



of Tastes Learning

Jewish History

Holidays

Becoming a better person

Personal Expression

Relationships

Israel



Preparing to be the Facilitator

Nervous? Relax. Remember - it's not about you.

- You don't have to dazzle them with your erudition or charisma.
- You don't have to be funny.
- You don't have to know everything.
- You don't have to have an answer for every question. Remember that at the Pesach Seder we start off by asking four questions. Then we read the *Haggadah*. We only answer three of the questions, one of the questions we never answer.

You just have to be personal and sincere. Your job is to:

- Guide them through the sources and facilitate the activities in the student booklet.
- Make sure that the evening keeps moving. Don't let it get bogged down. Don't let anyone monopolize the evening.
- Try to bring in people who appear to be on the outside, without drawing attention to the fact that they are an outsider, or that it is their first time.
- Encourage people to ask questions, and help to make them inclusive so that everyone understands and can participate.

You can do it. So relax and enjoy it. If you are transformed by the workshop, then for sure it will work for everyone else.

The Welcome

Are the Chevre seated comfortably? Can you make eye contact with everyone?

- Find the people who chose to sit on the outside. They're nervous. They're not sure if they really want to be here. They're checking things out. They're not just sitting on the outside; they're emotionally on the outside. They're the most likely to leave.
- Give them a big smile and bring them into the circle. Start a conversation with them.

Everyone seated? Let's get them talking. Ask someone: "Why did you come here tonight?"

Just point and shoot. Ask someone else. Try to bring in the people who are looking distant. It will help warm them up. It should give you a feel of the crowd.

The Chevre are coming from all different places – work, classes, sleeping in their rooms, exercise, coffee shop, etc. Your job now is to bring them together and to help them focus on the program. For this program to work, everyone will need to concentrate. Look serious. Even better, be serious.

Get Personal

You, the facilitator, now have to set the tone by saying something personal about yourself. If you don't lead the way, then they will not fully engage.

1. Talk about why this is an important subject for **you**. Try to be as specific as possible. Offer a moment – positive or challenging – that has affected your spiritual life. It's a great opportunity to deepen the bond you have with the Chevre, and to show new Chevre that you can create an engaging and welcoming space for them to discuss meaningful issues. Most of their professors do not share their personal side.
2. You're giving them permission to bring their hearts and souls (not just their minds) to the activity.
3. Don't (!) talk too long. Three minutes is plenty. Remember, it's not about you. It's about them. You're just the catalyst.



Timing and the Components of the Session

The program is designed to last around an hour, although it could go longer if you extend the conversation. The program consists of the readings, some eating, some one-on-one conversations (“chevruta”) and a small creative writing piece. All of the elements could be extended if you wish.

After the Session

One of the most important parts of these workshops is what you do *afterwards*. How are you going to capitalize on the success of the workshops? How can you involve these Chevre in future activities? How can you build on their interest and energy? Even before the session starts, invest some time in thinking about what will happen afterwards. Here are some ideas of how to continue the connection with the Chevre who participate.

Ideas for Follow-Up

- a. Invite all those who participate to have coffee with you and few chevre in the week following the workshop. Call them up and make a date to talk about their interests and how this workshop affected them.
- b. Encourage the Chevre to come to another, similar workshop that is run with the same format.
- c. Invite other religious leaders in the community to join you for similar activities in the future. They make good partners for future events.
- d. Think with the Livnot U'Lehibanot staff about planning a post-semester retreat based on similar activities, later in the year.
- e. Encourage the Chevre who participated this time to bring a friend to the next workshop, and to help organize and publicize.
- f. Involve your Jewish student board, and lay board, in activities of this type. Brainstorm ways to integrate pieces of these sessions to other events (personal *chevruta* at a Friday night dinner or other events, etc.)

