice, to right wrongs, to desire to make an impact on some positive and lasting way on others in this world... To understand the importance of family relationships and preserve those in some form of communication – a card, an e-mail, a phone call...To be a helping hand, a shoulder to lean on, to never turn your back on someone who needs your strength...*

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And what is next? As participants looked to the future and considered what they would

want to include in their “Jewish Bucket List.” [Of course, as I write this, I realize “so much for tiptoeing around the subject of mortality”!] “Visiting Israel”, “visiting other Jewish communities around the world”, “reading Jewish books”, “learning more about God” and “trying to understand how to be both a scientist and a Jew” are included in their lists. They continue to value community and friendship, learning more about what it means to be Jewish, helping to make the world a better place, making time for being Jewish and making new traditions, and making time for family.

The program ended with us singing “The Ner Tamid Song”, each of us realizing that, indeed, “...[E]ach of us has a spark inside, a warm and special glow; It’s a quiet flame that never dies, the Ner Tamid in every Jewish soul... An Eternal Light through history, sometimes bright and sometimes dim... but always there in each of us, shining from within.” We have been through much together – both celebrations and sadness, and our lights have shown bright... and sometimes dimly. Indeed, the lights are there – and how special they are in each and every person.

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### REFLECTIONS: “Tools and Process”

The combination of discussion and writing was very fruitful in helping participants to become comfortable with each other and the topics at hand. Speaking about themselves as Jews, the nature of their relationship with God, their hopes for their family’s Jewish future – these are not everyday topics; yet, the participants were open and comfortable with confronting these topics for themselves and in front of each other.

Beginning with the *Shehecheyanu* was a choice made especially for this group of people,



who know each other, and have come together at various times through the years. [I must admit, it, too, was a *Shehecheyanu* moment for me, as I came to this point in successfully bringing them together for the purposes of this project.] An alternative to this would be reciting the blessing before studying Torah – *la'asok b'divrei Torah* – as we were to study text – Torah, as well as the text of each person's life.

The song texts, the trigger film, the study texts – all offered openings to valuable conversation and reflection. Realizing that not every project leader might be a song leader, certainly the lyrics of the songs could be used by themselves, standing as “poetry” texts.

The sessions were held as a workshop, within a four to four and a half hour time frame. Originally conceived as a four-session program, I reconsidered the challenge of bringing everyone together consistently over four individual sessions, and opted for an extended workshop format. Participants came focused and ready to participate. Meeting around the kitchen/dining room tables in people's homes helped also to create a warm and comfortable atmosphere. As a result of the knowledge gained from the participants' “Jewish Bucket Lists”, future trips and multi-session programs could be planned. I would strongly urge that participants be included in the planning and development of these kinds of programs; their feelings of empowerment, of connection to each other and to the development of the program would be invaluable.

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## PROJECTIONS

Within each section of the program, repeating themes and values became evident. It is interesting to see the progression of these values through the course of the program, and the

degree to which they are evident in the participant's letters to their children... and in their "Jewish Bucket List." Table 1 shows the themes and values as they progressed through the program. The list of consistent values, or key words, across the program includes: community, family, friends, God, history/heritage/Holocaust, identity, Israel, learning, Shabbat/holidays, and *Tikkun Olam* – through giving back and helping others.

Table 1 – Jewish Themes and Values

<b>Jewish Identity</b>	<b>Jewish Journey</b>	<b>Jewish Values</b>	<b>Letter to Children</b>	<b>Jewish Bucket List</b>
God	Family	Family	Pride in being Jewish	Travel: Israel
Community and Friends	Community	Community (incl. temple community)	Family	Travel: Jewish communities in the world
Family	Learning	Traditions	Help others , Give back	Learning: Torah, Talmud, Jewish Philosophy, Kabbalah, Hebrew comprehension, Adult Bar Mitzvah
Culture	Friends	Friends	Community	
Observance of Shabbat, Holidays and Life Cycle Rituals	Israel	Connections/Seeking	Generations, Heritage, and History	
Learning	Holocaust	History/Heritage/Chain	God	Time with Family
Helping others, Doing	Support	Education/Learning	Be a good person; Treat others the way you want to be treated	Time with Friends
Israel		Sharing/Explaining	Learning	Shabbat and holiday celebrations (incl. "make new traditions")
Yiddish		Children	Israel	
Feeling Jewish		Identity	Keeping Jewish rituals and traditions	Volunteer/ <i>Tikkun Olam</i>
Connection to Jewish heritage		Home		
		Shabbat		

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In designing educational programs for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Lippman-Kanter Institute

(Woocher, 2008) proposes three key concepts:

1. Empowering the learner as an active agent in his/her own learning experience.
2. The centrality of relationships and the social experience of learning as dynamic forces that share an evolving identity and build commitment and community in a fragmented world.
3. Jewish learning as “life-centered,” addressing the totality of our aspirations, concerns, and experiences.

