

Itinerary for Change

Limud: Study and
Learning in the
Synagogue

Introduction



UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK



Synagogue2000

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The *Limud* Curriculum: Learning in the Synagogue: Introduction

OVERVIEW

A GLANCE AHEAD: WHAT THIS CURRICULUM GIVES YOU

This curriculum considers the role of Jewish learning in the sacred community that you have been creating since you began your work in S2K. As you go through it, no matter what specific topic you are on, you should remember to ask questions such as the following:

- How can the synagogue as sacred community be a community of learning as well?
- How should synagogue education differ from Jewish education that is offered in a university Judaica department, or in a community college of Jewish Studies?
- How should education be reconceptualized for the synagogue?
- How can concern for the sacred be evident throughout your synagogue school?
- How would Jewish education impart values that underscore the synagogue's sacred status?

Please note that education, in general, and Jewish education, in particular, are assumed here to be more than what children learn in classrooms. Exactly what they are is part of what you will be thinking through. So a second set of questions includes things like:

- How would you know good education if you saw it?
- What would count as success for your synagogue community?

Our purpose here is not to make everyone an educator; nor can your conversations as a Synagogue 2000 team take the place of discussions by education committees that you already have in place. But lay members of the congregation play a legitimate and necessary role in determining the direction of education initiatives. This curriculum outfits you to play that role. It gives you the concepts and vocabulary you need, if you are to think intelligently about what Jewish learning is, why it is important, what its goals ought to be, and how to make the synagogue a place where learning happens everywhere. The curriculum enables you to take moral responsibility for the Jewish education in your congregation.

HOW TO WORK WITH THIS CURRICULUM

1. The curriculum is designed to promote discussion. It therefore makes its case in strong terms. At the very beginning, for example, we could have allotted considerable space to synagogue success stories. Instead, we opted to emphasize what is not working the way it should. That decision arose from the realization that institutions, like individuals, tend to be somewhat “defended” against acknowledging harsh truths. We would rather over-emphasize a critique, and have you say, “But our educational system is better than that,” than overstate success, and have you conclude automatically, “Good, we are succeeding; let’s just move on.”
2. Each unit contains more than enough material for two to three meetings; thus this curriculum is expected to last eight to ten months for your team.
3. Team meetings follow the same format as you have been following – check in, ritual, study, etc.
4. Every meeting includes two parts:
 - (1) Material on educational theory as viewed from the outside: insights from secular disciplines, interspersed with analysis of relevant Jewish texts;
 - (2) “*From the Tradition*” - מְסֹרֶה, educational theory as viewed from the inside: what Jewish tradition *alone* has said on the subject of learning over the last 2,000 years. The texts of “*From the Tradition*” - מְסֹרֶה are paired with enough historical background for you to understand them in context, building up your own Jewish education even as you study ways to build up the education of others. In all, you will be educating yourself on education, learning about learning.

Also, you have been provided with a “Map of Rabbinic Judaism.” Please use this map throughout your studies to help you gain a historical frame of reference.

5. This curriculum has far too much material for any single team to do within the time span of your meetings together.
 - You do not need to read all of every unit with equal care, but please do not skip any unit in its entirety -- the units build on one another.
 - Please try to master each *concept* as it arises, but you do not need to spend equal time on them all.
 - Choose judiciously from among the readings and

exercises in each unit. Do what fits your synagogue and your team best, and you will be amazed at what you learn about yourself and what you learn about making your synagogue into a place of enhanced Jewish learning for all ages.

- Be *very selective* about what you try to cover for each meeting, remembering that team members may pursue the rest of the text study independently.
- Speak regularly with your consultant. The consultant is there to help you make decisions on what to cover carefully and what to skim within each unit.

6. Kinds of Material: Each unit, divided into meetings, comes with:

- a running narrative on various topics
- illustrative stories entitled *Ma'aseh Shehayah*, a traditional term used to introduce just such accounts (literally, “an event that occurred”)
- activities, surrounded by a grey box
- leading questions to guide conversation
- preparatory readings from various sources
- enrichment material for the meeting facilitator to read in advance of the meeting.

Here is how to approach each of the above:

- **Running Narrative:** Part of this you will read at home, and part of this you will read as a group, in order that everyone grow together in acquiring a common set of educational concepts. This is the glue that holds the discrete parts of every unit together. You may not have time to discuss it all when you meet, so choose some for team conversation.
- **Illustrative Stories (*Ma'aseh Shehayah*):** These illustrate theories, and generally lead to suggested conversations. Some will be read at home, some together in the meetings. Again, as with the running narrative, you will not have time to discuss them all at meetings. Choose selectively.
- **Activities:** Activities are suggested exercises that shed light on the various topics of the units as they apply to you, your team, and your congregation. Activities are surrounded by a grey box.
- **Leading Questions:** The running narrative, stories and exercises are supplied with leading questions to focus discussion. Choose just one or two of the questions for

group conversation.

- **Preparatory Readings:** Most readings will be referenced in meetings. Some have exercises based on them. If you decide to include team conversations based on them, they will have to be read in advance by all team members.
- **Enrichment Material:** These are for the meeting facilitator to read. The Enrichment Material includes extra text as well as some extra activities the facilitator may want to incorporate in the meeting. They should be read after the preparatory readings, as some activities included are based on preparatory readings.

Please know that at each meeting, someone in the group should take a few moments to summarize the readings that have been prepared in advance of the discussions or activities that accompany them.

7. Know your limitations. Education is a highly specialized field. Jewish education is its own sub-specialty. The purpose of this curriculum is not to transform you into a professional educator. It is assumed that synagogues with Jewish educators will take special counsel with them as they proceed. They will often have advanced insights to share with the group. This curriculum is designed to help you think through Jewish education in novel and exciting ways. The key to success is in this last sentence, “...*think through Jewish education in novel and exciting ways.*”

THE CURRICULAR PLAN

You are receiving four introductory units in this packet. These units introduce broad and exciting thinking about Jewish education in general. Yet to follow is a second set of units on three specific areas of congregational education: family education, adult study, and congregational schools. Depending on your synagogue, you may focus on all, some, or just one of these additional units.

The introductory units you have here look at:

1. Education in General

The first unit, “What is Education?” focuses on educational challenges facing us, and new ways of thinking about education in general. Since conversations about synagogue education sometimes seem to circle round and round, going over old ground but getting nowhere, we begin by asking you to *think differently*. Unit One, then introduces our topic by:

- presenting the challenge facing synagogue education
- introducing new vocabulary and concepts of learning such as:
 - * Education as metaphor
 - * Synagogue “uncommon knowledge”
 - * Curriculum as “tradition”

2. Education that is Jewish

In Unit Two, “What is Jewish Education?” you will look specifically at Jewish education. Since Judaism is so intertwined with tradition and traditional values, we begin with:

- education and tradition
- tradition and text
- tradition as adopted and adapted

We will look specifically at the times in life when tradition is best mastered, a conversation that will lead to the idea of nodal learning points.

3. Learning as an Individual

In Unit Three, “How Do We Learn?” we move to the question of how learning happens on an individual level, that is, *how individuals learn*. We will look both at secular learning theory in general, and at the traditional Jewish way of learning. That will lead us to think about:

- the centrality of learning in Jewish culture
- different kinds of learners
- learning “disabilities”
- learning as critical thinking

4. Learning in Community

In Unit Four, “Think Systems Within Systems Within Systems” we look at how learning happens in a synagogue specifically, that is, *the synagogue as a learning system*. We will emphasize:

- the synagogue as a system
- different kinds of learning
 - (a) “off-line” learning
 - (b) “game” and “spectacle”
 - (c) “parallelism” and “sequencing”

You will also look at your own synagogue as a learning system, in preparation for moving into your next piece of the *Limud* curriculum (family education, adult study, and congregational schools). We call that survey a “thermal scan” of your own synagogue’s learning system

We hope you find this curriculum enriching and that it encourages your team to look at your synagogue's education system in both a practical and thoughtful way.

Unit One

What is Education?

אל תקרא בניך אלה בניך
Al Tikrei [banayikh] ela [bonayikh]
("Read it not as ['your children'] but as ['your builders']")
Talmud B'rakhot 64a

"We make progress not by arguing better, but by speaking differently"

Philosopher Richard Rorty

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this unit is to help you begin thinking about how the congregants in your synagogue are educated. It will address the real challenges that exist in any educational system and ask that you think differently about the way education is considered. It will help you re-imagine what the curriculum is or could be for all the learners in your congregation, not just the young students. This unit includes some ways to look at Judaism's understanding of the importance of education and will help you place yourself within the context of the continuing chain of tradition of Judaism.

This unit asks you to *examine* your congregation's system closely, you will not recreate the educational system currently in place. The exercises and readings are here to help you keep track of the large picture: what the goal is of education in your synagogue and how you would like to see that goal realized inside its walls.

As with the other units of this curriculum there is more material than can be covered in two meetings. Please select those pieces that work best for your team and congregation, or spread this unit out over three meetings.

Unit One: What is Education? Meeting One

READ AND DISCUSS

THE CHALLENGE FACING SYNAGOGUE EDUCATION

That synagogue education is not all we want it to be is no surprise to anyone. Despite our best efforts and millions of dollars of investment, the odds are that if you ask members of your team to rate the synagogue education they received, you will find relatively low levels of satisfaction. But the issues of Jewish education run deeper than fixing up a synagogue school. Nowadays it is pretty clear that we want to grow Jewishly as a family. Education is a life-long enterprise. So another consideration is the education you receive as adults. A starting point for your work together is to compare your own experience of Jewish education with the experience of others on your team; and then begin thinking through what your team's goals ought to be. You can do that by the simple exercise of filling out a Jewish Education Autobiography.

ACTIVITY

NAMING OUR PRIORITIES BY LOOKING AT OURSELVES: JEWISH EDUCATION AUTOBIOGRAPHY

On the following pages, you will find a Jewish Education Autobiography.

- Fill out the form individually.
- Meet together to discuss what you found.
- Make a tentative list of priorities. The list will change as you go through your work together, but for now, divide the various Jewish Educational Challenges into two lists:
 1. Areas where you are reasonably satisfied for now, and can put on hold until later
 2. Areas that you might have to look at seriously
- After your list is complete, bring a copy to each meeting so it can serve as a reminder during your learning together.

Part 1: If you grew up as a Jew with some Jewish education...

1:1. If you grew up Jewish and had some Jewish education, where did it take place (check as many as are relevant)?

- a. Synagogue school
- b. Day School
- c. Home
- d. Elsewhere in the synagogue (attending services, junior congregation, youth group)
- e. Elsewhere (e.g. camp)

1:2. List each one you checked in order of importance.

1:3. Why does your list look the way it does? If, for example, you listed synagogue highest and home lowest, why did you do it that way?

1:4. What did you not learn but wish you had?

- a. In synagogue school?

- b. At home?

- c. Elsewhere (e.g. camp)¹

¹ We omit "Day school" here, since we assume that even if you have a synagogue day school, it is probably independent of your synagogue and not included in your team's mandate for discussion.

Part 2: If you did not grow up Jewish but received religious education in another religion...

2:1. If you did not grow up Jewish but had some religious education in another religion, where did it take place (check as many as are relevant)?

- a. Church school
- b. Day School
- c. Home
- d. Elsewhere in church (attending worship, Youth group)
- e. Elsewhere (e.g. camp)

2:2. List each one you checked in order of importance.

2:3. Why does your list look the way it does? If, for example, you listed church highest and home lowest, why did you do it that way?

2:4. What did you not learn but wish you had?

- a. In church school?

- b. At home?

- c. Elsewhere (e.g. camp)?²

² We omit "Day school" here, since we assume that even if you have a church day school, it is probably independent of your church and not included in your team's mandate for discussion.

Part 3: If you are a congregant with children...

3:1: If your children are grown but went through your synagogue's educational system,

3:1:a. What satisfies you about their religious school education?

3:1:b. What troubles you about their religious school education?

3:2 If you currently have children in your synagogue's educational system,

3:2:a. If they are in the religious school, what satisfies you about their religious school education?

3:2:b. If they are in the religious school, what troubles you about their religious school education?

3:2:c. If they are in some other form of education connected to the synagogue (youth group, camp, day schools), what satisfies you about their Jewish education there?

3:2:d. If they are in some other form of education connected to the synagogue (youth group, camp, day school), what troubles you about their Jewish education there?

Part 4: Thinking about yourself, now, whether you do or do not have children...

4:1. What satisfies you about the Jewish education you are currently receiving in formal synagogue classes?

4:2. What troubles you about the Jewish education you are currently receiving in formal synagogue classes?

4:3. What informal Jewish education have you actually had in the synagogue, just by being there?

a. In services?

b. Synagogue library?

c. Special events (e.g. lecture series)?

d. Other (museum, display cases in hall, the general ambiance)?

4:4. Look back at the answers to 4:3:a-d. In your view, which areas of education fall short of what they ought to be?

FROM THE TRADITION מְסֹרֶה

READ AND DISCUSS
THE JEWISH LEARNING MAP

It helps to think of education as a map. As you look at education in your synagogues, place yourself outside of this map, looking at all the “cities.” Each element, or “city” will play a different role in your journey. As we said at the outset, discussing your synagogue as a place of Jewish learning, without learning Jewishly yourself, is a contradiction in terms. So we are providing you with a set of Jewish texts on the subject of learning that will enhance your own knowledge as it shapes your plans for your synagogue.

We ask, therefore, that you take time out at every meeting to nurture yourselves with Jewish learning. How much you can do at each meeting is up to you to decide. Throughout this curriculum you are provided with a selection of texts from Jewish tradition from antiquity to today. The texts are carefully chosen to help you move in an orderly progression through the entirety of Jewish tradition, seeing each piece of it in relationship to the whole. You will feel that you are in touch not just with this subject of education, but also with the great Jewish classics. You will know the technical vocabulary of this classical collection of literature, how that literature is organized, and the time line that explains when and where the great Jewish books came into being.

To be sure, a map that is limited to the classical Jewish library is selective and has its own problems. It lacks the voice of women, for example. It omits also many traditions of average people, since rabbinic authors were generally the learned elite. But while it is true that rabbinic literature is not the sum total of all the wisdom Jews have acquired through the centuries, it is also true that Judaism is very largely what the Rabbis said and wrote. If rabbinic literature isn't everything, it is surely the best place to start.

Unit Two introduces you to the field of education from a *Jewish* perspective, through Jewish texts.

We suggest you start today by looking at one of the texts below.

THE UNKNOWLEDGEABLE IN THE SYNAGOGUE

Deuteronomy Rabbah 8:3

What is the meaning of, “Wisdom is too lofty for the unknowing. They do not open their mouth at the gate” (Prov.24: 7)? R. Tanchuma said: The unknowing enter a synagogue and see knowledgeable people discussing Torah. Not understanding what they say, they feel ashamed, as it is said, “They do not open their mouth at the gate.”

.... Another explanation: Our Rabbis say: The unknowing enter a synagogue and see knowledgeable people discussing Torah. They ask: “How can I learn Torah?”

The students answer, “First you read from a Scroll [a *m’gillah*, like *m’gillat* Esther], then a book of Torah, then the prophets (*N’vi’im*), and then the Writings (*K’tuvim*). After completing the study of Scripture (the *TaNakh*), study Talmud, and then the laws (*halakhot*), and then Talmudic lore (*Aggadot*).” Hearing all this, the unknowing think “When am I going to learn all this?” and turn back from the gate. This is the force of, “They do not open their mouth at the gate.”

R. Yannai said: This can be compared to a loaf of bread hanging from on high. The unknowing ask, “Who can bring it down?” But students of Torah say, “Didn’t someone suspend it?” Then they take a ladder or a stick to bring it down. So the unknowing say: “How will I ever manage to get through all of Torah?” But what do students of Torah do? They learn one chapter every day until they finish all of Torah. That is why G-d said: “It is not too baffling for you, nor beyond your reach “ (Deut. 30:11); if you find it baffling, it is because you haven’t engaged in it.”

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the difference between the reaction of the unknowing according to R. Tanchuma and according to the Rabbis?

2. In each case, what does the reaction indicate about people who are unknowledgeable? Or about the synagogue where they encounter people learning?
3. If the unknowledgeable entered the gate of your synagogue, what would they do?
4. In the curriculum on *Kehillah Kedoshah*, you studied ambiance: the “feel” of a synagogue, both physically, and systemically (how the people there treat you). How should the ambiance of your synagogue encourage the unknowing to stick around and become students of Torah?

GROWING IN WISDOM

Berakhot 40a

R. Zera, or as some say, R. Hinnena b. Papa, further said: Observe how the character of the Holy One (*Hakadosh barukh hu*) differs from that of flesh and blood. Human beings can put something into an empty vessel, but not into a full one. But the Holy One is not like that; G-d puts more into a full vessel than empty one [G-d gives more wisdom to the wise], for it says, “If listening, you listen,” (Ex. 15:26), implying, “If you listen [once] you will go on listening, and if not, you will not listen.” Another explanation is: “If you listen to the old, you will listen to the new, but if you pay no attention once, you will hear no more.”

FOR DISCUSSION:

What approach to education does this text presuppose? What does it indicate about a synagogue ambiance where successful learning occurs?

Unit One: What is Education? Meeting Two

PREPARATORY READINGS

1. New Vocabulary: Thinking Differently
2. Curriculum As “Tradition *x* Today *x* Take”

READ AND DISCUSS

EDUCATION AS METAPHOR & SYNAGOGUE “UNCOMMON KNOWLEDGE”

Please have a volunteer take a few minutes to summarize “New Vocabulary: Thinking Differently.”

Jewish education suffers because we continue to do what other people did, just because that is the way they did it. That way of thinking is called the “default position,” and it is not really thinking at all; it is endlessly reiterating what other people once thought. Thinking proceeds in metaphors, and thinking differently requires new metaphors for the same thing. Using new metaphors that make old things into new things lets us think according to *“Uncommon Knowledge.”*

John Mayher, Professor of Education at New York University, says he sat down one day to write a book on new ideas for educators. Then he realized that there are many such books with new and bright ideas. But the education system never changes. He realized that we are prone to falling back to default mode, which he labels “common knowledge.” What we need is “uncommon knowledge.”

Take one example: Education can be conceived as a card game. We say that children are dealt a deck of cards, and they are stuck with playing out their hand, with some lucky winners and some necessary losers. In some secular school systems, this is “common knowledge.” Some kids come with a hand of cards that contains a high I.Q., an intact middle-class family, their own room to study in quiet, and pre-school preparatory education. Other kids arrive with a hand made up of broken families, street smarts (at best), and crowded slum conditions. Common sense holds that there isn’t much we can do for the second group of kids. They are doomed to be life’s losers, regularly trumped by the first group who were dealt a better hand long before they even entered kindergarten.

If we generalize to synagogue education, we might easily conclude that some kids come with a hand containing Jewishly learned parents, facility for Hebrew, a home filled with Jewish ritual, Jewish books all over the house, and a family commitment to underscore the value of supplementary education while downplaying competing interests like weekend skiing trips, or Saturday morning soccer. They will be life’s

Jewish winners. As for people who arrive from homes that are marginally Jewish, who are dropped off for bar/bat mitzvah preparation by lackluster parents, who never see Shabbat at home, and who are raised to care more about sports or beauty salons than Israel or building a sukkah, well, there is just not much we can do for them.

But “uncommon knowledge” urges us to find some other metaphor for the life of learning. What if Jewish education is not a deck of cards at all, but, instead, an evolving story, where a child’s future life is an intriguing open-ended plot, and where children (and adults too) are authors of their own destiny? What if teachers are producers of the drama that students compose as they shape their lives? What if....

Yes, “What if?” We suggest you ask that question regularly. Take nothing for granted. Decide what metaphors underlie your educational system and what “common knowledge” you have in your synagogue. What ought to be replaced? What ought to be changed? Dare to think differently.

ACTIVITY

FINDING NEW METAPHORS

Here is an exercise in two parts.

Part One: Metaphors for Each Other

You all probably know each other pretty well by now. But you will be surprised what you can learn about each other if you try the following simple exercise in metaphor-making. It illustrates the power a metaphor has to help you think differently.

Think of a metaphor that describes who you are and complete the sentence, “I am a _____.” Share with your group what you come up with.

Here are some examples from people who have done this in the past:

- A mother of six small children (who ran circles around her every day), said she was a sprinkler system, watering the shoots in her family.
- “I am a peace-maker,” said another mother, “constantly making Solomonic decisions for my two young sons who quarrel all the time.”
- An inveterate reader of everything non-fiction called himself a learning machine.
- A rabbi, at first unable to think of anything, finally said: “I am a

wine cup -- I mean the large one that we reserve for the person who leads services. I have watched twenty-five years of people drink deeply from it. Well, I am that cup, but what no one knows is that I have sprung a hole in the bottom; some day, some one will lift me up and find me empty.”

Some metaphors will be more serious than others. But try it. Think of a metaphor for who you are, and watch the power of metaphor unfold. When you are done, you will know each other differently.

Part Two: Metaphors for Education

The same power of metaphor can help you to better understand your synagogue as an education system. It will help you go beyond “common knowledge” and prepare you to dream new visions of where you want education to go.

First, take stock of the “common knowledge” that, right or wrong, drives your educational system.

1. Divide into pairs and let each complete the sentences below.
2. Then compare notes.

Complete the sentences below by filling in what your synagogue does. The assumptions behind what it presumably does will constitute synagogue “common knowledge.” Imagine a graduate student from the University of Mars landing on earth to write a paper on “Education among earthlings.” First the Martian visits you personally and asks you what you think education is, in general. Then the Martian asks you what you think Jewish education is. The Martian needs some concrete image, a metaphor, to understand you. What do you say?

For example: a) “Education is **skills for living.**”
“Jewish Education is **Jewish skills for living.**”

b) “Education is **basic human values.**”
“Jewish Education is **Jewish human values.**”

Or even

c) “Education is **memorizing facts**”
“Jewish Education is **memorizing Jewish facts**”

It could even be that the way your synagogue education is constituted has nothing to do with what you think general education is. For example:

“Education is **training to be a citizen of the world**”
“Jewish education is **learning how read and speak Hebrew**”

Now, you try:

The way my synagogue education is constituted I would say that it compares to general education in the following way,

"Education is _____."

"Jewish education is _____."

Now think of alternatives:

At its best, "Education might be _____."

At its best, "Jewish education might be _____."

You have now compared "common knowledge" (what everyone thinks education is) with uncommon knowledge (what education at its best might become).

If education really were to become what you think it should be, how would education look different in your synagogue?

READ AND DISCUSS

CURRICULUM AS "TRADITION X TODAY X TAKE"

Please have a volunteer take a few minutes to summarize "Curriculum = Tradition x Today x Take".

Jewish curricula have changed dramatically over the years. Once upon a time, the ideal was people who knew "everything." They were walking encyclopedias who could tell you anything you wanted to know. They had learned it all.

No longer. Not since the invention of computers. The computer has expanded the knowledge base exponentially, because now there is no limit to what can be stored, cross-referenced, and looked up in ever-larger databases.

Halakhic knowledge is the best example in the history of the changeover from people to libraries to on-line data recovery. For almost all of Jewish history, the great *halakhic* minds to whom we have referred were expected to master all of Jewish law. They had to write responsa using sources that had no table of contents and no modern indices. With printing, people who knew it all provided marginal glosses telling readers how to go back and forth from the Babylonian Talmud to the *Shulchan Arukh*, but even then, most *halakhic* experts relied on their memory. They just knew that on page 55a or 72b of this or that work there was a precedent for whatever case they were considering.

Eventually, of course, you could look things up in libraries. But there were still no overall indices for most books. You had to know where to look. People

knowledgeable in *halakha* might no longer know it all by heart, but they could find their way through libraries of classics where, to the layperson, every page looks pretty much like every other, and where you cannot search the contents by topical indices at the back of the book.

Now we have databases that allow you to search out words or phrases instantly in most Jewish works, from the Talmuds to responsa. And that will mean that knowledge in particular will be redefined once again.

Curriculum is something smaller yet. It is the tiny percentage of knowledge that we actually make our own. It seems pretty evident, for example, that how to celebrate Jewish holidays still counts today as Jewish knowledge in particular. But how much of it counts as important enough to put into a curriculum? The Mishnah, for instance, knows a holiday called the 15th of Av; we moderns might choose to emphasize it, but we probably don't. The 15th of Av is so rarified that it is only "Jewish Knowledge in General" (it is *tradition*). It might not even be Jewish Knowledge in Particular (knowledge for *today*). Yom Kippur is clearly "Jewish Knowledge in particular, but how much information about Yom Kippur would you include in a curriculum for 2nd graders? Your decisions about education have to factor in how much knowledge we ought to learn, and at what age, why, and how.

In this curriculum, for example, we have done what every synagogue has to do. We decided, for instance, that you should think through education philosophically, learning to "think differently." In addition, we decided that determining your synagogue's strategy for Jewish learning, without simultaneously learning Jewishly yourselves, would be a contradiction in terms. So, this curriculum has two parts: a theory of education that presents new vocabulary, for the purpose of being able to think differently, and Jewish knowledge for your own Jewish growth.

If you as an individual created a synagogue, what would you include in your curriculum? Do you think you share the same vision as your fellow congregants?

ACTIVITY

MY CURRICULUM AND YOUR CURRICULUM

Take a moment to jot down your own basic curriculum ideas, then compare what you wrote and answer the following questions:

1. Were you surprised at the differences in your team members curricula?
2. Did you find that your curriculum matched those of people you thought would be different?

3. Did your curriculum focus on a specific subject – Text Study, Hebrew Acquisition, Social Justice, Liturgy?
4. Do you think the curriculum in a synagogue should be a synthesis of many ideas or should it focus on one main principle?

In each case, we have had to ask the curricular question of what learning to include here. Unable to present everything, we had to make choices. You will have to do the same.

FROM THE TRADITION מִסֹּרֶת

READ

THINKING ABOUT LIMUD (EDUCATION)...

