

SHALOM, SALAAM, AND MAY GOD BE WITH YOU: JEWISH IDENTITY FORMATION through INTERFAITH LEARNING

A Curriculum Guide for
Religious School Confirmation Students



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Curriculum Guide Rationale

“The whole world is a very narrow bridge and the most important part is not to be afraid.”

-Rebbe Nachman of Breslov

Our inhabited world grows smaller each day. Technology expands our access to worlds once beyond our reach. Media confronts us with stories and images from places barely identifiable on a global map. Today, a sense of belonging, individual and group identification, and collective cultural standards have become both prized possessions and contested arenas. In a world of decreasing privacy, there exists an essential need to establish one’s identity. Knowing who one is, and knowing who one *isn’t*, is a lifelong process; who we are, what we do, and where we come from are questions every individual must address.

The goal of this curriculum is to create a learning experience which blends Jewish identity formation with knowledge of world religious practices. This yearlong process will connect the learner both to Judaism *and* to the “global village” in which he or she lives. Students will focus on God, sacred text, prayer, and religion as they exist in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In-class learning will be enhanced by facilitated encounters with Christians, Muslims and other Jews.

This curriculum specifically targets tenth grade confirmation students. Each unit will ask questions such as: “What do Jews believe about God? How do Christians pray? What do Muslim holidays signify?” Students will pursue these answers through in-class learning and out-of-class activities, visits, and participation in events outside their synagogue. Students will learn about the common and differing values held by their peers and will consider what it means to be a Jew, a

Christian, or a Muslim in the twenty first century. Most importantly, students will be challenged to engage with their own personal connection to Judaism through exploring personal belief, cultural standards, and familial and communal rituals and obligations.

Tenth grade confirmation students have reached what may be their final year of formal religious education. Most fifteen and sixteen year olds are looking ahead toward leaving their family home for the first time. They are in the process of establishing an identity separate from their family unit, and Judaism can play a large role in this process. Through examining what it means to be a Jewish teenager in the twenty first century – paralleled by what it means to be a Christian or Muslim teenager in this same generation – a Jewish adolescent can grow and learn in unlimited ways. Additionally, articulating one’s religious identity alongside peers of other faiths can greatly impact a person’s growing sense of self. Altogether this learning process can contribute to a greater sense of understanding, respect, and compassion for the community at large. Each of these ideals can strongly influence this group of learners as they begin to prepare for a life outside their childhood cocoon.

This learning endeavor will take what students have studied in prior Jewish educational experiences and expand their knowledge. Learners will access in-class material through different avenues, including text, art, films, and guest speakers. Out-of-class learning will include visits to places of worship, facilitated dialogue, and exposure to the greater community. The entire program will be documented in a yearlong video journal project involving not only the students, but their families and friends, as well. The culmination of the program will be a unique, student-led confirmation ceremony at the conclusion of the school year.

The goals of this course are many. Its core aim is to better prepare Jewish teens for the adult world. Through this experience, students will grow as individuals, as Jews, as adolescents

on the verge of young adulthood, and as educated members of an increasingly diversifying society. This curriculum guides seeks to give them the tools and skills necessary for developing mature, articulate, and well-informed approaches to the world which awaits them.

Enduring Understandings of the Course

1. Religions have the potential to influence individuals in both positive and negative ways.
2. Diversity challenges individuals to explore who they are and what they believe.
3. Many Jews, Christians, and Muslims possess similar yet distinct interpretations of God, sacred text, prayer, and rituals and celebrations.
4. Tension exists between the desired practices of a religion and the actual practices of its followers.

Curriculum Guide Units:

This curriculum guide features six distinct units. In addition to the Introduction and Culmination Workshop, there are four units of solid content: God, Prayer, Sacred Texts, and Rituals and Celebrations.

Two constants will run throughout this curriculum guide. The first is the thread of **encounter**, which will take the form of memorable moments at the conclusion of each unit. The second is the assessment tool, which will be an online video journal taking place throughout five of the six units. (Excluding the Culmination Workshop)

The **encounter** thread will involve students interacting directly with members of a particular religious background, preferably their same age. The encounter sessions will be the highlighted “memorable moments” throughout the guide. Though the formula of each session is essentially the same, the content, food, participants, location, and responses to each prompt will undoubtedly vary. It is the goal of this curriculum writer that the encounter sessions leave a lasting impact on this course’s learners. These structured moments for facilitated dialogue should provide the greatest insight onto EU #4, above.

The **online video journal** will be the primary form of assessment in this guide. It will involve each participant filming him or herself at the beginning and end of each unit. Participants will be prompted with specific directions as to how, where, and when to film. At times, participants will be asked to film themselves with other members of their family and/or social circle. Specific guidelines will be provided by the instructor to ensure a successful submission to the journal.

Submissions to the online journal will be included in the culmination service, providing participants and their families with the opportunity to reflect on what has been learned and accomplished throughout this experience.

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Encounter: Rationale

At the heart of learning about cultures, religions, or communities separate from one's own is the imperative for face-to-face interaction. Additionally, for one to acquire full knowledge of that which is outside his or her comfort zone, learning cannot be isolated to the classroom. As this course is about learning to be a Jewish individual in a multi-faith world, the presence of facilitated dialogue is essential.

Four of the six units in this guide feature an "Encounter" session at their conclusion. The main goal of Encounter is to elucidate EU #4 of this course – *"tension exists between the desired practices of a religion and the actual practices of its followers."* Encounters will require all participants to approach sessions with mutual respect; respect not only for the host institution and its members, but also the decisions of those members to uphold their religious beliefs in their own personal ways.

The Encounter sessions will each take place at a house of worship or community center separate from the synagogue or religious school where this course takes place. The sessions will involve structured conversation time, engaging questions and conversations, shared meals, and prayers. Each session will take place in a different institution, feature unique, community-specific food, and undoubtedly feature varied answers to similar thought-provoking questions. Altogether, the Encounter sessions will provide a multitude of lasting memories for the students of this course.