The participants in the present study felt empowered as they made Jewish lives for themselves and for their families. They were met along the continuum of their lives and were supported where they were... and were offered Jewish learning and lenses to use as they moved along the way. Their repeated focus on “community” and “friends” points to the power of relationships – both horizontality, among their peers, and vertically, if you will, with the educators and clergy who challenged them to move forward and helped them feel supported “in their homes and along the way.” Their Jewish community was a beacon for them, as they raised Jewish children in the context of the larger non-Jewish communities in which they lived. Their life challenges and celebrations were not experienced alone, and continue to be supported in the caring circle of their friends to this day.

Our challenge as Jewish professionals, as we seek to continue to provide opportunities for Jewish living and learning, is to continue to listen to our congregants and to the people in our communities – they should not be lost along the way. It is so important for us to hear their concerns and their hopes and to actively find out what is truly important to them – and including them in the planning and development of programs. By listening, by providing them with the vocabulary to make their needs known, we can continue to offer them the support they need to meet the new challenges of their mid-life experiences... and beyond.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix #1

Program Packet for

“Our Jewish Journeys:

Reflections & Projections”

# *OUR JEWISH JOURNEYS: REFLECTIONS & PROJECTIONS*

## Information Sheet

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

AGE \_\_\_\_\_

OCCUPATION(S)

\_\_\_\_\_

EDUCATION

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

# *THE JOURNEY SONG*

*Music by Debbie Friedman*

*Lyrics by Debbie Friedman and Tamara Ruth Cohen*

Where does the journey begin? Where will we go?  
Hours pass, the answers might change – As we keep moving along.

Stand at the shores of the sea – Fearful we want to turn back.  
The sea parts, our eyes fill with wonder – As we go along on our journey.

Where does the journey begin? Where will we go?  
Days pass, the answers can change – As we keep moving along.

Stepping into the unknown – Hear the echoes of Miriam's song  
We awaken, retelling our stories – As we go along on our journey.

Where does the journey begin? – Where will we go?  
Years pass, the answers have changed – As we keep moving along.

Cross the sea, it's the time – To sing a song... we are free  
Dance with your timbrels in hand – There's no turning back from this journey.

Where does the journey begin? Where will we go?  
Hours pass, the answers might change... As we keep moving along.  
Days pass, the answers can change... As we keep moving along  
Years pass, the answers have changed... As we keep moving along.



## ***"The Tribe"***

"Barbie and Ken are many things to many people: a canvas to project onto and a lightning rod for social commentary. In the film she/he is a metaphor. Many of us grew up in an assimilated environment and we understand what it means to live in Barbie and Ken's world. They are a way to explore our own experiences and to unpack the complexity of Jewish identity in the twenty-first century." (Shlain and Goldberg, 2003)

- What does it mean to be Jewish today?
  - Going to temple?
  - Supporting Israel?
  - Eating lox and bagels?
  - Knowing what *chutzpah* means?
  - All of the above
  - None of the above
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  
- How would you describe your connection to Judaism?
  - Through Ritual...
  - Through Culture...
  - Through Family...
  - Through Community...

- "Israel" means "to wrestle with God."
  - Consider how your relationship with God has changed [or not] as the years have gone by. How would you describe it?
  
- "They went to Hebrew school... and got their Jewish education from Hollywood."
  - What's the story of your Jewish education?
  
- "When they hear 'Tikkun Olam' they think 'Kumbaya'."
  - What is important to you in terms of helping to make a difference - to repair our world?