All the S2K curricula have their unique flavor. The *Limud* curriculum is, therefore, uniquely shaped to fit its own particular concern: Jewish learning. Education is an English word with (by now) thoroughly North American connotations. It is “book-learning” that you learn “in class” moving higher and higher until you can “graduate” and be freed of educational requirements because you have “a job.”

Education in Jewish terms is more far-reaching. It encompasses the absorption and transmission of knowledge, skills, values, responsibilities, culture, tradition, tastes and passions, collected and sifted over a 4,000 year history devoted to knowing the word and will of the Divine. Because education touches every aspect of the vast and deep landscape of life, human nature dictates that we try to limit and contain it; and because we are necessarily influenced by the definitions of our American environment, we look to secular education systems to shape the contours of what the boundaries of education should be. Our Jewish institutions have therefore tried to make Jewish education “fit” into the structures and systems created for other kinds of education. As a result, synagogues rarely end up with most of their members feeling they are “educated Jews.” This curriculum tries to encourage a creative process of thinking about Jewish education, freeing you up to ask big questions about what the goals of Jewish education are, and how they should be achieved.

This *Limud* curriculum, then, raises important questions in new ways. It urges you to think systemically about the synagogue as a learning center. It provides “the state of the art”—what some Jewish educators are saying now. It enables you to think differently about what you are doing, in the hope that you will develop your own answers to the sometimes thorny questions of Jewish education.

It also insists that you not only *talk* about education, but also that you become better educated *yourself*. Every unit therefore has its own set of study elements. As with every curriculum we give you, you can decide yourself how much of your meeting time to spend on text study. But the assumption is that if your team only discusses strategies at doing a better job of educating, and does not enable you, yourself, to grow in Jewish study along the way, you will experience your team time as just more “committee” meetings that we have tried to avoid. Remember that you are the “uncommittee.” To avoid frustration and boredom, every team

meeting should see you deepening your own Jewish journey. *Team members need to be nurtured Jewishly if they are to nurture the rest of the congregation.*

FOR DISCUSSION

TWO LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS: AT HOME AND IN EXILE

Genesis Rabbah 34:15

A disciple of R. Issi was sitting before him but could not comprehend what his teacher was explaining to him. "Why can't you grasp it?" Rabbi Issi asked. The student replied, "Because I am in exile from home."

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the environments in which you learn best? Can you define some of the characteristics of those environments?
2. What elements have allowed you to feel "at home" in a learning environment? What elements have made you feel "exiled"?
3. How can the environment of your own S2K team help you learn as you go through "From The Tradition"? What environment of learning will you have to avoid if you want to make sure you feel "at home," not "in exile"?

Unit One: What is Education? Preparatory Readings

Meeting Two:

1. New Vocabulary: Thinking Differently
2. Curriculum As "Tradition X Today X Take"

Unit One: What is Education?

Meeting Two Preparatory Readings

NEW VOCABULARY: THINKING DIFFERENTLY

Modern philosopher, Richard Rorty, says, "We make progress not by arguing better, but by speaking differently"; in fact, Jewish tradition is built on the same insight. The Talmud regularly pauses to think of new ways to read Torah, stipulating, for example, *Al Tikrei [banayikh] ela [bonayikh]*, "Read it not as ['your children'] but as ['your builders']." The particular issue here is Isaiah 54:13, which reads, "All your *children* [*banayikh*] shall be taught by G-d; and great shall be the peace of your *children* [*banayikh*]." But the Rabbis invent their own creative misreading, not *banayikh* but *bonayikh*, a play on words that makes the verse read, "All your *builders* [*bonayikh*] shall be taught by G-d; and great shall be the peace of your *builders* [*bonayikh*]. Careful readers can go even deeper into the rabbinic mentality. *Bonayikh* can mean more than "builders." A small imaginative leap makes the same word mean "Those who understand." The Rabbis read Isaiah's prophecy as telling us that we, the *children* [of Israel], the *builders* of a Jewish future, must struggle to *understand* our challenges better than we so far do. Only as *builders who understand* will we, the *children* [of Israel] find peace.

Both Rorty and the Talmud advise us to proceed by leaps of imagination. Rather than repeat old lessons endlessly, we are to think differently:

Thinking differently is the only way to provide new insights into old issues.

Most issues of Jewish education have been argued endlessly, with little progress being made. The only way out of the morass is to think differently. To do that, you need a different vocabulary with which to talk.

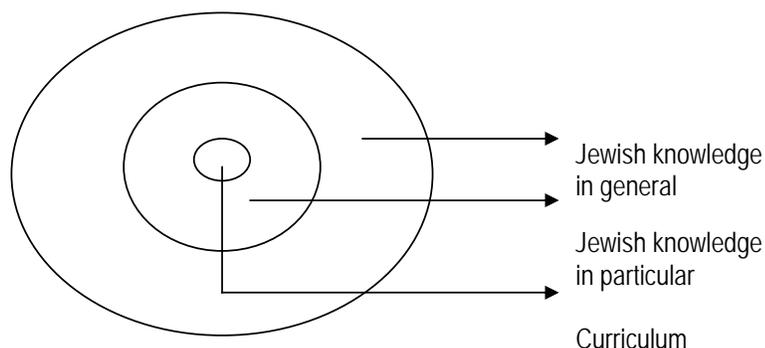
If we always think the way we always thought, we'll always get what we always got.

We invite you, then, to see your synagogue world anew, to conceptualize Jewish education afresh, and to be your synagogue's *understanding builders* for tomorrow.

CURRICULUM AS “TRADITION X TODAY X TAKE”

Most people think of curriculum as a list of course offerings or the description of what any given course within the list will teach. But curriculum goes much deeper. It requires a thoughtful determination of what will count as relevant knowledge for our time and place.

Imagine three concentric circles.



- The area between the 2nd and 3rd circle – the largest area by far – represents *Jewish knowledge in general*. It is the total amount of Jewish information, data, skills, and values that anyone at any time might know.
- The middle area (between the 1st and 2nd circle) is *Jewish knowledge in particular*. It is what we ideally would know, if we kept at it all our lives. It is *what we decide to count as Jewish knowledge* – which holidays, literature, values and so forth, we decide to emphasize. *Jewish education* is the transmission of that *knowledge in particular*.
- Take, for example, a relatively obscure Jewish book called *Tales of Baba*. This is a Jewish book composed in the Middle Ages, featuring a sort of Jewish Sinbad, who weaves a thousand and one Jewish stories, each one more fabulous than the next. A *baba meise* (pronounced Bah-bah My-suh) is *not* what most people think – an “old wives’ tale,” in English; that is, a tale (a *meise*) told by your *baba* (your grandmother). It is a tale so fabulous that it could have been told by Baba the Jewish sailor. Since *Tales of Baba* is a Jewish book, it counts as Jewish knowledge, but only *Jewish knowledge in general* the furthest out area. Even in a perfect synagogue school, it is doubtful whether we would ever consider making sure people knew it. It exists as Jewish knowledge, but not as something our generation worries about knowing. It is not part of *Jewish knowledge in particular*.
- *Curriculum* is smaller yet. Even *Jewish knowledge in particular* is too much to cover; how much of it we learn depends on whether we are in grade school, college, a Judaica Ph.D. program, or rabbinic school. *Curriculum, then, is that*

part of Judaism that any specific group of Jews decide to pass on as learning.

There is another way to look at it.

- Jewish knowledge in general, all of it, is **Tradition**. We will never know it all, and never even want to. Some of it is irrelevant; some outdated; some picayune, fit for specialists only.
- Jewish knowledge in particular is what we really wish we could know **today**, if we could know it all. It is just what is relevant for our time.
- Curriculum is that part of today's relevant knowledge that we want to **take** as our own; and a further decision as to how (at camp? in services? in the synagogue school?) and when (first grade? high school?) we want to take it.

So curriculum is a decision as to what will count as Jewish knowledge for you, in your synagogue, and how much of that you want to teach. Curriculum is a function of three factors:

- **Tradition**: What is a proper continuation of Jewish tradition of the entire Jewish *past* (Jewish curriculum has to be true to the Jewish past);
- **Today**: What counts as Jewish knowledge *now* (how our current place and time combine with tradition to determine what we ideally want to learn);
- **Take**: Every person and organization has its own peculiar "take" on things. You think of yourselves as modern Orthodox, or Kaplanian Reconstructionist; egalitarian or gender-divided; and so on. In order to be true to yourselves, you need to factor in the "take" on Judaism that your specific synagogue represents. Reconstructionists may want to be sure that everyone knows their founder Mordecai Kaplan's original thought. Modern Orthodox Jews may want to know about how to use the *Shulchan Arukh*. *Therefore Curriculum = "Tradition x Today x Take"*.

Unit One: What is Education? Enrichment Material

Meeting One:

1. An Extra Story And Activity To Use For “Uncommon Knowledge”

Meeting Two:

1. Background For “Tradition X Today X Take” (in this one situation, please read *before* the preparatory readings)
2. Two Additional Stories For Use Throughout The Curriculum

Enrichment Material for Unit One: What is Education?

ENRICHMENT MATERIAL FOR UNIT ONE: MEETING ONE

AN EXTRA STORY AND EXERCISE TO USE FOR "UNCOMMON KNOWLEDGE"

In meeting one, after your discussion of "uncommon knowledge," think about the following amusing little tale:

MA'ASEH SHEHAYAH: THE CAT STAND

Once upon a time, an elderly monk who inhabited an ashram inherited a cat from his elderly father. Having lived in the ashram for decades, shut up with other monks who owned no worldly goods, he was not sure what to do with the cat. He had no personal desire to "own" it, of course, but it was a living thing and needed care, so he decided to take it with him wherever he went, to feed it and care for it, and to treat it as any living being deserved. Among other things, he brought it to prayer every day.

The other monks, however, objected, as the cat tended to prowl around their prayer space interfering with their meditation. So its owner made a leash out of pieces of hemp that he found lying around, and tied the cat to the door of the prayer space.

This went on for years and years, as the elderly monk in question, as well as the cat, turned out to enjoy longevity beyond anyone's wildest imagination. New generations of monks came and went, but the cat and its owner just grew older, and eventually, other than the owner, no one in the ashram even remembered how the cat had come into their group or why it was tied to the door knob and not allowed to prowl around. Meanwhile, because of his age, his accumulated knowledge of tradition, and his gentle personality, the monk became the unquestioned leader of the ashram. His personal practices were seen as the ideal.

Eventually, the monk died. So other monks took turns caring for the cat and bringing it to prayer. But cats have nine lives, so it still took many years until the cat too died, by which time yet a new generation of monks had come into being. As far as they knew, the cat had always been part of their prayer circle, and word had it that the greatest monk of all time had introduced him there. Theological minds began explaining why a cat had to be included. Some saw it as a test to push their meditation practice so high that

even the cat's purring could not be heard in the meditative state. Others argued that as a living being, the cat's presence reminded people in prayer that inner spirituality was insufficient; G-d wanted spiritual adepts to care equally for the world's many creatures. And so it went, each thoughtful person giving voice to the importance of having a living cat present during prayer.

In any event, the cat had unquestionably died, so one monk was dispatched to the nearest big city, several hundred miles away, to buy a new cat. And when he returned, people looked at the old worn hemp leash with dismay. Surely the cat deserved better, they said. Moreover, the ashram had grown in size, and the old prayer room was becoming too small; as they designed the new prayer space, someone got the good idea to design a beautiful cat stand to which the leash could be attached.

Hundreds of years later, the ashram is still alive and well. No one knows how many cats have come and gone. The monks specialize in the art form of making cat stands. No one quite recalls how the custom got started, but everyone is quite certain that without their cat, proper prayer is impossible.

In everything we do, we are plagued by "cats," the things we think are necessary, even though we are not sure why. Jewish education has classrooms, books, curricula, scholars in residence, and much more. Moreover, what it has determines what it misses, if only because the budget is drained on the things felt to be absolutely necessary.

So try this in pairs:

EXTRA ACTIVITY

DO WE HAVE CATS?

- In groups of two, look at the various aspects of your synagogue's opportunities for education. Given what you see, list the things that your synagogue seems to think are absolutely necessary for Jewish education (e.g., classrooms? library? "Ask the Rabbi" night?)

- Now come back together as a group. Make a joint list of all the things you came up with; and ask yourselves in the group: "How many of them are cats" that you have inherited for whatever reason, but that might be dismissed or replaced with something better?

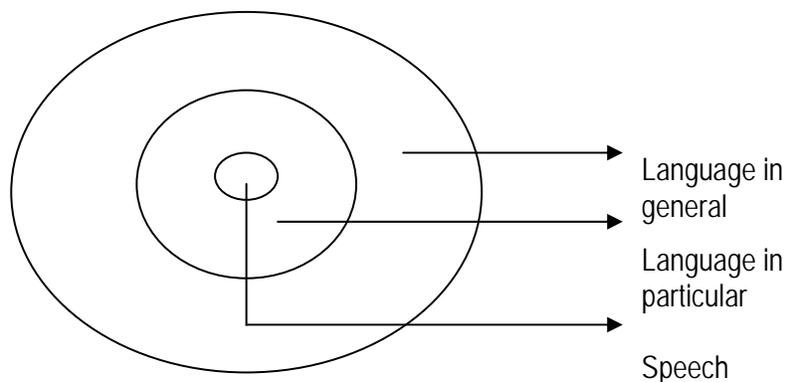
- What is the minimum list of “non-cats” -- the things that are really and truly, absolutely necessary? Why?
- What things are not on the list, overlooked by “common wisdom?”
- Try this thought experiment: If you could start from scratch, what are some altogether different ways to design your educational system, other than the way it is designed now?

ENRICHMENT MATERIAL FOR UNIT ONE: MEETING TWO

BACKGROUND FOR "TRADITION X TODAY X TAKE" (read *before* preparatory readings)

The curricular thinking presented here is part of a broader trend in intellectual thought, going back to the early part of the 20th century, when a linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) made linguistic history by contrasting "speech" and "language."

His dichotomy has since been generalized to many areas of culture -- including education. In fact, his two-fold dichotomy can be extended one step further into three disparate but related domains: *language in general*, *language in particular* (e.g.: English) and *speech* (that part of our language that we choose to master). These can be arranged in concentric circles.



- *Language in general*: everything any human being might say (the outermost circle);
- *Language in particular*: English, for example, a particular language within that larger whole (the middle circle);
- *Speech*: the particular part of the particular language that we master (the innermost circle)

Each of these three circles is determined differently:

- *Language in general* is driven by total human capacity for making sounds
- *Language in particular* is driven by culture: it is an arbitrary set of sounds that a given language "specializes in." English, for

instance, does not include the sound of the Hebrew *chet*; Japanese cannot differentiate the English “L” from “R.”

- *Speech* is driven by pragmatic ends. Middle-class Americans learn informal speech patterns for conversation, but formal patterns (with a much larger vocabulary, for example) for public addresses.

So too,

- *Knowledge in general* is driven by total human capacity for learning
- *Knowledge in particular* is driven by culture: it is an arbitrary set of “learnings” that a given culture (Judaism, for us) “specializes in.” Judaism, for instance, does not include a study of Boddhisatva saints (from Buddhism) or Easter (from Christianity).
- *Curriculum* is driven by pragmatic ends. Bar/Bat mitzvah students learn to chant Torah and/or Haftarah; converts to Judaism learn what Shabbat candles are; parents learn how to bless their children. What do we want people to learn and when do we want them to learn it?

TWO ADDITIONAL STORIES FOR USE THROUGHOUT THE CURRICULUM

MA’ASEH SHEHAYAH: THE STORY OF TWO MASTERS

A famous scholar of Bible, Harry M. Orlinsky z”l [zikhrono livrakhah = “May his memory be a blessing”] was not a halakhist, but he could have been one. He was essentially the dean of Bible study in the Jewish world, the first Jew to sit on a biblical translation committee for Protestants, and a man who knew it all. He used to tell students that when he studied for his Ph.D. in Bible, he discovered that he already knew practically the whole Bible by heart -- but not in the right order. Rather, he had studied enough Talmud as a child that he knew by heart every Talmudic quotation from the Bible and the page in the Talmud where it was cited!

Another example is the great talmudist, Louis Ginzberg z”l, from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. A former student of his, also deceased by now, said his class used to make up Aramaic phrases and ask Ginzberg where they were from. He would close his eyes, scan each page of the Talmud mentally, and report, “I don’t know! It’s not in the Bavli; and not in the Yerushalmi.” He

would return home shocked that he didn't know a phrase from Jewish tradition.

Unit Two

What is *Jewish* Education?

Gamrinan -- “We have learned it” -- “We have a tradition.”

Talmudic logic

“Do we choose tradition or does it choose us, and why is it necessary that a choosing take place, or a being chosen? What happens if one tries to write, or to teach, or to think, or even to read without the sense of a tradition? Why, nothing at all happens, just nothing.”

Harold Bloom

OVERVIEW

This unit looks at the totality of Jewish education from a variety of perspectives, inviting you to view it in new and different ways, perhaps even challenging your existing notions of what Jewish education is.

As with the other units of this curriculum, there is more material than can be covered in the three meetings presented here. Please select those pieces that work best for your team and congregation, or spread this unit out over four meetings.

Unit Two: What is Jewish Education? Meeting One

PREPARATORY READING

1. Lawrence A. Hoffman, "Living by Torah: The Spirituality of Discovery."
(The purpose of this reading is to help you think through the spiritual side of Jewish learning. The article explores the role of Torah in Jewish life, and the spiritual nature of discovering the mind of G-d.)

READ AND DISCUSS

DEFINITIONS OF EDUCATION

Almost everybody believes in education. But it is not clear exactly what they believe in. Mostly, people think education is facts. An educated person is someone who knows a lot. But if education were just facts, your computer would be better educated than any human being – and there seems to be something wrong with that idea. Clearly, there is *some* relationship between facts and education – it is hard to imagine an educated person knowing *no facts at all* – but confusing education with mastery of facts is one of the main stumbling blocks in trying to enhance synagogues as places of Jewish learning.

So let's consider another definition of education.

MA'ASEH SHEHAYAH: THE RELIGION OF THE FAITHFUL

In 1989, folk singer Pete Seeger reissued on CD his famous Carnegie Hall concert from June 8, 1963. All his life, Seeger had been a socialist, even a communist, yet he chose to introduce his CD with the following observation: "People of faith, religious, political and economic, have had their faith severely shaken in the last 25 years. The main faithful now are those who believe that by adopting the proper bodily position and uttering the proper words in front of the proper visual symbols, they will live forever while everyone else is doomed. I wish I could persuade them to consider the words of Alfred North Whitehead, the English philosopher, who believed strongly in education. He said, 'The essence of education is that it be religious.'"

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the difference between the religion of the people whom Seeger calls the "faithful" and the religion of Seeger himself?

2. What is Seeger's critique of the "faithful" today? To what extent is it descriptive of "Jewish faith" today? What, according to Seeger, is lacking? Is the same thing lacking in Jewish education?

ACTIVITY

DUTY AND REVERENCE AND ... WHAT ELSE?

Whitehead (1861-1947) had begun his career as a student of logic, at Cambridge. After moving to Harvard, he took up metaphysics. But he was also concerned about education by which he meant, "An education which inculcates duty and reverence."

Whitehead was not a religious man, and certainly not Jewish. But it has been said that he very nicely summed up the goal of Jewish education: "the religious process of inculcating duty and reverence" – reverence for G-d, that is, and duty regarding the *mitzvot*, by which G-d, other human beings and history itself are served.

FOR DISCUSSION

To what extent do you think duty and reverence *are* essential values that should be gained from a Jewish education?

ACTIVITY

EDUCATING FOR VALUES - I

1. Divide into groups of four.
2. Give each individual five to ten minutes to write a list of qualities (like "duty" and "reverence") that are important to Jewish education. Some will be obvious: e.g.: "honesty." No one will quarrel about that, so ignore it. You want to arrive at qualities that may be controversial. "Duty," for example, can be both positive and negative; evil people, too, can say they were only "doing their duty." The same is true of "reverence," since too much reverence may produce authoritarianism. Ask people for qualities that sound good at first, but need to be "nuanced" to prevent them from becoming negatives.
3. In your group of four, share your lists. The first task is to justify your list by convincing at least two of the three other people in the group to accept the quality as "being of importance." Any quality that does not make it past two of the three others has to be given up.

4. Each group should now take three sheets of paper from the flip chart, labeling them: "Critically Important," "Of Some Importance," and "Minimally Important." Take your list of qualities and divide them among the three sheets.
5. When people are done, each group should share its list with the others. Combine all the values of the "Critically Important" lists, striking those that are the same, and consolidating those that are similar. Now, as a group, divide that list into three: "The most important on the list," "The least important on the list," and "Those in the middle." When you are done, you will have a relatively small list of what you, as a group, think the most important Jewish values are. The list is only tentative, of course; it is not binding, but use it in the following way:
6. Imagine, for just a minute, that this list really is at the core of Jewish education. Imagine, also, that this theoretical education that you are considering will also have some basic skills (reading Hebrew? making *Kiddush*? *davening*?) and information (basic Jewish history? Names and themes of holidays? The *halakha* of Shabbat observance?). Limit your discussion just to the values on which you have agreed.
7. Having decided that these are of utmost importance, ask yourself now whether any of these are values that the synagogue lives by. Are they taught in any way? Do the official bodies of the synagogue (board? committees? office staff?) exemplify them? Do synagogue policies demonstrate them? Would anyone walking through the synagogue get a feel for them by how they are treated? By what they read and see on the walls?

ACTIVITY

EDUCATING FOR VALUES - II

1. Is there any discrepancy between the values you want to have and the values you actually observed in the synagogue? If a visiting anthropologist lived in your synagogue for a while, attending board meetings receiving the bulletin, and so on, what discrepancies (if any) would the anthropologist observe or note?
2. Make an institutional checklist of the values the anthropologist would observe and the values you wish your synagogue displayed.

Anthropological Reality

Value Observed

e.g. Rudeness

Value Displayed

When people answer the phone

*Ideal List of Values**Value Observed*e.g. Courtesy
the phone*Value Displayed*

When people answer

You have now looked at one concept of education: **education for values**. Having done the activity, you will probably have discovered the following (read together to make sure you have agreement on these points):

1. Beyond education for skills and knowledge of facts, values also matter greatly; education without inculcating values is insufficient.
2. It is very hard to teach values. You probably had trouble figuring out whether and where they are taught altogether.
3. More than they are taught formally, values are exemplified informally by how people in an institution behave toward each other.

If you agree with the above, now is a good time to think through exactly what the values of our synagogue are, and how they can be better lived institutionally. Agree to observe the synagogue more carefully during the period of time until you meet next. When you return, start a list of suggestions for how the synagogue can live out and exemplify its values for all to see.

READ AND DISCUSS

**EDUCATION AS THE PASSING ON OF TRADITION:
SOLOVEITCHIK ON TRADITION**

Begin with this quotation from Joseph Soloveitchik (*U'vikashtem Misham*, "Hadarom, vol. 47), which describes the joy of taking one's place as a virtual member of the chain of authority that every page of Jewish text provides:

When I sit down to study, I immediately find myself in the company of the scholars of the *Mesorah* [tradition]. The relationship between us is personal. The Rambam is at my right; Rabbenu Tam to my left. Rashi sits at the head and explains. Rabbenu Tam asks, the Rambam codifies and Rabad comments. They are all in my small room, sitting around my table. They look at me with fondness, playful with me regarding the logic and the text, encouraging and strengthening me like a father. The study of Torah is not simply a didactic act; involvement in the words of Torah is not simply a technical formal matter concretized via the creation and exchange of ideas. It is a powerful experience involving the closeness of many generations, the joining of spirit to spirit and the connection of soul to soul. Those who transmit the Torah and those who receive it meet one another at the same historic juncture.

FOR REFERENCE

Rambam: Moses Maimonides, lived in Spain and Egypt 1135-1204

Rabbenu Tam: Jacob ben Meir, lived in France, 1100-1171

Rashi: Shlomo ben Yitzchak, or Shlomo Yitzchaki, lived in France, 1040-1105

Rabad: Abraham ben David, lived in Provence, 1120-1197

With this quotation, you have begun the task of looking forward to our next meeting. Try this definition:

Education is the transmission of a tradition: in our case, Jewish tradition.

But what is tradition? Most people think they know what it is, but do they?

FOR NEXT TIME

Before meeting next time, try writing your own definition of tradition. Bring it with you. You will start the next meeting comparing definitions. To help you do so, read and discuss the following talmudic story.

READ AND DISCUSS

MA'ASEH SHEHAYAH: FROM THE TALMUD

Rabbi Judah said in the name of Rav: When Moses ascended on high, he found G-d sitting and tying crowns to the Torah's letters. "Master of the universe," he said to him, "Why are you doing this?"¹ G-d replied, "In the future, there will arise one man, at the end of many generations, named Akiba ben Joseph, and from every little jot and tittle of these crowns, he will interpret mountains of laws." "Master of the universe, show him to me," said Moses. "Just turn around and look behind you," answered G-d. So Moses sat down at the back of the classroom, behind eight rows of students, and understood not one word of what anyone was saying. He grew weary from it all. They came to a particular point and Akiba's students asked him, "How do you know this?" Akiba answered, "It is a halakhah given to Moses on Sinai."² That comforted him.

This is not the end of the story, as it happens. It has a surprise ending that we will consider at the next meeting. But for the time being, see what you can make of the story so far. What do you think of it?

ACTIVITY

¹ Surely the Torah is complete as it is. Why does G-d add things to it?

² Menachot 28b

Create your own definition of tradition, to bring to the next meeting.
You will start the next meeting comparing definitions.

FROM THE TRADITION מִסֹּרֶה

READ AND DISCUSS

A PAGE OF TALMUD

Please take a few minutes to have a volunteer summarize “Living by Torah: The Spirituality of Discovery,” which was intended to raise the question of the spiritual side of Jewish learning. It explores the role of Torah in Jewish life, and the spiritual nature of discovering the mind of G-d.