From “A Spiritual Check- up” By Aryeh Ben David. aryehbd@netvision.net.il
Can be found at <http://www.hillel.org/jewish/textstudies/workshops/checkups.htm>



A Jewish Approach to Art

Intro

"Faith" in Judaism (Hebrew: "emunah") is not just belief in God. It can also be belief in yourself, in your ideas, in your creativity. In fact, the Jewish tradition says that your own creations can be an *improvement* on divine creation! (Surprise!)

Source #1

"...As long as there is one sketch hidden in the depth of the soul which is missing and was not realized, there is still an obligation on the artist to express it...(this is under the limitation that...) only those treasures, which when opened perfume the air of reality, are good to be opened..."

[Rav Kook: "Olat Re'iyah", vol. 2, pp. 3-4]

Comment: In this way, Rav Kook explains the connection between the Hebrew words for artist ("oman") and faith ("emunah"): An artist's work in reality is faithful to the image held virtually in the artist's mind.

Questions:

*According to Rav Kook, art is not a privilege, but an obligation. What do you think? How would you define art?

*Who's to decide what art "perfumes" and what art "stinks?" Think of an example of when you've felt in the presence of perfumed-art and smelly-art.

*Can a person make "smelly-art" into "perfumed-art"? How?

Source #2

The worldview of ancient Greece revived in Renaissance Europe dominated Western art until the rise of modernism at the beginning of the 20th century.

Here, art was defined as "mimesis," the imitation of nature. The Hellenistic worldview is reflected in European languages: "art" in English and French, "arte" in Spanish, "Kunst" in German and Dutch, "iskustvo" in Russian, etc. These words are all related to artificial, artifact, imitation, and phony. In contrast, the Hebrew word for artist is spelled with the same letters (AMN) as the word "amen" which means "truth." Its feminine form is "emunah," faith, and as a verb "I'amen" means to nurture and educate. These two definitions of art are not only different from one another; they present opposite viewpoints.

This Jewish path begins with movement, a journey away from the safely familiar towards freedom to experience new ways of seeing. The biblical story of the Jewish people begins: "God said to Abram: ["Lech-Lecha"]'Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.'" This passage can also be read as: "Walk with your authentic self away from all the familiar and comfortable places that limit vision to a place where you can freely see." Here, the dynamic Hebraic mindset is established as new ways of seeing emerge from the integration of our journey through geographical space with our inner quest for spiritual significance. Movement through the psychological realms of intention, thought, and emotion coupled with action in the physical realm leads to fresh visions.

[Professor M. Alexenberg: "Jewish Consciousness and Art of the Digital Age", 2004]

Questions:

*According to Professor Alexenberg, Judaism encourages movement, experimentation, new visions. Have you ever felt this way, or do you think that Judaism is sometimes antiquated and stationary? Give examples of both how Judaism encourages movement, experimentation, new visions, and how Judaism is sometimes antiquated and stationary.

* As the personal "sculptor" of your life, how would you design the role and shape of your own personal Judaism?

Source #3

Once the wicked Roman ruler Tinius Rufus asked Rabbi Akiva: "Whose deeds are more perfect, God's or humans'?" Rabbi Akiva answered: "Man's."

He responded: "Can humans make heaven and earth?" Rabbi Akiva answered: "Don't pick an example that is beyond a human's ability to create; take an example that relates more directly to humans."

Rabbi Akiva brought him some stalks of wheat and some flour and noted that they are products of God's doing, whereas flour is the product of humans. Rabbi Akiva asked: "Is not the flour more perfect than the stalks of wheat?" [Midrash Tanhuma, Tazria]

Questions:

*With whom do you side, Tinius Rufus or Rabbi Akiva? Why?

* In any given day in your life, how do you help to perfect creation? Can you think of examples that do not involve a physical act?



The Parent-Child Relationship

Intro:

Yehuda Amichai (1924 – 2000) was an Israeli poet. Amichai is considered by many to be the greatest modern Israeli poet, and was one of the first to write in colloquial Hebrew.

His writings – as a secular poet - are characterized by gentle irony, and the pain of damaged love. It was a love for people, for the Torah and Eretz Yisrael, most of all it was a love for the city of Jerusalem.