# Mapping Your Jewish Journey

(based on Schuster, 2003)

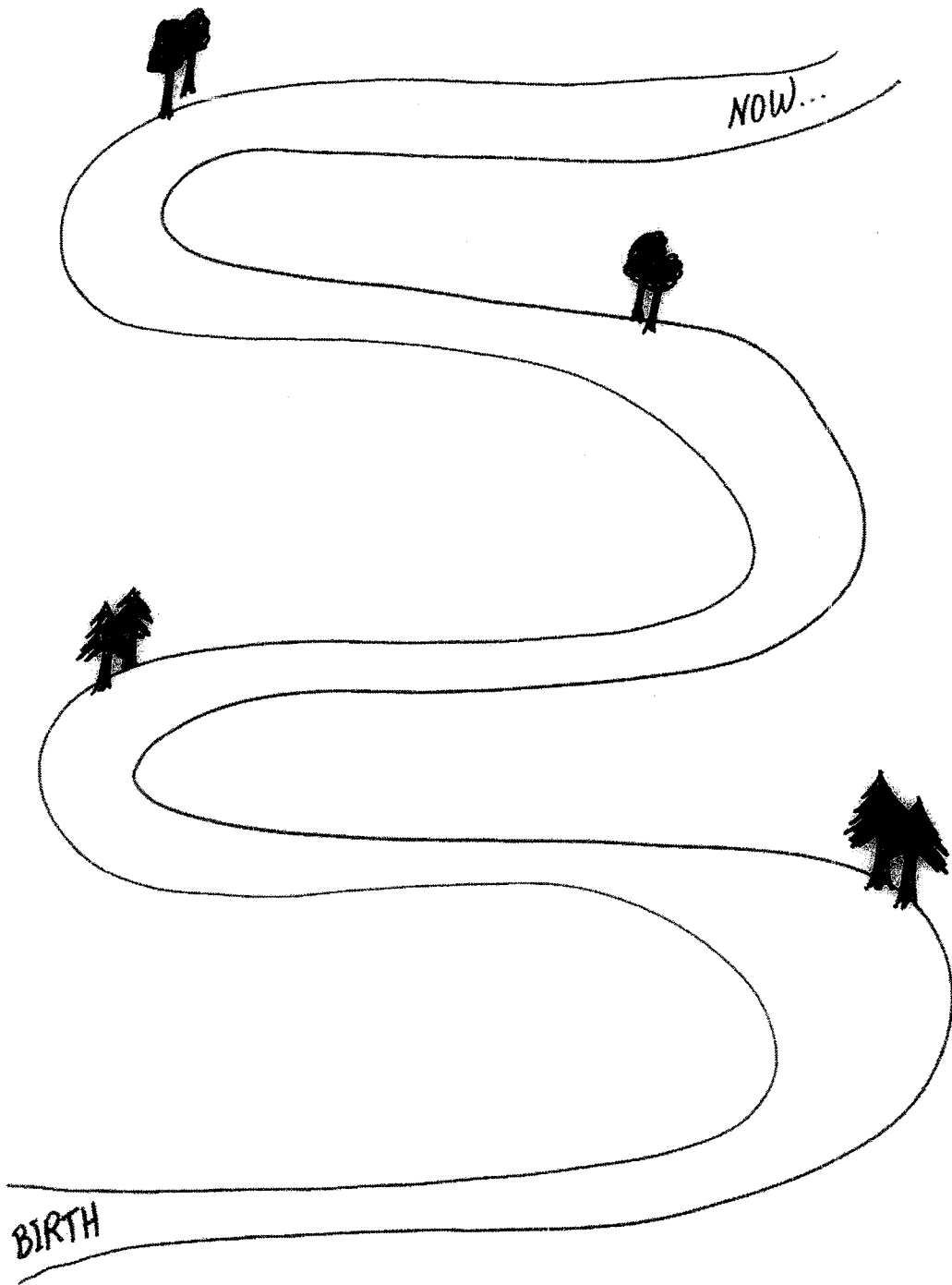
Make notes about yourself and your life using the pre-made Jewish Journey Map or draw your life story in whatever creative way you wish.

Be sure to consider:

- Critical incidents that propel you in certain directions
- Surprises along the way
- People who have provided a powerful spiritual influence over you
- Places important to you

# My Jewish Journey Map

• PEOPLE • PLACES • EVENTS • PEOPLE • PLACES • EVENTS •



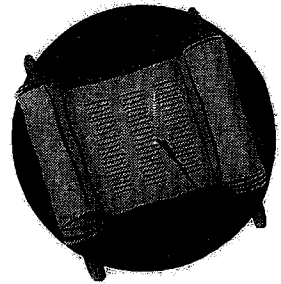
# What does Torah teach about living a Jewish life?

