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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Educators are busy. They constantly dance between the multiple roles they play—teaching, enabling, counseling, negotiating, peacemaking, managing, assessing, planning, designing, creating, reporting, adapting—and the list goes on. Educators spend years building their repertoire, finding the styles that work for them, and refining them through numerous iterations. And then, when they finally hit their sweet spot, they face perhaps their greatest challenge—repeating what they've been doing over and over again.

Why is this a challenge? Simply, because resting on the hard work of the past is a recipe for getting stale, possibly even burnout. Seven years into my teaching career I had a crisis of stagnation. I wasn't perfect, but by many indications, I was pretty successful as a teacher and yet I felt like I wasn't growing, I wasn't getting better. I didn't feel like I was becoming a better teacher, a more thoughtful lesson planner, a deeper thinker, a more knowledgeable learner. After briefly considering changing careers, I decided that I needed to change something else, and it took me a while to figure out what that something—or, more accurately—those somethings, were.

Few people want to start from scratch when they've put so much into becoming who they are personally and professionally, and most people do not need to. But everyone can benefit from exploring doing something different, not a radical overhaul but a tune-up. A tweaking of their practice by trying something different and seeing where it goes. Sometimes we try something that we definitely would not want to try again, and even then we learn from it what does not work for us. But then there are those times when we experiment with something new and which open our eyes to new visions of what is possible. In the process, we become energized, and this is transmitted to our students in profound ways—not only in their teacher's excitement but in seeing their teacher as a role model for perpetual learning.

This issue of the journal is devoted to the enterprise of trying out something new. Most of the articles are written by teachers who tried new things, sometimes more successfully than others, but who learned from each experience and tried again. Some were inspired by a need to refresh their teaching inspired by COVID-19, while others have been tinkering for years. Each is built on ideas that others can replicate, even to try once and to see what could be learned.

If you, the reader, would like to share something you've done to reinvigorate your own classroom, please reach out to me at zvi@lookstein.org. Someone out there could learn from your experimentation, and together we can help to reinvigorate Jewish learning, one classroom at a time.

Bivrakha,
Rabbi Zvi Grumet, Ed.D.

BIBLIODRAMA:
TRANSFORMATION OF STORY INTO EXPERIENCE

Yael Unterman

Yael Unterman is an international lecturer, author, and Bibliodrama facilitator living in Jerusalem. Her books are *Nehama Leibowitz: Teacher and Bible Scholar* (finalist, 2009 National Jewish Book Awards) and *The Hidden of Things: Twelve Stories of Love & Longing* (finalist, 2015 USA Best Book Awards). She's also published essays, stories, and reviews, and created and performed her own poetic biblical solo show, *After Eden*.

INTRODUCTION

This article, an expansion of one I previously published in Jewish Educational Leadership, focuses on what I consider to be a superb technique: Bibliodrama. Since I began using it in 2001, I have run over 500 workshops worldwide, in all kinds of frameworks, and to diverse groups; and I continue to be blown away by the power and versatility of a technique that is ultimately very simple. And although most of the groups I work with are adult groups, I have found it highly effective with school-age individuals as well and have trained teachers who have embraced the technique with enthusiasm for their own classrooms.

Bibliodrama is not acting, per se. Its creator, Dr. Peter Pitzele (whose book, *Scripture Windows*, is designed to train the reader to use the method) imported methods from the world of psychodrama into the study of Tanakh, and honed them into an art form. In Bibliodrama, a transition is effected by moving from studying the texts from the outside, using the analytical and academic left brain, to studying them from the inside, in creative and imaginative right-brain mode—and thus, getting right into the *kishkes* of the stories we are teaching. Questions, ones with no obvious answer, are posed to the students who respond in first-person language, speaking as the biblical characters or even as objects.

SAMPLE

Here's a sample snippet from a Bibliodrama session focusing on Moses' encounter at the burning bush. Note that the question can elicit a number of possible answers, none of which are necessarily right or wrong. Also, note the demand for a response in the first person. These are the two fundamentals of Bibliodrama:

Facilitator: So, Moses, you've turned off the path and are now staring at a bush that is burning yet not being consumed. What are you thinking or feeling at this moment?

Person A: Curiosity keeps me rooted to the spot. I've never been so puzzled in my life.

Person B: And I feel humbled. Normally, I can explain why things happen, but now I am stumped.

Person C: This bush feels like a metaphor for my own life: it is me. By rights I should have died many times—floating in the reeds as a baby, by Pharaoh's hand, wandering in Midian—yet here I am. I am moved.

Person D: I'm not thinking anything; I'm simply in awe.

Let's unpack what we learn from this snippet. First, you can deduce that Bibliodrama is not acting. For the most part, the students remain seated. Frequently, as is the case here, the entire group is role-playing a single character, building off each other to shape and deepen it.

The answers above are, as you may have guessed, given by adults. Children's responses would not be quite so sophisticated, but they often have their own depth. I have been impressed by the insight and innovation exhibited by children in their answers, which are sometimes more profound than those of adults. The method does work well with both populations, who bring different strengths and weaknesses to the technique. It should be noted that teenagers sometimes do not connect as well, due to self-consciousness.

As we can see from the sample, the multi-voice conversation is very rich and is crucial to the process. Person B bounces off Person A, while the ideas of Persons C and D, though different, may have crystallized upon hearing the formulations of the first two. Every voice is significant, as this is "Torah 2.0"—it is user-generated. If people remain silent, the page we want to write together will remain blank.

In my introduction to a Bibliodrama session,

I clarify that all answers are legitimate insofar as they stay within the boundaries of the text. Opening the boundaries in this way might feel a little challenging to the teacher. As a facilitator, I have often been surprised by answers, offering perspectives and insights I would never have thought of myself. That is something that teachers must be prepared for; they need to come in with an open mind and be prepared to hear things from various surprising angles, and not react in ways that are judgmental or will discourage others from feeling safe enough to share openly and with confidence. The teacher/facilitator must be prepared to be flexible in receiving unusual answers, and yet at the same time be firm when the boundaries are crossed. What constitutes a crossing of the boundaries is up to each teacher to decide.

EFFECT ON STUDENTS

Not for nothing is the technique sometimes referred to as "contemporary Midrash." Bibliodrama transforms unknowledgeable students into sensitive Bible commentators, assiduously searching the text for clues to solve puzzles and difficulties, after their curiosity has been aroused by thought-provoking questions such as, "*Cain, what did you say to Abel before you murdered him?*" or "*Jacob, what are your thoughts as you leave your family in Be`er Sheva for Haran?*" As the participants speak out, a previously inaccessible ancient text truly becomes a living tree.

The simple transition from third-person language, speaking about the text, to first-person language, speaking from within the text, makes a world of difference. Students begin to draw upon their emotions, experiences, and intuitions, often astonishing

themselves with the powerful insights arising from the encounter between themselves and the narrative. Even people with very weak biblical backgrounds—perhaps especially such people, since a strong education in the "correct" way to read Bible often obstructs the flow of Bibliodrama—open their mouths, and incredible ideas simply flow. This makes the session a joy for the facilitator too, another incidental benefit of the approach. While I personally get bored fairly easily, I can happily do the same Bibliodrama over and over again as each exploration, with a different group of participants, is new.

Further, in a Bibliodrama, certain children who do not shine in the regular left-brain classroom atmosphere will come into their own. This is especially true for those with creative imaginations, normally deprived of the opportunity to fully display them. In general, both children and adults tremendously enjoy the group experience of building up the inner life of a story, and they relish the opportunity both to be playful and also to express deeply personal feelings through the safe mask of the biblical characters. (Note: Bibliodrama may verge on the therapeutic and can reveal information that could be useful for a trained therapist.)

The experience also changes the participants' relationship to text. Groups of students were found in the next day's lesson to refer constantly to the insights gained in a Bibliodrama the day before; and I have witnessed an eighteen-year-old product of a religious Jewish education, announce, "I never before thought of Abraham as someone I could actually identify with!"

USE BY EDUCATORS
Two more points are pertinent to educators.

First, a Bibliodramatic experience constitutes an excellent companion to the study of Tanakh with commentaries. After having dealt with the textual difficulties by role-playing them out, students possess far greater clarity regarding the matters the commentators struggle with. (The technique is not limited to Tanakh—it may be applied with stories from Talmud, Midrash, literature, or even history, whether Jewish or not.)

Second, and very conveniently for educators, Bibliodrama may be easily integrated into a regular class. Although a full Bibliodrama can last for an hour or more, a teacher may also, in the course of a class, suddenly switch into a Bibliodrama moment lasting five or ten minutes, casually saying, "*Now, everyone, I want you to imagine that you are Abraham, after you have been commanded to take your son Isaac and offer him up. Are you going to say anything to Sarah—and if so, what?*" We can also diversify the methods, for example splitting the room into two and having one half speak as Abraham to the other half who are speaking as Sarah. Another great method is asking students to vote. "*Who feels, as Abraham, that you will tell Sarah the truth—hands up? And who feels you will not tell her the whole truth, but will partially lie or hide it from her?*" This voting technique is extremely useful in keeping the entire class engaged as the character. You can then call on someone and ask them to elaborate on why they voted as they did.

ON ZOOM
Before closing, I'd like to share some tips that arose when, due to COVID-19, I began to do Bibliodrama on Zoom. I commenced a weekly class beginning with *Parashat Bereishit* in 2020, something I had never done before. I

found that the method works well online, though it is best with small groups of four to eight people.

As well as having participants speak in turn as one character, I ask for emotions to be written in the chat. Further, the aforementioned voting technique is a great way to keep everyone engaged even as one person at a time takes the mic. My adult Zoom participants were able to stay focused and engaged during the course of 90 minutes, as we moved through sections of a story or a biography of a specific character. This format, generated by the exigencies of the coronavirus, has impacted lives very positively. "The best Torah I ever learned," reported one regular after completing a year's cycle, while another learned through all of the *parashot* for the first time in her life and made a *siyum*. Zoom Bibliodrama for children yielded similar results. Teachers needing to handle an entire class on zoom could certainly utilize these techniques to keep them engaged and excited, deepening their experience and stimulating multiple intelligences.

To conclude: Bibliodrama is a powerful tool to deepen learning, engage a broad range of students, and change up the classroom routine. It can be used with an extraordinary range of ages, backgrounds, and abilities, and helps to "level the playing field" in the classroom. When necessary, it is portable to the online learning environment. And it can help reinvigorate teachers with new insights into the texts they study and the students with whom they share a learning experience.

A MULTI-MODAL APPROACH TO TEACHING HUMASH:
AN INTERVIEW WITH M. EVAN WOLKENSTEIN

M. Evan Wolkenstein is Director of Experiential Education and teaches Tanakh at the Jewish Community High School of the Bay. His teaching is brimming with creativity as he seeks to engage his students deeply in the text and help them find authentic, personal connections with Torah. Most of his work is student-centered and challenges students to explore and generate interpretations of the text. In this contribution, he shares with us one of the multiple projects his students work on in the course of the year.