Text study is the Jewish way of life, *par excellence*. It is the dominant form of Jewish spirituality, a constant and consistent way that Jews find their way through tradition. More than anything else, Jewish text itself unites all Jewish generations in active conversation with each other.

Maps help us structure the landscape where we walk. They portray the things they measure in relation to each other, so we can see the whole, not just the parts. Think of the quintessential sign in a subway or strange neighborhood. It gives a picture of the whole, and an X, with the words “You are here.”

“Here” is always relative to where you started and where you want to go. You consult it only because you are on a journey somewhere and do not want to get lost. Without the larger map, the X means nothing. With it, you can contextualize how far you have come and how far you have to go.

Learning is journey also. Every curriculum ought to let people know how far they have come, where they are going, and the importance of where they are relative to the larger map of which their current position is relative.

A curriculum, then, is a map that links knowledge together in a meaningful pattern. Consider the case of the Professor and his Dog:

MA’ASEH SHEHAYAH: THE PROFESSOR AND HIS DOG
Students tell the story of a university Professor of Far Eastern Studies best known for the fact that he taught class while holding his dog on a leash, explaining that the dog needed to be with him because the dog had asthma. What students remember least is anything about the course content.

That is because the professor taught from a huge notebook where he had compiled vast amounts of material on an equally vast array of subjects. Each day he would come in, open the book at random and proceed to lecture on whatever subject he saw before him. One class might be on how Buddhism came to Japan; another

on Taiwanese cooking; another yet on 19th century India.

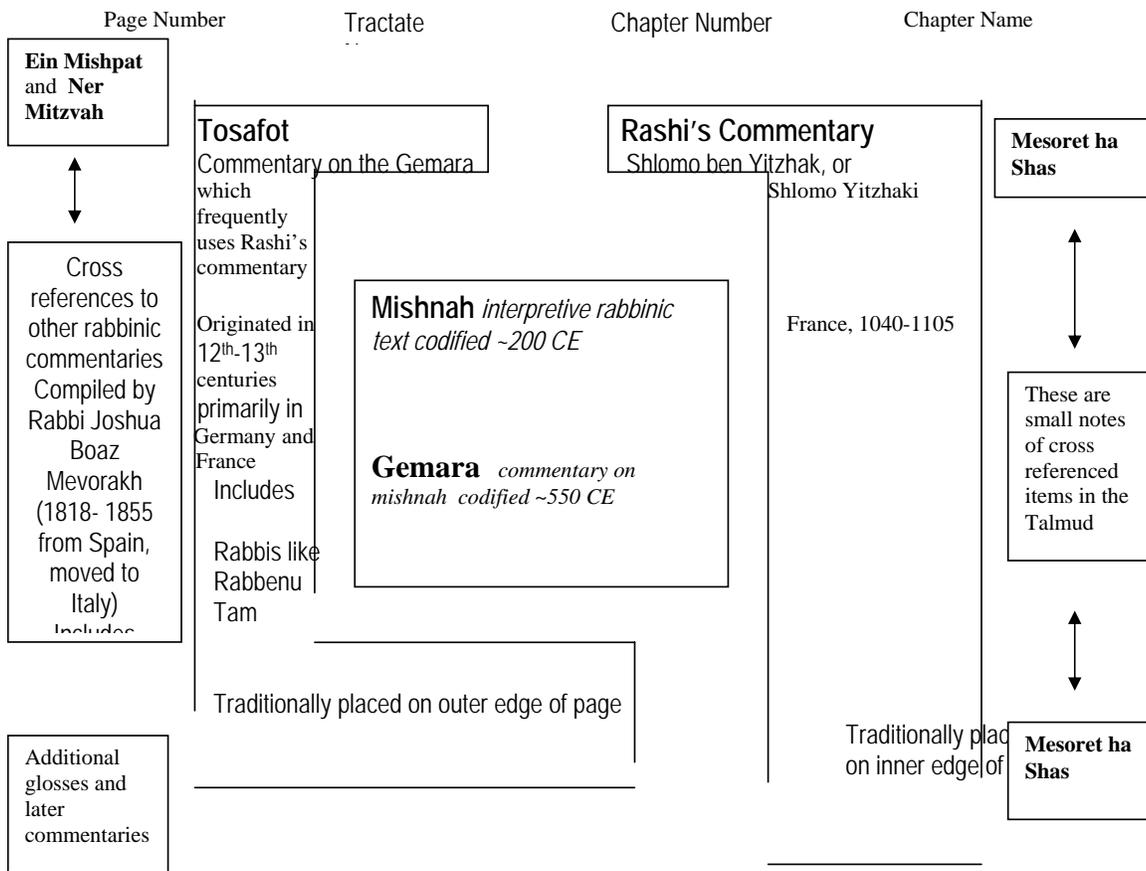
The reason students learned nothing at all is that they were never given a bird's eye view of the whole. No matter what the professor said, as interesting as it might be in itself, students had no mental map in which to put the material into context. And without a context that a mental map provides, they remember nothing.

All they remember is the dog with asthma.

Many adults who have studied Judaism long and hard complain that despite years of education, they feel that they have not learned very much. Often, that is because continuing education classes rarely allow people to get a sense of the whole. You study a subject that cites the Talmud, but what is the Talmud? When was it compiled? What is its relationship to the Mishnah, another book that gets cited but that people often cannot identify. Throughout this curriculum, we will give you maps to help you navigate through the compendium of Jewish literature both past and present.

The first map is a map of a page of Talmud.
(Have one of your clergy members explain how the map works.)

Page of Talmud



The Mishnah (dated around 200CE) and Gemara (dated at around 550 CE) are in the center, with rabbinic commentaries (and commentaries on the commentaries) by various generations surrounding them in the margins.

To conclude, we provide, again, the telling quotation from Joseph Soloveitchik (The *RoV*) ("U'vikashtem Misham," *Hadarom*, vol. 47). With a diagram of Talmud in your mind, you can see more clearly exactly what he means.

When I sit down to study, I immediately find myself in the company of the scholars of the *Mesorah* [tradition]. The relationship between us is personal. The Rambam is at my right; Rabbenu Tam to my left. Rashi sits at the head and explains. Rabbenu Tam asks, the Rambam codifies and Rabad comments. They are all in my small room, sitting around my table. They look at me with fondness, playful with me regarding the logic and the text, encouraging and strengthening me like a father. The study of Torah is not simply a didactic act; involvement in the words of Torah is not simply a technical formal matter concretized via the creation and exchange of ideas. It is a powerful experience involving the closeness of many generations, the joining of spirit to spirit and the connection of soul to soul. Those who transmit the Torah and those who receive it meet one another at the same historic juncture.

Unit Two: What is Jewish Education?

Meeting Two

PREPARATORY READINGS

1. Rachel Adler, "The Jew Who Wasn't There: Halacha and the Jewish Woman".
2. Deborah Weissman, "*Bais Ya'akov As An Innovation In Jewish Women's Education: A Contribution To the Study Of Education And Social Change*".
(These articles discuss the issue of Jewish traditions regarding women as seen from the point of view of a feminist.)

ACTIVITY

Begin this meeting by making a list of definitions of tradition that people brought with them.

READ AND DISCUSS

TRADITION AS ADOPTED AND ADAPTED

Values and tradition are interwoven. If the synagogue is to be a place of learning everywhere, it has to be a place where Jewish values are so obviously evident that the kind of Judaism people derive from being in the synagogue is the kind that warrants Jewish continuity. Education must also deliver whatever is required (sights? sounds? data? skills?) for Jewish existence, in order for those values to be passed along and owned by the next generation. It becomes a heritage that matters profoundly to their present. They own it because it enters their very spirit to the point where they cannot imagine living without it. That is why education really *is* (as Whitehead said) "religious."

How can we rethink the ways a synagogue transmits tradition so that new people constantly own it?

The second issue has to do with tradition itself. As the two articles you read illustrated, women have reminded us of some of the shortcomings of tradition, as it has been "owned" by Jewish women over the years. As you prepare to discuss the articles, look first at the following famous reconstruction by Virginia Woolf concerning what it would have been like if Shakespeare had a sister called Judith.³

³ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of Her Own*, (1929: Harcourt reprint, 1981), pp. 46-47, 48.

Shakespeare himself went, very probably – his mother was an heiress – to the grammar school, where he may have learned Latin -- Ovid, Virgil and Horace -- and the elements of grammar and logic. He was, it is well known, a wild boy who poached rabbits, perhaps shot a deer, and had, rather sooner than he should have done, married a woman in the neighborhood, who bore him a child rather quicker than was right. That escapade sent him to seek his fortune in London. He had, it seemed, a taste for the theatre; he began by holding horses at the stage door. Very soon he got work in the theatre, became a successful actor, and lived at the hub of the universe, meeting everybody, knowing everybody, practicing his art on the boards, exercising his wits in the streets, and even getting access to the place of the queen. Meanwhile his extraordinarily gifted sister, let us suppose, remained at home. She was as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was. But she was not sent to school. She had no chance of learning grammar and logic, let alone of reading Horace and Virgil. She picked up a book now and then, one of her brother's perhaps, and read a few pages. But then her parents came in and told her to mend the stockings or mind the stew and not moon about with books and papers.... Perhaps she scribbled some pages up in an apple loft on the sly, but was careful to hide them or set fire to them. Soon, however, before she was out of her teens, she was betrothed to the son of a neighboring wool-stapler....

And so the story goes. It ends, in its author's mind's eye, with Judith leaving her husband, being rebuffed by theater managers when she tried to get work the way her brother had, until eventually, "she killed herself one winter's night and lies buried at some cross-roads where the omnibuses now stop outside the Elephant and Castle."

We can hardly compare 16th-century England with 21st-century North American Judaism. But still, it is true that in the not so distant past, it was commonplace for Jewish traditions to get passed along to brothers but not sisters. Likewise, traditions that women passed down from mother to daughter went unrecognized as significant to main-stream Judaism, which remained "a men's affair."

The extent to which that is still the case can be discussed through your readings: *The Jew Who Wasn't There: Halacha and the Jewish Woman* by Rachel Adler and *Bais Ya'akov As An Innovation In Jewish Women's Education: A Contribution To the Study Of Education And Social Change* by Deborah Weissman. Both of these articles provide feminist perspectives on Jewish traditions regarding women.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. How are the approaches of these authors similar?
2. Where do they differ?
3. What are some other approaches that Jewish feminists have applied to the transmission of Jewish tradition?
4. How do Jewish traditionalists respond to a feminist critique?

The discussion of Jewish women provides an example of “take,” the third determinant of a curriculum. We said (in Unit One) that *Curriculum = Tradition x Today x Take*.

The role of the first, *Tradition*, is our overall topic here: How much of tradition is desirable? How do we decide? Who decides and according to what right? Is everything old necessarily good?

The role of the second, *Today*, is evident: Before the end of the twentieth century, the very idea of a feminist critique would probably have been unthinkable.

But we still have *Take*, the individual evaluation of these particular feminist critiques about which every congregation has to be clear, as it decides how it will remain faithful to tradition, how it will pass it along appropriately. No congregation should simply adopt what others have incorporated. Each needs to adapt belief and ritual so that it fits its own unique place.

As part of your conversation, you might want to include a discussion of a famous observation by renowned faculty member at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and the founder of Reconstructionism, Mordecai Kaplan. “Tradition,” he said, “should have a vote, not a veto.”

Question: What do you think of that view? What other factors get a vote?

We said before that:

1. Education is the transmission of a tradition: in our case, Jewish tradition
2. What we are capable of transmitting is never the total amount of knowledge available, but only what we choose for our curriculum
3. Curriculum = Tradition x Today x Take

Now we can add a fourth lesson:

4. The last two constituents of curriculum (*Today* and *Take*), make it virtually impossible for us to pass along the first one (*Tradition*) unchanged. The feminist critique is just one example of a general truth. Perhaps older generations use the educational process to transmit their heritage, but the

generation that receives it does so with a new sense of *today* and their own particular *take* on what their parents bequeath them. Therefore:

Education is not just the transmission of a tradition. It is the transmission and the reinterpretation of a tradition – transmission by the generation that passes tradition down, but, necessarily, a reinterpretation by the generation that receives it.

FROM THE TRADITION מִסֹּרֶה

READ AND DISCUSS
MOSES AND AKIBA

We already looked at the following text from the Talmud in Unit one, as a *Ma'aseh Shehayah*. Here it is again, this time with the “surprise ending” that we omitted before.

MOSES AND AKIBA: Menachot 29b

Rabbi Judah said in the name of Rav: When Moses ascended on high, he found G-d sitting and tying crowns to the Torah's letters. “Master of the universe,” he said to him, “Why are you doing this?”⁴ G-d replied, “In the future, there will arise one man, at the end of many generations, named Akiba ben Joseph, and from every little jot and tittle of these crowns, he will interpret mountains of laws.”

“Master of the universe, show him to me,” said Moses. “Just turn around and look behind you,” answered G-d.

So Moses sat down at the back of the classroom, behind eight rows of students, and understood not one word of what anyone was saying. He grew weary from it all. They came to a particular point and Akiba's students asked him, “How do you know this?” Akiba answered, “It is a *halakhah* given to Moses on Sinai.” That comforted him.

Moses returned to the Holy Blessed One⁵ and said, Master of the universe, you have a man like that, yet you give the Torah through me [and not him]?

G-d replied, “Quiet! That's what it occurred to me to do.” Moses continued, “Master of the universe, You have shown me his Torah. Show me now his reward.” “Turn around,” G-d replied.

So he turned around and he saw people weighing the flesh from Rabbi Akiba's body in a meat market.⁶ Moses said,

⁴ Surely the Torah is complete as it is. Why does G-d add things to it?

⁵ Menachot 28b

“Master of the universe, this is the Torah, and this its reward?” G-d replied, “Quiet! That’s what it occurred to me to do.”

Question: How do you explain the way the story ends in the Talmud?

FOR NEXT TIME

FANNING OUT WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED: TRADITION AND ME

At your next meeting, you will try to consolidate all you have learned so far. To prepare for it, review the curriculum you have completed thus far and whatever notes you may have taken. Come to the meeting prepared to say what has made the most impact on you.

Also, it is time to make sure others in the congregation know the course you are on. The best way to do that is to draw them in by virtue of their own experience. Each of you should find a small group to survey. You might:

- Use a committee you are on; spend some time at your next meeting with them to do the following exercise.
- Collect a group of religious school parents to do the exercise while their children are at the synagogue school.
- Invite some friends to your home for coffee; the exercise is really a lot of fun.
- Do the exercise at a board meeting.
- Phone members at random, people you do not even know, but people whose names just happen to be on the membership list. Invite them to your home for a discussion of synagogue education and their (and their family's) future. (They will be surprised and happy that you cared to include them.)

Whatever you decide, if your team numbers 20 members, and if each member surveys ten people, you will have some 200 people represented in your sample. But decide before you leave what you will do, so that you prevent overlap (the same people may serve on the board, on several committees and be friends with many of you).

We suggest that before you leave, see if members of your team have the board and all the committees covered, and if the committees and board have scheduled meetings before your own next meeting as a team.

⁶ Rashi: “A place where butchers weigh meat, as it says in Berakhot 61b, ‘They [the Romans] skinned him alive.’”

When the people get together with you:

- A. Explain what S2K is, and why they are there.
- B. Make sure everyone knows everyone else. You can do this with a guided check-in.
 - i) Explain what a check-in is, and ask people to introduce themselves.
 - ii) Say something about their homes (whatever they like) - that they have children, that they live alone, that they are grandmothers, whatever the case may be.
 - iii) Say when they joined the synagogue and why.
- C. Tell them you are interested education as "passing along tradition," and that you wonder what traditions people would like to pass along. Be sure not to phrase the invitation in such a way that people who did not grow up Jewish feel left out.
- D. Now facilitate the following exercise.

Ask individuals the following:

1. "Name a tradition that you have learned to call your own."
2. "Who taught it to you, who handed it over?"
3. "Where did it happen? In the classroom? Somewhere else, perhaps in a synagogue that you have experienced? Or elsewhere altogether?"
4. "Why did it stick with you? Was it because of the way it was passed down to you?"
5. "Is this something you would like to see passed along to the next generation?"
6. "Are there traditions that you really do not like? If so, why?"
7. "Are there any traditions that you see other follow that you would like to learn."

Be sure to write down people's answers and bring your report to your next meeting.

Unit Two: What is Jewish Education

Meeting Three

PREPARATORY READINGS

1. Nodal Learning Points

FOR DISCUSSION

REVIEW OF HOMEWORK EXERCISE: FANNING OUT WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED: TRADITION AND ME

Begin by reporting on your meetings with others about tradition and how it is passed on.

1. What was their reaction to being invited to participate?
2. How did they like the exercise?
3. What did you learn about the synagogue? The members? The way to fan out what you are doing better next time?

Try to generalize from the experiences your team had.

- 1) What traditions came up repeatedly? What surprises did you encounter? What negatives did you hear? If you were to compile a list of values (from meeting one of this unit) and traditions (from the group experiment on which you are reporting) that would serve as guides for a synagogue curriculum on education, what would the list of values and traditions include?
- 2) Go back to how the traditions you heard were passed along successfully to the people with whom you spoke. What are the critical conditions under which traditions “stick” with the next generation? The factors involved are many – for example:

- (a) Were people at particularly critical moments in their lives?
- (b) Were the “teachers” involved people who were “special” at the time (parents? rabbi? best friend?)?
- (c) What was the “learning” environment? What channels of communication were used? That is, were people just *spoken* to? Did someone *sing* with them? Was *movement* or *touch* involved? Did they *eat* anything at the time?
- (d) Who else was present?

You have begun your consideration of the conditions under which successful learning happens. You can now begin to generalize your list to every aspect of synagogue education: not just your religious school, but the synagogue as a whole.

Now think about the relationship between: 1. *synagogue* 2. *education* 3. *tradition* and 4. *life's journey*. They all come together.

The synagogue (1) is a learning environment where people pass through on their evolving Jewish journeys (4). Especially at life's critical moments, they are apt to take on Jewish traditions (3) if the “teacher” and the others around them understand the stage of their journey and communicate in ways that make an impact. That is the mark of good education (2) as the transmission and reinterpretation of tradition (3).

READ AND DISCUSS

NODAL LEARNING POINTS

Please have a volunteer take a few minutes to summarize “Nodal Learning Points”.

ACTIVITY

WHERE PEOPLE SYSTEM MEETS SYNAGOGUE SYSTEM

Make a list of the nodal points in human life in America where learning is apt to happen. Opposite each one, write “Yes” or “No” in the column that asks whether your synagogue does or should provide learning opportunities as people reach those nodal points. You are learning to see the synagogue and its members as complex interactive systems. The synagogue “works” when it is in touch with people’s lives, when, “system meets system.”

Nodal Point should	The synagogue does	The synagogue
	recognize this (Yes/no)	recognize this (Yes/no)

FROM THE TRADITION מסורה

READ AND DISCUSS
A MAP OF RABBINIC JUDAISM

Earlier you looked at the map of a page of Talmud. Now you will begin an historical map of the rabbinic tradition. Along the way, your study will touch upon the formative books of Jewish tradition without which Judaism cannot be understood.

The map will take shape bit by bit. With each unit, we will supply a short overview, then introduce the book in question, and then provide some study passage (or passages) from the book in question. Please remember to utilize your "Map of Rabbinic Judaism," it will help orient you to the dates and times of the various stages of Jewish text. The first book we look at is the Mishnah.

It is hard to say exactly when the rabbinic era began. Tradition itself thinks that the first Rabbis followed the period of Ezra (mid-5th century BCE). Ezra is one of the leaders who returned from Babylonian exile. He is said to have begun the process of rabbinic interpretation and to have started an institution called *Anshei K'nesset Hag'dolah*, usually translated as "The men of the Great Assembly." But a likelier candidate is the second century BCE, when the Hasmonean revolution (the Maccabees) occurred. The shake-up gave rise to a new class of teachers and political leaders known as the Pharisees. We have no names of any Pharisees prior to that time, and the *Anshe K'nesset Hag'dolah* may even be a later fiction of rabbinic imagination applied to an earlier time, a convenient way to think of the continuity of Jewish tradition. We really know very little about the three centuries that followed Ezra, and the early Rabbis knew even less, because they did not have the written sources that we have. They knew tradition had been passed down to them, but they did not know how. Therefore when they had old traditions that were not biblical but were also not so recent that they knew who had promulgated them, they placed them between the fifth and the second century BCE and attributed them to the *Anshe K'nesset Hag'dolah*.

Some scholars think that the Pharisees were not the Rabbis, but another group altogether. Most people assume, however, that the Pharisaic revolution was the beginning of the rabbinic era and that the first rabbinic-like personalities and the Pharisees are the same people. In either case, the first bit of rabbinic thinking comes from the second century BCE. Tradition assumes that, for the first 125 years or so, this thinking was developed by successive pairs (*zugot* in Hebrew) of Pharisaic scholars who opposed one another in principle. The last pair is the most famous: Hillel and Shammai, whose death is placed, roughly, in the year 1 CE. So successful were they that the next seventy years -- until the destruction of the Temple -- are called the period of Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai, the "Hillelites" and the "Shammaites" who dominated rabbinic thought as schools of interpretation.

Rabbinic literature's earliest recollections, then, are of three types:

1. Traditions attributed to the *Anshe K'nesset Hag'dolah* (from the fifth to the second century BCE.)
2. Traditions associated with the *zugot* from about 125 BCE to the turn of the Common Era.
3. Traditions associated with *Bet Hillel* and *Bet Shammai* from the beginning of the Common Era to the war of 70 CE.

But we have no significant body of rabbinic literature from that era. The earliest great rabbinic book is the Mishnah, and it does not appear for another 130 years. Nonetheless, the period prior to 70 represents the first chapter in the history of the Rabbis: we can call it the period of the Pharisees.

After 70, we hear no more about Pharisees. Now the Rabbis are known as just that: Rabbis. Most of the famous Rabbis who are later quoted in the Mishnah come from this period of time: Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Akiba, and so forth. They are said to have operated in significant Jewish centers of study, first Yavneh (near present-day Tel Aviv) and, later, Usha (farther north in the Galil). In actual fact, they were peripatetic scholars, like Socrates in Greek tradition, who taught in various places. They had no actual schools, if by schools we mean buildings. Disciples went to them, then were recognized as scholars in their own right, and developed their own study circles. Later still, after the Mishnah was composed, the Rabbis from 70 to 200 were known by another name as well: *tanna* (plural: *tanna'im*). The era from 70 to 200, then – the era following the Pharisaic period -- is called the *Tannaitic Period*.

A first among equals during this time was the Patriarch, a Rabbi himself, but the chief Rabbi politically, in that he had access to Roman power, and represented the rabbinic community to the Roman authorities. As the Rabbis in general carried the title "Rabbi," so the Patriarch was called Rabban. The first great patriarch appointed by the Romans after the war was Yochanan ben Zakkai. He was followed by Rabban Gamaliel, and thereafter, it was said that every patriarch was descended from Gamaliel, who, himself, was said to be descended from Hillel. The patriarch in the year 200 was Yehudah Hanasi, and it is Yehudah who promulgated the first Jewish classic, the Mishnah.

The Mishnah is divided into six books, each one divided into tractates. The first book for instance, deals mostly with agriculture; the second with sacred time (Shabbat and holidays); the fourth with civil and criminal law; and so on. Since the Rabbis were first and foremost students and teachers (*tanna*, in fact, comes from the Aramic root meaning "to teach"), the Mishnah has quite a lot to say about the importance of study, and most of the anecdotal advice is collected in a tractate in the fourth book, called *Avot*. It is probably the

most cited tractate in all the Mishnah, and often is called *Pirkei Avot*, literally, "The chapters of the Fathers." Father, of course, was an honorific title for "teacher." The Christian Church was developing its own set of religious wisdom under the aegis of Church Fathers. They kept the title; we did not. But it does show up here, as the popular name of the tractate that, among other things, passes along advice on how to learn and how to teach.

We begin our map of Jewish knowledge with Mishnaic wisdom on learning.

MISHNAH ON LEARNING

PIRKEI AVOT

4:15 Rabbi Elazar ben Shammua said: Let the honor of your student be as dear to you as your own, and the honor of your colleague be like the reverence due to your teacher, and the reverence for your teacher be like the reverence for heaven.

Question: Does your synagogue religious environment resemble the ideal as described this passage?

5:24 He used to say: At five years, the age is reached for the study of Bible, at ten for the study of Mishnah, at thirteen for the fulfillment of the commandments, at fifteen for the study of Talmud, at eighteen for marriage, at twenty for seeking a livelihood, at thirty for full strength, at forty for understanding, at fifty for giving counsel; at sixty a man attains old age...

Question: What is the difference between a modern life cycle and this one?

Question: This is the idealized life cycle that the rabbis established for men. How applicable is it for women? What might woman rabbi have said as her idealized life cycle?

5:25 Ben Bag-Bag said: Study the Torah again and again, for everything is contained in it; constantly examine it, grow old and gray over it, and swerve not from it, for there is nothing more excellent than it.

Question: The rabbis were as sophisticated as we are. They knew Greek philosophy and mathematics, for example, yet they still said everything is in Torah. Do you really believe "everything is in it?"

4:6 Rabbi Ishmael said: One who learns in order to teach will be granted adequate means to learn and to teach; but one who

learns in order to practice will be granted adequate means to learn and to teach, to observe and to practice.

Question: What and how are your children learning in synagogue school? Are they learning enough to teach? Are they learning enough to practice Judaism on their own?

Unit Two: What is Jewish Education Preparatory Readings

Meeting One:

1. Lawrence A. Hoffman, "Living by Torah: The Spirituality of Discovery."
(The purpose of this reading is to help you think through the spiritual side of Jewish learning. The article explores the role of Torah in Jewish life, and the spiritual nature of discovering the mind of G-d.)