*Shema & V'Ahavta (Deut. 6:4-9)*

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֶל־הַיְנוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד:

*Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad.*

Hear, Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One.



וְאַהֲבַתְּ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל־לִבְּךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל־מְאֹדְךָ:

*V'Ahavta et Adonai Eloheicha, b'col l'vav'chah, u's'chol nafshechah, u'u'chol m'odechah*

You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might.

וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם עַל־לִבְּךָ:

*V'ha'yu ha-devarim ha'eileh asher Anochi m'tzavechah hayom al-levavechah*

And these words which I command you today shall be upon your heart

וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבִנְיֶיךָ וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלִכְתְּךָ בַּדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ:

*V'shinantan l'vanechah v'dibartah bam b'shiv'techah b'vei-techah*

*uv'lechtechah vaderech uv'shoch'bechah uv'kumechah*

And you shall teach them diligently to your children when you sit in your house and when you walk on your way, when you lie down and when you rise up

וְקָשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל־יָדְךָ וְהָיוּ לְטָטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ:

*Uk'shartam l'ot al-yadechah V'hayu l'totafot bein einechah*

And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, they shall be a *totafot* between your eyes

וְכָתַבְתָּם עַל־מְזוֹזֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ:

*Uch'tavtem al-mezuzot beitechah u'vi'shareichah.*

And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

# *What is the following text teaching?*

Pirke Avot 5:25

*"He (Yehuda ben Taima) used to say,  
at five [one should begin the study of] Scriptures;  
at ten, Mishna;  
at thirteen [one becomes obligated in] the commandments;  
at fifteen [the study of] Talmud;  
at eighteen the wedding canopy;  
at twenty to pursue a living;  
at thirty strength;  
at forty understanding;  
at fifty counsel;  
at sixty old age;  
at seventy fullness of years;  
at eighty spiritual strength;  
at ninety bending over;  
at one hundred it is as if he has died and passed on from the world."*

## ***A third text...***

[based on participants' writings from when their children graduated from high school, in response to the question: During the past years in our religious school, what impacted your family's Jewish life and helped you grow Jewishly?]

What values are evident in this text?

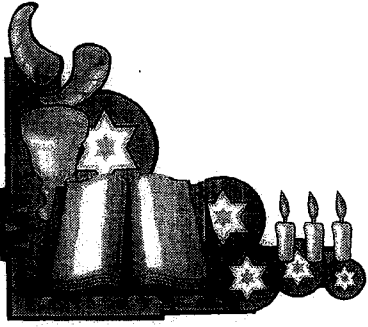
What would you change?

What has stayed the same?

*What do I value?*

*L'Dor Va'Dor: A letter to my children...*





## What do I want to learn more about?

## What Jewish things do I want to do?

[illegible]

# *The Ner Tamid in Every Jewish Soul*

*Enid C. Lader*



Each of us has a spark inside – A warm and special glow.

It's a quiet flame that never dies – The Ner Tamid in every Jewish soul.

And Eternal Light through history – Sometimes bright and sometimes dim...

But, always there in each of us – Shining from within.

It lights our days – the paths we take; it shines from one to another

It illumines our days when we celebrate ... When we thank God for each other...

Each of us has a spark inside...

At the beginning of time God made light, and saw that it was good.

There's a bit of that light in you and me... *Va'yar Elohim et ha'or kee tov!*

Each of us has a spark inside – A warm and special glow.

It's a quiet flame that never dies – The Ner Tamid in every Jewish soul.

And Eternal Light through history – Sometimes bright and sometimes dim...

But, always there in each of us – Shining from within.

## **APPENDIX #2**

**“What do I value? *L’Dor VaDor...*”**

**Respondents’ Letters to their Children**

## *What do I value? L'Dor VaDor: A letter to my children...*

### **From R.F.**

Be a good person. Do what is right for all people, not just a select group.

Do not boast of your accomplishments. Let your actions speak for themselves.

Do not speak ill of any person. Do not judge other people.

Make everyplace you go, everything you touch and every person you meet better because you were there and the presence of God in you shown through you.