The project is an exploration of the preparations for receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai, Exodus 19. Students engage in a number of different activities as part of their learning. These include studying the text, pursuing thematic approaches to understanding the relevance of the text, journaling, examining visual metaphors, generating ideas through dialog, and artistic expression. Built into the process is a significant amount of student choice, an expectation that students will try different things and refine their ideas over a number of iterations, and reflection.

The project is organized and presented to the students using an interactive Google slide deck. We encourage you to open it, click through it, and play with it to get a sense of what it includes, how it works, and how it helps students navigate through different stages of their project and remain organized through what could and should be a complex and messy project. JEL is delighted to share a conversation we had with Evan about this.

M. Evan Wolkenstein is a high school teacher and author of YA novel **Turtle Boy** (Random House), winner of the 2021 Sydney Taylor Book Award. He attended the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Hebrew University, and the Pardes Institute for Jewish Studies. His work can be found in **The Forward, Tablet Magazine, The Washington Post, Engadget, My Jewish Learning,** and **BimBam**.

Jewish Educational Leadership: Could you give a brief description of what this project is. Just for somebody who's completely uninitiated, who hasn't seen it?

M. Evan Wolkenstein: This project is an interdisciplinary exploration of a Torah text, namely the revelation at Sinai. By interdisciplinary I mean that it combines skills needed for close text

analysis, along with creative midrash, along with interviewing skills and also applying an art lens, like a contemporary or abstract art lens. All those things go together in this multi-stage project.

Why did you decide to do it that way? What are you trying to accomplish with that?
Great question. For a long time, I had a sense of what was possible to do with learning—how it could generate depth of meaning and how exciting it could be. I kept finding that doing close text reading by itself or just doing an art component was not turning out the rich exploration that I knew was possible. The text study alone felt flat, one-dimensional, and the art lens alone was lacking the deep roots in the text, unmoored and straying into an "anything goes" arts approach. I think that there is a place for that, but that wasn't my goal. So I began to think that if I could combine them in a way that wouldn't be confusing for students then it would become greater than the sum of its parts. Once I decided that, I needed an organizing tool, a wayfinding tool for students to work either at their own pace if they were ready for that or in a more guided way if they needed more structure and support.

So is this an in-class assignment or an out-of-class assignment?
Some of it is for sure at home. The interviews, notably, are with somebody who's a generation or two generations older than them. The interviews are important because the theme of the text as we're exploring it has to do with relationships, and the challenges of new relationships. And while the students have plenty to say about new relationships and the challenges, my thought was that older generations might have a different perspective

that they could bring to bear on the text. So some of it does need to be at home.

That being said, I've been moving into a mode of less homework in general. In fact, when possible, no homework at all—trying to do much in class, even if that means changing my expectations of what is possible. So most of it is in class, except for the parts that can't be. For example, the first chunk of every class might be journaling, sketching, or getting practice in one of the elements that they need to do for the project. If they're going to be designing that day, the beginning of the class might be a kind of guided exploration.

I'm curious what changes you make, if any, to the physical classroom space in order to facilitate the types of interactions that you're looking for.
Sure, it's less to do with what changes I make to the classroom and more to do with what other spaces in the school we explore. At Jewish Community High School of the Bay, we have something called Ever Lab, which is a kind of design lab with easily movable furniture and cushions and things, we have nooks around the second floor of the building where students can cluster, so what we'll often do is that we'll do an orientation at the beginning, maybe some journaling, and then a little reflecting. Afterward, I'll send students off to one of those places, either depending on how far they've gone and if they need to work independently or they want more support, they might report to a certain place. If they need to do some pair-share, they might use one of the nooks… so it's less about changing the classroom which we leave in our format, the circle, and it's more to do with how we think of the entire floor or even the entire school as the classroom.

Aside from designing this project, what are you doing while the students are doing all this other stuff.

I'm in a help desk mode, walking around and helping with students who are stuck. If students are in dialogue—I'm sitting close to them, but not so close so as to interfere with their conversation, to reinforce the idea that they should be reflectively listening to each other. They see me there, they see me with ClassDojo on my phone, they know that I'm giving them a star on their profile if they're reflectively listening. I'm providing students who need some art supplies with more art supplies or answering questions; I'm really floating around and just kind of checking in with groups of students to see what they need.

One of the things we noticed is that you provide lots of options for students to "read" the texts, including things like the Brick Testament, Hebrew texts with and without translations, etc. What inspired that? How does that impact the students and their learning? For those who are using one of the alternatives, do you or do they feel like their learning is being watered down because they're not just working with standard texts?

First of all, I've made a pedagogical choice to use an abridged text. I know that is not everybody's chosen approach and will certainly be legitimately criticized, but I do it to make sure that I can get through the narrative I want to explore in the amount of time that students have the attention span for to have an enriching experience. I'm basically

Text 1: Revelation at Har Sinai

Notes	Text	Comprehension	What Struck You?	Discussion/Challenge
Brick testament (LEGOS!) brit: covenant - a mutual contract	**Exodus 19:1 - 20:2** ᵀᴺᴷ **Exodus 19:1** On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone forth from the land of Egypt, on that very day....... they entered the desert of Sinai and encamped ... there in front of the mountain, ³ and Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus shall you say to the house of Yaakov and declare to the children of Israel: ⁴ 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, [and] how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me. ⁵ Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My "brit," you shall be... a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel."	How long after leaving Egypt does this take place? Verse 3: where did Moses go up?. verse 3: remember -- who is Yaakov? what famous CONNECTION did we see happen between Yaakov and God? (Click here for refresher, and do Legos (Brick Testament), G-dcast, comprehension AND discussion on the link) Verse 4: What is God referring to when he says "you have seen what I did to the Egyptians?" (What did God do?) Verse 4: "brought you to me (line 4)": what does it seem like God is planning, based on this? Line 5: What sort of deal does God offer the people? What do the people have to do? What do they get in return?		**Verse 4: Why might God call Israel the "House of Yaakov?" What is he reminding them? How does he want them to think of themselves?** (hint: click here) **Verse 4: God says he carried the Israelites on eagles' wings. That's a metaphor - poetry. What does he mean? There is more than one possible answer.** **verse 4: imagine being an Israelite and hearing these words - [God saying "I have brought you to me.] What are some of the thoughts and feelings you would have?** **Line 4: What sort of interaction do the people expect to have with God? Would they expect it to be up close and personal? From afar with an intermediary? What do you base this on in the text?**

curating the text in a way that allows for lots of possible interpretations. The decision to clip certain elements of the text does close the door on some of the tangents, but that makes sure that we don't get lost in the weeds. Even though you could say that stumbling over the words can be very productive, I try to remove impediments because there's enough challenge as it is. So, I'll hyperlink to images to help the students understand the concepts that are difficult or include a link to the Brick Testament because I found that some students, especially newcomers to Torah learning, have trouble. But again, I'm choosing to have the challenges be in the content and meaning rather than in the decoding.

I link to videos or outside resources that are thematically interesting; I might use Padlet or Wakelet or Symbaloo to aggregate resources. For example, for the Mount Sinai text, there might be five videos of things being plugged into too much voltage, or things melting down because so much sunlight is being focused on it, or movies that represent the concept of too much power for something to handle. I chose these because one of the themes that the students might choose is that the Sinai experience represents the dangers of too much intimacy or too much connection too fast, which can create a meltdown or a collapsing of boundaries. So, they view videos that might enlighten them on what that might look like. The texts are linked to some resources which are to expand their interpretations, which I have in what I call the "challenge column", and other resources which help them visualize or simplify, which I put into what I call the comprehension column. I recognize that I limit the choices somewhat, but I would say that the outcome is richer when they have resources to pick and choose from.

The idea of this project or of my class is that we're taking a text, which is esoteric and which for many of them seems mythical and hard to relate to, and to have them understand that these biblical stories are about us. Students need to decide if this is about their legacy and their history, their community, and their lives right here and right now. For that to be true, they need to have the chance to explore the text and discover how it resonates with them. For some, they get really interested in the idea of the desire for closeness but the fear of what might happen if they get too close, which is one of the ways of looking at Mount Sinai. For others, it might be that relationships need structure and expectations, and rules. And while they may not immediately relate to the idea of a covenant or especially a national covenant, they understand that with their close friends there are rules that they have to follow. Some of those rules are made explicit while others are implied, and they are interested in talking about the rules that govern their relationships and what happens if you break a rule.

Since they have to choose a theme to explore in the text and how it operates in their life—whether through different ways of accessing the text, art, relationships, interviews—they are provided with more options for exploring the text and more access points. It also means more experimenting and exploring and juggling.

In **your instructions, you state very explicitly that the quality of the art is not important. That's very interesting. Why is that? And do you limit their expression to sculpture? What would you say to a student who wants to express themself in poetry, music, or dance?**

That's a great question. This is a mid-year project, when students are just at the point where they are understanding the idea of multiple interpretations and that there is no single, iconic, or classic way that you have to read the text. Anything goes as long as you can support it with what the text seems to be saying. They're beginning to understand how they can link to Harry Potter or a psychology experiment and that can be integral to their understanding.

My goal is to have the points of stress be productive and not overwhelming. With that in mind, the artistic component of this is intentionally primitive and there is kind of a limit to what you can do with popsicle sticks, two cardboard cups, two Sharpies, an Exacto knife, and some pipe cleaners. We all know students who do art projects and when they start drawing a picture of the character they very meticulously, for half an hour, make the eyelashes on one of the characters. The idea of primitivity is to help those students—and there are a lot of them. We want them to focus on the ideas, the quality of the ideas, and the expression of those ideas; the execution of the art needs to be deemphasized. For students who say I'm a poet or a dancer or a musician, that creates a different source of stress for perfection in the execution and takes away from the idea itself, which is the opposite of what I'm looking for. The payoff comes when students get it and say, "Oh, wait, this doesn't have to be perfect," and then me being able to say: "Not only does it not have to be perfect, do not even aim for that. Make it an effective way to communicate what you're trying to communicate." This is an idea I borrowed from Design Thinking.

And I'm serious about that. I want ugly designs. I want ugly scribbles. I want it to be
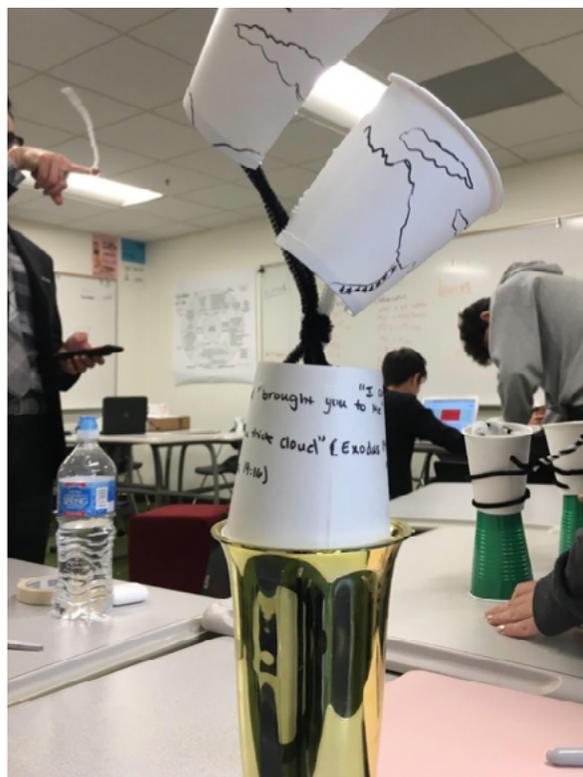
as ugly as possible. They'll show it to me and they'll say, "how's this?" And I'll say, "It needs to be uglier," because we want them to get used to the idea that ideas are disposable; I don't want them getting attached to one initial idea and trying to make it perfect. They're getting used to the idea of iterations and prototypes. In their next project, they're going to be building their own *Mishkan*, like an architecture project. Then they can use Minecraft or clay or cardboard—whatever, go crazy. And at the end of the year, I might be more open to someone who wants to do poetry, dance, or whatever, but we're ramping up this creative process. They need to first understand that it's primarily about the idea.