The Online Video Journal Project

Starring: All Course Participants

Of the multiple enduring understandings of this course, perhaps the most significant message is this: “*Diversity challenges individuals to explore who they are and what they believe.*” By stepping outside one’s comfort zone, a person is introduced to a variety of ways of living. Studying those avenues while simultaneously exploring oneself can lead a person toward exponential growth, maturity, and empathy toward others. As this course seeks to imbue its participants with the sense that they can be active members of a global village, this particular message is woven throughout all six of its units. Hence, there exists a need for an authentic assessment piece which captures the process and enables its participants to express this endeavor creatively.

In the year 2012, posting videos online has become one of the most popular modes of creative self-expression. People from all corners of the globe have taken to the internet to amplify their voice in a diverse range of ways. From the simple (one person talking directly into the camera) to the complex (an elaborate, choreographed dance number or multi-person short film) there exists a wide range of possibilities for one individual to capture and promote their message to the masses.

For this course, students will be asked to submit two online journal submissions per unit; one at the beginning and one at the end. (Excluding the Introductory unit, where there is only one submission, and the Culmination Workshop, where there are no entries) For each unit, there will be prompts which will guide the student through the creation of their video. Students will be presented with questions to guide them, ranging from the clothing choice they make to the

location they choose in which to film themselves. Additionally, students will be asked to involve other people in the creation of their videos. This could mean family members, friends, individuals met through “Encounter” sessions, or strangers on the street.

The overall goal of this endeavor is to allow students to capture both what they are seeking to learn (in the pre-unit video) and the knowledge they have acquired (in the post-unit video). These videos will be public for the entire community – including parents, siblings, friends, teachers, and congregants – to view. It is up to the greater institution to decide how these videos will be featured: YouTube, Vimeo, or an invitation-only website for participants and their families are suggested avenues.

Finally, segments of these videos will be presented at the final, student-created and student-led Confirmation ceremony at the conclusion of the course. For more information on how this will be structured, please reference the Culmination Workshop unit.

Throughout the course, the instructor has the choice to show submitted videos at his or her discretion. These can be used to highlight recurring questions featured by participants, address pressing issues, or simply chart learners’ progress. **Additionally – instructor should take photographs throughout the course, particularly at Encounter sessions, to present during the Culmination Workshop and Confirmation ceremony.**

Assessment Rubric for the Online Video Journal Project

Name of Filmmaker: _____

Unit / Assessment #: _____

	Advanced Filmmaker	Intermediate Filmmaker	Emerging Filmmaker
Accessibility	Material presented is clear, featuring an easy-to-follow progression of topics. Scene cuts and dialogue are polished. Quality of filming is excellent.	Material presented is mostly clear, featuring a progression of topics that makes sense. May present some awkward cuts or dialogue; quality of filming is good, not excellent.	Material is either unclear or hard to follow, progression of sequences are difficult or impossible to follow. Cuts and dialogue are choppy. Quality of filming is poor.
Content	Filmmaker presents a clear representation of the unit's content. Addresses questions posed in prompts with ease.	Filmmaker presents a mostly clear representation of unit's content. Addresses questions posed in prompts accurately, if somewhat uncomfortably.	Filmmaker does not address the unit's content. Questions posed in prompt are largely avoided.
Message	Filmmaker presents an intentional, enduring message through his or her video. Filmmaker teaches his or her audience something lasting and meaningful in this submission.	Filmmaker presents a message to his or her audience, yet the message may be unclear or hard to decipher. Filmmaker attempts to teach something lasting and meaningful in this submission.	Filmmaker presents a series of scenes or dialogue with no clear message or intention. Filmmaker does not attempt to feature a lesson or teach something in this submission.
(Aesthetic) Value	Filmmaker's choices of dress, location, participants, and props are intentional and clear. Video features supplementary and well-thought-out extras, such as background music or text.	Filmmaker's choices of dress, location, participants, and props are mostly intentional. Video does not feature many additional extras, such as background music or text.	Filmmaker devotes little to no energy to dress, location, participants, or props. Video features little to no artistic or creative additions.
Voice	Filmmaker portrays him or herself in a unique, authentic, and comfortable way. Filmmaker expresses him or herself with enthusiasm and displays a deep commitment to the unit's content and the course. Filmmaker poses thought-provoking questions from an honest, raw place.	Filmmaker mostly communicates his or her personality and authenticity through video submissions, yet maintains a status-quo level of energy in the assignment. Filmmaker demonstrates an interest in the course and commitment to his or her own unique perspective.	Filmmaker's voice is difficult to find in this submission. Filmmaker seems to be going through the motions to finish the assignment. Filmmaker demonstrates little to no interest in the unit's content or the course.

A sample prompt for the Online Video Journal, including examples for the question prompts:

Assessment #3: God Unit

Pre-Unit Video

For this installment of your online video journal, you will be asked to express yourself on the topic of God. Looking ahead to unit as a whole, we will be looking at what Judaism, Christianity, and Islam each say about God. Does God exist in these three religions? How? Where does God exist for Christians, for Muslims, or for Jews? What does God look like? How are notions of God similar in these three religions? Where are they different? How is God used as a force of good? Where might God be seen as a source of negativity or pain?

Before starting this unit, **you** have the opportunity to think about your own personal conception of God. Do you have a relationship with God? Why or why not? What do you, as a student in this course, personally believe about God's role in these three religions?

By first clarifying your own personal beliefs and convictions, you can then dive fully into what these different religions say about the topic. Remember that **everything** is fair game, as long as you approach each topic with a sense of maturity and respect – for yourself, your religion, and the religious beliefs of others.

Videos should be no longer than ten minutes, maximum. However – preparing for the video, including gathering your supplies, picking your setting, and writing down your answers *before* answering them on-camera, should take between 45 minutes and an hour, if not longer.

Please save this prompt and your answers in your course folder. It will come in handy during our Culmination workshop at the conclusion of the course.

Here is your prompt:

Name: _____

Date of Filming:

Setting: Where are you going to film yourself, and why did you choose that location?

For example: For the God unit, a student may want to film themselves in the sanctuary of their synagogue, or on a mountaintop where they feel peaceful or close to God, with the sun setting behind them. They may want to film themselves alone in a dark room, demonstrating their fear or ambivalence about God.

Clothing: What are you going to wear in your video, and why did you choose this outfit?