Meeting Two:

1. Rachel Adler, "The Jew Who Wasn't There: Halacha and the Jewish Woman".
2. Deborah Weissman, "Bais Yaakov: A Historical Model for Jewish Feminists".
(These articles discuss the issue of Jewish traditions regarding women as seen from the point of view of a feminist.)

Meeting Three:

1. Nodal Learning Points

Unit Two: What is Jewish Education

Meeting Three Preparatory Readings

NODAL LEARNING POINTS

"Life's critical moments" are often times when the educational process matters most. Precisely then, people are open to Jewish education; and precisely then, they are most unhappy if Judaism fails them.

We should, therefore, spend a moment on what we can call "Nodal Learning Points." We will see in greater detail later that everything needs to be considered *systemically*. People, schools, traffic, gardens and meals – everything – exist only as part of a system of things that impact on each other. A *node* is the central intersecting point of the system in question. The *nodal point* is the place in the system where stresses toward and away from change are most likely to occur.

Let's look at people as individual systems.

- Go back in your life and consider the times when you were most impacted by events that taught you something: a bar/bat mitzvah? The death of a grandparent? Your marriage? Whatever they were, they were *nodal points*, times of quantum leaps forward in your learning. That learning may have come immediately or only later, in reflection, on the moment in question. But the nodal moment prompted it. Take a moment to write some of your most important nodal points here:
- At your meeting, share some of these times with each other: what did you learn and why was this a nodal point, an especially conducive time for learning?
- Then have your team generalize from what you heard.

Some nodal points, like the sudden death of someone we love, come about without warning: they change us, as systems, like a bolt of lightning that suddenly strikes our home. As human beings, a species of animal, we are hard-wired to

learn quickly under such conditions, and the lessons we learn then are never forgotten.

But because human beings are a unique kind of animal, many human nodal points are predictable and even planned. By and large, they are not even biological, but cultural. We think about them in advance; we know they are coming; we open ourselves to special learning then. We often have rituals to celebrate them: a wedding; a 50th birthday party; or a bar/bat mitzvah, for example.

Even the ones that happen without prior notice attract rituals that provide time for us to learn: sitting *shiva* is the best example. But think also of discovering you are pregnant. There may be no Jewish ritual for the occasion, but you and your partner are apt to find yourselves developing ritual moments – lingering over dinner, or celebrating in special ways.

It is not true that every nodal point requires Jewish learning. In the modern world, we live both Jewish and secular lives, after all, and voting for the first time or getting a driver's license, for instance, may or may not rank as significantly Jewish. But serious Jews know that the most important moments in life – birth, death, having a family, building a home – are profoundly Jewish. These things are the Jewish nodal learning points that stand out later with memories, pictures on the wall, and lessons learned.

If the synagogue does not provide those lessons, some other institution, maybe not even a Jewish one, will.

Unit Two: What is Jewish Education Enrichment Material

1. More Thoughts On Tradition

Meeting Two:

1. An Expansion on "Tradition As Adopted And Adapted"

Enrichment Material for Unit Two: What is Jewish Education?

MORE THOUGHTS ON TRADITION

Famous Views By Famous Folks

- *Education, in the broadest and truest sense, will make an individual seek to help all people, regardless of race, regardless of color, regardless of condition.*
George Washington Carver

- *I do not much believe in education. Each man ought to be his own model, however frightful that may be.*
Albert Einstein

- *All that's different about me is that I still ask the questions most people stopped asking at age five.*
Albert Einstein

- *Whoever touches the life of the child touches the most sensitive point of a whole which has roots in the most distant past and climbs toward the infinite future.*
Maria Montessori

- *Knowledge does not keep any better than fish. You may be dealing with knowledge of the old species, with some old truth, but somehow or other it must come to the students as if it were just drawn out of the sea and with the freshness of its immediate importance.*
Alfred North Whitehead

ENRICHMENT MATERIAL FOR UNIT TWO: MEETING TWO

AN EXPANSION ON "TRADITION AS ADOPTED AND ADAPTED"

Whatever tradition is, there has been a return to it. And everybody claims to have it. Orthodox shuls have never been stronger, and not just in name but in genuine adherence to Jewish tradition; an official journal of Orthodox Jewish thought, published by the Rabbinical Council of America is even named *Tradition*. Conservative synagogues too now pay more attention to tradition than they did in the 1950s, when being Conservative largely meant that you came from Eastern Europe, you were not Orthodox, and you didn't belong in the Western European German Reform Temples. Any old-time Reform Jew will swear today that the Reform movement is positively overwhelmed with a return to tradition, and Reconstructionists have recaptured traditional practices that Mordecai Kaplan might have been surprised to see.

Conservatives like poet T. S. Eliot have always been fascinated by tradition, of course. What is new is tradition's attraction on the left as well. In 1985, the countercultural *chavurah* movement briefly launched its own journal named *New Traditions*. There is a reason why people flocked to hear Zero Mostel sing "Tradition, Tradition" in *Fiddler on the Roof*, and a reason too why of all the satirical Purim parodies at Hebrew Union College, many people recall a student dressing up like Tevya and singing about Reform Judaism: "No tradition, No tradition!"

But still, what is it? And why is it necessary to pass it on? Unbounded traditionalism can sometimes be a bad thing after all -- the wholesale recovery of Grandma's ethnic food favorites turns out to be less wholesome than we remembered, and women often remind us that a recovery of tradition can be somewhat suspect. The wrong traditions like the wrong foods can kill you. Still, one of the most remarkable features of the women's movement is that a significant segment insists on basing its revolution on traditional sources and recovering traditional ceremonies to celebrate its own identity.

And here is where we come to the essence of the matter: Sociologist Edward Shils notes that "Only traditions that have ceased to be possessions are viewed with indifference." The point is, that tradition must be owned or it is not tradition. It cannot be something about which people are neutral, else it becomes a museum piece, displayed under glass but not in life.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that the word comes from the Latin, *tradere*, "to hand over," paralleled exactly by the Hebrew equivalent *masoret* ("tradition") from *masar*, also "to hand over." In Roman law, *traditio* was a means of handing over actual property from one owner to another. For a while,

early English too used "tradition" in the purely legal sense of handing over title or deed to property.

Tradition, then, is public property of the past, which we inherit and then pass on so that it remains with those who come after us. It is not just facts; it is more than objective data; in family education, for instance, *tradition is sights and sounds and smells and lessons and skills and knowledge* that make the Jewish family what it is. And family education is how we keep the family going.

So, similarly, Jewish education, broadly put, is the *sights and sounds and smells and lessons and skills and knowledge* that make the Jewish People what it is. And Jewish education is how we keep the Jewish People going.

Even *new* traditions claim rootedness in times more ancient than the old traditions they replace. It is the very nature of tradition to be clothed in garb that appears older than living memory. Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss notes that primitive cultures responding to the question of why something is done, attribute their otherwise inscrutable ritualizing to -- "We've always done it," which is to say, with Tevya, "It's a tradition!" And Tevya is not alone; he could have gotten it from the Talmud, which regularly attributes its ideas to the traditions established by those who are dead. "It is a tradition" [*masoret hi*];¹ "It is a tradition in our hands" [*masoret b'yadenu*];² "It is a tradition handed down to me from my father's father, [*masoret b'yadi me'avi aba*]"³ and so on.

We said before that *tradition is the public property of the past, which we inherit and then pass on so that it stays in the family.* We can now add that tradition is a *generational* legacy, a recollection that is passed down all the way from that single charismatic moment of initial insight in which our religious tradition had its origins. Ownership is crucial here. If we, the recipients, do not take it as owned, it is not tradition anymore. It is typified by Ruth's promise to Naomi (Ruth 1:16), which we say to generations past as we take on their traditions and make them our own: "Where you have gone, we will go. Where you have lodged, we will lodge. Your people will be our people, and your G-d, our G-d."

¹ Baba Batra 99b.

² Megillot 31a.

³ Palestinian Talmud. Sanhedrin 11:5.

Unit Three

Lernen: How Do We Learn?

“Without learning – no Judaism!”

*Rabbi Zacharias Frankel
Ideological Founder of
Conservative Judaism*

“Learning without thinking is labor lost; thinking without learning
is dangerous.”

Chinese proverb

OVERVIEW

In this unit, you will consider how Jewish culture focuses on learning. You will be introduced to the array of learning styles which are present in your synagogue and asked to evaluate your own learning style. You will be encouraged to view learning and “learning disabilities” from a new perspective, one which includes each of us in the realm of advanced learner and of elementary learner.

You will also be introduced to additional elements of the Jewish Learning Map and will look at an old Jewish story in a new way.

As with the other units of this curriculum, there is more material than can be covered in two meetings. Please select those pieces that work best for your team and congregation, or spread this unit out over three meetings.

Unit Three: Lernen – How Do We Learn? Meeting One

PREPARATORY READINGS

1. Two Kinds of Learners: The Four Sons of the Seder
2. A Classic Answer to “Two Kinds of Learners”: Two Models of Learning Provided by Rabbinic Tradition

READ AND DISCUSS

THE CENTRALITY OF LEARNING IN JEWISH CULTURE

We Jews have been in the learning business a long time. One central insight of our sages is that learning, not teaching, is what matters. Good teachers do count, but at the end of the day, the only thing that really counts is whether anyone has learned anything.

In pursuit of a lifetime of learning, we have developed an entire specialized vocabulary on learning. They say that Eskimos distinguish different kinds of snow; whether true or not, it is certainly the case that Jews do that with learning.

The following is a partial lexicon of learning that the Talmud takes for granted.

A Jewish Lexicon of Learning¹

1. *Sh'ma Minah* -- “Hear from this, learn from this, conclude from this.” Used to imply, “Draw the following halakhic conclusion from the previous statement.” It is also used at the end of an argument to confirm that the previous conclusion or explanation is indeed correct.
2. *Ka Mashma Lan* -- “It informs us, teaches us.” In response to the contention (or implication) that a statement is superfluous, it is sometimes argued that the statement does indeed clarify a point that is not obvious or that is subject to misinterpretation.

¹ Compiled primarily from *The Talmud Steinsaltz Edition: A Reference Guide* by Adin Steinsaltz and *The Practical Talmud Dictionary* by Yitzhak Frank.

3. *Tanu Rabanan* -- “Our rabbis taught.” A term used to introduce a rabbinic teaching prior to 200 CE, when the Mishnah was promulgated (but not the Mishnah itself).
4. *Tanya* -- “It is taught.” A term used to introduce a pre-200 piece of learning that cites the Tanna (an authority prior to 200) who said it.
5. *T’na* -- “He taught.” Another term introducing the citation of traditions prior to 200, sometimes meaning that the scholar being quoted established a particular textual emendation based upon a tradition that he himself had learned.
6. *T’nan* -- “We are taught.” Yet another term that specifies a pre-200 tradition, but this time, specifically the main work of the period, the Mishnah.
7. *Darshinan* -- “We interpret.” [a biblical passage].
8. *Darash Rav Ploni* -- “Rabbi X expounded.” The Talmud probably uses this expression to indicate that a scholar stated his views in the presence of the public at large.
9. *Ta Shma* -- “Come [and] hear!” An expression used to introduce an earlier source that is used to support an opinion, prove a point, raise an objection, or resolve a problem.
10. *Yelamdenu Rabbenu* -- “Let our teacher instruct us.” This expression introduces a Halakhic problem that is presented to a Torah scholar for resolution.
11. *Gemara Gemirei Lah* -- “They learned it as a tradition.” Used to indicate something derived from tradition, rather than derived plainly from a Biblical verse.

12. *Gamrinan* -- “We have learned it.” “We have a tradition.”
13. *Makshinan* -- “We compare; draw an analogy” (between two subjects, usually because of their juxtaposition in Scripture).
14. *Badek Lan Rav Ploni* -- “Rabbi X tested us.” An introduction to a statement in which students relate how their teacher asked them a question in order to test their knowledge – the Socratic method of learning.

Clearly, there are different kinds of learning and Jews figured that out centuries ago.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the first things – both positive and negative – that you remember learning? How did you learn what you did? Why do you think they stuck with you?
2. What are the most memorable things you learned along life’s way? How did you learn them? Why do you think they stuck with you?
3. Of the teachers you have had during the course of your life, whom do you remember well? What percentage of them were teachers of Judaism? Is there a pattern here that reveals something about Jewish education?
4. Who was your favorite teacher? Why? (You might even want to write that teacher a letter, expressing what made him/her so wonderful as a teacher for you. At a later date, team members can read their letters aloud to one another. You may even want to send your letter to your teacher.)

READ AND DISCUSS

A SIMPLE DICHOTOMY IN LEARNING PATTERNS

Think back to the last time you visited a museum to see a retrospective on an artist you have always loved or heard about. As you are about to enter the

exhibit, you discover that you can rent a head set with a tape explaining the background for each of the paintings on display.

Question: Do you rent the head set or not? (Compare the responses among your group.)

Think back now to a concert you have attended. On the way in, you receive a program giving you the title of the music to be performed and a write-up on the composers and the pieces you will hear.

Question: Do you read the write-ups? (Compare the responses among your group.)

We often make the mistake of thinking that what we do is simply the natural thing to do. But, in reality, some people would feel lost wandering through an art exhibit without a viewers guide; others say the guide just interrupts their enjoyment of the paintings. Similarly, some people read voraciously through the concert program notes, while others skip right past them.

Two kinds of learning are at stake: *didactic* and *experiential*. Didactic learners love lectures. They take copious notes and measure success by extent of linear detail. They memorize their notes with the goal of knowing the subject well enough to explain it to others. Experiential learners hate all of that. They love to experience an event without concern for history, background, structure, or other intellectualizations.

Most people are a combination of both, but extremes at either end of the spectrum do occur.

- a. A purely *experiential* learner wants no introduction or accompaniment at all.
- b. A purely *didactic* learner loves accompanying aids, and may become so involved with such things as a viewers' guide or program notes, that the experience becomes secondary to the guides; instead of the guides illustrating the art, the art is "used" to prove the guide is correct.
- c. The *experiential* learner walks away testifying to the beauty of the experience; this learner may be so moved by it, that learning *about* it will eventually be welcomed.
- d. The *didactic* learner walks away having memorized the salient facts about the art at hand; direct experience of the art becomes desirable only after the data is memorized.

Question: How many of your team members are primarily *didactic* and how many are primarily *experiential*?

Traditional school systems are didactic. Education is like a banking system. Knowledge is credited to a student's account and then drawn upon in examinations. But most people need at least some experience for learning to happen, and many people learn very poorly in the traditional classroom where passive students just take notes and go home to memorize them. Good educational systems provide parallel entryways for both kinds of learners. Think, then, about the education in your synagogue.

- a. Do you provide *experiential* learning as well as *didactic*?
- b. Is childhood education *didactic*, *experiential*, or both?
- c. Think about your congregation's offerings for continuing education? Are they *didactic* only? Or are there *experiential* models and modules as well?
- d. Where is *didactic* learning more appropriate?
- e. What do *b'nail mitzvah* students learn, and how do they learn it? Is their education limited to *didactic* learning?

FROM THE TRADITION מִסֹּדֶרָה

ACTIVITY

TWO KINDS OF LEARNERS: THE FOUR SONS OF THE SEDER

Please have a volunteer take a few minutes to summarize the reading, "Two Kinds of Learners: The Four Sons of the Seder." Refer to the reading as you work with your chevruta partners.

1. First, as background: Why are there four sons, not five or eight or two? The answer is that the Torah tells us four times to "tell our child" about the Exodus. The Rabbis assume each instruction is meant for a different sort of child.

2. Divide into pairs -- each pair is called a *chevruta* -- and compare the two versions in your pairs. One person should read aloud the first account (from the *Mekhilta*), and the other person should follow the reading silently in the *Yerushalmi*, noting where differences occur. Then the two members of the pair should go over the differences together, asking the following questions:

There is a change in the order of the children mentioned. What is it?

There are also minor changes of wording here and there. Identify some of these.

Above all, the answer has been reversed for two of the children. Which two get each other's answers?

3. Come back together as a whole group and compare what you found. Make a master list on the board of what differences you saw, and speculate on what the differences might entail.

A. Begin by looking at the order of children mentioned. Do you think the order in each case is random? Or do you think each version has its own internal logic, telling us something about learning or the Jewish ideals of learning?

B. Now look at the minor differences in wording. Are they accidental, the result of different oral traditions, perhaps? Or are they purposeful, an attempt to say different things about the makeup of the children?

C. Most significantly, you will see that two of the answers are reversed in these parallel rabbinic versions. This reversal is said to exist

because we are dealing with two kinds of learners. To get at the difference between them, ask the following questions: (Start with the *Mekhilta* version, because that is the version that found its way into our Passover Haggadah).

1. In the *Mekhilta*: What constitutes the wisdom of the wise child? The evil of the evil child? The simpleness of the simple child?

2. Why is each answer appropriate to the child to whom it is given?

3. Ask the same questions for the *Yerushalmi*: What constitutes the wisdom of the wise child? The evil of the evil child? The simpleness of the simple child?

4. Why is each answer appropriate to the child to whom it is given?

D. Finally, given your answers to C, what is the difference between "learning" as presented in the *Mekhilta* and learning as presented in the *Yerushalmi*?

(After you have discussed your answers, see the classic answer in your preparatory readings provided by Rabbi Eugene Mihaly, z"l, a former professor of Midrash at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.)

Unit Three: *Lernen* – How Do We Learn? Meeting Two

PREPARATORY READINGS

1. “Learning Disabilities” – Not Just in School
2. Learning as Critical Thinking
3. Samuel Heilman, *People of the Book* [The traditional Ashkenazi way of learning], pp. 6-8.
4. Samuel Heilman: *The Gate Behind the Wall: A Pilgrimage to Jerusalem*, pp. 168-195.

(The two Heilman readings complement each other. The first presents Heilman’s recollection of a particular study group, in which the nature of what he calls “lernen” comes alive. The second describes the four stages that traditional Ashkenazi study demands.)

5. A Further Word on Creativity
6. More on the Map of Jewish Knowledge: Talmudic and Geonic Traditions

READ AND DISCUSS

LEARNING DISABILITIES – NOT JUST IN SCHOOL

Please have a volunteer take a few minutes to summarize “Learning Disabilities’ – Not Just in School.”

After having read about the relativity of learning disabilities, you are now ready to think about real ways to deal with learning disabled students – and not just in your religious school, but also the way educational opportunities are set up for adults.

Here are some options for dealing with challenges in your synagogue:

1. Ignore them. Reward those who are good at the system, and (in effect, if not on purpose) punish those who are not. That is, let culture trump learners and their environment. (If you think you have “no problem” at all, you have already adopted this situation whether you know it or not. Disabled students have already become invisible to you.
2. Let learners and their environment trump culture. Decide that any abilities that students bring to school are equal to any others. Change the synagogue school system to let all students do whatever they are good at, have no standards of any sort, and declare everyone a winner.
3. Strike a balance. Decide which aspects of the traditional system truly matter and which aspects do not. Determine which educational goals should be maintained.

Recognize that there may be parts of your curriculum that were not emphasized, and have not been emphasized traditionally, which may now also serve as educational goals. And recognize that not all students will learn the same way. Design a system where everyone learns enough to feel competent as a Jew.

If we adopt the third option, we would have an educational system where many learning patterns were rewarded; teaching would take different forms; the curriculum would give everyone a feeling of competence – without sacrificing what it needs to ensure the continuity of Judaism.

Please remember, as we learn about these styles, it is likely that your educators have taken many of the philosophies into consideration. The job of the S2K team is not to try to immediately or independently “fix” what may be wrong in the synagogue school system; it is to look carefully at the system in place in order to help the professionals in your synagogue use their experience to determine the next step of your journey with you.

In the next unit, we will look deeper at education as a complex system. For now, let’s expand our insights into **abilities** and **disabilities** to explore more than just the supplementary religious school. What goes for the religious school goes also for services, adult learning, general programming, and even committee and board meetings. Didactic or experiential learners plan these events, very often with others like themselves in mind.

ACTIVITY

WHO PLANS WHAT FOR WHOM?

Make a list of some of the environments within the synagogue that bring people together. Imagine they are all places where people can learn something. A partial list may include: Shabbat services, board meetings, “Mitzvah Day”, and an Israel program.

For each event:

- a. Decide what is being taught.
- b. What skills are being rewarded and what skills are being dismissed.
- c. Who will walk away feeling competent, and who will leave feeling disabled? Are there ways to recognize the “disabled” attendants?

These “disabled” attendants have not learned what they need to know.

- a. Why not?
- b. How might the synagogue expand the ways it teaches so that “differently abled” learners learn enough not to feel incompetent?
- c. How can the situations on your list include opportunities for the “disabled” to have their own abilities recognized?
- d.

READ AND DISCUSS

MORE ON *YESHIVAH* LIFE

Please have a volunteer take a few minutes to summarize, “*Learning as Critical Thinking*” and the two Heilman readings, from “*People of the Book*” and “*The Gate Behind the Wall: A Pilgrimage to Jerusalem*”.

If education is the transmission and reformulation of tradition, then one Jewish tradition is the high value we put on independent judgment and critical thought. Part of what we aspire to in our Jewish way of *lernen* is empowering every person to take his or her stand on matters that matter, and to do so after weighing the evidence, thinking through the alternatives, taking tradition seriously.

But now, recall what we said about different kinds of learners and about learning disabilities. Obviously, the underlying problem with the *Yeshivah* model is that it rewarded didactic learning and treated people who were not naturally endowed with the love of debate as if they were disabled.

But, critical thinking is not limited to didactic learners. Artists, for instance, may not be didactic. They may approach learning differently altogether. But that does not mean they cannot make critical distinctions. Van Gogh wrote to his brother, saying that he spent days mastering the “simple” skill of painting a single petal on a sunflower. Athletes may test poorly in a *Yeshivah*. But watch a batter in a baseball game make microscopic judgments on whether to swing or not. Children born with multiple physical and mental handicaps may be especially loving because they recognize subtle emotional cues in people that others miss.

DISCUSS:

Go around your group asking what each person thinks he/she is good at, and how critical thinking enters into their skill.

When you are done, consider a blessing that our tradition provides. It is to be said when you come across someone who is “different” in the sense of being “misshapen.” Most people turn away at such a sight. Judaism honors such a person as made by G-d just as much as any of us. Physical “difference” is like learning “disability.” Both are relative to culture. If you feel comfortable doing it – this will depend on your view of the *halakhah* governing the recitation of blessings – you might want to look at one another, admire the diversity in the room and say:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה...מְשַׁנֵּה הַבְּרִיּוֹת

Baruch atah... m'shaneh ha-b'riyot: “Blessed are You...who creates us all differently.”

FOR DISCUSSION

A FURTHER WORD ON CREATIVITY

Please have a volunteer take a few minutes to summarize “A further word on creativity...”

Question: Where in your synagogue do you find examples of artistic learning?

Question: Do you think your congregation would be comfortable “pushing the boundaries?”

FROM THE TRADITION מִסֹּדְרָה

READ AND DISCUSS

MORE ON THE MAP OF JEWISH LEARNING: TALMUDIC AND GEONIC TRADITIONS

Please have someone in the group summarize the reading “More on the Map of Jewish Learning: Talmudic and Geonic Traditions.”

Remember to refer to your “Map of Rabbinic Judaism.”

The Rabbinic tradition that western European Jews inherited officially went from Mishnah (and *Tosefta*) to *Bavli* to the Geonim in Babylonia. True, Rabbis of what are today Spain, France and Germany adopted Palestinian liturgical poetry, and they were not uninterested in the *Yerushalmi*; they also made use of collections of *halakhah* that they called minor tractates, as opposed to the major tractates of Mishnah and Talmud. And they inherited an altogether different collection of literature called Midrash (to which we will turn in the next unit).

But even as they were collecting the literary output of Jews from Eretz Yisrael, Palestinian Jewry fell on hard times. The Crusades that began in 1096 culminated in Crusaders establishing the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. Jews fled temporarily, and even though they managed to return when the Muslims uprooted the Kingdom in 1187, by that time, they had adopted the customs of the lands where they had lived for four generations. These were the traditions of Babylonia, which they now carried back with them. Babylonian Jewry was now central even to Jews in Israel.

We can now add to our chart, filling in the growth of Jewish Tradition from the Mishnah (200 CE) to the death of Hai Gaon and the end of the Geonic era (1038).

For this meeting, we have provided two text studies:

AN EXCERPT FROM KIDDUSHIN 30A.

This is a talmudic discussion on the responsibility of a parent to teach Torah. Even this short and relatively simple passage will give you the flavor of a closely reasoned Talmudic argument. It also shows the complexity of dealing with the Talmud some 1500 years after its composition -- like interpreting the American constitution only 300 years after its promulgation. Both documents reflect their times and require interpretation by later generations of readers. In this case, the opinion near the end of the passage applies the obligation to teach Torah only to sons and not daughters – a point on which contemporary opinion varies. This is a difficult reading, as it follows the logic of Talmudic debate. If you are not used to Talmudic argument, you will need some help getting through it. The footnotes

provide a running commentary on the argument, but it might help to have a personal guide as well.

KIDDUSHIN 30A

To what extent must a man teach his son Torah?⁵ Said Rav Judah in Samuel's name, "Take as an example Zebulun ben Dan,⁶ whose grandfather⁷ taught him *Mikra*,⁸ Mishnah, Talmud,⁹ halachot and aggadot.¹⁰ An objection was raised from another Tannaitic teaching [called a *baraita*]: "If the father taught him *mikra*, he need not teach him Mishnah";¹¹

⁵ In the Gemara, the obligation is always stated with regard to a man (a father, or, here, a grandfather) with regard to his son.

⁶ His exact identity is unknown. Rashi says he was a certain student known to the Amoraim.

⁷ According to Rashi, the question "To what extent" is taken to mean, "For how many generations [must a man teach Torah]?" The answer therefore cites the case of a grandfather, indicating that the obligation carries forward for two generations. All the more so, is it incumbent on a father for his own son.

⁸ *Mikra* usually means scripture in general, from the root *kara*. But see below.