Let's talk about the slide deck that you give them. The project is presented as a series of slides that are interactive—I don't think I could describe it to anybody who hasn't sat and played with it. When we first

saw it, we were a little intimidated until we started clicking around and seeing how the pieces connect and interconnect. Are there students for whom the interactive stuff is so overwhelming that they need help with it?

First let's talk about what this thing is and then address the challenges. For those of you who are seeing a resource like this for the first time, this is a Google slide show, but get rid of the word show. Nobody's showing anything. Rather, think about a slide deck as a series of pages, and since it's Google, you can share it with the whole class. Each page of the slide deck has the big box on top and the speaker's notes on the bottom, which is used like a sidebar with additional comments. Think of it like a page of Talmud text, with the primary text in the middle and the additional resources around the sides. Everything in both the text and the sidebar hyperlinks to a different slide. For example, one slide focuses on emotions, and there is a hyperlink to that on the first slide which makes reference to

an assignment about emotion. And some of the links might go outside of the slide deck to additional videos or whatever other resources they have.

Why do I use it? Imagine that all the material for the project is stored on a series of Google docs, each focusing on a different aspect. Students would have to have five or six or seven different Google docs open at any given time and be jumping from one to the other. Alternately, it could have been a single, long Google doc with sections that are hyperlinked. That's the way I used to do it, and I'd watch students scrolling up and down over a thirty-page document. I realized how easy it was for students to get lost and decided that there needed to be a better way for them to do wayfinding.

The upside of this is that if a student can't find the art section, I can tell them to simply go to the green section on the opening slide or the green slide. There are students who immediately attach to this organization and

to whom it feels very familiar. They've used slide decks in other classes. The downside is that not all of my students get it right away, and it can get overwhelming. For students with issues of executive functioning, it can be challenging, like getting dropped down into a world and needing to figure out how to use it. But every modality that you use—whether it's a worksheet or a binder or a textbook or parchment—whatever it is, they all have pros and cons. Ergonomically, it's the best that I have found for this kind of interdisciplinary work with lots of components; it seems to get the job done better than the other things that I tried.

I guess that you really have to play with it to get a sense of how it works. One of the things that becomes clear is that you are looking to create multiple pathways for students. Students can start at different entry points (text, interview, emotion, relationship, etc.) and they have a choice at every step of the way, even though they need to eventually get to the same place or parallel places. We're really interested to hear more about why that's so important.
It would be hypocritical if the idea was for students to discover themselves in the text and find their own meaning in the text, but then the way that they had to go about doing it was super rigid. I want the experience of the project to match its ethos. That way, students can choose to work on something for a while, then switch to something else and come back to it later. Or they can build some momentum by doing what they're excited about. I want the process to match the experience so that it feels personal and that they've chosen their own path.

I will say parenthetically that having a huge number of options about the ways that they can interpret the text is actually less important to me. If a teacher said that this is too complicated then I would suggest providing fewer options and a little more direction, like "Study the text first, then do the interviews, then do the visual metaphor," because they will still have the experience of being at a buffet of interpretations and the logistics of having everyone roam at their own pace. Most important is the range of interpretations and which metaphors they are applying.

For what age or grade level is this?
This is for high school students, mostly tenth and eleventh grade. The number of cognitive and abstract leaps they need to do requires a sophistication that ninth-graders generally don't have. That being said, the project could be done with somewhat younger students with fewer elements and more structure. Someone who wanted to do something similar doesn't have to use a slide deck or the interviews or some other component. I do it this way because I've been doing this project for a long time, so I can anticipate the mistakes. Even then, I don't introduce it until halfway through the year after the students have had a chance to onboard into my different techniques
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In terms of designing the project itself, where is the art and where is the science? Are there checkboxes that you're making sure you're hitting; are you using a model like UbD or UDL?
I have been influenced significantly by Understanding by Design as a model for setting up your curriculum. Absolutely. And you can see elements of that. For example, introducing the themes early in the year so that students are starting to understand

where they might be heading as they go along rather than constantly not having any sense of where this is going. I've also been influenced heavily by Design Thinking, and you can see elements of prototyping, disposable design, trying something, and huddling with a group and getting some quick feedback. All those things and the stamps of those disciplines you'll see in the project. On the other hand, I've also been experimenting long enough to discover that rigid adherence to any system often turns into a tail wagging the dog situation where the structure directs the substance rather than the other way around. For example, multiple prototypes are great, but that is not the end goal. So, I might decide to deprioritize an element because it doesn't fit or because the vibe of the classroom is that they're getting impatient and we need to wrap up the unit.

For somebody who is feeling constrained by their current way of teaching and that they want to see teaching from a different perspective, Understanding by Design and Design Thinking are great models. But if you've been also working with them for a while and they're starting to feel constricting or like you're running into obstacles, then you need to find your own pathway as an educator, which is one of the reasons why I'm not suggesting that anybody just adopt this activity. I would hope that someone might be inspired to try a range of different types of things that work for them. The project that I've built was built over many years, layer after layer, with smoothing out over the course of time. This project, for example, is probably the result of at least ten years of experimenting, tinkering, and refining built one piece at a time and modified each year.

What advice might you have for somebody else who wants to try to jump in and do something different with their teaching?
It's sort of like flying a plane, which I do not know how to do. You don't just get into a plane and start pushing the buttons to try to get the plane off the ground. You have to learn the different components and understand them before you're going to do the full flight. This is a rather complicated machine; don't try to just do the whole thing and get it to take off.

What I would rather say is to find something that's inspiring or interesting and just experiment with it. And it's a good idea to tell your students, "We're going to do something that we've never done before, and that I've never done before. We'll try it for a day or two. We're going to see how it goes. We're going to play with pipe cleaners." I actually did this a long time ago, and you can still see elements of that in this project, we still use pipe cleaners.

I'm not sure if students liked it; I didn't really get a good assessment from it, and I didn't really build it into the curriculum. But it did expand my toolbox, and I eventually came back to it. I think that's true for teaching in general.

But try one thing and play with it and see how it goes. If you really like it, keep it; if not, then put it in your teacher's parking lot—maybe later it'll occur to you to dig it out, rework it, and use it differently. Eventually, you'll glom together something that works.

How do you envision the relationship between learning projects like this and assessment?
That's a very good question. The project itself is an experience. I don't grade the project and students need to understand that because

otherwise, they caught up making the little eyelashes. They want perfection; they're concerned about their grade. The assessment is not the project. You can give them a completion score for doing all the elements or doing all the elements to a certain level of completion. You'll get a range of quality, but it's a completion score. Maybe they can fix it if they didn't finish it and then they'll get full credit.

The assessment, however, is what you would have them do after they're done with their projects. It might be something like a one-page bullet-pointed comparison of their project and another one, explaining areas of overlap, areas where they disagreed, and what they learned from doing this. That's where they are getting off the dance floor and up into the balcony, looking at the bigger picture and seeing themselves in context. Now that they've seen another student's work, that's where the assessment comes in. Depending on what kind of mode of teaching you're in, if they're not trying to compute something, then they can come in and talk with you about it.

You can have informal conversations with each student and you can make sure that they understood it. You can sharpen their thinking so that they walk out of that meeting with full credit because they've dropped into it, and you don't need another test or another assessment after that. They've demonstrated in that conversation that they understood their theme, how it's different from another student's theme, and how it applies to their life. They demonstrated how having a disposable attitude to their original ideas is really helpful when they're trying to solve problems.

As a teacher in a complicated experience like this, you have to project calm and enthusiasm. You're the docent of a museum—

don't worry, just enjoy the walk through the museum. Enjoy playing with the stuff. The assessment will come later. And when they do see the assessment, they'll understand that it is a reflection of what they've done, and students are often comforted by that. At that point, you, as a teacher, can ask the highest-level questions about what the students really took away from this. I think that's what assessment should really be.

EXPERIENTIALIZING THE TEXT:
AN INVITATION TO JOIN

Aviva Lauer

Aviva Lauer is the Director of the Pardes Center for Jewish Educators (PCJE). Previously, she developed educational materials for Melitz and at the Leo Baeck Education Center, and was head of Jewish Studies at Immanuel College, London. At PCJE she has served as teaching coach, director of recruitment, and director of the Summer Curriculum Workshop.

1) The Challenges

Those of us reading this journal are a pretty self-selected group. We love studying Jewish text. We find meaning and value and personal relevance in the word of God, in the divinely inspired writings of our ancient leaders, and in the holy and courageous power of the rabbinic project. We care deeply about Jewish history, and the compiled written chronicles of these past 3,500 years. For many of us, learning Torah fosters a state of "flow"—when we are in the zone, fully absorbed, fully alive.

But this is definitely not the case for many of our students. For them, the study of classical Jewish text is a struggle. It feels old. Antiquated. Archaic. Illegible. Irrelevant. Foreign. Alien. Lackluster. Tedious. Lifeless. Black writing on white paper.

And while we know this to be the case, we simultaneously hold onto another "knowing"—that the only way we can expect students to be able to learn Torah themselves, independently, later on in life, is if we hand over to them the technical skills to decode, decipher, interpret, and analyze those texts while they are still in our sphere of influence in day school.

As such, on one shoulder sits that responsibility to train towards independent learning of Jewish text. On the other perches the uncomfortable knowledge that many students find the methodological process of learning to closely read those texts to be completely disconnected from their own lives.

My colleagues and I at the Pardes Center for Jewish Educators wondered: could we help narrow the chasm that often exists between our students and texts? Could we bring those texts to life in ways that would make the close and careful reading of our tradition an inherently meaningful, engaging, positive experience for our young learners?

Before we answer those questions, we have to flag one more seemingly obvious but often overlooked "knowing": that to solely fall back on the affective domain, the realm of meaning-making (or, as we like to call it, meaning-mining), as the one where the relevance and bringing-the-text-to-life happens, is to relegate the learning of Torah content and text skills to the second class citizenry of Jewish studies. And that, as we've already noted, won't help us in the long run.

2) The Hypothesis

I would venture a guess that our self-selected group of journal readers, besides finding deep existential satisfaction in the act of Torah study, can also point to many, many Jewish experiences over the years that have positively informed their spiritual and religious lives. Getting dressed in white and blue for and attending *kabbalat shabbat* at sleepaway camp; taking part in musical *havdalah* on a youth group shabbaton; attending a service learning trip to Guatemala during college with Hillel; understanding the Deborah and Barak story so much more viscerally while on a *tiyul* at Mt. Tabor; making the blessing of *sheheheyanu* at school with our students when we use newly donated iPads for the first time—these are the moments of connection that have shaped us Jewishly.