For Example: A student may want to wear all-white as homage to their time at summer camp and their closeness to God while there. Or, a student may want to wear an outfit of neutral colors to symbolize God's neutrality and acceptance of all human beings. A student may want to wear a colorful, zany outfit to showcase his or her curiosity about God, or God's acceptance of all humankind.

Participants: Who else is joining you in this video, and why are they joining you?

Example: A student may want to ask their parents to join them in the video to explain how he or she believes God is present in the creation of new life. Or, a student may want to go to a crowded supermarket or public area to showcase God's presence everywhere, at every time. A student may also choose to be alone, providing a convincing rationale for doing so.

Props: What props are you going to use in this video, and why are you using them?

Example: A student may want to use any number of ritual objects: a Bible, a tallit, T'fillin, siddur. Or, a student may want to use an empty jar to show his or her lack of belief in God.

Additional: What other additional people, props, artifacts, or personal stories will you include to tell your feelings about God?

Questions to Address in Video #1:

- 1) Prior to the start of this unit, what do you personally believe about God?
- 2) Does God exist?
- 3) Where does God exist?
- 4) When do you feel/see/experience God?
- 5) Is your understanding of God a "Jewish" understanding?
- 6) What do you think Christianity says about God?
- 7) What do you think Islam says about God?
- 8) What are you most looking forward to learning about God in this unit?
- 9) What are you most apprehensive about learning about God in this unit?
- 10) What is one question you hope to answer by the end of this unit?

Assessment #4: God Unit
Post-Unit Video

Congratulations on finishing the “God” unit! For this video installment, you will be asked to reflect on what you learned during these lessons. First, please review your pre-unit submission to the Online Video Journal. This will help you answer some of the questions posed below. Next, sit down with these questions and really think about your answers. Look back over your notes and readings and recall some of the activities you did to help answer these questions.

Here is your prompt:

Name: _____

Date of Filming: _____

Setting: Where are you going to film yourself, and why did you choose that location? How is it different, or is it the same, as your previous location? Why?

Clothing: What are you going to wear in your video, and why did you choose this outfit? How is it different, or is it the same, as your previous outfit? Why?

Participants: Who else is joining you in this video, and why are they joining you? Are they the same individuals or different individuals than those in your previous videos? Why?

Props: What props are you going to use in this video, and why are you using them? Are they the same props you used in the first video, or not? Why?

Additional: What other, additional people, props, artifacts, or personal stories will you include to tell how you have progressed or not progressed in your understanding of God?

Questions to Address in your post-unit video:

- 1) Following the conclusion of this unit, what do you personally feel about God? Have your feelings changed?
- 2) What do most Jews believe about God? What is the Jewish conception of God?
- 3) Do Christians believe in God? How does God appear in the Christian tradition?

- 4) Do Muslims believe in God? How does God appear in the Islamic faith?
- 5) How is the portrayal of God similar for Jews, Christians, and Muslims? Name one example.
- 6) How is the portrayal of God different for Jews, Christians, and Muslims? Name one example.
- 7) What is one thing that surprised you in this unit?
- 8) What is one stereotype you confronted or preconceived notion you addressed during this unit?
- 9) Did you answer the one question you had moving into the God unit? If so, how?
- 10) What is one question you have moving forward into our next unit? (Prayer)

A Letter to the Instructor...

Shalom, Blessings, and *Marhaban!* (مرحبا)

First, thank you for opening this Curriculum Guide. Whether it was simply assigned to you or you chose it from a multitude of options, *todah rabah!* I hope that this course is as meaningful for you to teach as it was for me to write.

In this guide, I have provided you with a great many things. It is by no means an exhaustive list, and I am certain that with a topic such as this much has been omitted. But here's what's there: a table of contents, enduring understandings, lessons, activities, resources, assessments, and most importantly, a course rationale. The rationale seeks to address the questions, "*Why this course, and why these learners?*" It answers in a professional voice, addressing the needs of Jewish teenagers on the cusp of their religious school Confirmation and articulating the demand for interfaith dialogue, among other goals. Yet – it does not express my personal rationale for choosing to write this curriculum. Please allow me to provide that here, in this letter to you.

This past summer I was the Education Director at URJ Camp Newman in Santa Rosa, California. Within the first week of orientation, I learned that the *rashim* (unit heads) of our tenth and eleventh grade social justice unit, Hevrah, planned to focus their curriculum on the Arab/Israeli conflict; specifically, Islam. Despite my own personal passion for interfaith learning and interreligious dialogue, I initially balked at the idea. I claimed our fifteen and sixteen year old campers were too young to grasp the complexities of the subject, and too inexperienced to understand the nuances of the Arab/Israeli conflict. I dismissed the idea of teaching an entirely

separate religion at a Jewish summer camp, concerned that it would send the “wrong message” to our campers.

I am pleased to report that I was proven wrong.

After several conversations with the *rashim*, their incredible faculty rabbi, and the camp directors, I saw that this course could, in fact, be quite meaningful for these campers. We gave it the go-ahead and guided the curriculum designers as they crafted an extraordinary and transformative program. We watched as these tenth and eleventh grade students delved into the foundations and principles of Islam; as they listened respectfully to guest speakers and engaged whole-heartedly in an *iftar* (break-fast) during the holy month of Ramadan. The most poignant memory I can share is accompanying these campers to Sacramento for their Project Day. There, they lobbied for religious tolerance in California’s schools and increased awareness of Islamophobia in the public sphere. Fueled by passion and empowered by knowledge, these campers validated the tremendous impact of interfaith learning; of a unique, challenging, and dynamic educational experience.

Each day our world simultaneously grows and shrinks. As we expand our capacities to reach foreign shores, we also retreat ourselves into our own personal comfort zones. As Hevrah 2011 (also known as H2K11) taught me, engaging with the world outside your own bubble is an invaluable experience. It has the capacity to change you; to deepen your empathy and enhance your close, personal relationships. Most importantly, confronting the unfamiliar, or “the other,” to which it is often referred, teaches you to identify and articulate who *you* are. It is this reason, among many more, that I chose to embark on this curriculum for a degree in Jewish education. It is my sincere hope that this message resonates through your teaching of this course.