⁹ This passage is itself taken from the Talmud, so appears self-referential. The Amora in whose name it is given, Rav Judah, is Judah bar Ezekiel, who died in 299, almost 250 years before the date at which the Talmud is said to have been codified. He cites it in the name of Samuel, who died even earlier (in 263). So he could hardly have been referring to "The Talmud" as we know it. He must either mean talmudic logic or specific talmudic teachings already collected either orally or in written form in Samuel's or in Judah's day.

¹⁰ "Jewish law" and "Jewish lore" (like *midrash*, stories with a moral but not necessarily legally binding). The citation of *halakhot*, especially, would be redundant, were Judah to have meant by "Talmud" above, "specific talmudic teachings" (see note 9, above). He must therefore have meant "talmudic logic," that is, a talmudic way of reasoning. Now we learn that in addition to that logic, a child should be taught certain *halakhot* and even *aggadot*.

¹¹ Rashi interprets this to mean that if a father teaches his son Bible, he is under no obligation to teach him Mishnah as well. The son himself is expected to pursue that later discipline. But other interpretations are possible. An earlier teaching (29b) rules that if a son proves exceptionally gifted, a father should place his son's education ahead of his own. Since "his own" education implies something beyond mere Bible (that, presumably, his own father had already taught him), the teaching

“and according to Rava, *mikra* means Torah.”¹² It¹³ means “like” Zebulun b. Dan, but not entirely, for in the case of Zebulun ben Dan, his grandfather did the teaching, and taught him *mikra*, Mishnah, Talmud, *halakhot* and *aggadot*, whereas here,¹⁴ *mikra* alone suffices.¹⁵

Now, is the grandfather under this obligation? Surely it was taught: “You shall teach them to your sons”¹⁶ – but not (by logical inference) to your grandsons. How then should I understand the verse, “You shall make them known to your sons and grandsons”?¹⁷ That verse means to say that anyone

here must mean that at least for gifted children, the father is obliged to teach Mishnah and Talmud too.

It may be, of course, that there are actually two separate obligations referred to. The first (in the passage before us) is a minimal requirement that a court can demand of a father. It may, for instance, fine the father to pay for his son’s education in Bible. The second (from page 29b) is a general moral obligation to pursue a child’s education as far as possible. Though there is no legal recourse for this second obligation, it is nonetheless morally, if not legally, incumbent on a father; and if the son in question is a genius, the father is morally bound to advance that son’s education even before seeing to his own.

¹² Torah alone, that is – not even the prophets and writings that together with Torah constitute the whole Bible. This would be the least possible obligation on a father.

¹³ The first teaching.

¹⁴ In the case of the normal father doing the teaching.

¹⁵ The initial teaching led us to believe that every father should do what Zebulun ben Dan’s grandfather did – teach him the whole gamut of subjects. That teaching was challenged by a *tannaitic* statement that *mikra* would suffice, and in case we wonder what *mikra* means, we were given an interpretation by Rava (a fourth-century *amora*) identifying it not even as the whole Bible, much less post-biblical study. *Tannaitic* teachings always trump *amoraic* ones, so the *Gemara* cannot overrule the *tannaitic* objection. It therefore must maintain that the initial teaching was not meant literally. Instead, it intended to say only that one’s obligation is “like” the one described in the case of Zebulun ben Dan. Zebulun was taught more than the minimal requirement. Normally, obligation extends only to Torah.

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 1:19.

¹⁷ Deuteronomy 4:9.

who teaches his son Torah is credited as if he had taught his son, his grandson, his great grandson, and so on in perpetuity.¹⁸ That interpretation¹⁹ agrees with the Tanna who taught: “You shall teach them to your sons” implies only “sons.” How do I know that grandsons are included too? From the verse, “Make them known to your sons and grandsons.” If so, why state, “your sons?”²⁰ To teach: “your sons, but not your daughters.”²¹

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said, “Anyone who teaches his grandson Torah is considered as if he had directly received Torah from Mt. Sinai, as it is written, “You shall make them known to your sons and grandsons” [Deuteronomy 4:9] and then, immediately after that [Deuteronomy 4:10], it says, “The day that you stood before G-d at Horeb.”²²

¹⁸ This is all very well and good, a nice moral indeed, but it leaves us still with Samuel's original lesson unproven. How could Samuel have thought that a father's obligation extends also to grandsons? It is assumed that Samuel must have had some *tannaitic* basis for the ruling, or he would not have made it.

¹⁹ That is to say, Samuel's.

²⁰ So Samuel has been supported by an alternative *tannaitic* statement which takes the verse, “Make them known to your sons and grandsons” to imply grandsons literally, rather than just by metaphorical extension, as above. But the argument is not over. The person who holds the first opinion (that the obligation is only toward sons, not grandsons, and that “You shall make them known to your sons and grandsons” is to be taken metaphorically only) can still challenge the inclusion of the word “sons” in the verse, “You shall make them known to your sons and grandsons.” Indeed, if the verse does include grandsons, literally, then surely it includes sons without having to say so. Why then does it bother saying “your sons,” when we could have deduced that as obvious?

²¹ Having to justify the inclusion of “your sons” in a verse where (according to the interpretation being championed here) “sons” would be self-evident, the arguer finds a reason why “sons” had to be stipulated expressly. It is not to include sons in the obligation to teach Torah. That would indeed have been deducible from the fact that grandsons must be taught. But still, Torah had to say “sons” here to imply “sons, not daughters.”

²² Mt. Sinai is also called Mt. Horeb. Juxtaposing the commandment to make Torah known to sons and grandsons with the statement that “You stood on Mt. Horeb” implies that teaching grandchildren is tantamount to hearing Torah directly at Sinai.

AN EXCERPT FROM *DEREKH ERETZ ZUTA*

This is a Palestinian compilation from the *geonic* era, containing mostly moral advice for students of Torah. Note how Jewish theory of education worries as much about the character of those who are learned as it does the technical mastery of what they manage to know.

DEREKH ERETZ ZUTA, 4:1-3 – ON SCHOLARSHIP AND SCHOLARLY ETIQUETTE

1. Always act mannerly when entering or leaving somewhere. Spend less time on business affairs, that you may keep busy with Torah. Once, Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar was riding a donkey on a beach, when he came across a stranger who was exceptionally deformed. He said to the man, “You empty-head, how ugly are father Abraham’s children! Is everyone in your town as ugly as you?”

The man replied, “What choice do I have? Go complain to the potter who made me.” Rabbi Shimon immediately dismounted and threw himself face down on the ground before the man, begging, “I am so sorry. Please forgive me.”

I will forgive you only if you go tell the potter who made me, “How empty-headed is the container you have made.”

With that, Rabbi Shimon walked behind the man a certain way, until arriving at his own hometown. The townsfolk went to greet him, calling out, “*Shalom aleikhem*, Rabbi.”

“Who are you calling ‘Rabbi,’” queried the man.

“Why, the person walking behind you,” they answered.

“If he is a rabbi,” shouted the man, “let there be no more like him!”

Then he told the town folk the whole story, after which they earnestly asked him to forgive Rabbi Shimon.

“Alright,” answered the man, “but on condition that he never speak like that again.”

That very day, Rabbi Shimon taught in the Academy: Bend like reed; be not stiff like a cedar trunk. Even if all four winds of the world were to blow upon a reed, it would bend with the winds, and still remain standing when the winds

are long gone, such that we could still fashion a quill pen with it to write a *sefer Torah*. Not so the cedar. If the north, east or west wind were to blow it might remain in place, but a blast from the south wind would uproot it. It would be chopped and used to build houses, with the leftover used for firewood. That is why the Rabbis taught, "Bend like reed; be not stiff like a cedar trunk."

2. How do you honor your teacher? When walking together, walk on the teacher's left, not on his right. If two of you are walking with the teacher, put the teacher in the middle – the more important of you being on the right, the less important on the left. Thus do we find when the three angels, Gabriel, Michael, and Raphael, visited Abraham. Gabriel came to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Raphael came to heal Abraham from his circumcision, and Michael came to tell Sarah she would have a child. Michael was in the middle, Gabriel was on the right, and Raphael was on the left....
3. If you walk behind your teacher, you may not leave without asking permission first. If two people are equal in learning, the host enters his home first and the guest follows, but when leaving the guest goes first and the host follows. If you take leave of someone, whether greater than you or not, you must first say, "I am leaving."

Unit Three – *Lernen*: How Do We Learn? Preparatory Readings

Meeting One:

1. Two Kinds of Learners: The Four Sons of the Seder
2. A Classic Answer to “Two Kinds of Learners,” Two Models of Learning Provided by Rabbinic Tradition

Meeting Two:

1. “Learning Disabilities” – Not Just in School
2. Learning as Critical Thinking
3. Samuel Heilman, People of the Book [The traditional Ashkenazi way of learning], pp. 6-8.
4. Samuel Heilman: The Gate Behind the Wall: A Pilgrimage to Jerusalem, pp. 168-195.
(The two Heilman readings complement each other. The first presents Heilman’s recollection of a particular study group, in which the nature of what he calls “lernen” comes alive. The second describes the four stages that traditional Ashkenazi study demands.)
5. A Further Word on Creativity
6. More on the Map of Jewish Knowledge: Talmudic and Geonic Traditions

Unit Three

Lernen: How Do We Learn?

Meeting One Preparatory Readings

TWO KINDS OF LEARNERS: THE "FOUR SONS" OF THE SEDER

Most people know the "Four sons" narrative in the *Haggadah*. Most do not know, however, that there are two early versions of it, one in the *Yerushalmi* (The Palestinian Talmud, c. 400 C.E.) and one even earlier still, in a midrashic text called the *Mekhilta* (c. 200 C.E.). But the two accounts are different! They illustrate two kinds of students, and two ways in which Jewish tradition is passed on and owned by a new generation.

(Please try to look beyond the male language of the original text. We can see this as including girls, not just boys. Except when translating the original text, we will refer to them as "Four Children.")

Here is the *Mekhilta's* version:

Introduction: It is possible to say there are four sons, one wise, one simple, one wicked, and one who does not even know what to ask.

The Wise Son: What does the wise son ask? "What are the statutes, laws and ordinances which G-d commanded you?" Open him up to the laws of Passover, that "*ein maftirin achar hapesach Afikoman.*" [We will translate this later].

The Simple Son: What does the simple son ask? "What's this?" Tell him, "This is because with a mighty hand, G-d brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

The Wicked Son: What does the wicked son ask? "What is this labor to you?" Because he excludes himself from the community, do the same back to him. Tell him "It is because of what G-d did for me when I left Egypt. For me; not for you. If you had been there, you wouldn't have been redeemed."

The Son Who Cannot Ask: And as for the son who doesn't even know what to ask, you should start for him, as it says, "You shall tell your son..."

And here is the version 200 years later from the *Yerushalmi*:

Introduction: Rabbi Hiyya taught, the Torah speaks of four sons, a wise son, a wicked son, a simple son, and a son who does not even know what to ask.

The Wise Son: What does the wise son ask? "What are the statutes, laws and ordinances which G-d commanded us?" Tell him, "This because with a mighty hand, G-d brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

The Wicked Son: What does the wicked son ask? "What is this labor to you? Why all this work by which you burden us year after year?" Because he excludes himself from the community, do the same back to him. Tell him "It is because of what G-d did for me when I left Egypt. For me; not for you. If you had been there, you would never have been worthy of being redeemed from there.

The Simple Son: What does the simple son ask? "What's this?" Tell him the laws of Passover, that "*ein maftirin achar hapesach afikoman.*" [We will return to this quote later.] One is not permitted to get up from one *chavurah* and go to another one."

The Son Who Cannot Ask: And as for the son who doesn't even know what to ask, you should start for him, as it says, "You shall tell your son..."

A CLASSIC ANSWER TO “TWO KINDS OF LEARNERS” TWO MODELS OF LEARNING PROVIDED BY RABBINIC TRADITION

(A summary of the classic answer provided by Rabbi Eugene Mihaly, z”l, a former professor of Midrash at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati)

We begin with the *Mekhilta*, the better known account, because it is the version found in our *Haggadah*:

Why is there a switch in answers between the wise and the simple child? In the *Mekhilta* (and our *Haggadah*), the wise child asks, “What are the statutes, laws and ordinances which G-d commanded you?” She is told the various laws of Passover, including the enigmatic rule, “*ein maftirin achar hapesach afikoman*” (which is translated below). The usual explanation is that the wise child wants to know all the laws of Pesach, so is told them, even the last law of the *seder*, namely, *ein maftirin achar hapesach afikoman*. This is indeed an answer fit for a wise child, especially since its last little bit of Hebrew is so difficult to comprehend. Literally, it means, “After the paschal offering” (*achar hapesach*) “you may not take your leave” (*ein maftirin*) “with *afikoman*.” But what could that mean?

Originally (before the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E.) an actual lamb called the *Pesach* (or “Passover Offering”) was sacrificed at the Temple during the afternoon prior to the *seder*. The carcass of the slaughtered animal was then taken back home to be eaten that night as the main course of the *Seder*. Since some families could not afford their own lamb, several families would customarily buy the lamb as partners. They would have it slaughtered for all of them together, and then eat it together as well. There still was no *Haggadah* in those early years, so the *seder* was basically an exercise in eating what we would consider a barbecued lamb in family groups, and then sitting around informally discussing the miracle of the Exodus from Egypt.

One of the rules for the meal was that the last bite of food that evening had to be a piece of the lamb. You would go to bed, so to speak, with the taste of *Pesach* on your tongue. It was that practice that prompted the final rule: “After the paschal offering” (*achar hapesach*) “you may not take your leave” (*ein maftirin*) “with *afikoman*” – though we still have a ways to go before we understand just what the rule meant. Crucial to our interpretation will be our understanding of what the *afikoman* was.

Today, the *afikoman* is a piece of matzah that gets eaten last instead of the piece of the paschal lamb, that used to be the final taste for the evening. So the Conservative *Haggadah* (for example) translates the Mishnah’s law as, “Nothing should be eaten after the *afikoman*.” But that is not what it meant originally when people were still eating sacrificed lamb for dinner. We will return to the original meaning, but meanwhile, let’s look at the wise child’s answer more closely.

In the *Mekhilta* interpretation, the wise child asks for all the laws of Passover, and then gets them -- including the last one which is hard to translate, and which presupposes

considerable historical sophistication, if it is to be understood. This is a complicated cognitive response – just what an A+ student in a typical post-graduate honors seminar would probably expect. She goes to the head of the class.

By contrast, unable to memorize and master complex data, the simple child isn't even sure what to ask. The only question she can muster is, "What's this?" The adults in the room despair. Instead of being given a complicated *halakhah* to worry about, she is told, simply, "With a mighty hand, G-d brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

But look at the *Yerushalmi*, where the answers are reversed. Also the statement about the *Afikoman* is expanded to warn against "getting up from one *chavurah* and going to another one."

Rabbi Mihaly characterized the learning style of the *Mekhilta* students as *didactic*. Their classroom features oral instruction and memorization. Smart people master lots of data. Simple students don't. Graduate and professional schools are built on this system. IQ tests fit it. Religious school classrooms too are usually patterned after didactic learning models.

But the *Yerushalmi* pictures a different kind of student, a student who learns experientially, perhaps at camp, or in a *seder*, with all the smells and food, and the warmth of family and friends gathered together. It therefore interprets the wise child's question differently. The wise child doesn't really want to know all the laws, as if he is a memorization machine. He wants to get to the heart of the Jewish experience that brings everyone together that night. So he is told the only thing worth knowing and experiencing: "With a mighty hand, G-d brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

In this system, the simple child also wants more than data. He too wants experience. But what makes him simple is that he is likely to misunderstand the *seder* and take advantage of the wrong experience. To grasp the nature of that experience, we need to know more about the early *seder*.

Our *seder*, began in late Greco-Roman times, and is the invention of the Rabbis. It was customary to celebrate holidays and life-cycle events by gathering for a feast, and then participating in light philosophical conversation. These gatherings were called *chavurot* (singular: *chavurah*), "fellowship circles," or, better (to coin a phrase) "tableship groups." The Rabbis belonged to *chavurot*, and would meet together regularly for good food, drink and conversation about Torah.

That is why we read in *Pirkei Avot* (1:6), *asei l'kha rav uk'nei l'kha chaver*, usually translated as, "Provide yourself with a teacher and get yourself a companion." *Chaver* is no mere companion. It is someone who belongs to the your *chavurah*, and meets you at the table to celebrate and learn.

The *seder*, then, began as a “tableship” celebration. People ate heartily and drank lots of wine; then they settled in for conversation about the Exodus, the obvious philosophical topic for the evening.

Nowadays, we do not get around to eating until *after* most of the *Haggadah* has been read – just the opposite of the way it was done originally. The problem back then was that many people ate and drank too much and then, in a stupor, ran off before the religious part of the evening. That is to say, they would “eat and run.” So somewhere in the second century C.E, the Rabbis changed the order, making people sit through the learning before they were allowed to eat.

Now we return to the original meaning of “*ein maftirin achar hapesach afikoman*” Only by the end of the second century was the afikomen a piece of matzah. Before that, it was a verb, “to carouse”. “*Ein maftirin achar hapesach afikoman*” did not mean (as now), “Nothing should be eaten after the afikomen.” It meant, “After eating the Paschal lamb (the last taste on your tongue), you are not allowed to take your leave and carouse.” *Afikoman* was not a thing; it was a verb, “To carouse.” “To afikomen” (“to carouse”) meant leaving early from your own *chavurah* and running off to another one where they might still be having fun – instead of staying where you were and turning to the religious substance of the night.

So in this *Yerushalmi* account, the simple son does indeed get an experiential answer. He is told not to mistake the fun for the religious meaning of the night. He is not to become drunk or eat so much that he falls asleep; he may not leave his *chavurah* early to find another one where there is still plenty of wine and fun to be had.

Unit Three

Lernen: How Do We Learn?

Meeting Two Preparatory Readings

LEARNING "DISABILITIES" – NOT JUST IN SCHOOL

There are many ways we learn, some ways linked to age, others to genetic abilities, other still to gender and to culture and so on. Being "abled" educationally means being adept at fulfilling whatever learning expectations a particular learning style demands. Since Jewish education presupposes certain preferred styles, some people will always discover they are "disabled" relative to the style preferred.

A learning disability, therefore, is a function of both the learner and the learning culture.

Imagine, then, two Jewish societies, one purely didactic and the other purely experiential. Each society has its own synagogues, which, in turn, have opportunities for adult learning every Tuesday night.

In the didactic system, we see a woman who has finished post-graduate school, having been admitted because she is great at memorizing data, and has scored beautifully on standardized tests. In the synagogue, she welcomes classes where teachers lecture on the Bible -- a class on the matriarchs and patriarchs, for example. But the class also calls for some role-playing of Bible stories. The didactic child/woman is experientially **disabled**, and finds the role-playing somewhat embarrassing. Her neighbor, an experiential learner, is bored by the lectures. But she loves the role-playing.

"Disability" is always a relative term.

Jewish culture has come to value certain skills and devalue others. Traditionally, memorizing pages of text, competing to see who could outdo others in debate, and knowing how to figure out complicated rules for keeping *Kosher*, *Shabbat*, and the like, became defined as "abilities." People who were not good at these things were, by definition, **disabled**.

"Disability" is relative to whatever a given learning system counts as "ability."

At one time, the students who were unable to memorize enormous amounts of data were considered "bad" learners -- meaning, stupid, lazy, or otherwise mentally impaired. Then, some years ago, we widened the circle of culpability, by blaming the culture or environment in which these "bad" learners grew up. Though we did not use the word, in some circles they could have been described as "culturally deprived." These suburban

kids were the victims of Jewishly broken homes, Jewishly uncaring parents, and environments where lessons from religious school were not reinforced.

So learning disabilities are relative to the interaction between students, their learning culture, and their environment.

LEARNING AS CRITICAL THINKING

One of the things Jewish culture has specialized in is the penchant for critical thinking. That may be the reason that Jews have stood out as Nobel Prize-winners, business entrepreneurs, university professors, and students in general. For example: Whereas 69.2% of all baby-boomer Jews have at least a bachelor's degree, only 24.5% of the general population does.²

This figure is somewhat tendentious, because it does not take into account gender, race and class differences. But if we compare more carefully, we still get a clear picture of Jews attending college more than non-Jews.

- Comparing just white males, age 30-39, for instance, the 1990 population study shows 87% of Jews with some college education, 67% having graduated college; and 37% with some graduate education as well.
- The parallel figures for other white American males in the same age range is 52% (with some College training), 31% graduating with a B.A., and 11% going to graduate school.³

It is not just that Jews have freely made the choice to go to college and graduate school in far greater numbers than non-Jews; rather Jews have decided to emphasize the importance of critical thinking.

We looked before at education as transmission and reconstruction of tradition. Now we look at it as the art of critical thinking.

MA'ASEH SHEHAYAH: QUESTION PLEASE?

Think back to this old Jewish joke:

Two acquaintances, one Jewish and one not, meet in the market place.

The non-Jewish friend starts the conversation.

"How are you?"

"How should I be?"

"Well, you seem morose today; why aren't you smiling."

"What's to smile about?"

"Why is it that Jews always answer a question with a question?"

"Why not?"

² Chaim I. Waxman, *Jewish Baby-Boomers* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), pp. 27-28.

³ Sidney Goldstein, *Profile of American Jewry* (New York: CUNY, 1993), p. 111.

The joke hints at a central factor in Jewish culture: the Jewish tendency to question everything. Traditionally, Jewish education has emphasized the centrality of a sacred text. But the study of that text has focused on questioning everything about it. Rashi, for example, our superb medieval French commentator to Torah and the Babylonian Talmud, provides what might have become the universally accepted way of understanding what the text in question means. But that never happened. As we saw from our chart of a typical Jewish page of Talmud, Rashi's commentary is printed in the inside column, but on the outside, we have a second commentary, called the *Tosafot*, which generally takes issue with Rashi. The Talmud itself is a running argument between two sides, and throughout history, it has been studied by students who meet in *chevruta* to argue about the argument. The deliberately argumentative mode of Jewish learning had its negatives: the Talmud itself warns us about *kinat sofrim*, jealousy born of competition among scholars. But at the same time, a Hebrew adage admits, *kinat sofrim tarbeh chokhmah*, "Competition among scholars increases wisdom." Jewish study has never settled for standard interpretation. It has insisted on critical thinking.

To be sure, Jews are not the only critical thinkers in the world. But it is hard to get through serious Jewish study without learning to value critical thought. *Yeshivah* education, for example, makes students take up both sides of a Talmudic debate and try to argue them both with equal fervor. Sociologist William Helmreich cites the following dialogue in a contemporary *yeshivah*.⁴

MA'ASEH SHEHAYAH: TALMUDIC DIALOGUE

Yechezkel: The Gemara [the Talmud] asks, "Why do the chokhomim [the sages] say it is a klal gadol [a "major" principle] that a claimant for damages must bring proof? This is an extra word. Why don't they leave out "major"? What are they getting at? And the answer is, we need it to show you that even in a case where, let's say, it was your calf that I damaged, but I'm not sure I did and you are, even in that case you can't collect anything.

Dovid: But why should that be? The guy didn't see it.

Six or seven students, all shouting at once: That's why it is klal gadol: that even when one is sure and the other isn't, it applies.

(Dovid appears momentarily perplexed; perhaps he is taken aback by the vehemence of the opposition. Sensing his confusion, his learning partner, Ephraim, tries to explain it to him.)

⁴ William Helmreich, *The World of the Yeshiva* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 102

Ephraim: Look. Can you go to court in America and collect without witnesses? Just show up and say, "I know."

Dovid: But there's no one to really argue with him.

Several students, including Ephraim: What's the difference?

Dovid: A big difference [heatedly]!

Various students: No there isn't!

Dovid: Yes there is. Let me explain!

The Rebbe: Hold it! Hold it! Everybody quiet down. Let's go over the whole thing from the beginning again.

Here was just one glimpse of a complex legal argument that exemplifies Talmudic critical acumen. The Jewish way of study demands free thought. Critical thinking is essential in the Jewish educational model.

We have no hierarchical authority to issue instructions that are taken to be the last and final word on matters. Even the great *poskim* (rabbis who issue responsa) argue with one another. By contrast, many Jews who work in interfaith dialogue are constantly amazed by the extent to which even their most brilliant Roman Catholic colleagues feel the need to cite papal authority. Rabbinic authority in Judaism isn't the same thing. The great rabbinic minds, past and present, certainly laid down rules, but the system empowers individuals to engage in a search that only critical thought makes possible. That differs entirely from a system where challenges to church authorities are anything but encouraged. The result, historically, was that Jews entered the modern world already socialized into thinking independently.

A FURTHER WORD ON CREATIVITY...

As we have seen, not all learners revel in the give and take of critical debate (what the Talmud calls *shakla v'tarya*). To be sure, Jewish education has specialized in it. But it has always demanded creativity as well. True to our recognition of different ways of learning, we cannot leave the impression that logical argument and critical thinking are the only marks of Jewish learning. Jewish tradition also has a long and rich tradition of the arts -- longer and richer than most people suppose.

There is first of all midrash, not law, but lore – as we will see in our survey of rabbinic tradition. Midrash derives lessons from biblical text, but usually not *halakhic* lessons. Early midrash entered the prayer life of Jews through *sermons*.

Then there is music. While we have no idea exactly what the music sounded like back in the first two centuries, we know at least that Jews did sing then. The Temple had musical instruments as well. Eventually, the Torah too was chanted, not read. Prayers also were set to melodic chants called *nusach*, that varied with holidays and individual services. If you have a cantor on your team, or someone who can demonstrate *nusach*, spend a few minutes letting him/her do so, highlighting the differences in *nusach* – how *kabbalat shabbat* has a different sound from *ma'ariv* that follows, for instance.

Poetry, too, was common, highly stylized in complex patterns that drew on midrash, *halakhah*, acrostics, rhyme and rhythm – in various combinations ever since the fourth or fifth centuries. Inserted into the liturgy, this body of poetry that continued throughout the Middle Ages was called *piyyutim* (singular: *piyyut*).