In the Torah, there are two separate versions of the Ten Commandments. The first version says: "Observe the Shabbat." The second version says: "Remember the Shabbat." According to tradition, God – when verbally giving the Ten Commandments to the Jewish People at Mt. Sinai – said both words simultaneously in one utterance.

Source #1

He gave me the Ten Commandments not in hunger, nor in anger, not in fire and not in clouds, but in tenderness and love, and he added hugs and good words and he added "please" and he sang "Remember" and "Observe" in one tune, and begged and quietly cried between one commandment and another, Don't Take the Name of God in Vain, Don't Take, in Vain, please, don't judge falsely against your neighbor.

And he hugged me tightly and whispered into my ear Don't Steal, Don't Commit Adultery, Don't Murder, and he put the open palms of his hands on my head during the Yom Kippur blessing.

Honor, Love, So that you might live many days on the face of the earth.

And my father's voice was white as the hair on his head. Afterwards, he turned his face towards me for the last time like on the day he died in my arms and he said:

I want to add two more to the Ten Commandments:

The Eleventh Commandment: Don't Change.

And the Twelfth Commandment: Change, Change.

Thus did my father speak and turned from me and went away and disappeared in his strange distances.

[Yehudah Amichai]

Questions:

* What does the father tell you in his words "Don't change. Change, change"? * *What would you keep the same and what would you change?

* What parallels do you find between "G-d-man" relationships and "parent-child" relationships?



Getting Mad

This source sheet is appropriate for either for a hike day or for a normal get-together, but not for Shabbat or a community service day.

Intro:

Many people feel strongly about anger. Some think people should not get angry – it's a total loss of self-control that can be dangerous. And others think it's a very healthy thing to get angry at times, and not to repress valid feelings and emotions. Read the sources and discuss: where do you stand?

Don't Get Mad!

Source #1

Anger is a destructive emotion. The key to ridding ourselves of anger may lie in exercise. Working out can help you transform your angry energy in to peaceful, productive energy. I used to have a bunch of pent-up energy that would often turn into negativity (like while driving or arguing with a co-worker). My life has been better in every way since I started making exercise a priority, and when I use my energy towards working out, I feel better physically and emotionally. [Martha Edwards: "Don't Get Angry, Get Active"]

Question:

*In Chassidic and Kabbalistic teachings it mentions that there are two parts to our soul: a physical part (Nefesh Behemit) and a divine part (Nefesh Elokit). When in life do you feel that the physical part of your soul is leading and when the spiritual?

* How do you think you would cope with anger if you tried to have the other part of your soul lead than what you are used to?

Source #2

Rav Ada Bar-Ahava was asked by his students: "To what do you attribute your long life?" He told them: "I have never been strict at home." [Talmud, Taanit 20, 2]

Source #3

Rabbi Shimon said: The true characteristic of a righteous person is "hard to get mad" and "easy to please." This is the most important character trait of all. And this is supported by the story of Noah ("Noah" in English: "at ease"). The verse says: "These are the generations of Noah." At ease in his thoughts, at ease in his speech, at ease in his behavior. [Zohar Hadash, Noah 21]

Questions (to Sources #2 and #3):

* What do you think is the connection between not being strict and a long life?

*Where, in your everyday life, do you think you need to be more strict and where do you think you need to be more at ease?

Source #4

How do we know if we should become close to a person or not? We can find out by how that person gets angry. [Zohar Tetzaveh 182, 1]

Question:

How do you choose your friends?

Get Mad!

Source #1

Then Moses became very angry and said to Hashem: "Do not regard their offering! I have not taken a single donkey from them, nor have I done harm to any of them." [Numbers 16:15]

Question:

Moses is "taking a stand" on the issue that G-d wanted to do away with Korach and his followers (rebels in the Israelite camp). Does anger have to mix with "taking a stand"?

*When have you encountered a circumstance where this was the appropriate reaction?