I consider the various components of this guide to be springboards. Please use them all as launching pads, capable of being re-constructed and enhanced by you, the educator. Take chances with this curriculum, and do not be afraid to reach out and contact me should you have any questions, comments, or suggestions. I am deeply grateful (and truly excited) that this curriculum guide has reached your hands. May it be, for you and your students, a sacred, meaningful, and fun endeavor.

B'hatzlacha, thank you, and *shukran*. (شكرا)

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Unit 1: Introduction

Here begins this year-long course, “Shalom, Salaam, and May God Be with You: Jewish Identity Formation through Interfaith Learning.” You, the instructor, and your community of learners (plus other invested parties, such as parents, friends, congregants, clergy, and fellow teachers) are likely all asking yourselves the same question: In a course like this one, where, exactly, do we start?

We start at the beginning. We start with providing all interested and invested parties with the rationale for why this course, and why now. We start by providing background information for learners so they have a base from which to jump into further learning. Most importantly – we start by providing ourselves with the resources and tools (emotional and physical) to engage in a meaningful, powerful, potentially transformative learning experience.

This introductory unit provides the instructor with three lessons, each of which attempts to satisfy these needs. The unit features one lesson on interfaith learning and an introduction to the study of religion, one lesson on the various odds and ends of this particular course, and one lesson on the basics of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It is the hope of the curriculum writer that this introductory unit serves as a launch pad for the remainder of the course, generating excitement and curiosity and providing learners with a base to begin their in-depth study of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Unit Enduring Understandings:

- As evidenced in their biblical roots, Jews, Christians, and Muslims share a mutual responsibility to one another.
- Facilitated interfaith dialogue provides meaningful opportunities for personal growth.
- Documentary filmmaking offers creative, engaging ways to capture messages.

Unit Knowledge:

- The study of religion is a worthwhile endeavor which can provide both personal meaning and engagement in the greater community
- Interfaith dialogue must be facilitated and carefully crafted to provide opportunities for personal growth
- Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are often referred to as “Abrahamic Faiths,” as they can each be traced back to the patriarch Abraham
- Judaism and Christianity emerged from what is now the land of Israel
- Islam emerged from what is now Saudi Arabia
- The year-long Online Video Journal is the method of assessment for this course

Unit Objectives:

- Students will be able to recall that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all “Abrahamic Faiths”
- Students will be able to explain why interfaith learning is a worthwhile endeavor for a teenager in the twenty-first century
- Students will be able to compare the early roots of Judaism with those of Christianity and Islam
- Students will be able to formulate questions on what they can expect during this course
- Students will be able to compose a general outline for their first Online Video Journal submission
- Students will be able to compose a letter to themselves to be opened at the end of the course, expressing their excitement and/or ambivalence

Unit Evidence of Learning:

- Following the conclusion of this unit, students will submit their first entry to the Online Video Journal. This first entry will detail both the knowledge acquired through this introductory unit *and* the questions students have moving into this course.
- Students are not expected to contribute to their Online Video Journals at the beginning of this unit.

Lesson 1: The Whole Word is a Narrow Bridge...

Essential Question: What is this course all about?

Objectives:

- Students will be able to identify Rebbe Nachman of Breslov by name
- Students will be able to discuss the concept of a “global village” and describe how they are residents of that global village in the present day
- Students will be able to compose a “tweet” featuring the phrases “global village” and “not afraid”
- Students will be able to define “Abrahamic faiths”
- Students will be able to describe how “the whole world is a narrow bridge”
- Students will be able to interpret Genesis 12:1-3 in their own words
- Students will be able to hypothesize a personal rationale of the course
- Students will be able to compose a letter to themselves to be opened at the end of the course, capturing their feelings at its beginning and their questions for the future.

Resources Needed:

Talented songleader with guitar

Lyrics / chords for “Geshher T’zar M’od”

Copies of Genesis 12:1-3 text (in Resources)

Pre-printed *large* copies of quotes for the “Why Do This?” Activity

Notebooks for all students

Pens for all students

Paper for letter-writing

Envelopes

Timeline: (Assuming an 80 minute allotted instruction time)

00-05 – Set Induction

05-15 – Introduction

15-30 – Activity 1

30-50 – Activity 2

50-60 – Break: Snacking and Socializing

60-75 – Activity 3

75-80 – Closing

Core Learning Experiences:

Set Induction: Instructor will first welcome all students to class. Then, instructor will either have a songleader (preferred) or a recording of the song “*Geshher T’zar M’od*,” words by Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, music by Baruch Chait. (Lyrics can be found in Resource 1.1) Instructor / songleader should encourage students to sing.

**Kol ha’olam kulo gesher t’zar m’od
V’ha’ikar lo l’fached k’lal.**

*The whole world is but a narrow bridge
And the most important part is not to be afraid.*

Introduction:

Following the conclusion of the song, **instructor will say:** do any of you recognize this song? (wait for a show of hands) Tell me... what do you think this song is about? (Possible student answers: *this song is about creating relationships between people from different places, it's about facing your fears, it's about the world being small, after all, etc.*) How do you think the whole world might be a "narrow bridge?" (*We're all connected, it's a small world, etc.*)

Instructor: Who knows who wrote this song? (*Rebbe Nachman of Breslov*) And who was Rebbe Nachman? Does anyone know? (*Rebbe Nachman was the founder of the Breslov Chasidic Movement of Judaism. Rebbe Nachman was from Breslov, in the Ukraine. Rebbe Nachman taught that a person can experience moments of joy in Judaism by dialing down all the "fuss." Rebbe Nachman believed you could get closer to your Jewishness by focusing on the relationship you have with God. Rebbe Nachman also believed that a life of study, simplicity, faith, and intimate relationships with those close to you was enough to create and sustain a person all the days of their life.*)

Instructor: In many ways, this one song captures what we are attempting to do in this course, this year. Does anyone have any ideas as to why that is? (*Because we are trying to live as citizens in this global village, and we should not be afraid of that. Because we are all connected. Because the whole world is such a small place, and we must encourage each other to go forth into it with faith, with strength, and with knowledge. Because it's cool*)

Instructor: Exactly. This course is all about identifying who we are as Jews, and who we are as citizens of a global village. What is a global village? (*It's a figure of speech / expression that means, even though we are a part of this gigantic world with all this crazy stuff going on, like the internet and such, we're still connected. Whether it's through the internet or our greater communities, we are a part of one great big community*)

Instructor: Okay, everyone. I am now going to give you your first assignment. Please take out your cell phones. Now, please take five minutes to write a tweet or a Facebook status update – 140 characters or less – on how this one song might capture the overall goal of this course, this year. The one catch? You have to use the phrases "global village" and "not afraid" in your tweet or status update. Ready? GO!