Remember, everyone has a bad day – but you do have a choice. “Don’t sweat the small stuff.” Being “perfect” means you make mistakes and have imperfections – that means you are already perfect, so you don’t have to worry about that.

Eat well. Exercise your mind and body and spirit.

Have fun. Life is a fun ride, enjoy it each day.

Don’t expect anything from anyone else to “make you happy.” You are the key to your success and all you do in life.

Dad

### **From J.F.**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_,

As you know, I never hold back on sharing what I value, and at times may annoy you! That’s okay, though, because I know that you hear what I am saying and I hope someday you will respect my convictions. You both approach your Judaism in a different way, but I hope what I’ve modeled for you is what will follow you as you navigate through your adult lives. Life is full of amazing challenges and what I want most is for you to follow your hearts.

What I want most for you to value and to carry to the next generation, our grandchildren, is Tikkun Olam. You already know to treat others the way you wish to be treated, and if you do that, life will maintain its sweetness, even during times of darkness.

I know that deep in your hearts, you are proud to be Jewish. Let that pride carry you and remain strongly based in your heart. That’s the “tree of life” and “all the rest is commentary.”

I love you with all my heart.

Mom

**From M.B.**

I value my family, each of you, more than you know. God has been an important part of my life and I value my journey to establish a relationship with God and to come to an understanding of who God is and what the concept of God means to me.

I value education – the formal and informal education we get through learning and sharing what we've learned.

I value the act of giving – of giving yourself in the best way you can to others.

I value my heritage's diversity, so I can be a link to others.

I value the truth – for it truly does set you free on whatever level you seek it, from yourself or others.

Mom

**From S.C.**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_,

As you venture forth in this world as young adults, remember that being the best you can be, a good person, is what is most important. Treating others as you would want to be treated are truly the words to live by. A balance in life is so important.

Be honest in the work you do and take pride in it and love and value your family. Be generous and kind. Enjoy yourself and have fun and be grateful for all that you do have. Do your best to help others less fortunate than yourselves. Be proud of yourself and remember from all that life hands you, good or bad, there is a lesson and growth and change that you can handle.

I love you all with all my heart.

Mom

**From B.K.**

Remember, Jews are supposed to stick together and help each other; that's how we've survived for so long. We have a history that we can be very proud of. We brought the idea of one G-d to the world and the concepts that being a good person was more important than anything, including wealth, power, fame, etc. That's also why we continue. Keep the rituals and traditions since they are part of our history and bond us to Jews who have lived thousands of years ago. If you can, try to raise children who will feel Jewish in spirit, if not in identity. They should, at least, know our traditions and history, even if they choose to worship G-d in another

way.

Make sure you also do things to help others and make the world a better place.

Always support Israel and make sure it remains safe.

Remember that your grandparents survived as Jews so you too could be Jewish.

Dad

#### **From E.K.**

I hope that you will always treasure the “messages” over the years that you got from your parents and grandparents –

1. The pride in being Jewish, which for us has meant to teach others, to struggle against prejudice, to right wrongs, to desire to make an impact on some positive and lasting way on others in this world.
2. To pursue with passion whatever you are inspired by or interested in, to never stop learning and doing, and to be the best you can be at whatever you choose.
3. To understand the importance of family relationships and preserve those in come form of communication – a card, an e-mail, a phone call...
4. To be a helping hand, a shoulder to lean on, to never turn your back on someone who needs your strength.
5. To be blessed with your own children so you can truly understand the meaning of “unconditional love.”

Mom

#### **From A.C.**

You are just a part in a long journey that started thousands of years ago. You did not choose it – and I did not choose it. But we are still a part of it. And all the parts make the whole.

There is no Jewish individual – there is only a Jewish people, and you are part of it, as important and as insignificant as anyone else.

On the way, remember what you learned, how you felt, and what you would like your own kids to know about you, about us, about how you figured what’s important in life, and about how you want them to be.

Dad

## From L.C.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_,

You children are the best that my life has given me. I hope that you are always true to who you really are – if you don't know, then keep searching... Life is a process. Trust yourselves, and believe in your own good judgments.

Don't be afraid to take risks, to try new things, to fail – life is a process...

Give back! Find some way to do something that means something to you – that way it's not work but pleasure.

I know that you feel Jewish, identify with Jewishness, but perhaps aren't as observant as you once were. It's OK, but be opened to "giving back", to experimenting with your own children or on your own.