Jews were pictorial artists too. Contrary to common belief, the commandment against making “graven images” was not interpreted as a ban on painting in general. Many medieval prayer books have entire pages given over to illustrating the meaning of biblical stories or prayers, often with midrashic overtones, not just the literal interpretation of Torah.

And, finally, Jews have danced. The most common form of dance has accompanied the conclusion of a Torah cycle on *Simchat Torah*. That custom goes back to the kabbalists in the 16th century, but stylized movements in prayer go back much further, and are based on rabbinic precedent from the Mishnah, and even the Bible.

Synagogues need to be places where the Jewish tradition of critical thought is continued. But they need to be places of artistic learning as well.

MORE ON THE MAP OF JEWISH KNOWLEDGE: TALMUDIC AND GEONIC TRADITIONS

We saw before that the *Tannaitic* era culminated in the dissemination of the Mishnah. The era from 70 to 200 was launched by two wars: the war against Rome in 70, that resulted in the Temple's destruction; and then, in 135, the Bar Kokhba revolt, which failed miserably. The result of both wars was a state of famine and the steady exodus of many Jews to other lands, primarily cities of Asia Minor to the north, Alexandria in Egypt to the west, and Babylonia (current-day Iraq) to the east. Not all these centers furthered that form of Judaism that we call rabbinic Judaism. The communities in Asia Minor featured a Hellenized form of Judaism that eventually passed into oblivion. In Alexandria, Judaism developed philosophically, and also died out. Elsewhere, however, rabbinic Judaism thrived. The Mishnah became the primary Jewish document for Rabbis in Babylonia and the Land of Israel.

We distinguish the period before 200 from the one after it by using different names for the two eras. The *tannaitic* era is said to end with the Mishnah, although some *tannaitic* teachings were still being written down shortly thereafter, as in the *Tosefta* (a second collection of *tannaitic* sayings). Mostly, the Rabbis after 200 can be seen as elaborating on what the *tannaim* had taught. These Rabbis -- who explored *tannaitic* teaching in this way and who added to it with their own teaching -- are called *Amora'im* (from the Hebrew root, *amar*, meaning "to say").

Just as the *tannaitic* era ended with the Mishnah, so the *amoraic* era culminated in the Talmud -- actually two Talmuds, one by the *Amora'im* in the Land of Israel, and one by the *Amora'im* in Babylonia. The first is called the *Yerushalmi* (that is, the Talmud from Jerusalem) or the Palestinian Talmud. The latter is the *Bavli* (the Talmud from *bavel* "Babylonia") or the Babylonian Talmud.

The two Talmuds are very different from one another. The many laws having to do with agriculture, for example, are mostly irrelevant to Jews living outside the Land of Israel, so while they are discussed in the *Yerushalmi*, the *Bavli* passes over most of them. Yet the *Bavli* is much larger. It is probable that most of the creative energy that went into the *Yerushalmi* ceased by about the year 400 -- the traditional date when the *Yerushalmi* is said to have been completed. The *Bavli*, however, is usually dated around 550, one and half centuries later, and it is probable that the real date for its absolute conclusion came later still, perhaps even as late as the eighth century. The dates for both works are speculative, but it is obvious that much more editing went into the *Bavli* than the *Yerushalmi*, which shows signs of having been interrupted and stopped in the middle somehow.

The *amoraic* period is said to end with the *Bavli*, but we do not know exactly when that was. Several traditions hold that the *Amora'im* were followed by an era of minor redactors to the Talmud, people known as *Sabora'im* (from the Hebrew root, *savar*, meaning "to think logically"). We know neither when that era began nor when it ended. The period in question (sixth to eighth centuries) saw the fall of the Sassanian dynasty (the native rulers

of Babylonia since the third century); the coming of Islam; and wars between the first Islamic caliphate (the Ommayads) and their successors (the Abbasids). In all of this dynastic turnover, fewer records survived, hence our limited knowledge of the Jewish community at this time.

By the middle of the eighth century, however, the historical circumstances come more clearly into focus. Major changes in world events favored the destiny of Babylonian Jewry. The first Islamic dynasty (the Ommayads) had established its seat of power in Damascus, the capital of current-day Syria. Since it was close to Eretz Yisrael, money in the empire flowed toward Palestine and its environs. But the Abbasids made the momentous decision to move their capital to the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, in a new city being built there: Baghdad. Now investment money and large numbers of people moved to Babylonia. The result was a huge increase in the power, size and wealth of the Babylonian Jewish authorities.

By then, the leaders of Babylonian society were called *Geonim* (sing: *Gaon*, from *ga'on*, a Hebrew word from the Bible, meaning "illustrious"). The *Bavli* may have found its final form in the hands of the first Geonim, at the latest, who declared it canonized and closed it forever to further alteration. Instead of adding to it, the *Geonim* invented a new kind of literature: responsa. Jews had followed Islam as it moved west and east conquering much of the known world. From all over the world, then, letters arrived with regularity to the *Geonim* requesting guidance on this or that subject. *Geonic* letters back are our first responsa, a form of Jewish writing that continues to this very day.

The *Gaonate* differed as an institution from those of prior eras. Now, permanent institutions for study had developed. Jewish study at the highest level occurred in a limited number of academies, mostly in the two most famous ones, Sura and Pumbedita. For a while, one was in the ascendancy, then another; and at times, they both flourished. The *Gaon* was the head of either Academy, or even both, so that at times two *geonim* existed simultaneously, and at times there was only one. We know little about the bureaucracy of scholars who worked beneath and around them.

Many of the *Geonim* have names you may recognize:

- *Yehudai Gaon* (757-761), probably the first *Gaon*, wrote the first comprehensive code of Jewish law, and invented responsa.
- *Amram Gaon* (858-871) compiled the first known comprehensive *Siddur* (Prayer Book), sending it out to Spain or Southern France as a responsum explaining how Jews should pray. Most of our prayer service today comes from Amram, whose responsum was eagerly copied by scribes all over Europe.
- *Saadiyah Gaon* (928-942) was a preeminent philosopher, poet, and polemicist, who also wrote a prayer book, but because its instructions were written in Arabic, it never caught on in Christian countries where Jews used Rabbinic Aramaic (the language of the Talmud) as their

- common mode of written discourse.
- *Sherira Gaon* (968-987) wrote the first comprehensive history of Jewish tradition, as a responsum to Jews in modern-day Tunis who wondered how the Mishnah, *Tosefta* and two Talmuds had come into being. It is Sherira who tells us about the *Saboraim*.
 - *Hai Gaon* (998-1038) son of Sherira, is generally considered the last of the great *Geonim*. For some time after, the title continued to be used, but by the death of Hai, power had shifted from Babylonia to European communities like Italy, Spain, Germany and France, all of which had built their own academies and their own nascent Jewish traditions, based largely on the *Bavli* and on *Geonic* traditions, but also in touch with the *Yerushalmi* and writings from Palestine during the years following the *Yerushalmi's* publication.
 - Palestinian creativity (creativity in the Land of Israel) differed significantly from that of Babylonia. Palestinian Jews gave us most of the early poems (*piyyutim*; sing. *piyyut*) that we find in our holiday liturgy. When you sit in shul on Yom Kippur, reading through densely constructed poetic additions to the service, you are probably reading something by Yose bar Yose, Yannai, or Eliezer Kalir, classical poets from the Land of Israel. As far as Palestinian Jews were concerned, the real Talmud was the *Yerushalmi*, not the *Bavli*, but by the tenth century, the *Bavli* had won the day, and ever since then, when people say “The” Talmud, they mean the *Bavli*, not the *Yerushalmi*.

Unit Three: *Lernen*: How Do We Learn? Enrichment Material

Meeting Two:

1. More On Disabilities: The Catch 22 Of Education
2. Extra Activity: The Believing Game
3. Extra Activity: A Believing Exercise

Enrichment Material for Unit Three: *Lernen*: How Do We Learn?

ENRICHMENT MATERIAL FOR UNIT THREE: MEETING TWO

MORE ON DISABILITIES: THE CATCH 22 OF EDUCATION

We have said that a learning “disability” is relative to whatever learning culture considers an ability. But that concept of this relativity seems counter-intuitive. It seems clear to most of us that some disabilities are more disabling than others. It is “nice,” perhaps, to have empathy, but lacking it seems hardly as bad as lacking basic informational competence to get dressed, get to work, follow instructions, do arithmetic calculations, and read. That is true – but only because as much as social life demands a modicum of empathy, it requires even more an elementary mastery of basic data about how to get around (what sociologists call life’s “recipe knowledge”). Still, experts at recipe knowledge who absolutely lack empathy can become psychopaths, even brilliant psychopaths. It is our own social bias that fails to recognize how relative “disability” always is. Think back to Joseph Heller’s 1961 novel, *Catch 22*.

MA’ASEH SHEHAYAH 1 – CATCH 22

“Yossarian looked at him soberly and tried another approach. “Is Orr crazy?”

“He sure is,” Doc Daneeka said.

“Can you ground him?”

“I sure can. But first he has to ask me to. That’s part of the rule.”

“Then why doesn’t he ask you to?”

“Because he’s crazy,” Doc Daneeka said.

“He has to be crazy to keep flying combat missions after all the close calls he’s had. Sure, I can ground Orr. But first he has to ask me to.”

“That’s all he has to do to be grounded?”

“That’s all. Let him ask me.”

“And then you can ground him?” Yossarian asked.

“No. Then I can’t ground him.”

“You mean there’s a catch?”

“Sure there’s a catch,” Doc Daneeka replied. “Catch-22. Anyone who wants to get out of combat duty isn’t really crazy.”

There was only one catch and that was Catch-22, which specified that a concern for one’s own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as

soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, but if he was sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to he was sane and had to. Yossarian was moved very deeply by the absolute simplicity of this clause of Catch-22 and let out a respectful whistle.

*"That's some catch, that Catch-22," he observed.
"It's the best there is," Doc Daneeka agreed."⁴*

Here is how Catch 22 works educationally. "Dis-abled" is defined as the opposite of what any educational system defines as "abled." A system specializes in setting rules and then establishing them as the only system that counts. Other systems don't consider those things as "abilities." So, read on:

MA'ASEH SHEHAYAH 2 -- CATCH 22 IN WESTERN CULTURE

Yossarian was a schoolboy who had been born into North American culture following the Enlightenment, the industrial revolution, and the rise of science. He knew, in theory, that these were good things, which had catapulted the United States to world dominance financially, industrially, and scientifically. The problem was that he was just no good at them. They depended on logical argument, linear thought and debating skills. He preferred writing poetry, listening to music, and smelling flowers.

Clearly, the only rational thing for such a student to do was to request equal respect for what he was good at -- which Yossarian regularly did. The problem was that logical argument, linear thought and debating skills were the only socially recognized grounds for deserving respect, and the minute Yossarian argued logically for respect because he was good at poetry, music and flower-smelling, he demonstrated precisely the reasons he didn't deserve respect.

Wait a minute," Yossarian pleaded, "You mean the only way to get respect is to be good at logical argument, linear thought and debating skills?"

"Correct," the school psychologist advised.

"But if I make the logical argument that my abilities at poetry, music and flower-smelling are grounds for respect, I automatically demonstrate that it is precisely the ability to argue linearly that

⁴ Joseph Heller, *Catch 22*, New York, NY: Scribner Paperback Fiction, Reprinted 1996, pp. 54-55.

matters, so my abilities at poetry, music and flower-smelling must not warrant respect after all. And if I admit that logical argument, linear thought and debating skills are the sole reasons for deserving respect, than I have to remain unrespected. Right?"

"Exactly," said the psychologist, "That's 'Educational Catch 22.'"

EXTRA ACTIVITY

The Believing Game

Modern educators explain "The Believing Game" (from *Writing without Teachers* by Peter Elbow).

The function of a group in the believing game is for people to help each other believe more things, experience more things, and thereby move away from the lowest-common-denominator tendency in a majority conclusion.

Our group learning experiences can be categorized in two types of games we are urged to play: "the doubting game" and "the believing game." The doubting game is a zero-sum exercise which focuses on finding one side right and the other wrong. The believing game focuses on perception without judgment, where there is always more than meets the eye. Think of the difference between a debate (the doubting game) and literary criticism (the believing game) where alternative insights are allowed to rest side by side with each other. In the believing game, it is possible for both assertions to contain some truth.

While the doubting game jumps to the conclusion that alternatives must not both be true, so that one of the sides must suffer from a grievous error, the believing game leads to a truth that incorporates parts of both sides. Such complex truths become "hypotheses to climb higher and higher to a point from which more can be seen and understood."

The rules are simple:

As you enter the debate, be prepared (at first):

- Not to argue.
- Believe everything.
- Put yourself into the mind and skin of people with other perceptions; they are not fools; they know some experience you do not; keep asking them what it is.
- Try hard to restate or re-understand what they say so that you can enter into their heads. Ask others around you to do it with

you; explain why you have trouble, and listen hard when they tell you what you miss.

At its most extreme, you get the following opposition of traits in the two games:

Doubting Game

Extrication, disengagement
 Detachment, perspective
 commitment
 Rejecting or fending off what is new

 Closing, clenching

 Literal
 Rigid
 Stubborn, hanging on
 Impulse for security
 Centered, unmoving self
 Learning to be sharper, harder, tougher

 Aggressive: meeting threat by beating

 Deflating

 Competitive

 Solitary or adversary

 Talking, noise, arguing

Believing Game

Involvement
 Projection,

 Willingness to
 explore what is
 new

 Opening,
 loosening

 Metaphorical

 Flexible

 Yielding

 Impulse for risk

 Floating self

 Learning to be
 encompassing,
 softer

 Non-aggressive:
 meeting threat
 by bending it
 down

 Cooperating,
 incorporating

 Supporting,
 Cooperative

 Working in a
 group

 Listening,
 silence, agreeing

This is actually old Jewish wisdom. When Hillel and Shammai debate, Hillel is declared the overall winner, but not entirely. *Eilu v'eilu divrei elokim chayim...* goes the ruling. "Both sides are the words of the living G-d."

You are in the midst of learning, even as you are learning how your synagogue ought to learn. Your group discussions are learning sessions, where you balance critical judgment with the believing game. So try the following:

EXTRA ACTIVITY

A BELIEVING EXERCISE

Think about your most divisive meeting in the last year. Role-play what people said. But this time, limit the conversation to 30 minutes duration, and agree not to make up your mind until the 25th minute. Along the way keep track of how you suspend judgment, how you hear each other differently than you did the first time around.

Unit Four

Think “Systems Within Systems Within Systems”

...עֲרִיבִים זֶה לָזֶה...
 ...*Arevim zeh lazeh* - “...connected all together”
The Talmud

“Worlds on worlds compose one universe.... System into system runs.”

Alexander Pope

OVERVIEW

In this unit you will delve into thinking about your synagogue as a system. You will learn about the natural and inescapable realities of working within a system and what the repercussions are for your synagogue. You will be asked to look carefully at your education system and consider what the goals are and what they ought to be.

You will also have the opportunity to learn about education through the voice of midrash and learn from Maimonides, one of our tradition’s most revered teachers.

As with the other units of this curriculum there is more material than can be covered in two meetings. Please select those pieces that work best for your team and congregation, or spread this unit out over three meetings.

Please note that there are an extraordinary number of activities in this unit. The most important things we ask you to do are:

- 1. Draw up a stakeholders’ chart: this is designed to help you see the complexity of your own synagogue system and the various constituencies that will have to be addressed for any significant change to occur.*
- 2. Do a thermal scan of your congregational learning: this is designed to let you see where learning occurs in the synagogue, and how it links to other learning, either “in parallel” or “in sequence.”*

Unit Four: Think “Systems Within Systems Within Systems”

Meeting One

PREPARATORY READINGS

1. Systems Thinking
2. Systemic Pathology or Systemic Dysfunction: The Case of the Black Box
3. Midrash, Just What Is It?

FURTHER STUDY

In addition, if you have time, you will find the following readings particularly relevant to this meeting.

1. Lawrence A. Hoffman, “Zoning Out And Tuning In To Education For Jewish Journeys” (in the Preparatory Readings)
2. Isa Aron, *The Congregation of Learners: A New Paradigm for Congregational Education*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, VT 2000.

READ AND DISCUSS

THE SYNAGOGUE SYSTEM

Please have a volunteer take a few minutes to summarize “Systems Thinking” and then read the next section together.

Synagogues are like hospitals. Both are institutions and both are systems. Education is a system within a system. The hospital knew better than to blame Gawande. Synagogues should not blame any particular part of the system either: not the educator; nor the teachers; nor the cantor or the rabbi; nor the curriculum, the schoolroom environment, or anything else – *in and of itself*. Instead think *systems!*

Systemic problems are not just issues for the part that is apparently failing. “Presenting problems” usually mask deeper structural concerns. The easy thing is to attend immediately to the “bad part” – but the lasting solution is always more complex: identifying the various systemic relationships that need to be readjusted. The most evident approach is to scapegoat one of the system’s parts, but it is only a matter of time until another investigative committee finds some other part to blame, and then another, and another, *ad infinitum*, while the problem persists.

Synagogue education – for everyone, not just for kids – is a sub-system of a larger system, the synagogue itself. So let’s look first at the synagogue system; and then at its sub-system, the education-system. Our education system is a part of a larger Synagogue System.

It is useful to think of the synagogue as an intertwined set of systems impacting on one another. Depending on the synagogue in question, there may be a sisterhood, men's club, board and committee structure, office staff, clergy team, and so on. Frequently, when things go wrong in synagogue education, they can best be handled by doing something to one of these *other* systems. For instance, instituting lay-given *divrei Torah* at every board meeting raises the expectation that every serious leader of a synagogue's governance should be engaged in ongoing Jewish study.

But the education system has its own set of sub-systems. In the religious school alone, you have parents; teachers; an education committee; educators, cantors and rabbis; a set of special bar/bat mitzvah tutors; the physical layout of the classrooms and the maintenance people who make sure things are working; an office staff; and maybe even more. The problem with change is that everything is connected to everything else. Here is an example.

MA'ASEH SHEHAYAH: OH BABY! IT'S JUST A SHABBAT STORY!
The associate rabbi in Congregation P'ru Ur'vu had a baby. After returning from maternity leave, she tried to alter her professional responsibilities, so that she could be home with her baby at certain times. One of the things she no longer wished to do was visit the pre-school Friday mornings to tell a Shabbat story. Surely someone else could do that, she reasoned.

Her senior rabbi agreed, and the two rabbis went to discuss it with the educator. The problem, said the educator, would be that many parents had enrolled their child and even joined the synagogue with the associate rabbi in mind, since it was widely known that she had a fabulous talent for working with three and four-year olds. Yes, one of the teachers might be able to tell the story, but it wouldn't be the same. The educator felt he had to take it to the committee in charge of the pre-school program.

The committee decided the traditional Shabbat story was too important to be left to a teacher. It really had to be one of the clergy who told it, and since the senior rabbi was already engaged visiting the nursing home at the time, they suggested asking the cantor to tell the story. But the cantor, it turned out, needed Friday mornings to prepare for services. He used that time each week to prepare a written program listing the Friday night music, which he later slipped inside everybody's prayerbook cover. Nonetheless,

he was willing to forego the program from now on and tell a story instead.

Unfortunately, the Temple music committee now objected. Why should the pre-school take precedence over meaningful worship? It had taken months to initiate the written music program, and worshipers had come to expect it. Besides, the choir would be upset: its members liked to take the program home to show their friends, since their name appeared in it. Indeed, when word got out about the proposed change, congregants in the choir began phoning the Temple president objecting to the assumed priority of pre-school children, many of whose parents were not even members, over the volunteer choir.

But those parents who were members called in equal number to say that they were counting on the presence of a rabbi or cantor at the school. Maybe the senior rabbi could forego visiting the nursery home on Fridays.

Eventually, three interest groups began vying for the success of their own agendas. The music committee and the choir (subtly supported by the cantor) were pitted against the pre-school and its governing board (with the tacit help of the associate rabbi); and then there was the senior rabbi and adult children of aging parents in the nursing home. Matters heated up to the point where the board met to decide the issue, only to find that the rabbis, cantor and educator preferred working it out themselves, on the grounds that what each of them did professionally was a matter of their own internal decision and not part of what the board was entitled to decide. The board responded that there were fiscal consequences to the decision -- parents might withdraw their children from the school, for instance -- so that it truly was a matter for the board. Within weeks, the systems of the entire synagogue found themselves at odds with one another -- over a simple Shabbat story!

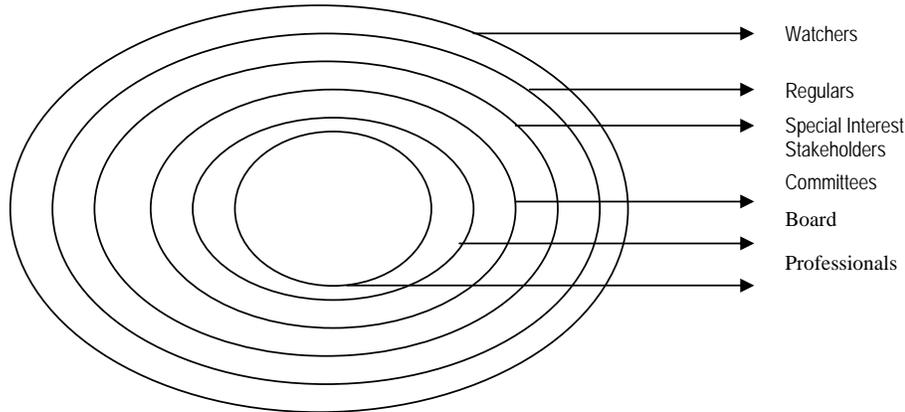
And the next step, predictably, was the natural tendency to find culprits. It was all the associate rabbi's fault, people said. Yes, the synagogue believed in recognizing the validity of parenting, but why did it have to be Friday morning that the rabbi stayed home. Others thought the cantor was at fault, selfishly putting an unimportant music program ahead of the children. The choir blamed the pre-schoolers' parents; who, in turn, blamed the older generation for having a "selfish" stake in the nursing home. The rabbis blamed the overreaching board; the board blamed the "ineffective" educator who apparently couldn't sort it all out. Everybody blamed everybody in a ceaseless round of scapegoating, when, in fact, it was really a systems problem.

ACTIVITY

A STAKEHOLDERS' CHART

(The following exercise will take you at least 45 minutes, maybe even an hour.)

One of the best ways to figure out the challenges you face with change is to figure out who the stakeholders are. Just think of the congregation as a series of concentric circles:



- The professionals of the synagogue include the clergy as well as the directors, teachers and all full time staff members.
- The **board** is the legally responsible body for congregational affairs; board members are often extremely connected to the synagogue, both practically and spiritually.
- **Committees** like the School Committee or the Adult Education Committee are charged with the responsibility of being caretakers for a specific segment of the synagogue.
- Every congregation has **special interest stakeholders** like the parents of the various age groups, or members of certain committees who are only interested in the work that committee does.
- Then too, every congregation has "**regulars**," the people who may or may not hold office, but who come to everything and who often like things just the way they are, if only because things are familiar that way.
- Last, there are the **watchers**, the anonymous members whose names appear on rosters but whom you see only a few times a year.

Now it is time to be more specific about the makeup of *your* synagogue's constituencies. The story you just read will serve as our example. It indicates some of the normal stakeholders in a synagogue. They vary with each individual case.

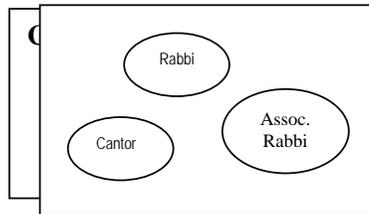
Imagine, for the sake of this exercise, that you are the synagogue mentioned just now. Draw a box in the middle of a large chalkboard representing the “presenting problem” – the associate rabbi. She is not actually a problem, just the “presenting problem,” because she is the reason the case comes up in the first place. It would be easy (and also wrong) to treat her as the real problem – that would be scapegoating her. She is part of the synagogue system. It is that system that you want to figure out.

Imagine then that you have such an associate rabbi, a cantor, a music committee, a choir, and the rest of cast of characters here. In addition, fill in the actual bodies you do have, who might be somehow involved in this case, were it to come up in real life.

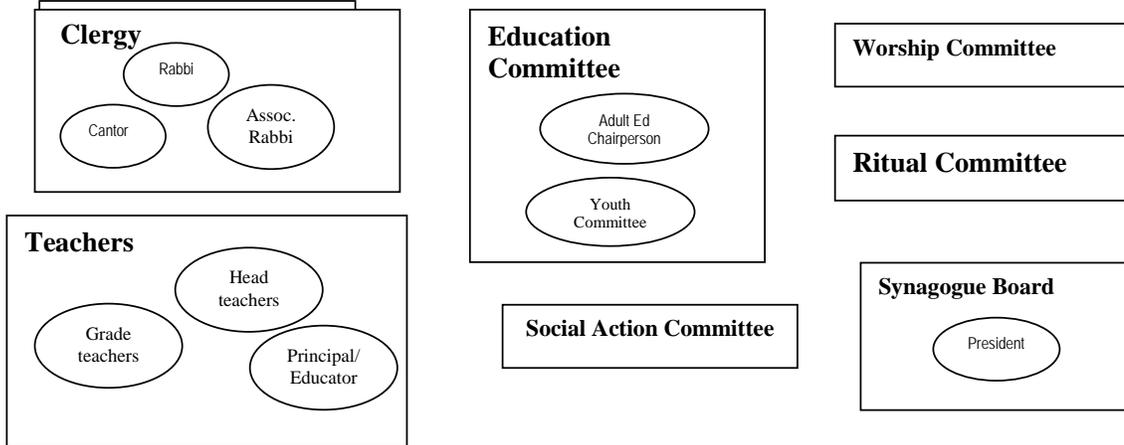
Start by drawing a small circle in the middle representing the associate rabbi. Circles will represent people. Boxes will represent groups.