(allow for students to tweet/update statuses)

After five minutes, **Instructor:** Can we have some people share their tweets and updates?

(allow for student sharing)

Instructor: Excellent. Thank you all so much for sharing. You all captured beautifully the rationale for this course, in 140 characters or less!

This course has many different goals. First and foremost, this course will help us explore who we are as Jews in the twenty-first century. This course will help us explore who we are as members of this global village; a series of connected communities. It will also help us acquire knowledge about two other religions which are both connected to and different from Judaism: Christianity and Islam. This course will help us better understand our responsibilities to the greater world in which we live. And in order to start that learning process, we begin here, today, on the right foot! *(Pause for student applause, excitement, questions)*

Activity 1: In the Beginning...

Essential Question: Where did this all start?

Instructor will pass out copies of or project on a board the following passage: (Resource 1.2)

Genesis 12:1-3

¹ [God] said to Abram, “Leave your land, your family, and your father’s household for the land that I will show you.
² I will make of you a great nation and will bless you.
I will make your name respected, and you will be a blessing.
³ I will bless those who bless you,
those who curse you I will curse;
all the families of earth will be blessed because of you.^{1”}

Once all students in the room have the quote at the ready, **instructor will ask:** at first glance – who recognizes this piece of text? (*Wait for hands*) Does anyone know what Torah portion this piece of text comes from? (*Lech Lecha*) Great! Can someone please translate “*lech lecha*” for me? (*You, go forth; go, really go, etc.*)

Excellent. So this is from a passage in our Torah – from a portion which we know as the one where Abraham receives the divine call to go forth, where he will be a blessing. Now I ask – how do we interpret this final line of text? What’s the first thing that jumps out at you when you read this final line – “**all the families of earth will be blessed because of you?**”

(Wait time, then *it means all the families of the earth are connected to Abraham, all the families of the earth are connected to Judaism...*)

Say: This quote – all the families of earth will be blessed because of you – this is a universal quote. This quote does not say, “Only the Jewish families of the earth will be blessed because of you. Only the ones who keep Kosher will be blessed because of you. No – this quote clearly states that *all the earth’s families* – Christian, Islam, Buddhist, even Atheist – will be blessed because of Abraham.

This is where we begin our study of religion. Here, with this quote. In this quote we read that we are all connected; we are all a part of a divine fabric that stretches out generations before us. We are all blessed, together, in spite of our differences. As we will learn throughout this course,

¹ Common English Bible (CEB) translation

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are linked in more ways than one. We share more than we realize. These three religions are connected through Abraham – they are the *Abrahamic Faiths*. And it is our sacred task in this upcoming year to uncover what sets us apart – as Jews – and what unites us, as individuals in this great global community.

For the Instructor: This is an opportunity to briefly explain the Abrahamic Faiths – Judaism is connected through the patriarch Abraham, Christianity is connected through Jesus’ Jewish roots, and Islam is connected through Ishmael, Abraham’s son with Hagar.

Activity 2: Why Do This?

Essential Questions: Why are we doing this course? Why now?

Instructor will print out and tape around the room three different quotes from three different individuals, plus three separate images, each of which is an important site in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. (Quotes and images can be found in Resource 1.3. Instructor should feel free to add to or modify the quotes and images selected)

Instructor will distribute notebooks and pens for all students. These will be their notebooks for the duration of the course.

Instructor: I now invite all of you to put your “observer” hats on. You have entered a museum of sorts – a place where different images and quotes have been preserved and are on display for you to examine. You will now spend the next 20 minutes walking through this classroom/museum with your notebooks and pens, and you will write down the different observations, reflections, ideas, and ruminations that you encounter while looking at these different relics. What does each of these quotes make you think of? What do you think these images try to capture? For the places you don’t know – what do you think they are? How might they be symbols of the religions we will be studying? What are your hypotheses as to the significance of each piece?

(Ask for questions)

Snack: It is highly recommended that instructor plans for built-in snack and socializing time for students, for each session. This will give students the opportunity to build community while nourishing themselves. It will also provide moments of levity and decompression following more intense activities. Instructor should be present, speaking and socializing with students during this snack time. Instructor may want to begin each snack time with a prayer.

Activity 3: Debrief and Looking Ahead

Essential Question: What was the Purpose of our Previous Activity?

Instructor will begin by **saying**, “Welcome back. I trust you all had a delicious snack. Let’s discuss some of the observations you made while walking through our classroom / museum.”

(Allow for student sharing)

Instructor should **summarize** the various comments of students. Students will likely focus on a few different elements of the quotes and images represented, and instructor should feel free to add to or enhance the various comments made, providing a summative response to student observations. Instructor may also want to prepare the written rationale for the course, of which several quotes may be useful in this discussion.

Finally, instructor should pass out paper and pens to students and give them the following prompt:

We now embark on this journey; this year-long course on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It will be a year of many great insights and many challenging moments. We will push ourselves, as one community, to learn new things about ourselves *and* about others. We will explore what it means to be a Jew, a Christian, or a Muslim in the twenty-first century. It will require an open mind, an open heart, curiosity, dedication, and above all else, *respect*.

I now ask that each of you take a few minutes to write yourselves a letter, which you will open at the conclusion of the course. What message do you wish to tell yourself nine months from now? What hopes do you have for this course? What fears or ambivalences? Take this time to write to the future version of yourself, and when you are done, put it in an envelope, seal it, write your name on it, and hand it back to me.

Conclusion:

Instructor should ask students to turn to one another and share one thing about which they are excited for this course.

For the very conclusion of the day's learning, instructor should return to the lyrics of Rebbe Nachman's "Gesher T'zar M'od" to bring the conversation full-circle. Leave students with the following message: "*the whole world is but a narrow bridge and the most important part is not to be afraid.*"

Lesson 2: Nuts and Bolts

Essential Question: What are the logistical pieces of this course we need to know about?