As such, my colleagues and I also wondered: could we borrow from these magical **experiential** moments and events and apply them to the Jewish day school **classroom**? But even more importantly—could we use some of the most tried-and-true tools of experiential Jewish education *not only* to spark meaning-mining, but also to better teach vocabulary, the structure of the *sugya*, a breadth of content, and interpretation skills? Could we conjure up a day school world in which we could "**experientialize the text**"?

In order to do so, we turned back to the seminal work of Professor Barry Chazan, one of the most influential professionalizers of the experiential Jewish education field over the past half-century. Chazan defines eight attributes or characteristics of experiential Jewish education (called informal Jewish education in its earlier iterations):

- **Person-centered Jewish education**
- **The centrality of experience**
- A curriculum of Jewish experiences and values
- **A pedagogy of interactivity**
- **The group experience/the group as educator**
- **An immersive culture**
- **Playfulness**
- The holistic educator

We didn't engage with the two unbolded of Chazan's attributes because we were hoping to develop an approach that could work with almost any pre-existing curricular materials and choices that Jewish studies teachers and day schools might have already developed. Furthermore, we wanted to stay away from the educator him/herself as a particular attribute, and stick to the how rather than the who.

We were thus left with the six bolded characteristics above. What was next?

The Process

As the teaching of Tanakh seemed to be the "easier" to align with Chazan's categories, we

chose to focus on the teaching of Mishnah as a starting point. Different members of our team picked various *mishnayot* that we knew were popularly taught in Jewish day schools and set out to create sample units of teaching that would include engaging learning activities which could be tagged as person-centered, interactive, immersive, etc.

Because we wanted to cover the range of not only meaning-mining but also skill-building, we deconstructed our newly created units into the following four Mishnah-learning categories:

1. Decoding, vocabulary literacy, understanding the *peshat*
2. Concepts (which included two sub-categories: oft-used Mishnaic/Rabbinic terms throughout the study of Mishnah, and concepts core to the main idea of this particular *mishnah*)
3. Structure of the *mishnah* (or of Mishnah in general)
4. Theme (i.e., the bigger idea or set of ideas this *mishnah* connects to)

Our goal in working alone on separate units was to see whether there were replicable strategies and techniques that could be used across the teaching of Mishnah that fit Chazan's experiential education categories. We drafted a series of strategies charts—one for each of the four Mishnah-learning categories listed above, each category delineated into the six experiential Jewish education attributes we were going to be using. For example:

THEMES			
	Name of strategy/ tool/ technique	Description of strategy/ tool/ technique	Specific Examples
Person-Centered			
Centrality of Experience			
Immersive Classroom			
Playfulness			
Interactivity			
Group as Community			

4) What We Found

After working individually or in *hevrutot*, we presented our units to each other over a series of several days and attempted to fill in our charts. Here are some of the interesting things we initially noticed:

- We found that many of the techniques that were independently suggested included a lot of movement or physicality. For example—in the Concepts category, in order to teach the dichotomous Mishnaic/Rabbinic concept pairs such as *patur/hayav; mahmir/ meikil, mutar/asur*, etc., we identified a technique called Concept Embodiment in which students come up with agreed-upon whole-body sign language signs that illustrate and express the concept pairs, which they then use each time they encounter those terms. As such, we questioned whether we should add another characteristic category entitled physicality, or whether what we were understanding as **physicality** was actually Chazan's **centrality of experience**.

- We found that sometimes, people had a difficult time crafting learning activities that would transcend the content of just one *mishnah* or *sugya*, that could fit in a bank of activities to be used generically to teach, for example, the vocabulary or the structure of any Mishnaic text. For example—the suggestion that students can establish an actual 'lost and found' in their school after studying *Baba Metzia* 2:1: אֵלּוּ מְצִיאוֹת שֶׁלּוֹ, וְאֵלּוּ חַיָּב לְהַכְרִיז is a beautiful example of a learning activity that experientializes the *mishnah*. It makes the ancient rabbinic text relevant to students' very own lives; it reinforces and brings to life the Jewish values taught in the text; it enables the students to undergo a meaningful Jewish experience. However, it is not an activity that can easily be transferred to the teaching of other Rabbinic texts. As such, we are still considering whether we

should add a fifth category of Mishnah-learning techniques, called "**Content**," which might yield ideas that could be applied to the learning of other *mishnayot*, but don't necessarily need to.

- We found that some of the experiential education attributes we had chosen from Chazan's eight were just not touched upon all that much. For example, while **person-centered**, **immersive classroom environment** and **playfulness** were experiential education characteristic categories that we referred to over and over, the category of **group as community** was more difficult for us to employ.

5) Where We Are Now

Our first contribution is a step-by-step planning guide for teachers who seek to "experientialize" a curricular unit of Mishnah. Second, we offer here a table of engaging learning activities, categorized according to our favorite of Chazan's experiential education characteristics. We share both of these here with a real understanding that we are still in the early stages of our "experientializing the text" process. We welcome—more than welcome!—feedback and suggestions from educators who use it.

At this point, we also wonder: while it is always novel to invent a new verb ("experientialize/experientializing"), is our term the correct and most appropriate description of what we are trying to do? Perhaps, what we are talking about, while definitely an adaptation of the definitions and categories of the experiential Jewish education field to the day school classroom, would be better served with a different name—something like, "bringing the text to life"? After all, when we are in the zone—studying Torah—that is the most alive one can feel. And we wish that for our students, every single day.

We look forward to your thoughts and feedback, and even your collaboration!

FROM TEXT TO SYMBOL:
THE ART OF JEWISH LEARNING

Elyssa Moss Rabinowitz

Elyssa Moss Rabinowitz is Executive Director of Kol HaOt — Illuminating Jewish Life through Art, a Jerusalem-based organization dedicated to weaving the magic of the arts into Jewish educational experiences, as well as the director of their flagship program, the Teacher Institute for the Arts, a year-long PD program for North American day school teachers.

The world surrounding us (and all the more so, surrounding our students) has become more and more visual in its communication. We are engulfed by logos and icons that we associate with meaning as they immediately conjure in our minds entire worlds of associations, thoughts, and feelings. And yet, we are the "people of the book." Judaism is text-based and highly values the written word. How can we help bridge these two cultures? How can the two enhance and deepen each other, without being at the expense of the other? Might we, as educators, find ways to both enable our students to become experts at Jewish text, as well as give them opportunities for a deepening of meaning through visual experiences?

The arts are a powerful tool, opening up whole new realms of experience that can significantly enhance Jewish learning, help teachers to reach many more students, and bring a different kind of depth to student learning. Neither students nor teachers need to have artistic talent to explore using art, and the process of learning to bring art into the classroom need not be complex. One easily accessible way of accomplishing this is by using the following framework: See, Do, Share.

See: Refers to viewing and studying art created by a master, and in our case, art designed as a visual interpretation of text. Students, guided by their teacher, try to understand some basic principles which guided the artist in creating their work.

Do: Empowers the students to create their own artistic interpretation of texts using the same principles, the artistic "language" which guided the artist, all while they use their own internal and individual artistic and creative abilities, regardless of what they might be, to create their personal interpretation and understanding of a different Jewish text, idea, or value.

Share: The students share their work with each other, interpret the work of their peers, and together experience the breadth of possible interpretation and expression.

Here is an example that has been replicated successfully, based on a symbolic visual, color-coded "language" that "translates" text to symbols. The students are introduced to a work by artist David Moss: *The Binding of Isaac: Genesis 22* (originally created as a mural for Akiba Day School in Dallas, TX), which portrays the entire biblical story of *Akeidat Yitzhak* using a color code of ten colors. Each character or element in the story is assigned its own color (God is blue, Abraham is white, Isaac is red, Time is yellow, etc.), and the story is "narrated"—phrase by phrase and including a close reading of the text—using striking collages including shapes, arrangements, and symbolic forms. The students, with a little practice, quickly learn to "read" the whole story directly from the images. After immersing themselves in the dynamic visual language of the work, the students are challenged to create their own work using the same strategy on a different text. They now become the artists—they have to carefully analyze the story, determine its major elements, select their own color scheme and take on the role of artists/interpreters/translators themselves. The simple collage style is easily accessible to all students—no previous artistic technique or mastery is required. It is not about the quality of the art, but rather about using the artistic methodology as a form of expression and interpretation.

This kind of activity can be done as an introduction to a new text, to give the students an opportunity to engage with the text directly before they are influenced by more traditional interpretation after they've explored more traditional forms of learning, or even as an assessment tool to gauge student understanding of what they have learned.

Teachers' responses to trying this kind of learning affirm its value and efficacy. As one expressed:

It opens the conversation of the intersection of arts and Jewish studies in Jewish text, and I love how it opens the people who participate to a different way of looking at it.

Or in the words of another:

Take a class of 11th and 12th-grade boys, who were not our strongest learners. … What this did for them was it opened their eyes to the value of art and artistic expression in a way that the vast majority of them wouldn't have anticipated. Secondly, it gave them a medium through which to connect to their learning and to make it a little bit more personal. It wasn't just learning ancient texts. It was saying, okay, and what does that mean for me?

A different example focuses on the connection between Hebrew letters and the content and meaning that the words and letters represent. Here too, we open with professional works of art: Hillel Smith's *Parsha Posters* and David Moss' *OMG Bencher* are both excellent examples of how an artist can play with the form and shape of the actual Hebrew letters to convey the meaning of the word (or words) the letters are trying to convey. This kind of activity is used by teachers of Hebrew to encourage students to connect the words with their meaning. Words are thus transformed from "random" phonetic symbols to images that visually express their

meaning.

Incorporating the arts into Jewish text study gives us a surprisingly powerful opportunity to leap many steps further towards our goal. In the words of one school leader:

This gave them another opportunity to really explore "who am I?" and "what does it mean to me to be Jewish?" and "what symbols represent who I am?" … I think we often ask kids what it means to be Jewish but it's a really hard question to answer. Sometimes using art as the medium in order to express themselves is an easier vehicle for younger children to begin to connect to that. Then they work on an artist statement so that they've got something to kind of work from. When you've got a visual, the words seem to flow better.

Just as there is no specific need for students to be blessed with artistic talent, teachers do not need to be gifted artistically. Often, one or two training sessions are sufficient to get teachers started, without the need for an artistic-educator partner, as long as the teachers are open to their own innate internal creativity. The teacher-training harks back to the **See, Do, Share** model; as the teachers experience how quickly they make the transition into artistic interpreters, they build confidence in bringing their own students into that learning cycle. Obviously, longer training can yield deeper results, but the basic educational approach is easily accessible.

To help facilitate this kind of learning, the team at Kol HaOt has developed a number of "toolkits"—from which the examples described above were taken—easily accessible and adaptable for Jewish studies teachers which can be used to elicit, encourage, and strengthen their students' artistic expression in the context of Jewish text. These have been tested over the course of the past eight years at a range of schools across a spectrum of grade level and denominational affiliation and are enhanced by additional training through the *Teachers Institute for the Arts*, a year-long professional development program for teachers in Jewish day schools in North America.