Source #2

AUGUST 21, 1947, JERUSALEM — Britain's decision to ship the Exodus refugees back to Germany was received with great anger today by the Jewish community, and this could result in renewed violence. No Jew in Palestine will accept that immigration must be limited to 1,500 Jews monthly. Already the Haganah, the Jewish defense organization which directs illegal immigration, has replied that the job of bringing the remnants of European Jewry to Palestine will continue regardless of British interference. [Palestine Post]

Question:

- * What in the world would make you so mad that you would get up out of your couch and do something about it?
- * Is there something like this that is happening in the world right now?
- * What's stopping you?



Israel: Refuge or Homeland?

Intro:

Read the following sources. What feeling do you get after you read them all? Is there indeed a great rift between the historical and "religious" sources? Should the Jews have gone ahead and settled in Africa? Should we have compromised in order to prevent a Holocaust? Or would it have been incredulous to choose any land except Israel? After reading them all, do these sources put Zionism in a different light for you?

Source #1:

After the Kishinev Pogroms at the turn of the 20th century, many felt the Jews needed a place of refuge – quickly. Theodor Herzl sought support; Great Britain first suggested part of Sinai, then East Africa. "The Uganda Program" was to be a temporary refuge for Jews in Russia in immediate danger. A delegation was sent to inspect the area, and found a dangerous land filled with lions and other creatures. Moreover it was populated by a large number of Maasai who did not seem at all amenable to an influx of Europeans. After the rejection of the Uganda scheme on the grounds of impracticability by the British, Zionist leader Israel Zangwill turned his attention to settlement in Canada and Australia. But opposition from local residents led him to abandon the scheme. Expeditions were sent to Mesopotamia (Iraq), Cyrenaica (Libya) and Angola (Africa), but little came of these expeditions.

Source #2

One project that had some concrete success was "The Galveston Plan" which settled Jews in the American Southwest, particularly in Texas. Almost 10,000 Jews arrived in that area between 1907-1914. Other territorialist attempts, meant as counterweights to Zionism, were undertaken in the Soviet Union. One was in the Ukraine and the Crimea in the early 1920's and obliterated when the Nazis invaded. The second was in Birobidjan, where a "Jewish Autonomous Region" was proclaimed in 1934. This venture also failed. In 1935, in response to the Nazi accession to power in Germany, Isaac Nachman Steinberg established the Freeland League in the United States. This organization attempted, unsuccessfully, to pursue Jewish autonomy by obtaining a large piece of territory in sparsely populated areas in Ecuador, Australia, or Surinam.

Source #3

In Warsaw in 1891, Zionist Jews met to discuss various options for Jewish settlement. At the meeting, a representative of Baron Hirsch, a wealthy German Jew, advanced a plan to create an autonomous Jewish state in Argentina, with the help of the local government. After he spoke for three and a half hours, an old, stooped figure arose. He was Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever, the Zionist rabbi of Biyalistok. He said: "May the Lord bless Baron Hirsch for his interest and endeavors and grant him long life and success. But we are going only to the Land of Israel." And that statement ended the meeting.

Source #4

Next year in Jerusalem. [Passover Haggadah, Yom Kippur Mahzor]

May our eyes see Your return to Jerusalem in mercy. [Siddur]

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, and there we wept when we remembered Zion...How could we sing the song of God on an alien land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill, May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy. [Psalm 137]

Now that you have "tasted" these flavors of Zionism and modern Jewish history, go over the questions again together and discuss.



No More Oil to Burn: Are American Jews Dying Out?

Source #1

In the most comprehensive study to date of intermarried couples, sociologist Bruce Phillips found that only 14% of intermarried couples considered their homes "Jewish." Close to 90% of the children of intermarriages will themselves marry non-Jews. Jewish identity is declining sharply. Of 5.6 million Jews, 2 million American Jews live in households identified as non-Jewish. Intermarriage rates are increasing dramatically. Since 1985, 52% of Jews who married have done so outside the faith. 54% of all American Jewish children under the age of 18 are being raised as non-Jews or with no religion. [Jewish Media Resources, 2000]

Questions:

- * Is quality or quantity or both important? Should we care about numbers at all?
- *Remember the saying "America, love it or leave it!"? Is it okay for us to feel: "Judaism, love it or leave it!"? After all, it's a free world. Let people choose! This will only strengthen Judaism. Agree or disagree? – Discuss.