Objectives:

- Students will be able to identify their role as participants in this course
- Students will be able to describe their own personal level of comfort going into this course
- Students will be able to restate the process of submitting to the Online Video Journal
- Students will be able to analyze the process of documentary filmmaking as an assessment method
- Students will be able to summarize the goals of the Encounter sessions
- Students will be able to compose a general outline for their first Online Video submission

For the Instructor: This lesson should be planned in advance with the colleagues and supervisors at the greater institution in which this course is taking place. Please address ahead of time the logistical elements, such as where to upload all Online Video Journal entries, what the attendance policy is, when the Encounter dates are, and so forth.

Introduction: Instructor should begin by taking a general “hot/cold” poll from students. First, ask students where, on a scale of 0 to 10, (0 being totally cold, no movement, no interest; 10 being hot, burning, passionate) they are at with regards to this course. This should also be an opportunity for brief student descriptions of their emotional state with regards to the start of this course.

Activity 1: Logistics

Essential Focus: Establishing the logistical elements of the course

This activity will deal with the following elements. How they are structured and carried out is entirely up to the instructor and powers that be at the greater institution:

- Schedules and absences / expectations
- Assessment – the Online Video Journal project
- Encounter sessions and dates
- Confirmation ceremony
- Course expectations (consider writing a *brit* with students)
- Enforcing constructive dialogue (consider referencing Drew Kugler’s article, “Constructive Candor”²)
- Online Video Journal Logistics (including finding access to recording equipment if students do not have SmartPhones or video recorders; where to upload all journal entries)
- At-home work; readings prior to class
- Any other logistical needs

² Drew Kugler, “Constructive Candor,” *The American Lawyer*. (June 2004)

Activity 2: Online Video Journal Project, in-depth

Essential Question: How will the assessment tool be carried out?

In this activity, instructor should introduce students to the Online Video Journal Project. For this activity, instructor should prepare ahead of time his or her own submission as a model for students, plus the rationale for the assessment and assessment rubric. Additionally, instructor should prepare copies of the first prompt.

At the end of this activity, students should compose an outline for their first journal entry, (responding to the prompts) which will be submitted at the conclusion of this introductory unit.

Activity 3: Encounter, in-depth.

Essential Question: How will the Encounter sessions run?

In this activity, instructor should introduce students to the Encounter sessions and how they will take place. Instructor will likely want to photocopy ahead of time and introduce the Encounter rationale for students to grasp what these sessions are all about. Instructor may want to use this time to introduce the various host institutions participating in the Encounter session.

Activity 4: Questions and Comments

Essential Focus: A free-for-all discussion about the course and its expectations

This activity should be an open-forum discussion for any and all questions students may have about the course. Instructor may want to consider inviting parents and clergy to this activity, as well. In all likelihood, the many invested parties will have plenty of questions regarding the focus and general expectations of the course. Instructor should be prepared with copies of the rationale, example of Online Video Journal submission, expectations of students, and any other important documents he or she deems appropriate.

Conclusion: TBD by Instructor

Lesson 3: A Short History of Nearly Everything

Essential Question: Where do we start?

Objectives:

- Students will be able to recall a general timeline of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam's development (for example, Judaism began, according to Torah, several thousand years before the birth of Christ, Christ began his ministry around the year 30, CE; Islam began in the 7th century)
- Students will be able to explain some general principles of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
- Students will be able to determine how Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are part of the "Abrahamic tradition"
- Students will be able to compare the Five Pillars of Islam to one another
- Students will be able to deduce how Judaism, Christianity, and Islam each have fringe sects which focus on extremes and radical views
- Students will be able to analyze the presence of grace in Christianity

Introduction: TBD by Instructor

Activity 1: History

Essential Focus: The historical developments of all three religions

This activity should introduce students to the general development of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Resource 1.4 features a simple, easy-to-read timeline of the development of the religions. Instructor should feel free to add to/modify this timeline. This activity should be a fun and engaging way to integrate the historical elements of the course, and the method for doing so is entirely up to the instructor. It can be structured as a game, a trivia contest, or students can be asked to prepare a presentation ahead of time.

Activity 2: The General Principles

Essential Question: What are the general principles of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam?

For this activity, instructor can go in any number of directions. Resource 1.5 highlights some key points/facts/moments in each religion. How students study these principles is entirely up to the instructor. It is suggested that students compose a table detailing the common origins of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Instructor should feel free to add to/modify these essential elements of all three religions.

Additionally, instructor may want to use this background information to generate a discussion about the concept of Grace in Christianity, and/or the Five Pillars of Islam. Both are foundational elements of each religion which are significant to a nuanced understanding of each.

Activity 3: On the Fringes

Essential Question: What's so bad about religion, anyway?

Instructor should use this time to discuss the negative or controversial elements of each faith. Instructor should prepare students for the idea that each faith – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – possesses fringe sects which possess extreme or radical views. **This is a crucial conversation to generate at the beginning of this course.**

Ways to structure this time include the following:

- Generate a list of the various “misconceptions” people may have about each religion
- Address the notion of stereotypes in each religion
- Show a short film
- Hear from a guest speaker,
- Encourage students to write and act out scenes which depict these themes

Conclusion: TBD by Instructor

Assessment #1: Intro Unit

Post-Unit Video

Congratulations on finishing the introduction unit! As you film yourself for this first submission to the Online Journal, consider the following: this is your opportunity to express your expectations, hopes, and apprehensions for the coming year. What do you think this course will offer you? What are you most excited about? What are you most nervous about? What are the pieces of knowledge you have acquired in these first three sessions? Where would you like to go from here? Allow this prompt to guide you, and please reference the outline you created during this unit.

Here is your prompt:

Name: _____

Date of Filming: _____

Setting: Where are you going to film yourself, and why did you choose that location?

Clothing: What are you going to wear in your video, and why did you choose this outfit?

Participants: Who else is joining you in this video, and why are they joining you?

Props: What props are you going to use in this video, and why are you using them?

Additional: What other, additional people, props, artifacts, or personal stories will you include to tell your message?