Now add circles for the various clergy, and enclose them along with the associate rabbi in a box. You now have a box representing the “clergy system” – with relationships and tensions among its own members, but with external relationships and tensions with other sub-systems of the synagogue as well.



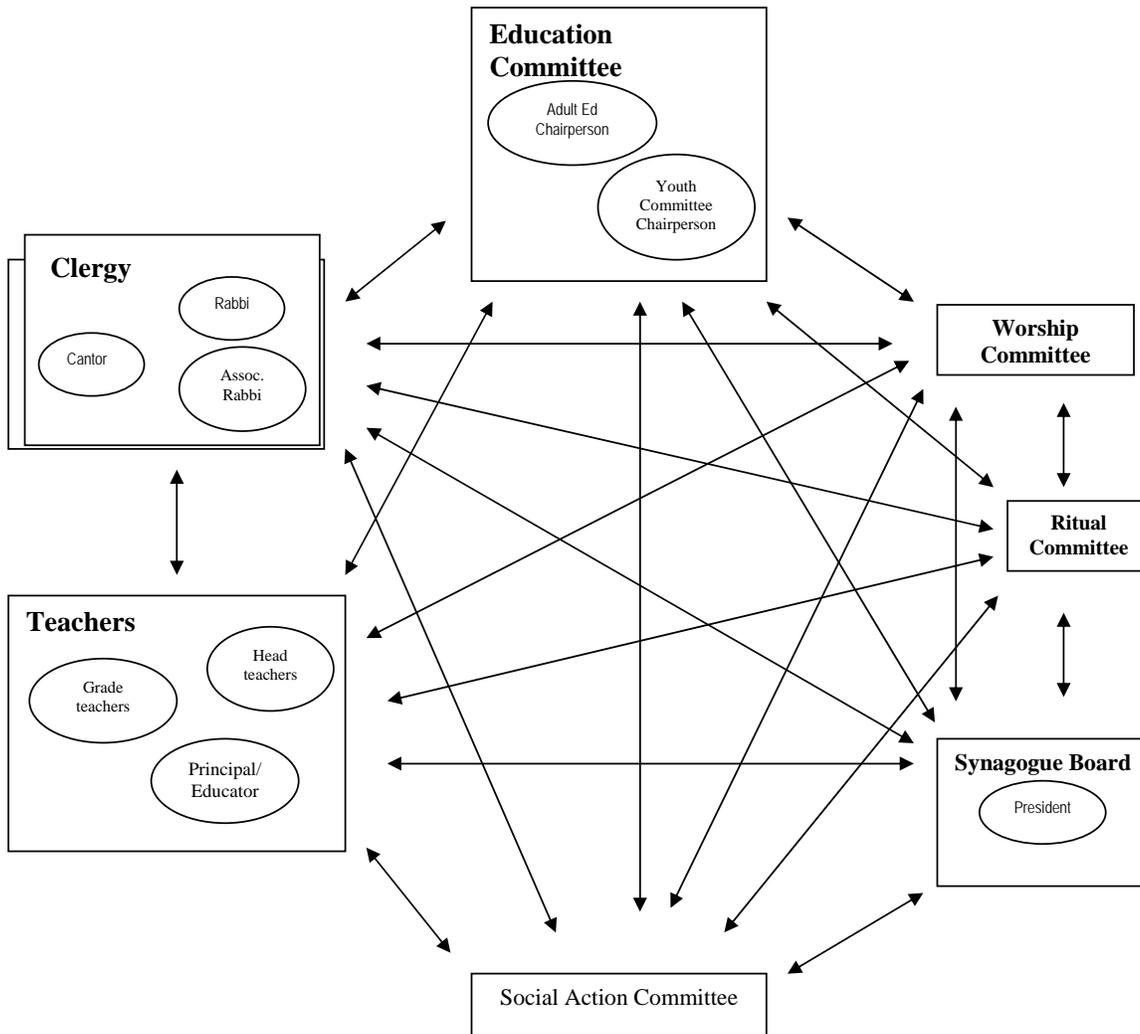
So draw other boxes to stand for the education committee, the teachers, the board, and so on (combining the story and your own synagogue), until you have a set of boxes standing for all the relevant subsystems. In each sub-system place circles that stand for the most influential people; sometimes for each person, sometimes for a small clique of people -whatever proves most useful. A sample of what your chart may look like so far is given below.



Finally, draw arrows of influence connecting each box.

You can fine-tune this any way you like, making up your own set of symbols. The idea is somehow to get on the board all the "sub-systems" and their "major players." You do not want to be blindsided by pursuing a good idea only to find out that you failed to understand how the total system worked, spoke to the wrong people, ignored the really influential people, or threatened the proper authority of a standing synagogue committee or group.

A sample diagram is presented below.



When you have your own chart on the board, make up a scenario of how you would go about making the change you want – in this hypothetical case, letting the rabbi have her baby without losing her or causing her so much conflict that she cannot work efficiently.

Now try it out by role-playing. Let different people play the various roles and go about your strategy. See what reactions you get. Would your plan have worked? What mistakes did you make? What surprises did you encounter?

READ AND DISCUSS

SYSTEMIC PATHOLOGY OR SYSTEMIC DYSFUNCTION

Please have a volunteer take a few minutes to summarize the reading “Systemic Pathology or Systemic Dysfunction: The Case of the Black Box” then read the following:

MA’ASEH SHEHAYAH: CONGREGATION B’NAI MITZVAH

Consider the religious school in Congregation B’nai Mitzvah. Parents dutifully enroll their children when they are five or six, but somehow, they don’t seem to learn very much. By age eleven, most of them still cannot read Hebrew, and their knowledge of things Jewish is paltry. The older kids begin acting out, and there is a high absentee rate, especially during ski season when whole families like to visit the faroff mountain lodges rather than drive the kids to religious school. Finding little congregational support, educators continually come and go, so there is little sense of an ongoing presence or consistent policy. Teachers who stay in their jobs have become inured to the situation and just put up with it. The rabbi prefers putting his energy elsewhere.

This sorry state of affairs changes when the kids turn twelve. Now the synagogue, parents and kids gear up for the final push toward bar/bat mitzvah. The bar/bat mitzvah family takes a year off from skiing; special tutors are engaged to teach every child how to read Hebrew. Pretty much every Saturday morning, there is at least one bar or bat mitzvah family that takes over the sanctuary with its own invited guests, to the point where regular worshipers have largely stopped coming. The rabbi runs a terrific bar/bat mitzvah service for the family.

Apparently, the parents do not recognize any problem with the synagogue school. The real reason they joined the congregation was to have a bar/bat mitzvah for their children. And they get one. Function and dysfunction, it turns out are in the eye of the beholder. Systems are dysfunctional only from the viewpoint of our definition of what they are supposed to do.

This indicates the difference between mechanical black boxes and human ones. If, for example, your toaster breaks and burns every piece of bread, you would correctly observe that the toaster is in a state of dysfunction. We distinguish now between people standing outside the toaster waiting for edible toast, and the mechanical parts of the toaster. The people -- those outside the system in question -- unanimously agree that the toaster is dysfunctional. That’s because they can all agree that the purpose of toasters is to make toast, not charcoal. From the hypothetical perspective of the internal toaster parts, though, the toaster

system is functioning with admirable perfection. Every time bread goes in, out it pops, perfectly burned. As a system for burning bread, the toaster never fails. If the toaster parts could talk, they would argue that the problem lies with the outside people who project unreal expectations on the toaster. It is not a toaster in the first place, it would say, but a burner. As a burner, it is functional and without peer. The people would then respond that if it were a burner, it should have been advertised in the store as such. No one with such a toaster would hesitate to get it fixed and convert it from a burner to a toaster. The point is this:

Dysfunctional systems often function very well at doing things that we do not claim we want them to do. They are dysfunctional only from the perspective of our own arbitrary definition of what they are supposed to do.

In the eyes of the parents, the education system at Congregation B'nai Mitzvah is functioning quite well, but at something other than deep and lasting education. If we define the school as a system that is supposed to transmit a deep and lasting love of Jewish tradition, then the system is an obvious failure. No teacher or principal is deliberately sabotaging things, so we have no obvious case of *pathology*. This is systemic *dysfunction*. When the religious school committee becomes frustrated, it looks around to scapegoat something: the curriculum, perhaps, or the Hebrew teacher. Assuming that all breakdowns are pathological, the committee works hard to find a cell that can be blamed.

What nobody notices is that the dysfunctional school system is doing some things remarkably well. Every kid succeeds at a bar or bat mitzvah, for one thing. For another, the school makes the synagogue a lot of money, whether the kids show up to every class or not. By making few demands on the parents prior to the bar/bat mitzvah year, the parents get to take weekends off skiing, without guilt or consequences -- so they are happy. Even the rabbi benefits, since he gets to spend his time and energy doing other things that interest him more.

**READ AND DISCUSS
A LAW, A COROLLARY AND A LESSON**

From what we have read so far, we can deduce a law of institutions, a corollary, and a lesson about change:

Law: Most systems are mostly efficient most of the time. If they seem to be inefficient, we are probably not looking at what they do efficiently.

Corollary: Every human system has two agendas. One is stated publicly. The other is not. In the functioning of organizations, the unstated agenda takes priority.

Lesson: Whether they know it or not, some leaders of institutions got where they are because they learned to appreciate whatever it is that the institution is doing effectively. Despite the need to perform the official agenda more efficiently, they may resist changes that threaten the successful performance of the unofficial agenda.

Here's another example, from the public school system. Everyone knows the purpose of the system is to teach our children. But is it? Is that the *only* function the system fills? Actually, an unexpressed agenda is the successful sorting of the population. Tests determine who gets ahead and who does not. Universities control high school agendas, and demand education for the sake of passing tests, so the "best" will get into higher educational systems, where more tests will decide who gets farther still. We may decide that this is not necessarily wrong. A society of excellence may demand such discrimination, and we believe in excellence. But at the same time, it cannot be denied that there is no adequate system to care for the "left-behinds;" geniuses like Einstein become dropouts because they think too differently to fit the "testing" bill. So, even though the school system is, in fact, a sorting system, few people think of it as such.

official agenda : unofficial agenda
school system : sorting system

Officially, we say we want good schools; unofficially, society wants a sorting machine. Synagogues, like schools have official and unofficial agendas. The only way to break out of "old-thinking" is to face up to the unofficial, unacknowledged agendas that drive our synagogues.

Unacknowledged sets of goals are not necessarily bad. They are just parts of how institutional systems work. Systems would not be systems without them.

Thinking now of synagogue schools rather than public schools, we can adjust the equation above and say:

school system : sorting system
synagogue system: _____

Is there an unacknowledged goal that inefficient synagogue schools accomplish efficiently?

Maybe some of you remember the old "Pogo" cartoon, where Pogo contends, "We have met the enemy and the enemy is us." We can indeed be our own worst enemy, if we do not think systemically, and fail to acknowledge the hidden goals that our system serves inadvertently.

Only with respect to the official goals are systems usually dysfunctional. With regard to what they actually do, they function beautifully. Change demands this further insight:

Stated goals often fail; unstated goals usually succeed.

Or, put another way:

Dysfunctional systems may do the "wrong" things right, but the "right" things wrong.

Scapegoating rather than correcting dysfunctional systems will only exacerbate the problem. Progress depends on convincing the people within the system to examine the system as whole.

FROM THE TRADITION מִסֹּדְרָה

READ AND DISCUSS

MIDRASH: EXPANDING THE MAP OF JEWISH LEARNING

Please have a volunteer take a few minutes to summarize “Midrash, Just What Is It?”

Pesikta d’Rav Kahana 15:5

Rabbi Asi and Rabbi Ammi were dispatched to look into education in the villages of *Eretz Yisrael*. On arriving at each village, they would say, “Bring us the guardians of the settlement.” When the watch-commander or his lieutenant was brought, Rabbi Asi and Rabbi Ammi would ask rhetorically, “Do soldiers guard the settlement? They are equally likely to become its destroyers.” Then, who are the true guardians of the settlement? They are the teachers of Torah and Mishnah who guard the settlement 24/7, dispensing knowledge, as it says, “Do not allow this Book of the Teaching cease from your lips, but recite it day and night.” (Josh. 1:8). Scripture also says, “Unless G-d builds the house, its builders labor on it in vain; unless G-d watches over the city, the watchmen keep vigil uselessly.” (Psalm 127:1).

Rabbi Huna and Rabbi Jeremiah, said in the name of Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba: It is written “Your fathers...have forsaken Me and have not kept My Torah!” (Jer. 16:11)... Indeed, as long as they kept studying My Torah, but forsook Me, all would be well; for if they did forsake Me but kept on studying My Torah... their engagement in Torah would have brought them back to Me.

Vayikra Rabbah 11:7

“It happened in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham (Isa. 7:1)...” What terrible thing happened? Ahaz thought, without little children, there will be no pupils; without pupils, there will be no scholars; without scholars, there will be no Torah-study; without Torah-study, there will be neither synagogues nor houses of study. Without synagogues and houses of study, the Holy One of Blessing will not permit the *Shechinah* to abide in the

world. What did Ahaz do? He closed the synagogues and the houses of study. That is what is alluded to when it says, "Bind up the testimony, seal up instruction among my disciples (Isa. 8:16). R. Huna said in the name of R. Eleazar, " Why was he called Ahaz? Because he seized (*ahaz*) the synagogues and houses of study.

FOR DISCUSSION

King Ahaz closed both the synagogues and the houses of study. He must have connected the two institutions together, as if they shared a relationship to one another.

Question: What relationship exists between the synagogue as a whole and the religious school at your synagogue?

Question: Do the two act together (parallelism), or are they treated as separate entities?

Question: Could one exist without the other?

Unit Four: Think “Systems Within Systems Within Systems”

Meeting Two

PREPARATORY READINGS

1. A Thermal Scan of Your Synagogue’s Learning System
2. “Off-line” Learning: Game And Spectacle”
3. Learning “parallelism” and “sequencing”
4. Thomas F. O’Meara, "Field of Grace"

(An off-beat article that may appear to have nothing to do with education, but forms the backdrop for making the distinction between “formal activities” called “the game,” and “informal activities” called “the spectacle.”)

READ AND DISCUSS

A “THERMAL SCAN” OF YOUR OWN SYNAGOGUE’S LEARNING SYSTEM

Please have a volunteer take a few minutes to summarize “Thermal Scan” and “Off-line Learning: Game and Spectacle.”

What would Congregation B’nai Mitzvah (from unit four meeting one) have discovered, if it had done a thermal scan of its learning? It would have found a single hot spot: the year prior to *bar/bat mitzvah*; and it would have seen that only the *b’nai mitzvah* benefit from it. There would be few, if any, patches of red in the adult population; no family learning; no learning among the professional staff, who meet only for business; and no learning by the board or even the education committee, whose members discuss the synagogue’s programs, but never learn together themselves. There would also be little carryover of the learning from the *bar/bat mitzvah* year to later years, and no significant build-up to this all-important learning year.

Congregation B’nai Mitzvah is really not much of a synagogue. It is a business that processes bar and bat mitzvah families. It pretends to have learning happening throughout the ineffective school, but in actuality, the 12-year olds are the only people learning anything, and because no learning happens elsewhere, even the impact of that is dubious.

A “thermal scan” of learning would also measure the learning that happens just by occupying the synagogue’s physical space. We usually think of space as empty housing in which we put things. But as anyone’s living room makes clear, by choosing the things to put there, we convert empty “space” into a human “place” that tells the story of the people living there. Suppose you walk into a stranger’s living room, and see a piano covered with framed pictures of family. Jewish art

covers the walls, and several bookcases hold assortments of books on gardening and Jewish history. A stereo system frames the fireplace. The sofa is somewhat old and used; people really sit there. It does not take long for a visitor to see what matters here: music, family togetherness, books, gardening, and Judaism.

Try to imagine what Congregation B'nai Mitzvah looks like. If it has a library, no one uses it. What is on the walls when you walk in? Probably pictures of synagogue presidents and not much more. It may even have a corporate look. No one learns very much just by occupying the place. But it probably has a big sign announcing the names of next week's b'nai mitzvah.

This is such an important lesson, that we need to spend some time unpacking it. Toward that end, make sure you have read the last article in the list of Background Readings, Thomas F. O'Meara, "Field of Grace."

If people have not read it, take ten minutes to give them a chance to do so.

Anthropologist Kenneth Pike divided all human activity into "game" and "spectacle." The *game* is the official, formal, and stated reason that people show up to group events. The *spectacle* consists of all the subsidiary reasons that people really come for. These are unofficial, informal, and usually unstated. But as we said above, "Stated goals often fail; unstated goals usually succeed."

READ AND DISCUSS

FATHER O'MEARA

Father O'Meara is actually a theologian, not a sports buff. In his wildest dreams, he probably never would have predicted that he would write an analysis of the Notre Dame Football season. But he did.

Officially, he noticed, people come for the "Game." But, unofficially, thousands of people arrive with no possibility of getting tickets, and no intention of seeing the game altogether. They come to buy scarfs, sweat shirts, ponchos, pennants, and blankets – all with the coveted Notre Dame colors and logo on them; and to tailgate with thousands of others in the many fields turned into parking lots that day, to handle the masses. They come for the spectacle

What goes for Notre Dame football goes for everything else: for everything is part of a larger system.

Take opening night at the opera. The official goal for attending -- the *game*, that is -- is to take in the debut of the latest upcoming tenor. But lots of people fall asleep during Act Two. They are there for the *spectacle* -- the intermission, when anyone who is anyone mixes with all the other "anyones who are anyone" dressed in black tie and gown, carrying expensive champagne that only patrons get.

So too, look at members of the local prestigious city arts commission. Yes, these are people who care about the arts. They will enjoy the *game* of deciding what concerts in the park to feature this coming summer. But they come equally as much for the *spectacle* -- meeting, greeting, and networking, for social or for business reasons.

There is nothing wrong with coming for the spectacle, except in the eyes of the game's officials. By definition, officials are in charge of maintaining the game's purity. They object to people who come for the wrong reason: the "inappropriate" goals that constitute the spectacle as opposed to the "appropriate" love of the game.

- Umpires look askance at baseball fans who miss the opening pitch but who come for the hotdogs, the seventh-inning stretch, or the fun in the stands when people practice "the wave."
- Maestros cannot stand the thought of concert habitués who know little about music but come for the upward mobility inherent in being part of high arts scene.
- Convention organizers cannot fathom why attendees insist on conversing in the halls, rather than attending the opening words of the keynote speaker or the panel listed in the program.
- Successful high school teachers learn to live with the fact that their teenage students, who love hanging out with their peers, insist on continuing lunch-hour conversations in the classroom, rather than concentrating on the lesson being taught.
- Rabbis and cantors find it frustrating to see people arrive late for Shabbat services, missing all of *Shacharit*, but getting to their seats in time for the *maftir* and *haftarah* that their nephew, the bar-mitzvah boy will chant; or who close their *siddurim* during services to take time out to shmooze; or who seem more animated at the *Kiddush* or *Oneg* than they do for the sermon or *Musaf*.

Every human activity has a *game* and a *spectacle*. Experts care deeply that people come for the game. The people who come may not completely ignore the game, but they are invariably moved by the side activities that we can call the *spectacle*.

<i>Game</i>	<i>Spectacle</i>
Football game	Tailgating
Opening night opera debut	Intermission with champagne
Convention program	Reconnecting with friends
Shabbat services	Bar mitzvah "performance"
	Shmoozing
	<i>Kiddush</i> or <i>oneg</i>
Classroom lessons	"Hanging out"

The Game is formal, official, on-line
The Spectacle is informal, unofficial, off-line
Learning ought to happen in both ways.

ACTIVITY

YOUR OWN THERMAL SCAN: WHERE DOES LEARNING HAPPEN?

The time has come for you to make your own thermal scan of your congregation. You will not make the same mistake as the camp committee. Instead, you will look for official, on-line, "game" learning, as well as unofficial off-line "spectacle" learning.

1. Divide into groups of three or four, and prepare to take a walk through every room in the synagogue.
2. Take a separate sheet of paper for each room; put the "official" name of the room at the top; if there is no official name for it, simply label it in some way that will allow you to identify it after your walk is completed.
3. Now divide each sheet into two columns: label the left-hand column, "Activities." Label the right-hand column, "Learning."
4. As you stand in each room, fill in the left-hand side of the page by listing the *activities* that normally happen there (either official or unofficial, game and spectacle, on- or off-line). On the right side, do the same thing for any corresponding *learning*. An example is on the following page:

.....
 The Youth Lounge

Activities

Teenagers hanging out

Learning

Official: nothing (because teenage learning happens in formal youth group events, Confirmation class, or in Hebrew High School)

Unofficial: kids that age learn a lot by talking to one another and to the clergy in an informal setting.

.....
 5. Meet back together and share what you have found in your groups. Make master lists of each room surveyed.

6. Ask yourselves the following:

- Where does learning happen?
- Is there learning, for instance, in the board room at board meetings? Wherever committee meetings occur? The meeting places for sisterhood or men's club?
- The front hall where people enter?

7. *Be careful to include off-line learning also.* Do not limit yourself, that is, to the game. The synagogue spectacles may be of equal importance.

READ AND DISCUSS

LEARNING "PARALLELISM" AND "SEQUENCING"

Please have a volunteer take a few minutes to summarize Learning "Parallelism" and "Sequencing."

MA'ASEH SHEHAYAH: SADDLEBACK ON SUNDAY MORNING
The Saddleback Baptist Church is south of Los Angeles in Irvine, California. Every Sunday, 6-7,000 people drive there for one of two morning worship services, one from 9:00 to 10:00, and the other from 11:00 to 12:00. Timing is exact, as is everything else in a system that processes cars, people, and a complex program with state of the art methods and hundreds of people involved in production and delivery of the service to the congregation.

Many people -- at least a thousand -- come with children, who must be dropped off for Sunday school, and then picked up again as parents leave for home. Saddleback has established a system by which children are left at a building that is age-specific -- all 3rd-6th graders in one place, 7th-9th graders in another. Parents drop off their children, and receive two things in return. First, they get a beeper that the teacher promises to use if any problem occurs with the child during the hour's school session. Parents can pay strict attention to the worship service, knowing they will be "beeped" if anything goes wrong. Second, they get a "hat check" (or, to be exact, a "child check") -- a number corresponding to another number that the teacher pins on each child's clothes as he or she arrives. Parents rest assured that they and only they will be allowed to pick up their child after services.

The system is brilliantly synchronized to function with both parallel and sequential perfection. Parallelism works by making sure the teachers know several weeks in advance what the preacher is going to say in the adult service. While parents listen to a sermon with a message based on a particular biblical text, their children learn exactly the same message in terms that are age appropriate for them. Both children and parents emerge from an hour at church thinking the same thoughts, and able to discuss the morning's lesson together.

Sequencing is evident in the way parents and children are encouraged not to go home right away, but to stay around the church grounds, eating donuts and talking about the lesson they have just heard, along with other families who they meet at the donut tables. This kind of sequencing is "short term." It underscores learning by returning to it for an hour or so after it was initially learned.

Other churches have initiated "long-term" sequencing. Sunday morning messages build on one another, and each week, after church is over, children and parents get printed (or even audio) summaries of what the pastor and teachers had to say. Families who come week after week build up a cassette collection that starts at Genesis, say, and moves through the Bible, book by book, giving people a sense of how the entire Bible is arranged. When the year is over, they feel they have "gotten somewhere."

Synagogue learning systems may not be able to do all the church does. It may be impossible to run religious schools on Shabbat, for instance (though it may not be). But other kinds of *parallelism* that are certainly possible may not occur because they are overlooked: day-care, for instance, and not just day-care where kids play out of the parents' way, but day care with a religious message that

parents can reinforce at home. As for *sequencing*, we do worry about it: we move children successfully along from grade to grade; and we have a natural instance of sequencing in the weekly Torah portion. But in most synagogues, children rarely study the portion, even if adults do. And adults complain regularly that after years of study, they know bits and pieces here and there, but have no overall sense of mastering anything.

Your thermal scan, therefore, must do one more thing. It must measure the heat, both on-line and off-line; but it should also consider the heat in terms of *parallelism* and *sequencing*. Here are some questions to think about:

- How does learning build on itself (*sequencing*), so that people are not limited to a single experience of Jewish learning?
- Do parents study with their children (*parallelism*), or just drop them off?
- Does a pre-school lead naturally to the religious school (*sequencing*)?
- Does the formal school system feed a healthy informal learning system of youth groups (*sequencing*), that is paralleled by more formal teenage schooling (*parallelism*)?
- Are your clergy and professionals given time together to study as a group (*parallelism*), rather than catch-as-catch-can individually?
- How many adults come to continuing education classes? Do these build on one another (*sequencing*), or are they all pretty elementary, so that a serious adult student is continually studying the same things at the same level?

These and similar questions will give you a systemic picture of the learning in your synagogue. They will help you see where you need to concentrate your attention.

ACTIVITY

THE BUDGET AS LEARNING TOOL

If you really want to know how your system operates – not just how you say it does – try looking at your synagogue budget. Budgets reflect an institution's values. Most synagogue budgets allot considerable money to their religious school, since many members join for their children's education. The education budget may apportion nothing much anywhere else. The library may have only a tiny outlay, or may be dependent on the rabbi's discretionary fund or donations by members. There is probably no serious library program that attracts people to actually use it, or the funds necessary to staff a table with library books in the gathering area in the front hall.

Check through your budget. What percentage of the budget goes to various forms of learning? What potential kinds of learning receive no budgetary allotment at all?

Finally, go back to the idea of Law and Corollary of systems about which you read before this meeting.

Law: Most systems are mostly efficient most of the time. If they seem to be inefficient, we are probably not looking at what they do efficiently.

What would an outsider conclude about what your synagogue does efficiently? How efficient is it as a system of learning?

Corollary: Every human system has two agendas. One is stated publicly. The other is not. In the functioning of organizations, the unstated agenda takes priority.