Source #2

75 percent of American Jews are not affiliated with any synagogue or Jewish organization, and are organizationally separated from Israel. This situation is even more evident among students. About 90 percent of Jewish youth in the U.S. attend university, where Jewish identification is still lower. It should therefore come as no surprise that less than 20 percent of all American Jews have ever visited Israel.

The root of the problem, in the opinion of experts, lies in the weakening of Jewish identity, accompanied by the accelerated process of integration characteristic of Western society in general and American society in particular. The success of a Jew today is measured by his economic standing and by the degree of his integration into the society in which he lives. The process of integration in American society is very intensive, and the rate of assimilation is consequently the highest. Diaspora Jewry today is characterized primarily by material success, and less by its historic heritage. [Shimon Peres, 1994]

Questions:

- *Is the success of the American Jew today really measured by economic standing and societal integration?
- *Is this representative of how you define your own Jewish "success"?
- *Do you consider yourself a "successful American Jew?"

Source #3

The Maccabees of those days could not have won the battle alone. In the conflict, many Hellenized Jews decided to stand by their fellow Jews rather than by the Greeks. A coalition won the victory of Hanukkah - the traditionalists united with acculturating Jews who decided to come down on the Jewish side...

Properly done, acculturation (modernizing) is an alternative to assimilation. Since no one group can offer all the answers for all the life situations or cope with all the options in society, it becomes very important to form coalitions to cover the field, to correct one another, to give Jewry the strength of variety and numbers.

A further lesson Hanukkah (as Purim) is not to write off assimilating Jews. In a showdown (as in 1967 and 1973), many more Jews will be with the cause of Jewish survival than appears on the surface. A coalition of traditional, acculturating, and assimilating Jews pulled off the Maccabee miracle. What is needed is a coalition and symbiosis of traditional Jews, modernizing Jews, and those assimilating Jews who can still be reached.

Pessimists and assimilationists have more than once informed Jews that there is no more oil left to burn. As long as Hanukkah is studied and remembered, Jews will not surrender to the night. The proper response, as Hanukkah teaches, is not to curse the darkness but to light a candle.

[Rabbi Yitz Greenberg: "The Jewish Way," 1988]

Question:

- *Rabbi Greenberg wants a coalition of diverse kinds of Jews to ensure Jewish survival. Is he dreaming, or can it happen? Are you an optimist or a pessimist?
- *If you think it can happen, then what is the small part that you can do to make this dream come true?



Chosen People

Intro:

Were the Jews chosen, or did they choose? Does "chosen" necessarily mean "better?" Can more than one nation be chosen? Is it possible that *all* humans are chosen in some way? These are important questions that we should all ask ourselves, especially after reading the following sources. How do *you* feel about the whole "Chosen People" issue?

Source #1

If the Nazis would only realize how Jewish their notion of Aryan superiority was, they would drop it immediately. [George Bernard Shaw, 1930's]
"The Zionists have come forward with the theory of the Chosen People, an absurd ideology. That is religious racism." [Yakov Malik, Soviet ambassador to the UN, 1973]

Source #2

Does Judaism believe that chosenness endows Jews with special rights in the way racist ideologies endow those born into the "right race"? Not at all. The most famous verse in the Bible on the subject of chosenness says the precise opposite: "You alone have I singled out of all the families of the earth. That is why I call you to account for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). Chosenness is so unconnected to any notion of race that Jews believe that the Messiah himself will descend from Ruth, a non-Jewish woman who converted to Judaism. [Joseph Telushkin: "Jewish Literacy," 1991]