Questions to Address in your Post-Unit Video:

- 1) What is your current state of mind regarding this course?
- 2) What are you most looking forward to doing or learning in this course?
- 3) What are you most apprehensive about with regards to this course?
- 4) What are some examples of knowledge you acquired during this unit you did not know before?
- 5) What are some examples of pieces in this unit which surprised you?
- 6) What are some examples of stereotypes or misconceptions you had prior to this unit?
- 7) What are some distinctions you are beginning to make between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam? Name a few examples.
- 8) What is one hope, one aspiration, or one message you have for your community of learners as you embark on this course?

Resources

Resource 1.1 – *Gesher Tzar M'od*³

SONGS - שירים

50. GESHER TZAR M'OD

Music: Baruch Chait
Text: R. Nachman of Bratzlav
Capo/Key: o/Am

Am D Dm Am
Kol ha-o-lam ku-lo, ge-sher tzar m'-od, ge-sher tzar m'-od

כָּל הָעוֹלָם כְּלוֹ
נֶשֶׁר צַר מְאֹד

Ge-sher tzar m'-od

Am D Dm Am E7 Am
Kol ha-o-lam ku-lo, ge-sher tzar m'-od, ge-sher tzar m'-od

וְהֶעֱקַר וְהֶעֱקַר
לֹא לִפְחַד לֹא לִפְחַד כָּלֵל

Am G Em Em7
V'-ha-i-kar v'-ha-i-kar, lo l'-fa-cheid, lo l'-fa-cheid k'-lal

וְהֶעֱקַר וְהֶעֱקַר
לֹא לִפְחַד כָּלֵל

Am G Am
V'-ha-i-kar v'-ha-i-kar, lo l'-fa-cheid k'-lal

*The entire world is but a narrow bridge,
and the most important thing is not to be afraid.*

³ Union for Reform Judaism. Shireinu: Our Songs – A Songbook for Camps, Conclaves, Kallot, and Retreats. (New York: Transcontinental Music Publications, 2000) 32

Resource 1.2 – Genesis 12:1-3

¹ [God] said to Abram, “Leave your land, your family, and your father’s household for the land that I will show you.

² I will make of you a great nation and will bless you.
I will make your name respected, and you will be a blessing.

³ I will bless those who bless you,
those who curse you I will curse;
all the families of earth will be blessed because of you.⁴”

⁴ Common English Bible (CEB) translation

Resource 1.3 – Quotes and Images for “Why Do This?”

Quote 1:

“... That is still the choice facing humankind. Will we endlessly replay the hatreds of the past? Or will we choose differently this time, for the sake of the world’s children and their future? As our capacity for destruction grows, so must the generosity of our moral and spiritual imagination. I pray that this affirmation will be answered by many voices from many faiths.”⁵

-Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of England

Quote 2:

Why Study Religion? – UC Davis Department of Religious Studies⁶

Religion is a major force in human experience. It has shaped the world’s history, literature, art, culture, politics, ethics, and economics. Across the globe religious agendas have fueled conflict and encouraged acts of terrorism and ethnic cleansing, dislocating populations and destroying economies. Religion has consequently proven to be one of the greatest threats to world peace and prosperity. But religious traditions have also laid the foundation for human rights, social justice, toleration, and world peace. Religious Studies is therefore by nature an interdisciplinary field with direct relevance to the Arts, Humanities, Sciences, and Social Sciences.

It is impossible to open a newspaper, listen to the radio, or watch television without being bombarded by debates about the religious and ethical dimensions of cloning, euthanasia, abortion, divorce, aids, gay marriage, feminism, animal rights, preemptive war, capital punishment, and a host of other issues that fiercely divide the public both in this country and abroad. Since moral and ethical issues are at the heart of every religious tradition, encouraging students to discuss them in an academic setting is of the greatest importance in creating educated, thinking individuals.

Quote 3:

“I grew up in a household that was deeply Jewish but that respected the wisdom and arts of those who lived outside our own particular religious and cultural framework. Despite sensitivity to the universal value of humanity that I learned from my family, growing up in America naturally instilled within me a number of vague prejudices that were simply imbedded in Jewish or American culture. As a result, when I first traveled to Israel as a naïve American Jewish teenager in 1970, I had a vague, unarticulated expectation that the Jewish Israelis would be heroic and upright while the Arabs would be dishonest and deceitful. This evaluation was hazy and indistinct, and I had not thought about it in any kind of conscious way... But soon after arriving in Israel, I was surprised to find myself some quite unheroic Israelis and some quite upright Arabs. I found myself living in the Muslim Quarter within the aged Ottoman walls of the “Old City” of Jerusalem... I became particularly close to two young Muslim Arab cousins who had

⁵ Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*. (London: Continuum, 2002) viii

⁶ Website. University of California: Davis, Religious Studies Department. <http://religions.ucdavis.edu/about/why-study-religion>

each recently married, and I was privileged to spend quality time with them and their extended families.

Because of my experiences, my general approach to Islam is sympathetic, but also, I hope, realistic. I have no need to be [argumentative], because I do not feel threatened or fearful of Islam. I have learned that Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, (and I would suppose all religions), allows for certain expressions and behaviors that I would consider terribly problematic, and others that I consider transcendent, and even sublime.”

-Rabbi Reuven Firestone

Image 1: Western Wall in Jerusalem

(Former Retaining Wall of the Second Temple, believed to be the holiest site in the world for Jews)



Image 2: Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem

(Site of Jesus' Burial and subsequent Resurrection)