The efficacy of the approach was affirmed by a study conducted by Rosov Consulting which indicated that:

1. 94% of responding teachers indicated that incorporating art improved their "ability to make learning Jewish content more engaging for students"
2. the teachers' perceptions were that for almost all of their students the artistic expression impacted positively on their "ability to make personal meaning of Jewish content"
3. the majority of teachers felt that it enabled students to connect with texts that had not previously aroused their interest

Ultimately, as Jewish educators, our goal is not only to pass on content and knowledge but to make this knowledge meaningful for our students so that it will become an integral part of their identity and practice. Integrating artistic expression into learning can be a powerful vehicle for accomplishing this.

PEREK BET: TEFILLAT YONAH

| Hashem |
| Yonah |
| Fish |
| Time |
| Water |
| Land |
| Resurrection |
| Holy Structure |
| Sin/Evil Inclination |
| Death |

These 10 colors are used to represent the 10 most important people, places, or things found in the Perek.

Each mural image represents about one passuk in the perek.

Simplified symbols are used to represent major ideas in the text and in the midrash.

The high school students at The Frisch School, in Paramus, NJ, explore a chapter from the Book of Jonah. As a group, they identify the ten key elements to the story and assign each a color (see the legend on top). Each pair of students then receives a verse or two to "translate" from text into symbolic collage images (inspired also by the midrash they previously learned) using the color code.
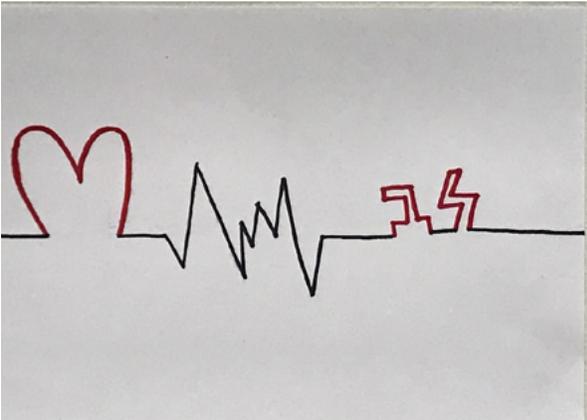
Students at Weber Jewish Community High School, in Atlanta, GA, learn Hebrew vocabulary by playing with the Hebrew letters and words to convey the meaning of the word. Here, the word *lev*, heart, is incorporated into the EKG style drawing of a heartbeat, as well as the ubiquitous symbol of a heart.

Students at Robert M. Beren Academy in Houston, TX learn Hebrew vocabulary by playing with the Hebrew letters and words to convey the meaning of the word. Here, the word *dag*, fish, is written inside the body of the fish.

- Halleluya/Praise - yellow
- God - blue
- Places - purple
- God's aspects - brown
- Objects - orange
- People - green

Hallelujah.
Praise God in His sanctuary;
praise Him in the sky, His stronghold.

הַלְלוּ־יָהּ
הַלְלוּ־אֵל בְּקָדְשׁוֹ
הַלְלוּהוּ בִּרְקִיעַ עֻזּוֹ׃
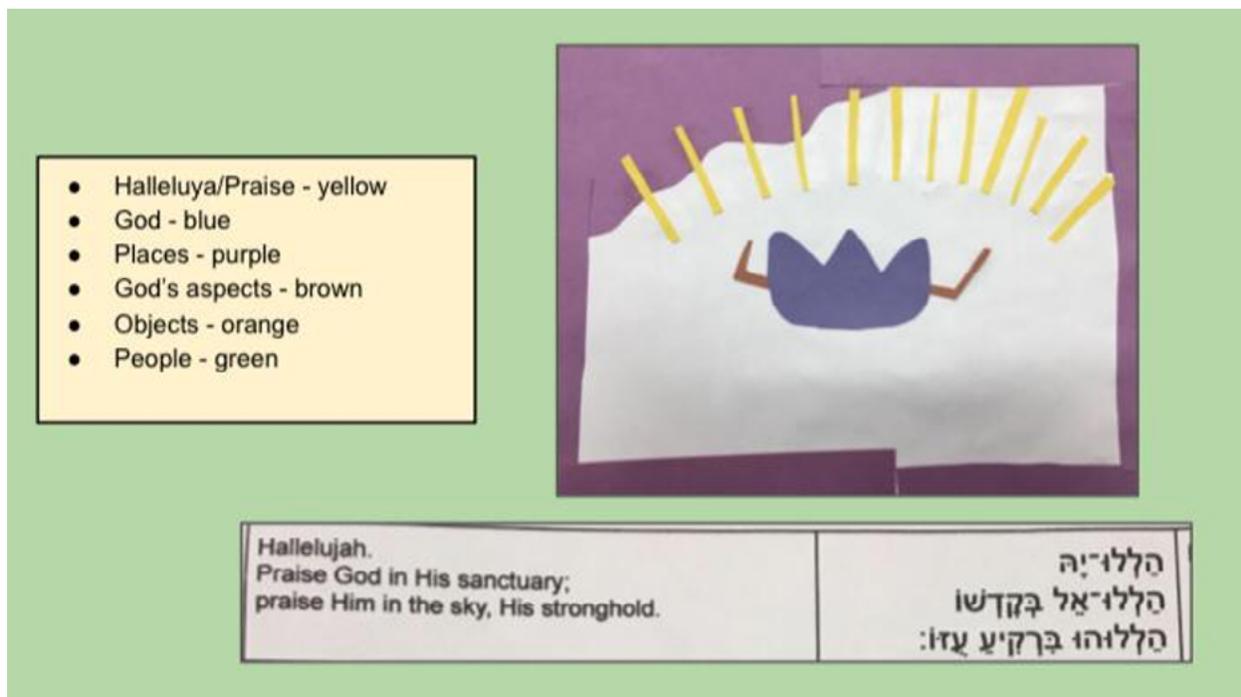
Seventh grade students at Pressman Academy in Los Angeles, CA, explore verses from *Pesukei deZimra*, the morning prayers. The students identified the elements in the text, assigned them colors and then each student created her own collage on one segment of the text.
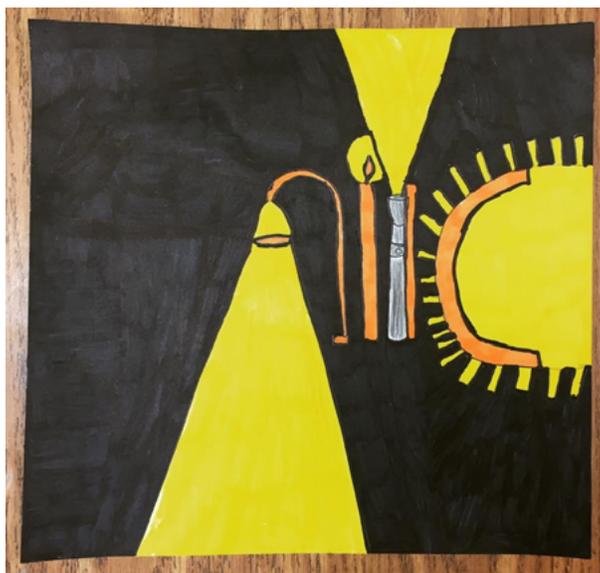
Students at Robert M. Beren Academy in Houston, TX learn Hebrew vocabulary by playing with the Hebrew letters and words to convey the meaning of the word. Here, the word *or*, light, is written in orange, incorporated into images of various sources of light.

EXPANDING CONVERSATIONS ABOUT BARRIERS TO LEARNING TALMUDIC TEXT

Debra Drang and Eli Perles

"What barriers to learning can I anticipate?" is an ongoing question pondered by educators who use the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework to plan their teaching. UDL emphasizes that the variability in how our students learn is both expected and systematic, which allows for teachers to predict what obstacles students will encounter in the classroom before they even enter it. The framework provides a roadmap for anticipating barriers so teachers can remove them, by proactively embedding options into lessons that maximize access to the curriculum for all students. Teachers who approach teaching and learning with a UDL lens incorporate a barrier analysis into their planning and think as much about how students will experience the content as about the content itself.

BARRIERS TO LEARNING TALMUD IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

Conducting a barrier analysis for teaching Talmud in middle school highlights familiar obstacles: while students are hopefully experiencing some excitement about beginning to learn this foundational pillar of our tradition, the skills required for academic success are challenging to master and students can struggle to understand both the nuanced detail and relevance of the text. Judaic studies educators have long acknowledged the pivotal role that students' introduction to Talmud study plays in their long-term relationship with the subject, and have devised multiple methods for teaching the novel language, text structure, working memory, and analytical skills that are so difficult for beginners, as well as finding creative ways to connect the often-abstract content to students' everyday lives. These efforts yield successful learning outcomes for many students, but teachers still struggle to positively engage and involve all learners.

Debra Drang is the Director of Special Education at Sulam in Rockville, Maryland. Dr. Drang is a longtime UDL trainer for teachers and school leaders, and is passionate about meeting the diverse learning needs of all students.

Eli Perles is a Judaic studies special education teacher at Sulam in Rockville, Maryland. Rabbi Perles integrates research-based best practices into his teaching, develops curriculum, and trains educators in implementing UDL in the Judaic studies classroom.

From a UDL perspective, the problem can be framed as follows: what does a teacher do when a learning goal itself presents one of the most significant barriers to student learning? Educational researchers have identified developing "disciplinary thinking" as critically important. This refers to the habits of mind needed for a given subject. For Judaic studies in general and Talmud study in particular, developing disciplinary thinking is inextricably linked to developing textual skills and aptly describes, from an educational perspective, why this is an essential learning goal and critical focus of the curriculum. The solution to the challenges inherent in learning Talmud is for Judaic studies educators to embed instructional scaffolding into their teaching practices in engaging and creative ways (which, as noted, is happening to varying degrees) in order to provide access to textual learning for the full range of diverse learners in the classroom.

STUDENTS CREATE WEBSITES IN TALMUD CLASS

During distance learning, new and complex dimensions were added to our conversations about anticipating barriers to learning. In the context of Talmud, one result of those discussions was to leverage the online medium by having middle school students create websites around the Talmud passage they were learning. Using Google Sites, each student constructed a website that included a personalized homepage designed with visuals and headings, as well as a dropdown menu with the following sections:

- **Highlighted Gemara**: a color-coded breakdown of the text. This is an existing resource from the digital platform, Mercava.

- **Flow Chart**: a visual display of the logical sequence of the text, which follows the same color-coded system as the first section (Mercava).

- **Animated Video**: produced using Plotagon. This allowed students to review the discussion in the text by creating a conversation about it between two animated characters.

- **Modern Day Application**: a video, written and directed by the students, in which they acted out a practical, real-world example of how the concepts they learned about in the text apply to their lives.

- **Quiz**: a Google Form that students created with comprehension questions on the text.

- **Loose Translation**: a Google Doc that students completed to summarize each step of the Talmudic discussion outside of the text.

- **Sync**: a video that synchronizes the color-coded visual text with the audio explanation of the text (Mercava).