Source #3

All human beings are God's people, as it says that Adam and Eve were created in the image of God. Further, the great prophet Malachi said, "Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us?" (Malachi 2:10) In fact, the Talmud also states that Adam was created from the dust of all four corners of the earth (so to speak) so that no one nation could claim the distinction of being better.
Historically, however, the world slipped away from its relationship with God, and eventually the entire world was idolaters. Abraham re-discovered the idea of one God, and chose to accept the challenge to change the world through an understanding of monotheism and morality. Through his dedication and willingness to give up everything for God, he was chosen - and his descendants after him - to become the teachers of morality. In other words, Abraham chose God, and thus God chose Abraham. [Rabbi Shraga Simmons: "Ask the Rabbi"]

Source #4

All the good characteristics were not given to one place, to one person, to one nation, to one generation, or to one world; but the good characteristics were scattered.
Every nation has special characteristics, some have better characteristics than Israel, but Israel has the potential to unify all the characteristics of all the nations.
All of humanity is worthy of being unified into one family, and then all the fighting and evil characteristics that emanate from the division of nations and their borders will cease. But the world still needs some softening, and humanity needs to get bettered by rich colors that are unique to each nation. ...and then there will be no need for division, and all the nations will be one unit. [Rav Kook: "Orot"]

Source #5

When God revealed Himself to give the Torah, He revealed Himself not only to the Children of Israel but to all other nations as well.
There was not a single nation among the nations to whom God did not go and ask whether it would be willing to accept the Torah. At long last He came to Israel and asked them: 'Will you accept the Torah?' They said, 'We will do and we will obey.'
[Sifri Devarim 343]

Let's talk!



Shmittah: The Sabbatical Year

Intro:

This year (5768, which just began on Rosh Hashanah) is a Sabbatical Year in the Land of Israel. Many people think it is simply a technical farming rule: don't till the land. But the Torah speaks of Shmittah as a much broader and deeper idea. Read the following sources. Even though Shmittah applies only to Eretz Yisrael, do you find any relevance in it for your life?

Source #1: Equality

The emphasis here is clear: helping your fellow person. And not just as generic loving kindness, one person helping a friend. But rather from the social angle, so that there will be a kind of equality. There is no giver, there is no taker, there is no rich, there is no poor. The earth and the fruit are totally ownerless. Employer and employee are disconnected. There is a social Tikkun (repair, fixing)...as if all return to square one and start anew. [Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein: The Ideological Foundations of Shmittah]

Source #2: Social and Religious

There are two aspects of the Mitzvah of Shmittah: the "social" aspect and the "religious" aspect, and davka (necessarily) in that order. Shmittah is first and foremost a societal-socialistic order, meant to solve Jewish and Universal social imbalance. If only for a year, we try to annul any personal ownership on the national level. The religious aspect has its origins in the Torah description of the Sabbatical Year as "God's Shabbat." There is no justification and no authority to annul personal ownership during this year, except for the claim that "The earth is Mine" (Vayikra 25, 23). In other words, the land does not belong to us, but rather to God, and during this seventh year we return ownership to the true owner of the land...

[Amnon Shapira: The Ideological Foundations of the Shmittah Debate]

Source #3: Learning Through The Body

How does one educate the body? Since the days of antiquity, Western civilization has mistakenly believed that it is possible to convince the body by reasoning with it, by telling it what it may and may not do. And so it hoped in vain for effective ethical conduct through education. At its best, Western civilization was talking to the mind and never really reached the body. The body is not accessible to logical reasoning. One can only teach it by making it do things. One does not learn to swim by reading books on swimming technique, nor does one become a painter by merely contemplating the styles of different schools. One learns to swim by swimming, to paint by painting, to act by acting. One learns how to do anything by doing it. This applies nowhere more strictly than in the realm of ethical action.

[Essential Essays on Judaism, Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits, ed. David Hazony, p.22]

Source #4: Honey from Desolation

No grower of bees
would put his
beehives here.
But people
sometimes make honey from desolation
sweeter than anything.

[Yehuda Amichai, Israeli Poet]

Group discussion