No doubt, your public agenda ranks Jewish education very highly. Is there, however, an unstated agenda that no one thinks about – it might even be unconscious – that is taking priority?

FROM THE TRADITION מסורה

READ AND DISCUSS

MAIMONIDES AND THE *SHULCHAN ARUKH*: EXPANDING THE MAP OF JEWISH LEARNING

Moses ben Maimon, also known as, Rambam, is recognized as one of the world's greatest Jewish thinkers. Born in Cordova, Spain in 1135, Maimonides entered a world fraught with zealous anti-Jewish sentiment. Consequently, Maimonides, along with his family, was forced to flee Spain. His travels brought him to Morocco, Israel, and ultimately, Egypt. Maimonides spent most of his life there, and died in Cairo in the year 1204.

Truly a renaissance man of his time, Maimonides was not only a prolific and remarkable scholar; he was also a famous physician to the Egyptian Sultan, and a prominent figure in Cairo's Jewish community. Although Maimonides wrote many books, including *Guide to the Perplexed* and *The Book of Commandments* (*Sefer Ha-Mitzvoth*), one of his most frequently studied works is the *Mishneh Torah*.

The *Mishneh Torah* was intended to be a concise yet comprehensive summary of all Jewish Law. Written in the style of the actual Mishnah, Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* is divided into fourteen sections, each of which is further subdivided into tractates, chapters, and laws. Its orderly and systematic layout provided students with a means to understand the sometimes random organization of the Talmud. With the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides desired to create a guide to Jewish Law, which, in tandem with the Torah, could be used to determine proper Jewish conduct at any place and at any time, therefore bypassing long hours of intense Talmud study. Although the *Mishneh Torah* was not immediately well received, it is today regarded as a standard reference manual of Jewish practice, and a principal source of Jewish study.

The *Shulchan Arukh* was compiled in the mid 1500's, around three hundred years after the *Mishneh Torah*. It was, though, based on the *Mishneh Torah* and similarly attempts to clarify Jewish law. The *Shulchan Arukh* was written by the Sephardi Rabbi Joseph Caro and still to this day stands as the standard legal code of Jewish practice for the traditional Jewish community. It includes practices accepted by both the Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities as it is published with comments on the rulings by a contemporary of Rabbi Caro's, Rabbi Moshe Isserles.

Caro's Sephardi rulings and Isserles's Ashkenazi rulings make this a phenomenally inclusive compendium of traditional Jewish law.

The *Shulchan Arukh* is divided into four volumes, each one addressing the particular concerns of the Jewish community.

1. *Orakh Chayyim* addresses the laws of prayer and holidays.
2. *Yoreh Deah* – varied laws, including those explaining Torah study.
3. *Even Ha'ezer* – Jewish marriage and divorce laws.
4. *Choshen Mishpat* – Jewish civil law.

The text was intended, like the *Mishneh Torah*, to aid Jews in their effort to live their lives according to *halakha*.

Below you will find passages about teaching and learning Torah. After reading all the texts, each team member should decide which resonates with them most strongly. If there is time, take the opportunity to share with the entire team, or split into groups of three or four and do the same.

[Introductory note: Maimonides, and the *Shulchan Arukh*, that follows, reflect the tradition that obligates only men, but not women, to study Torah. It was, however, always felt that Torah should be open to women as well, and Jewish tradition records many women who achieved the stature of being a highly regarded Torah scholar. Liberal interpretation tends to universalize the *mitzvah* as applying both to men and women. Here, we remain faithful to the classical texts, however, translating them with masculine pronouns, and allowing the reader to determine the extent to which the stipulations apply to men and women equally.]

Mishneh Torah: Laws of Torah Study

1:8: Every Jew is obliged to study Torah, whether he is rich or poor,⁵ So we find that Hillel obligates the poor; Elazar bar Charsom

⁵ In Talmud, Yoma 35b, the following is found:

The Rabbis taught about a poor person, a wealthy person and a wicked person who arrive for judgment.

To the poor person, they say, "Why didn't you study Torah?" If he says, "I was busy just finding food and sustenance," they reply, "Were you poorer than Hillel? They say of Hillel that every day he would work to make a little money, half of which he would give to the doorkeeper of the study house [to pay to go inside] and half he would keep for his and his family's sustenance. One day, he failed to find

obligates the wealthy; and Joseph obligates the wicked. Enjoying bodily health or suffering from disease, still a youth or weak from

work, and the doorkeeper would not let him go inside for class. So he climbed the roof and sat suspended over the skylight, so as to hear the words of the living G-d from [his teachers] Shemaiah and Avtalyon. They say that day was *erev Shabbat*, in the winter season. Snow began to fall on him, and as the next day dawned, Shemaiah asked Avtalyon, "Isn't it usual that light shines in here during the day and it gets dark only at night? Could it possibly be that cloudy a day?" So they looked up and saw the silhouette of a man in the skylight. Upon climbing to the roof, they saw Hillel covered with snow. They pulled him loose, washed and bathed him, and sat him in front of the fire, saying, "For this, it is permitted to desecrate Shabbat."

To the wealthy person, they say, "Why didn't you study Torah?" If he says, "I was so busy, I had to take care of my possessions," they reply, "Were you wealthier than Rabbi Elazar bar Charsom? Of Rabbi Elazar bar Charsom, they say that his father left him 1,000 cities on land, and correspondingly, 1,000 ships at sea. Yet every single day, he would load a barrel of flour on his shoulder and go from city to city, to study Torah. One day his own servants saw him and (failing to recognize him) pressed him into service. "Please," he said, "Release me so that I may study Torah." They answered, "By the life of our master Elazar bar Charsom, we will not let you go." From this we learn that he must have sat and studied Torah all day and night, to the point where he never even visited the people working for him.

To the evil person, they say, "Why didn't you study Torah?" If he says, "I was so handsome, I found myself continually busy satisfying my evil inclination," they say to him, "You think you were more handsome than Joseph?" They say of Joseph the righteous, "Every single day, Potiphar's wife would try to seduce him with words. She would change into evening clothes for him, and say, "Come be more responsive to me." When he refused, she threatened to imprison him. Joseph responded, "G-d releases those who are imprisoned."

"Then I'll break you physically until you are bowed over," she replied. "G-d straightens up those who are stooped over," he said.

"Then I'll blind you," she said. "G-d opens the eyes of the blind," Joseph responded.

So she bribed him with a thousand silver ingots, so that he would agree to be with her and have sex with her. But Joseph would not listen. He would not agree to be with her in this world, because he did not want to have to be with her in the world to come.

very old age; even if he is so poor as to be the recipient of charity and has to go begging from door to door, and even if he is married with children,⁶ he must set aside time to study Torah day and night.

1:9: Some of the greatest scholars in Israel were manual laborers.⁷ Even those who were blind studied Torah day and night, being among those who repeated to others what they had heard, as part of the oral chain going all the way back to Moses our Teacher.

1:10: How long is one obliged to study Torah? Until the day of death, as it is written, “Lest they [words of Torah] depart from you all the days of your life.” Whenever one does not study, one forgets.

2:1: Teachers are to be appointed in every state, district and city. If there are no children going to school, we excommunicate the people of the city until they appoint teachers... for the world is sustained only by the breath of schoolchildren.

Shulchan Arukh: Laws of Torah Study

Yoreh Deah. 246:7. Do not teach Torah to morally unworthy students. First, bring them back to the good and direct them on the path of righteousness. Then bring them into the schoolhouse and teach them.

Y.D. 246:8. If a teacher does not behave morally, even if he is really a scholar such that everyone depends on him, it is forbidden to learn anything from him until he returns to the path of goodness.

Y.D.246: 10. If students do not understand, the teacher should not become angry with them, but should go over things again as long as it takes for them to comprehend matters in depth. Also, students shouldn't say, “I understand that,” if they do not understand, but should ask about it over and over again, as many times as necessary, and if the teacher gets angry, the student should say, “But teacher, this is Torah, and it is necessary that I understand it, although my ability to comprehend is limited.”

⁶ The idea being that such a father is completely busy providing for his family.

⁷ Literally, “woodchoppers or drawers of water,” a phrase that Maimonides takes from Deuteronomy 29:9, and used by Torah to refer to “everyone.” The verse says, “You stand this day, all of you, before A-donai your G-d...from woodchoppers to water drawers.”

Y.D. 246:12. Students should not ask a teacher anything while he is just entering the classroom, but should wait until he gets settled. Nor should students ask anything until they themselves get settled in their place. Two people should not ask questions at the same time. A student should not raise questions about subjects other than the one under discussion, so that the teacher is not embarrassed. Teachers should direct the attention of students to the questions and cases that are put before them to test them in order to find out if they remember what they have been learning, and it goes without saying that the teacher can ask questions about any topic whatsoever in order to keep the students on their toes.

ACTIVITY

Your next step will be to begin the exciting process of applying what you have learned in this curriculum to your own synagogue system.

To help you with that application, we are providing you with another curriculum, geared specifically for a single element of your synagogue. As you read through it, you are to apply the concepts of this curriculum to it.

We suggest you meet one more time before tackling the next curriculum. In order to decide exactly how to apply the lessons you have learned as you go forward, remember, to make progress you will have to think differently.

It will not help to go over old ground all over again, so before the next meeting, go through this curriculum recollecting the concepts that stood out for you. Make a list of ideas that should motivate your thinking as you move on to the family education, adult study, and/or congregational schools curricula. Then meet with the following chart filled out and keep these concepts in mind in your continued learning.

<i>Concept Learned</i>	<i>Why it was important to me</i>	<i>How it might help us as we move forward in our synagogue</i>
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Unit Four

Think “Systems Within Systems Within Systems”

Preparatory Readings

Meeting One:

1. Systems Thinking
2. Systemic Pathology or Systemic Dysfunction: The Case of the Black Box
3. Midrash, Just What Is It?

FURTHER STUDY

1. Lawrence A. Hoffman, “Zoning Out And Tuning In To Education For Jewish Journeys” (in the Preparatory Readings)

Meeting Two:

1. A Thermal Scan of Your Synagogue’s Learning System
2. “Off-line” Learning: Game And Spectacle”
3. Learning “parallelism” and “sequencing”
4. Thomas F. O’Meara, “Field of Grace”
(An off-beat article that may appear to have nothing to do with education, but forms the backdrop for making the distinction between “formal activities” called “the game,” and “informal activities” called “the spectacle.”)

Unit Four: Think “Systems Within Systems Within Systems”

Meeting One Preparatory Readings

SYSTEMS THINKING

Probably the biggest breakthrough in modern thought was the recognition that everything is part of a system. That is to say:

Everything is connected to everything else, so that “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” Changing just one thing changes the relationship among all things: changing any element in the system changes the whole system.

MA’ASEH SHEHAYAH: WHOOPS!

Whoops! Atul Gawande is a surgeon ... who has just completed a book on why medicine goes wrong....¹ He fastens our attention on the case of an obese woman, who almost died when Gawande, still a junior physician, remember, tried to perform an emergency tracheotomy on her, a “procedure” (as linguistic euphemism has it) by which a breathing tube is injected through an incision into the larynx for a patient who is unable to breathe. The woman in question, a victim of a car accident, was literally being asphyxiated by blood in her nose and throat that obstructed her airway. An emergency intubation of a breathing tube into the larynx only exacerbated the problem causing more bleeding but no relief. That is when Gawande finally took over:

The inexperienced Gawande ... waited too long... The lighting was bad, the patient’s neck was fat. Gawande made the wrong choice of incision... Most egregious of all, he had not called for more experienced help. Just as all seemed lost, the senior attending physician appeared and took over. But by then, the wound was such a mess that even he could not do much. And then, at a moment that could have been fatal, an anesthesiologist who had

¹ *Complications: A Surgeon’s Notes on an Imperfect Science* (Metropolitan Books, 2002).

just arrived was somehow able to insert a pediatric breathing tube between the swollen vocal cords, and the patient's life was saved.²

Doctors meeting later to discuss the case came to the following conclusion.

It was clear that the accumulating errors and unavoidable circumstances, had led to the near-disaster. They followed one upon the other as though in a series, each growing out of the previous ones: the patient's thick and fatty neck; the consequent inability of the emergency room physician to intubate her and the trauma resulting from his attempts; Gawande's not calling for help and his too-long wait before commencing tracheotomy, a procedure at which he had little experience; his poor choice of incision; the inadequate lighting; the clot-obstructed suction-tube and the unavailability of a replacement; the senior surgeon's failure to come to the bedside on his own, having lingered unnecessarily elsewhere. If any of these factors had not occurred along the way, the patient would very likely not have come so close to dying. The people involved failed and the instruments failed, but most importantly of all, the system for dealing with extreme emergencies did not stand up to the stress placed on it.³

Even more could have been said -- about the way hospitals employ residents and interns around the clock, and, most of all, the economic system that necessitates these desperate measures that place patients at the mercy of the most inexperienced doctors who are sleep-deprived.

The hospital could have blamed Gawande, but to its credit, it didn't. Gawande was a pawn in the larger system that failed.

² Sherwin B. Nuland, "Whoops!" *New York Review of Books* 49:12 (July 18, 2002), p. 12.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 12-13.

SYSTEMIC PATHOLOGY OR SYSTEMIC DYSFUNCTION: THE CASE OF THE BLACK BOX

Sometimes, the "fault" does indeed lie with an individual. In such a case, the analogy is a sick cell within an organism. Though the organism as a whole is healthy, a single deviant cell may not be. That cell may grow malignantly until the entire organism stops functioning. In the face of potential malignancy, we remove the pathological cell to save the organism as a whole. This is what we mean by *systemic pathology*.

But *systemic pathology* is relatively rare. Most people support a strong synagogue education system. They know that Jews are supposed to study, and they welcome a good religious school, classes for adults, and the like. So the weakness that plagues most synagogue education programs is not *pathology* but what we can call *systemic dysfunction*. It is *The Case of the Black Box*.

Picture a machine encased in an opaque box. The mechanical parts are not available to you for examination. All you know is that the machine does not do what it should. If you could see inside it, you might discover some particular part that is not functioning properly. But since you cannot do that, you have to treat the box as a whole and apply corrective pressure somewhere outside it, hoping that you can get the correction to spread throughout the box until it starts behaving the way it should.

Educational systems are often like black boxes: as far as we can see, everyone seems to be doing everything right, but education doesn't happen.

MIDRASH, JUST WHAT IS IT?

Midrash is one of the most exciting elements of our heritage of Jewish texts. It is what originally allows the early rabbinic mind, and eventually, Jewish minds to add extra meaning to biblical texts. Midrash, comes from the root *d,r,sh*, and literally means to explicate, or to investigate. Creating midrash is a process of explicating or investigating text and finding hidden and deeper there. Sometimes the rabbi's even used midrash to clarify a *pasuk* (line) of Torah which seemed simple, but with which they would add layers of depth.

"Midrash" is not just a method, it is also a genre, a style of Jewish writing and examples of that style. Therefore, you can talk about Midrash as a method, or you can speak about a specific midrash you have read. Today, some people use the term midrash to describe any interpretation of Jewish writing, from books of historical fiction, to children's stories, to the more traditional use – rabbinic interpretation of biblical passages.

Midrash is typically separated into two categories. The first, *Halakhik* midrash, attempts to explain *halakhik* (legal) issues, and the second, *Aggadic* midrash, attempts to explain legends and folklore within the Jewish tradition. Sometimes the lines between these two types are blurred, but both are looked at as part of the compendium of Jewish literature. Traditional midrash incorporates not only *ideas* from biblical text, but also the text itself. Some types of midrash follow a very specific structure, beginning with a biblical verse, explaining it and ending with that same verse. These can be difficult to understand and take a tremendous amount of skill to create and write. Other types are much more accessible. In all cases, writing midrash requires a deep understanding of biblical messages and Jewish text.

There are collections of both types of midrash, some dating back to the early third and fourth centuries. Some of the collections are divided according to the books of the *TaNakh* while others are organized according to holidays or themes. The collections lend a great deal of clarity to those who wish to delve into the biblical story.

Unit Four: Think “Systems Within Systems Within Systems”

Meeting Two Preparatory Readings

A “THERMAL SCAN” OF YOUR OWN SYNAGOGUE’S LEARNING SYSTEM

Two images – one old and the other quintessentially new – come to mind. The old one is from the *Zohar*, which conceptualized all of creation in the form of a primeval human being, *adam harishon*, with blessing, pictured as divine light, flowing smoothly from top to bottom.

The second image comes from medical commercials, advising the public to invest in a body scan. Modern instruments can picture the workings of all our inner organs to make sure everything is in order.

Such a scan would not look altogether different from the *Zohar’s* idealized *adam harishon*. It would show all the organs joined together by a steady flow of blood, without which they would quickly atrophy. The most important difference would be that the source of the life-giving flow would be the heart, whereas in the *Zohar*, it is the brain that sends light throughout the system.

In their essence, both *adam harishon* and the body scan represent thermal maps of systems. The *Zohar* maps the flow of light through a pulsating universe. The medical scan maps heat in the human body. In both cases, if you deprive any systemic part of its light (or heat), it dies.

Imagine the synagogue as such a system: an educational system, where study must flow throughout, as *light* flows through the *Zoharic* image and as blood sustains the body. Where there is no learning, the synagogue breaks down.

Imagine an instrument that measures the amount of learning taking place in the synagogue’s systemic parts. The learning produces heat, let us say. As the measuring device travels throughout the synagogue it creates a map that measures the intensity of the heat. Ideally, like a human body, we would see very strong sources of heat that diffuse throughout the system. Some parts of the synagogue would show up bright red with learning “heat,” But no part of the synagogue should be without some kind of learning.

You will be asked to make your own thermal scan of the learning that occurs in your own synagogue. Before doing so, you need a few more concepts.

OFF-LINE LEARNING: GAME AND SPECTACLE

Sometimes, heat shows up in the most remarkable places; and sometimes thermal technicians miss it. A Jewish summer camp mostly for teens features evening programs that are carefully put together by staff members who are experts in the art of teenage education. Since teenagers value independence, however, the campers must attend programs only three times a week. On other nights (except for Shabbat), they are free to go anywhere they like on the camp grounds, as long as they are not in private cabins and as long as they keep busy.

Recently, the oversight committee for the camp decided to measure how well the educational system was working. When the committee discovered that for half of the evenings, campers were free "to roam," and when they saw that only about a third of the camp was coming to optional programs, they complained about giving the kids too much freedom.

In fact, however, they missed what was really happening. Several staff members were simultaneously hosting campers on their front porches, holding informal conversations on matters pertaining to Judaism and teenage problems. Other kids were singing Jewish songs around a campfire. Some were knitting *kippot* in a corner of the arts and crafts area.

The official programs were being measured as the official learning opportunities. But everyone in camp knew that the official learning was only half the story. Sometimes the most important learning opportunities could be found in off-line education.

LEARNING “PARALLELISM” AND “SEQUENCING”

A thermal body scan does more than register heat. It follows the heat along certain paths; and it indicates parallel instances of heat that occur in two parts of the body at the same time. That is because most systems are not static, and subtle changes occur in them regularly, and it helps to be able to track the influence of one part of the system upon the others.

Imagine an athlete doing chin-ups or lifting weights with both arms at once. A thermal scan would reveal a more or less equal amount of heat in the muscles of both arms. If one arm is noticeably low on energy, so that heat is displayed only in the other, the body system is in danger of overload on just the healthy side, with a threat of damage to the good arm that is doing the work of two. The best scenario is when both arms are working together and thereby giving off the same amount of “heat”. *When two parallel sections of the system work together, you have a case of parallelism.*

Alternatively, imagine a runner sprinting along a track. A healthy thermal scan will show heat emanating from the heart, where blood is being rapidly pumped, to the outermost extremities of feet and hands. If you suddenly observe the heat disappearing from the runner’s entire left side, you may be watching blood being cut off from half the body, or, a stroke. A healthy organism always demonstrates the smooth flow of heat around a circuit from heart to limbs and back to the heart again. *When a system pumps energy smoothly from one part to the next, you have a case of sequencing.*

What is true of the body is true of other systems also. Imagine the case of a pharmacy outlet – not an enormous store, but a medium-size franchise selling a variety of goods to local shoppers, equipped with two checkout lines. You have probably had the experience of standing in one line only to watch the other moving rapidly ahead while you are at a standstill. That is a case of faulty *parallelism* – one line is always ahead of another. The two cash-register lines are like the weight-lifter’s two arms, carrying all the weight of customers anxious to leave the store. Smart owners will replace the slow checkout clerk, fix the broken cash register, or otherwise repair the system so that half the customers do not get tired of waiting and leave without making their purchase, never returning again.

Similarly, you have probably been in appliance stores where you choose what you want from the floor models, and then are told it will be just a moment while the purchase is being processed and then, an unopened version of the item is brought to the pickup counter or loading dock. Sometimes, though, you wait and wait and wait. The order has been properly placed, but the store is having a *sequencing* problem.

So, too, with synagogue education. It is not enough to generate activity in just one sector of the system, just as it is not enough to have only one cash register going or to have an efficient salesperson but no way to complete the transaction from the warehouse to customer's car.

Unit Four: Think “Systems Within Systems Within Systems” Enrichment Material

Meeting One:

1. Teeter – Totter: Another Example Of Systems
2. An Early Text On The Synagogue As A Learning-System

Meeting Two:

1. The System And The Rabbi: Finding Time To Think

Enrichment Material For Unit Four: Think "Systems Within Systems Within Systems"

ENRICHMENT MATERIAL FOR UNIT FOUR: MEETING ONE

TEETER-TOTTER: ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF SYSTEMS

Here's another example, a simpler one, that will teach us something about systemic problem-solving -- an ordinary seesaw in a playground. Imagine your son sitting at one end of a teeter-totter. On the other end is a much lighter child, so that your son finds himself sitting permanently on the ground with no way to divest himself of enough weight to get his end of the teeter-totter up in the air. After trying in vain to push himself up, he calls you to help. Now you could reason that the problem lies with your heavier son, who must be pushed up; this diagnosis would lead you to go to his side of the seesaw and lift it, thereby forcing the other end down. But only a fool would do that, because it is much harder to lean down and pull up than it is to reach up and push down. So the normal correction of the weight inequity is to go to the other side (the one where the light child sits perched on high), to push that end down, and as a consequence, let your son ride his end up.

The reason we can and do act that way is that we know instinctively that the teeter-totter is a system. Any problem with one of the elements in the teeter-totter (in this case, one of the riders) is really a problem in the relationship between the system's constituent parts (in this case between the light child, the heavy one, and the relative position of the fulcrum that distributes force). So a malfunction that surfaces in one of the parts can be solved without ever going near that part. We adjust a completely separate part and redistribute the relationship among the parts, eventually reaping the reward in the part perceived as "The Problem."

Our choice of where exactly to apply the corrective measure in the system depends first on how the parts are related. We would never think to push down on the middle, or fulcrum, for example, since that wouldn't change the relationship between the ends. We must also know what part within the system is available for us to tackle. Thus, we could have pulled up the heavier child, but that would have been harder, which is to say, less available to us. The problem, in any case, is the way the parts of the system relate to each other; the problem is with the teeter-totter and its two inhabitants (seen as a whole), not with the single rider who happens to sit on one of the ends, and who is easily identifiable as "the issue," because he is the one screaming for help.

Actually the teeter-totter is not as simple a system as it appears. Every system is part of a network of subsystems within a larger system. The teeter-totter system

was part of a larger "playground system." The problem of the inequity in weight could have been solved by having recourse to other things in the playground. For example, the light child could have been given a large rock to hold, thus equalizing the weight inequity. We would then have solved the problem by adjusting the boundary between the system under analysis (the teeter-totter and its riders) and the larger system of which it is a part (the playground). Seen from this perspective, the *system* under discussion is always a subsystem of some other larger system, which, to continue the progression, is itself subsumed under a higher-order system, and so on.

By the same token, working in the other direction, the teeter-totter, which is a subsystem of the playground, can be arbitrarily broken down into its own subsystems. The heavy child, for example, may himself be considered as such a subsystem, as can the mechanical parts that make up the teeter-totter. Perhaps, focusing on the latter, we might notice that the fulcrum is really movable, and that we can rearrange the forces exerted by the two riders by moving the fulcrum from the center toward one of the ends.

AN EARLY TEXT ON THE SYNAGOGUE AS A LEARNING-SYSTEM

When the Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E., the Rabbis decided that study of Torah, rather than sacrifice, would sustain the Jewish People, and eventually, synagogues became centers of such study. Already in the first century, the synagogue was emerging as a place of gathering, a kind of hostel and study place together. A famous synagogue inscription from that era is clear.

Theodotus the son of Vettenos, *kohen*, president of a synagogue, son of a president of a synagogue, and grandson of a president of a synagogue, built this synagogue for the reading of Torah and for instruction in the commandments; and the guest house and the rooms and the water as lodging for those needing it from abroad.

ENRICHMENT MATERIAL FOR UNIT FOUR: MEETING TWO

THE SYSTEM AND THE RABBI: FINDING TIME TO THINK

Consider the following tale told by Rabbi Gunther Plaut:

MA'ASEH SHEHAYAH: NO TIME TO THINK

Rabbi Gunther Plaut recalls moving to a new synagogue to serve as Rabbi. He had already acquired the reputation of being a significant author, preacher and scholar, and was told that he had been selected because he could make learning a primary part of the synagogue's agenda. In his first week of work, he initiated the practice of studying and writing in the early hours of every morning, so he instructed his secretary to answer his phone then and inform callers that "the rabbi is unavailable at the moment because he is thinking." People were outraged! How dare the rabbi "think" instead of answer the phone?! So Plaut changed his instructions. Henceforth the secretary was to explain that "The Rabbi is unavailable because he is in conference." People stopped complaining. That seemed like a reasonable explanation for the rabbi's being away from the phone.

Sh'ma minah – "We learn from this" that parts of Rabbi Plaut's synagogue system thought learning was primary; but other parts did not. It took a long time to change the mind of the parts that thought the rabbi should be spending time in meetings, not learning.

Synagogue 2000

Introduction to Limud

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