Instructional scaffolding provides a structure to support learning new skills by systematically building on students' knowledge and experiences. The ultimate goal is a *gradual release of responsibility*—moving students toward greater independence and mastery of the learning goal, in this case

reading, translating, and understanding the step-by-step logical thread (*shakla vetarya*) of the text. Each component of the website utilized research-based methods of instructional scaffolding including color-coding, visually displaying information, integrating multiple modalities, and providing opportunities for the application of knowledge. Additionally, students were required to explain the purpose of each activity as they designed the sections. This created a space for them to focus on the learning goals and to understand the educational function of every element of the project.

OUTCOMES AND REFLECTION

The process of creating a website about the passage of Talmud they were learning was highly motivating for students and successfully removed the short-term barriers around engagement during distance learning. However, the other positive educational outcomes so effectively removed general barriers to learning Talmud in middle school that the project is currently being implemented again this year, even as school is in-person.

The individual teaching tools incorporated into the sections of the website each contributed independently to students' understanding of the text and conceptualization of the content. However, the power of this project is in the synergy that is created when students construct the website and design every aspect of it. The learning goals are addressed comprehensively, while students are agents in creating an artifact that both demonstrates their own mastery and can serve as a resource for others. This last point was something the students were noticeably enthusiastic about—the idea that someone might use their website to learn.

Perhaps the most unexpected outcome of this endeavor was that students reported their fluency with the text as the accomplishment they were most proud of. Despite having created an impressive product, the facility with reading, translating, and understanding Talmudic language and thinking outweighed the excitement about technology. This underscores the idea that we can retain the goal of developing disciplinary thinking by building textual skills, even as we explore new ways of removing barriers to get there.

SINAI 2.0:
A MULTISENSORY APPROACH TO LEARNING

Tzvi Hametz

Creating meaningful, well-rounded learning experiences is essential for all students. The opening *mishnah* in *Pirkei Avot* describes Moses as "receiving the Torah from Mount Sinai." In the Torah, the Sinai experience was immersive and multi-sensory—sights and sounds, wonder and awe, and who knows what else. Today's students need more Sinai-like learning that can fuel their passion and independence, and teach them to work hard to build the skills necessary to truly own their learning. That ownership helps students to become what futurist Alvin Toffler describes as being literate in the future—the ability to learn, unlearn, and relearn.

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For the past eight years, I have been working in and around faith-based makerspaces. In the faith-based environment of the Jewish day school, where I have invested the bulk of my energies, I argue that at the core of the Human, particularly the Jew lies a creative imperative. As for makerspaces, for those of you who have never been to or seen a makerspace, imagine taking a computer lab, a welding studio, a robotics lab, and a woodworking shop, and combining them with all the crafts and cardboard that we can muster—that is a makerspace in a nutshell. It's a place for teachers, students, and parents to come together and apply their classroom learning to real-world problems using real-world tools. It is not a place for those who need things to progress systematically and smoothly. We try new things; it gets messy. We fail often, but we also grow and learn a tremendous amount in the process. It expresses a pedagogical style firmly rooted in the Constructivism and Constructionism approaches to learning. Prima facie, the concept of a makerspace is daunting—it can be scary, but with baby steps and a real framework, its principles can be imbued into any classroom, with or without an actual makerspace.

All of these ideas sharpened for me as I re-examined my teaching in light of the pandemic. Listening to my students it became clear that they needed their learning to be hands-on, that they needed things to feel real, and that they needed less screen time, not more. My goals for them fell into three main areas that I wanted them to develop: the ability to be self-directed learners, the confidence to create a self-paced learning schedule, and the knowledge that their learning has real-world impact.

Creating the framework to support these goals was a challenge. I knew that it couldn't happen

all at once and that I could not bring about a complete upheaval of the current curriculum. In my work as an educational technologist, part of me needs to be able to imagine what will continue to support education down the line while evaluating what students and teachers are actually ready to embrace now; too fast and people don't get it, too slow and people aren't excited. I created space in my classes for students to explore the material that we need to cover by creating project-based learning modules as well as a series of in-class "professional" learning cohorts (PLCs). I established a number of journaling and self-reflection protocols for my students and leaned heavily on canva.com to create beautiful support material because as my students and I agreed, anything worth doing is worth doing beautifully. Every module and assessment that my students had, whether it be *hevruta* learning or tests or projects, had a self-reflection tool attached to it.

Arguably the hardest bit to accomplish was to create an environment in which my students had the confidence to create and learn independently. I chose to borrow an idea that the LEGO Education group has been doing work on in the arena of confidence in education. My students were given the option of joining one of three PLCs: the 3D Printing and Judaica Cohort, the *Tikun* Tech Fellows, or the *Halakhic* Makers Group. Each of these groups had a distinct goal in our community, whether it be exploring their connection to religious items, fixing technology at school, or contemplating and recording *halakhic/ hashkafic* approaches to the use of technology. Each student discovered the challenges that they wanted to explore while balancing the real demands of their skills.

One of the most successful simple shifts

I made in my teaching that addressed the goal of real-world consequences was to build off an idea that I saw a general studies counterpart of mine employ years ago. Many of my students were familiar with the concept of text-to-text connections, text-to-world connections, or text-to-self connections where students examined a text they were learning and tried to make connections to it.

In our class, we expanded the concept to text-to-media creation, text-to-problem creations, and text-to-creation creations. Students would be challenged, sometimes from me and sometimes from each other to identify a problem of practice in the world that needed addressing based on the texts we were learning. Rubrics were used to help guide and focus our work, but not as the ultimate arbiters in these projects. It was helpful for students to have a familiar grading paradigm even as they took on open-ended projects. My students quickly realized coming up with independent ideas was hard but not impossible, and therefore not an unreasonable requirement.

To support my students' independent learning, I adapted from a platform called HITRecord.com, where people make public what they are working on and freely collaborate with each other on ideas. I highly recommend checking out the platform, but for our purposes, we created what I called the *Tzei U'lemad* (go and learn) board. Initially, this was a simple Google spreadsheet. Students would post what they were learning, what they were struggling with, and what their goals were. As we went on, it evolved in both my Torah and engineering classes to something much bigger. Students would come into my class and write on a physical board what they were working on, including its implications and how they could use help. Other students would see how they could fill in the gaps of their peers' learning or projects. Sometimes a student would propose an idea and offer help without the initial student asking for help. This was a pivotal moment of my students owning their learning. They set their own pace and they collaborated, knowing full well I was going to ask them for reflection pages at the end of the process.

When we stack these next to each other, it's hard to think of this as not having totally upended the way I was teaching my classes. The truth is that these began as side initiatives, alternative assessments, bite-sized challenges, and activities that were coupled with a traditional model of learning. We were inspired by what we were doing in class, and I was motivated by what I had learned from the Rebbe of Piacesna, a radical thinker in pre-WWII Europe. He writes:

> *An educator, however, who wishes to uncover the soul of the child that lies hidden and concealed within him, who wants to help it grow and to ignite it so it will burn with heavenly fire, upwards, towards the holy, so that the students entire being, including his physical body, will increase in holiness and will long for God's Torah, such an educator must adapt himself attentively to the students, must penetrate into the midst of his limited consciousness and small mindedness, until he reaches the hidden soul-spark. Then he can help it emerge, blossom, and grow.*

My goal as an educator has always been to be flexible enough to look for even the smallest new ways to reinvigorate the souls of our students. We will hopefully continue to inspire and challenge our students to continue progressing in their learning, whether that be on Zoom, in person, but most importantly, long after they have left the walls of our classrooms.

ENGAGING TWEENS AND TEENS IN JUDAIC LEARNING:
A MULTI-MODAL APPROACH

Brett Kugler

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Performing magic is a fascinating art. For a young child, going to a birthday party and seeing an amateur perform the simplest sleight-of-hand trick such as pulling a quarter out of their ear or an incredibly long multi-colored handkerchief from the magician's sleeve creates a sense of wonder and amazement. They don't question how it was done, they just want to see more. As we matriculate into the tweens/teens and eventually into adulthood, while we remain captivated by good, professional magicians, we are no longer content with just seeing the next trick. Instead, with that same sense of awe and amazement, we push further by asking, "How did he do that?" We try to figure it out and make sense out of it. If we can figure it out, we feel a sense of accomplishment in having a better understanding, but we move on to the next trick, continuing to search for that next feeling of amazement. We yearn for that childhood feeling of believing in something that takes over our thoughts and emotions. The Torah, while not sleight-of-hand, has that same power to transform our students' views about their religion from an old book with stories of characters long since passed to an exciting guide book for how to live life, connect to our heritage, and engage in meaningful Jewish practice as they continue their journey into adulthood. However, while our goal of creating a sense of wonder and awe is similar to that of a magician, we also want to create a sense of lasting connectivity and purpose as we encourage the students to explore and make sense of what they are learning.

FOSTERING A SENSE OF CONNECTIVITY

In order to create that sense of awe, connectivity, and purpose, we must find ways to immerse students in text, practice, and spirituality. Text ignites the visual, practice ignites the touch, and spirituality ignites the soul. The ultimate goal is to apply this multi-modal approach in the classroom to inspire the future of the Jewish people to connect, take action, and make Judaism a necessary part of their daily lives. Many teachers are sensitive enough and trained to find creative ways to teach when students are struggling, have a learning disability, or seem disengaged.

Perhaps we need to consider doing the same for all learners, to help them learn better and connect more meaningfully to a Torah filled with love, learning, and practice.

RE-ENVISIONING THE ROLE OF THE TEXT

So what does engaging Judaic learning look like? For each classroom and for each student, there are a variety of answers, but one place to start could be by rethinking the

role of the text. Is the text the learning itself or is it an important piece of a larger learning experience? While the general practice traditionally is to start with the text, many students find themselves less engaged with a text-based foray into Judaics. After all, the text can feel challenging, foreign, overwhelming, and tedious. Imagine starting with a practice or a discussion of a practice. This grounds the learning in the lives of the students—in actions that they are already doing or can do and experience—which can then serve as a spark for questions, which will help to eventually push the conversation into the text. This conversation and textual study will have greater meaning and engagement due to the momentum created by the practical, hands-on approach. Studying the text now provides answers or a path to finding answers. It helps to solve the students' problems rather than generate problems for them. After all, in going back to our magic analogy, seeing is believing. They will be able to understand that their questions were the very same questions that have been pondered for centuries, and/or they will be able to apply a new and unique perspective to practices that they may or may not have learned at home.

A PRACTICAL EXAMINATION OF EXPERIENTIAL JEWISH EDUCATION

To make learning experiential and meaningful, the simplest question to ask is "How does this affect my life?" For some, a love of Judaism is easy and part of how they grew up. Participation in Jewish text, thought, and practice is not a struggle, and they know what their place in the community will be. Some may go on to become Jewish clergy members and community leaders, which is vital to our survival and growth. But we lose far too many

people who develop a lack of passion and engagement with Judaism because we set text as the only way to "achieve success" in Judaism. Changing the normative practice from "let's read *Masekhet Rosh Hashana*" to "let's learn how to blow shofar" may take a student who struggles with text and teaches them a practical skill that makes them a vital necessity to the Jewish community.