Have fun! Experience new things, try new adventures. Love openly and freely. Love yourselves. Like yourselves.

Know that Dad and I have total faith in you and we love you bushels.

Mom

XX00

P.S. Don't do anything that's "TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE."

## From H.L.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_,

Understand and never forget your roots, which set a basis for your future. The autobiography of grandma and grandpa is an example of what they went through that shaped their lives, which then shaped my life, which in turn has shaped your lives. Judaism is the source of our strength that, with the help of community, will sustain you in the future.

Some personal values and I would like to pass on:

- Know what your strengths are, and build on them.
- THINK about what you do and see if there is a better way to do things.
- Care for the environment; it is the only planet that we have.
- Treat others the way you want to be treated, even if you think they don't deserve it.

- Care for your body with the right foods and exercise.
- Care for your spirit with community and spiritual teachers.
- Find yourself, wherever it may lead.

Love, Dad

### From M.L.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_,

I want to take the opportunity to tell you how much I love you and what truly special people you are. I have been thinking about what I value and hold dear (aside from you) and so:

- 1) Treasure your family and your links to Judaism. All of you (yes, each of you) is an important part in helping to keep our people “alive and well” into the future. And treasure your links to the past – whose shoulders you stand upon.
- 2) Treasure your fellow human beings in our world. All are carriers of God’s divine spark and likeness and being. Practice Godliness and goodness with acts of loving kindness.
- 3) Treasure our world and do what you can to keep it safe and healthy.
- 4) Celebrate your Jewish lives with pride.
- 5) Keep Israel in your thoughts and prayers – it’s too important to let only others be interested.
- 6) Value family and friends-and I hope you can find the Jewish community that is as supportive and caring as the one in which we made our home.
- 7) You continue to give us such pleasure and *naches* – thank you for that special gift.

Wishing you all the blessings of God’s goodness and *Shalom* – peace and wholeness and love,

Mom

### From J.P.

I hope you’ll always learn new things, concepts, and ideas; will consider various points of view; and will think critically of issues important yourself, your friends, and your communities (for you are always part of many).

Please help others – because you can. You have amazing gifts. Volunteer – give of



yourself.

Mom and I have given you a view of ways to participate in our various communities – not because we had to, but because it is rewarding personally and makes the world a better place. Do things to sustain the world for yourselves and for the generations to come.

Love, Daddy/Dd

**From M.P.**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_,

We have come together with special friends to talk about our Jewish journey.

When I was asked what is important to give you of value from my own journey, these are my thoughts:

Surround yourself with layers of family, friends, and community.

Share good times and bad with each other.

Help each other to learn and to make life full.

Light candles every Friday night because each flame adds more light to the world and you connect with tradition that has been passed down from generation to generation.

Allow all generations in your circle of family to help you fill your life with joy.

Love, Mom

**From R.A.**

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_,

I want you to have the love and joy that your mother and I share. All else springs from that.

Dad

**From V.A.**

Dearest \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_,

As young parents, we created a Jewish home for you. We lit Shabbat candles, created our own traditions and learned together what it meant to be Jewish.

We widened our circle to include the temple community of friends and mentors that encouraged our learning and were influential in shaping our lives.

You have taken that background to become independent thinkers and leaders. You have taken opportunities to give back to your community and make a difference in other people's lives.

Keep learning, keep giving, keep doing. Now it's time to do it your way. Take my love with you.

Love, Mom

### **APPENDIX #3**

#### **Example of “Word Balloon”**

#### **Using Collective Themes and Values from Table 1**

Children  
 Holocaust Give Traditions Help others Be a good person  
 Travel  
 Family  
 feeling Jewish communities Education Support  
 Treat others the way you want to be treated  
 Holidays  
 Explaining  
 Sharing  
 Connections/Seeking  
 Volunteer community Torah  
 Generations  
 Israel  
 Community  
 Yiddish  
 make new traditions  
 Friends  
 Heritage  
 God world  
 Tikkun Olam  
 Hebrew  
 Keeping Jewish rituals  
 Pride  
 Time with friends  
 Observance  
 Helping  
 Identity  
 Kabbalah  
 temple Home  
 Philosophy  
 Talmud  
 Shabbat  
 Life  
 Learning  
 Rituals ♦ traditions ♦ Culture ♦ Holiday celebrations