Once they've learned the skills, they will then not only be much more engaged in the text study after learning the practice but will also be set up for lifetime engagement in the community. This example rings true for many and allows students who may not be gifted textual scholars, but who excel at music, to connect to Judaism. The same is true for our climbers and kinesthetic learners regarding *eruv*. Sure, *Eruvin* is fascinating to some as a straightforward text, but is there anything wrong with starting by building an *eruv* on your campus? Or perhaps sending a school bus of high school students to help check the local *eruv* once per month? So many elements of hands-on learning such as building the school *sukkah* while learning the laws of what makes a *sukkah* kosher, learning to read *Megillat Esther* and then volunteering in the community, tying *tzitzit* to wear them, learning *kashrut* through class time in the school kitchen, open up many new doors. Seeing and participating in these areas of Jewish life and community service would only heighten the interest of all students in following up these experiences with the text. After all, this is why so many children identify camp as the place that they feel most Jewish. Why not take that eight-week feeling and incorporate it into the other ten months of the year? This process fosters allowing them to experience a Jewish education with a much more powerful

sense of authenticity. It is also accessible to students of differing abilities.

WE ARE IN THE TEXT, NOW WHAT?

Now that we have explored ways to engage students in discussion and experiential learning, how do we help the students to use the text? The most common thought would be to now jump into the text. While this is a logical next step, thinking about how our students will relate to the text should come first. Do we know who our students are as people? How might a child who does not have strong role models at home react to the story of *Akeidat Yitzhak*? Would students who struggle with sibling rivalry have differing opinions on Yaakov and Eisav's relationship? Perhaps a middle child might feel like there are favorites and see Yaakov wearing furs on his arms and deceiving his father because he is his mother's favorite as unfair. Perhaps they can look at the text and learn how to deal with adversity which is as relevant today as it was back then. Ask questions and be receptive to questions. Speaking to the students about who they are and how they view themselves is vital for you and for them. Calling home and speaking to a parent/guardian to get a sense of each student (at the beginning of the year) will help educators to be able to approach each topic with a greater sense of sensitivity towards the figures in Tanakh. Taking this approach will make the text relatable, which is a significant key to unlocking connectivity. Text study now becomes meaningful. And if they did not get through as much text using this method, but are more interested and active in their religion, then we are successfully creating lifelong learners who will continue to use their skills, rather than abandon the skills they have developed because they weren't connected.

DESIGN THINKING AND TALMUD INSTRUCTION

Pesha Kletenik and Karen Simon

It was the model of a truck that made us realize that the project was a success. Students were challenged to create artifacts for a museum as the culmination of our unit focused on *Megillah,* discussing objects that serve holy things or God's name. Once an item functions to serve something holy, such as a Torah, that item takes on special status and needs to be treated differently. What better modern, practical implication could there be of these laws than a truck carrying Torah scrolls?

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Design Thinking is a problem-solving approach that includes iterative thinking—planning, experimenting, learning from failure, and restarting again. Given that Design Thinking is an approach used in other areas of our school, specifically in science, we thought that it would be enriching for our students to try this type of learning in Jewish studies as well to make the text-based study come alive. A central tenet in the study of *halakha* is that it is dynamic and adapts to every time period. Furthermore, the dialogue in the Talmud, which includes the use of extreme cases to establish principles that can be applied to other cases, followed by refutations of the Rabbis, is a form of failing forward. The tradition of Jewish law is the result of debate, failing forward, and learning. Design Thinking, with its emphasis on experimentation and failing forward, is a model that is perfectly suited for student learning and understanding of *halakha*. It supports the exploration of the banter in the Talmud, which is what draws adolescent students into the text and helps students to understand that the evolution of Torah law is the product of many views and the debate surrounding them.

As we imagined integrating Design Thinking into Jewish studies it became clear that we should try to include the use of our makerspace—an engineering lab for children including tools (hammers, glue guns, a drill, paint, computers, and craft materials) and endless supplies that make any person of any age want to create. The space has been used for lessons about how to make the speediest car or what materials impact the foundation of a structure but had not yet been used for Jewish studies. This was our opportunity to integrate cutting-edge pedagogy into our Jewish studies program to energize and excite the students.

Here is the text we were studying:

*The Sages taught in a baraita: **Articles** used in the performance **of a mitzvah may be thrown out** after use. However, **articles** associated with the **sanctity** of God's name, i.e., articles on which God's name is written, and articles that serve an article that has God's name written on it, even after they are no longer used, **must be interred** in a respectful manner. (Translation from Sefaria.)*

Our challenge was to cultivate within the class a comfort for failing forward. Students needed to use the Design Thinking approach to create a model and either succeed or fail forward in its creation.

The assignment was to create a museum with artifacts representing various holy items and museum plaques detailing the Jewish legal implications for the items. In the case of the truck: if it does regularly carry Torah scrolls, does its status change from one which is used in the performance of a *mitzvah* to that of a *tashmish kedusha*, an article associated with the sanctity of God's name?

We needed to consider identifying elements of what we learned in the text. What is the length of time needed to make something a *tashmish kedusha*? What was the intention of the truck—is it only to transport the Torah or does it honor it in some way? And then we thought about another item, a student backpack holding Jewish books (*siddur, Humash*, etc.): how can it be crafted in a way that protects those sacred books? Some creative students figured out how to totally secure a cover on the table used for Torah reading, so that the table never comes into direct contact with the Torah, preventing it from being classified as a *tashmish kedusha*.

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Since this was our first attempt at a project like this, every step of the way we needed to fail forward ourselves. For instance, how should the models be evaluated? A rubric, of course. Who should create the rubric? We decided that it should be the students, since a critical element of Design Thinking is the ability to self-evaluate and be an active, rather than passive learner and evaluator. This represented a dramatic shift from traditional modes of text study in which students are passive (particularly when studying Talmud with its Aramaic language, unique terminology, and difficult to read sentence structure, in which students are heavily dependent on their teachers) rather than active learners.

Another challenge was that our makerspace needed to be retooled from one which primarily served younger children to one whose materials, tools, and space could be adjusted for older students. For example, when reviewing the students' prototypes, we realized that the middle school students we were working with could benefit from having sewing machines and heavier tools and should be given even more freedom in the actual space than younger children. A microgrant through the Jewish Education Project was extremely helpful in moving this retooling forward. Similarly, the guidelines for use of the makerspace were adapted through group meetings with the class, and when they needed to be adjusted, we failed forward, using student-generated ideas

to recalibrate the rules.

The project demanded that teachers begin to think differently about their work as well. Teamwork, co-teaching, and failing forward replaced siloed teaching. The director of educational and professional initiatives, including the makerspace, teamed up with the eighth-grade teacher for girls' Gemara, each bringing different strengths to the team and complementing the other. Both ended up enriched from the experience.

Aside from making the concepts tangible for the students, the project enabled them to grow from the learning process. As the students adjusted their projects they were able to see how the varying *halakhic* ideas were relevant and played themselves out. The process of failing forward and adjusting their plans dynamically shifted their lenses to see mistakes as part of the learning process, especially as they understood that we expected changes to happen between their prototype drawing and their actual final product.

The teachers were forced outside of their comfort zones and extended the way that they think about instruction. Like the students, they too learned to plan dynamically, reflecting after each day and adjusting the upcoming lesson based on where they left off the day before. The project inspired regular class meetings to hear from the students and generated a sense of partnership with the students which was profoundly empowering for both students and teachers.

The success of this project is driving our school to explore additional use of the makerspace in other Jewish studies classes. The growth for the students and the teachers has been an experience we want to replicate as we energize ourselves as teachers and our students as learners.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING:
LOWERING THE BARRIERS WITHOUT LOWERING THE BAR

Suri Ganz and Valerie Mitrani

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Teachers play an essential role in student development in two central ways: first, they broaden and deepen student knowledge; second, they promote the skills students need to become purposeful and motivated, resourceful and knowledgeable, strategic and goal-directed—what Universal Design for Learning (UDL) calls "Expert Learners." Jewish studies teachers can help students transform Jewish learning into living meaningful lives. When students are able to relate their studies to everyday life experiences, engagement and motivation increase, leading to greater learning outcomes.

As Jewish studies teachers seek to make rich Jewish content accessible to ALL learners, they are presented with unique potential barriers to student learning along the way. Text-based learning intensifies the potential challenges of reading and decoding. Learning to communicate in multiple languages (Hebrew and Aramaic) and scripts (Hebrew print, script, and non-voweled text) increases these text-based challenges. Variations in students' culture and practices at home, as well as different family customs than those being taught in school (i.e., Sefarad vs. Ashkenaz, different levels of observance, etc.), can also create learning barriers that prevent students from connecting to the content being taught.

A UDL approach provides teachers with a framework for lesson design that allows for multiple pathways and opportunities to increase learner agency in each aspect of their lesson. The recent

experience of shifting education from a traditional classroom model to a variety of teaching modalities has reinforced the need for a flexible approach to student learning that allows teachers to lower the barriers without lowering the bar for success in meeting learning goals. Many learning barriers can be resolved by considering the following foundational principles of teaching and learning: keeping students engaged in the process—the **why** of learning; determining the goals, content, and strategies to support the learning—the **what** of learning; and providing choice for students to demonstrate what they know—the **how** of learning.

A HYPOTHETICAL CASE
Consider the following scenario:

Morah Simone teaches 5th-grade Humash in a Jewish day school. One typical day in January she presents her class with an exciting lesson on the weekly Torah portion, Va'eira. Morah Simone has put much thought into preparing a lesson that she feels will be interesting and engaging to her students. After all, what could be more exciting than the story of the plagues in Egypt?!

As she begins to teach, reading from the Hebrew text with great emotion and drama, one child distracts his neighbor by imitating the teacher's voice modulation. Quickly realizing that her students have been listening passively to the lesson, Morah Simone makes a swift decision to have the students read the passages to each other in small groups. As she sets up the groups and the reading begins, it becomes clear that some students are doing all of the reading and explaining of the text, while others are "spaced out" or fidgeting.

"What is wrong with this class?" wonders Morah Simone. "They can't pay attention to my teaching nor do they learn from each other! Something clearly needs to change… but what? Perhaps they are weak Hebrew readers? Well, then, teaching the story outside of the text might be the answer."

Morah Simone gathers the students together once again and picks up the story of the parasha from where she left off earlier. This time she elaborates on the sequence of events for the first three plagues, without using Biblical text. The students seem to perk up, listening avidly to the story. Encouraged, Morah Simone decides to share with the students some of Rashi's commentary, asking why it was Aharon, and not Moshe, who brought about these plagues. She enthusiastically offers a reward to the student who can find the answer in Rashi's commentary first.

Havoc breaks loose in the classroom. A number of students open up their books and are searching through the text while others are calling out possible answers. As the noise begins to grow, some children take the opportunity to run from student to student asking questions or just being silly.

Morah Simone ends the class feeling unsuccessful.

While this is not a true account, versions of this scene occur in various forms in Jewish studies classrooms all the time. We would like to suggest that by considering any of the following components of UDL lesson planning, teachers can start to lower barriers to learning for their students by incorporating opportunities for student choice and agency. In doing so, they make it easier for their students to succeed, without lowering the bar on the quality of their lessons or on the expectations of students.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR UDL JEWISH STUDIES LESSON DESIGN

UDL provides a framework for thinking about the multiple components of effective lesson design. Below are some questions and potential strategies for teachers to consider throughout the lesson design process. It is important to note that by addressing even one or two of these components, teachers will find themselves implementing strategies that address the diverse needs of every learner, promote a safe classroom environment, and engage students in rigorous curriculum and instruction.

Lesson goals

Clear goals are the starting point for effective teaching and learning. Teachers and students must have a clear understanding of where they are headed before embarking on their journey. Teachers can share lesson goals with students and collaboratively develop a roadmap in order to achieve success, posting this roadmap where students can see it.

Students may work individually or with a partner to create a checklist for completing an assignment. Alternatively, teachers can prepare graphic organizers and rubrics for

students that include lesson goals, what success looks and sounds like for each goal, and space for students to jot down what steps they will take and what support they will need in order to reach each goal

.

Consider:
- Are the lesson goals clear and specific?
- How will I share the goals with my students using language that they can understand?
- Do the lesson goals include success criteria?
- How are my students involved in personalizing the goals?

Assessment

Formative assessments are checkpoints to ensure we are heading in the right direction. In Jewish studies classrooms, teachers can assess students' text-based skills through recordings or videos that students make of themselves reading and/or explaining the text. This strategy has the added value of allowing students to track and self-assess their own progress throughout the year.

Teachers can provide options for how students will demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the content, such as slideshows, oral and written summaries, cartoon strips, or playlists of songs to represent different concepts. When the choices are paired with a rubric, students are able to self-assess their products using criteria provided by the teacher.

Teachers also may consider using a variety of formative assessment strategies to check for understanding and pre-assess knowledge, such as Exit and Entry tickets or K/W/L charts.

Consider, how will I:
- figure out what students already know?
- check for understanding throughout the lesson?
- assess whether students have achieved the lesson's goals?
- offer multiple ways for students to show me what they know?

Learner variability

Teachers learn about their students' preferences and needs by conducting interviews and pre-assessments so they can anticipate potential roadblocks and proactively plan how to address these barriers. When planning strategies to address students' variable needs, "What works for some, may work for all" is the general principle.

When the language—not the content—is the barrier, voice-to-text translation, Hebrew text with vowels, Hebrew-English translation, and/or transliteration, as well as options to create voice recordings or take oral assessments, are some ways to compensate for language barriers while supporting students to achieve learning goals. To address the cultural diversity in Jewish classrooms, teachers create equitable opportunities for students and foster awareness and acceptance of various customs by having students share family practices and experiences.

Consider:
- Who are the students in my class and what are their individual learning styles and needs?
- What are some options or scaffolds that I can offer my students to support their learning?
- What do I need to keep in mind

as I plan my lesson in order to be as inclusive as possible for my students?

Methods and materials

When learning, there are many ways to arrive at the same destination; planning multiple pathways benefits all learners. The key factors to student success when considering methods and materials are student choice and agency and include teaching students the skills to make productive decisions for their learning.

Self-assessments to determine individual preferences and most effective methods for learning, as well as rubrics to articulate expectations and criteria, are ways in which teachers promote these skills. Furthermore, when working in groups, it is important to remember that providing structure to the assignment is essential for success. This can be accomplished through clear expectations and norms for collaboration and providing clarity around roles and responsibilities.

Consider:
- How am I ensuring that the instructional methods and materials support the learning goals?
- Which instructional methods and materials will best meet the varied needs of my learners, including considerations regarding student access to technology?
- Which instructional methods and materials will allow for student choice and how will they choose?

Reflect

Reflection and feedback are essential to improvement and growth. When students are

provided with opportunities to self-assess and reflect on their growth, they develop agency over their learning and start to realize what works well for them. In order to accomplish this, have students:

- respond to prompts such as *"a strategy that worked well for me…"*, or *"something I would like to do differently next time…"*
- share their insights with peers, teachers, and parents
- use protocols for receiving feedback and brainstorming solutions to identified challenges

When teachers reflect on their own practice, they are able to draw insights into what they are doing well and what are areas for growth. Feedback on content and process from students, colleagues, and administrators allows teachers to consider additional perspectives. Some methods of collecting feedback include student surveys, recording lessons to share with others, and collecting and analyzing student data.

Consider:
- How will students reflect on their successes and challenges?
- How will I, the teacher, consider what went well and what I would do differently next time?

REVISITING THE CASE STUDY

Let's imagine, for a moment, that Morah Simone had considered some of these questions when planning her lesson.

1. **Are my lesson goals clear and specific?** We will review the sequence of the first three plagues and the ways in which they were brought about, through Aharon's use of Moshes' stick. But what I really want my students to walk away with is the lesson of gratitude, according to Rashi's interpretation of the text, in the fact that Aharon, and not Moshe, brought about the first three plagues. I also want my students to discuss the significance of gratitude in their lives (the "Why") and reflect on whom and what they are grateful for in their lives, which they might otherwise take for granted.

2. **What are some options that I can offer my students to support their learning? What scaffolds will I provide for students who need them?** If I read the Biblical text aloud it will present roadblocks for many of my students. Some of my students can read fluently, but others would do better with text that includes the vowels and/or English translation. I will offer choices for accessing the text so that they each have the opportunity to review the events of the plagues and discover Rashi's interpretation on their own. Since my primary goal for this lesson is not developing skills for reading the Torah or the Rashi, I am comfortable offering flexibility through these choices.

3. **How will I check for understanding? How will I assess whether students have achieved the lesson's goals?** A graphic organizer would allow students to record what they already

know about the first three plagues, and they can find additional details and the sequence of events from the text itself.

I want to emphasize the concept of gratitude for my students to apply to their own lives and I want them to be able to share their examples. After they read the Rashi, I will have them "Turn-and-Talk" to discuss the significance of gratitude in the context of the story and their own lives. As a whole class debriefs, we will talk about why our lives are enriched through cultivating the quality of gratitude.

As an exit ticket, I would like my students to write a letter, draw a picture or cartoon, or create a hashtag to express their gratitude to someone (or something) from whom/which they have received a benefit. I will hang copies of their products on the bulletin board for them to be able to learn from each other's examples.

CONCLUSION

When neuroscience and education are combined with all of the resources available and a passion for the mission, a "one size fits all" approach to learning becomes a thing of the past. Learning is a journey, and Jewish studies educators play an important role in guiding students along their individual pathways as they develop the skills and knowledge that will inform their future lives.

BEYOND THE SOURCE SHEET:
NEW MODES OF EXPLORING THE JEWISH LIBRARY

Rachel Buckman and
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With the onset of COVID, classes moved online and digital texts proved to be crucial to continuing instruction while students were learning outside the walls of the classroom. Now that teachers and students are returning to the school buildings, digital texts can continue to provide opportunities to model authentic learning and create lifelong learners. This article will point towards exciting ways to reorient pedagogy using digital texts as a core feature of instruction and will provide examples from teachers who have used the digital library to open the world of the Torah to their students. With proficient use of new technologies for learning, students develop their familiarity with the Jewish library, set off on their own paths of discovery, expand the range of texts that they access, and gain new understandings of the Torah.

A robust digital library positions students in an easily navigable and stimulating *Beit Midrash*, allowing students to move from one work to another with ease. Shifra Elman, a teacher at Kehillah Jewish High School, is using the digital library to introduce her students to the Jewish canon. Elman models navigating the library and students with little or no Judaic background engage with the library by opening books, seeing their position within the library, perusing the texts, and reading about the books and their authors. She finds that "there's something about being able to touch them and click them…that they can grasp more readily what this canon is." Matan, a high school student from Maryland said that through using a digital library, he learned how vast the Tanakh is. "A whole other world was opened for me." Dahlia, a high school student from California, agreed when she said, "I have a much better sense of the variety of texts." Another key feature of a digital library is the extensive interlinking between texts, which makes the connections more apparent and easier to navigate than footnotes or other indicators in printed works. Links show the students the relationship between text and commentary and the process of Torah which cites prooftexts and is in conversation with other works. Understanding these relationships and having the skills to confidently navigate throughout the library prepares the

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students for deeper investigations into texts.

Once students realize the breadth and depth of the library and they have the tools to access it, they can follow their interests, answer their own questions that arise from text study, and become comfortable exploring multiple approaches and opinions on different questions. Toby Kaplowitz, a fourth-grade teacher at the Krieger Schechter Day School, encourages her students to dig deeper into the text by exploring multiple commentaries. Using books, students at this age are often only introduced to one commentator, Rashi. With the digital library, dozens of commentators are available to them. Students have discovered Ramban on their own while preparing a text and together they have learned their first Hizkuni while searching for answers to a question that arose during class discussion. Kaplowitz notes, "What's been interesting for me to see is how my students are beginning to understand the idea of challenging a text, looking closely at the text and asking higher-level questions when they are curious." Because all the connections are at their fingertips, students develop the habit of looking into the library when questions arise.

Easy access to connected information and the ability to click to go deeper helps encourage students to question and investigate. This is true even when the students cannot understand or fully absorb all the information presented. When looking at a new text, teachers can ask their students to notice the number of commentaries written about it. If the number is large, students can contemplate why the text has generated so many comments. They can assemble a list of questions about the verse and propose answers. Then, after reading some of the commentaries, they can determine if any of the commentators addressed their questions, what questions they asked, and what were their answers. This type of inquiry helps learners realize that one verse can generate many questions, that there isn't just one answer to a question, and that commentators can disagree with each other. The vastness and interconnectivity of a digital *Beit Midrash* highlights the scope of the timeless Jewish conversation around these texts and helps

students go beyond what is accessible to them in printed works.

A digital library empowers students to drive their own learning experience. No longer do the teachers have the responsibility of being the sole providers of texts to their students. Students are more easily able to pursue independent research, with teachers available to support and scaffold the experience as needed. Lucy, a high school student in New York, noted that being given the freedom to click through texts on her own enabled her to take the time to analyze texts that she discovered. She was grateful that she could make her own discoveries when she said that she could "see the development of an idea by clicking through [the library]". It is also worth noting the value of a library that is portable and can be opened up anywhere in the world. When students leave the confines of the classroom, whether they are in college, traveling, or working, they can bring their digital library along with them. Having strong skills in navigating the digital library gives them the ability to continue their learning, both formally and informally, wherever life takes them.

Digital libraries are facilitating a dramatic change in pedagogy. Teachers model authentic learning by demonstrating to students how and why they might delve into texts. While the overall objectives of a lesson are preplanned, the actual route taken can be flexible; teachers can click through connections in real-time to show students how to answer questions that arise when learning a topic or text. As digital natives, students are quick to adapt to these tools and to begin using this library to follow their interests, problem-solve, and chart their own path through the texts. Just as they find materials on Google that they can't yet understand or which prove to be irrelevant to their quest, students learn to select texts on their level, push themselves to reach a little higher, or ask a teacher for help in understanding a difficult passage. Working in an expansive digital library while supported by skilled educators and a rich learning environment, students build a mental map of the landscape of the Jewish library and learn to explore Torah in ways that will continue to serve them throughout a lifetime of continued study.

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