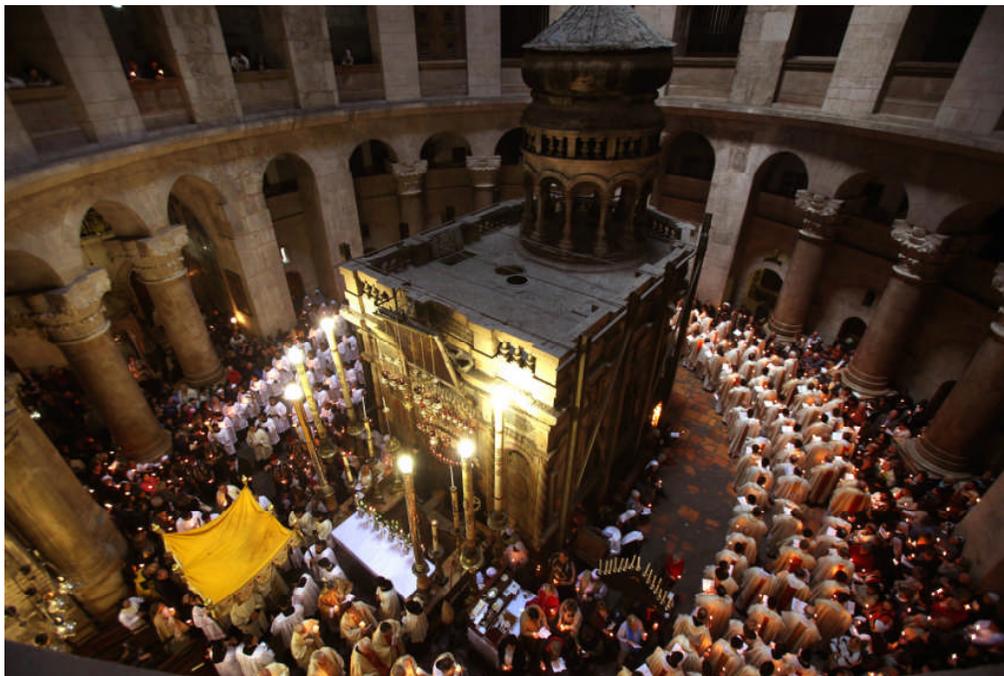
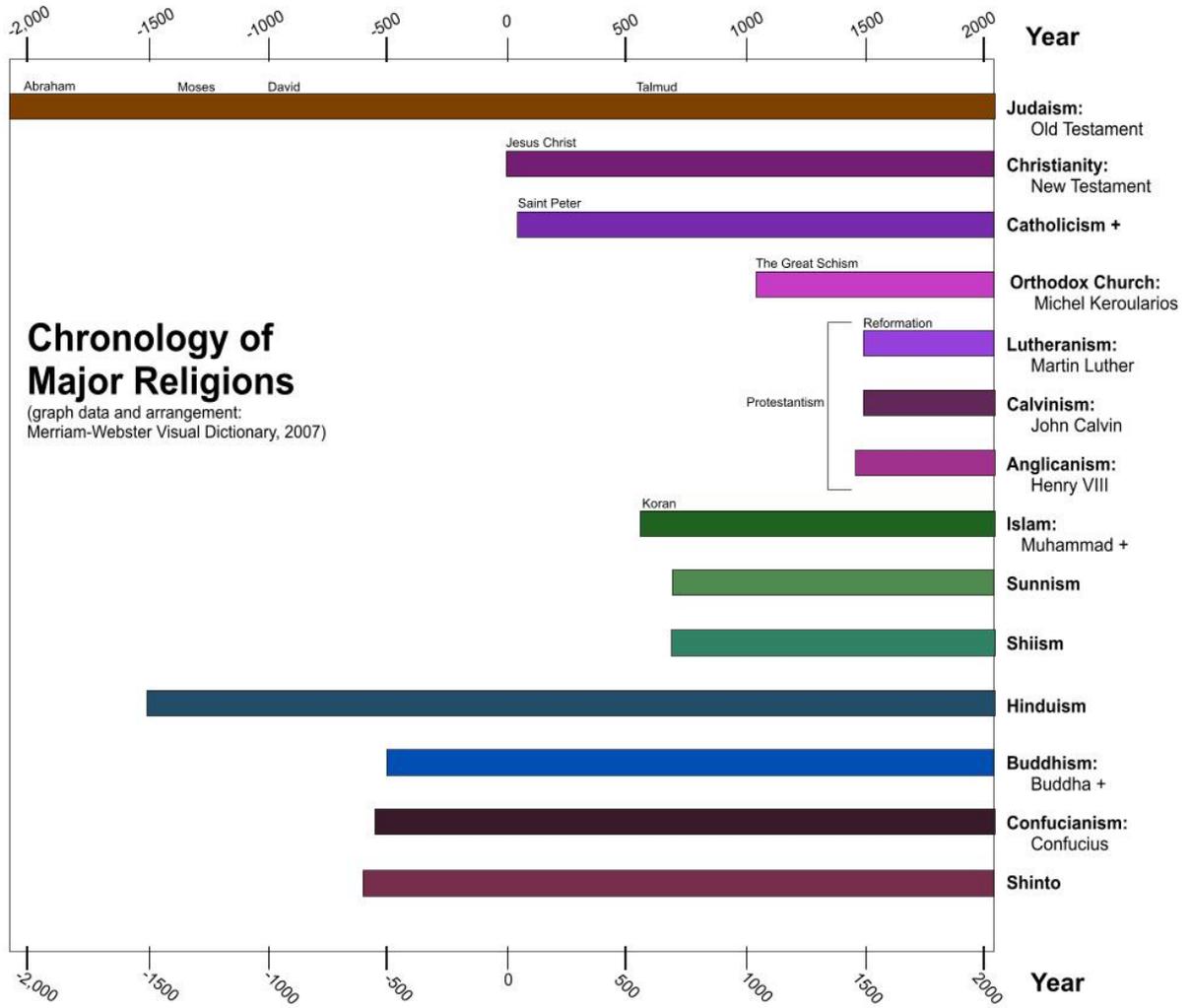


Image 3: The Kaaba in Mecca

(Holiest Site in the World for Muslims; in the Qu'ran it is written the Kaaba was built by Abraham and his son Ishmael)



Resource 1.4 – Timeline



Resource 1.5 – A Short History of Nearly Everything

1) Judaism – The Bare Minimum

- Jews believe in one God, making it a monotheistic faith. According to the Torah, that God has many names. (Yahweh, Elohim, Adonai, El, el-Shaddai, etc.)
- Jews look to the Torah as their foundation for living and learning. The Torah is also known as the Etz Chayim, or Tree of Life.
- The TaNaKh – referred to as the “Old Testament” by Christians, comprises the Torah, N’vi’im (Prophets) and Ketuvim (Writings).
- The story of the Jewish people begins in the book of Genesis, the first book of Torah, with the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.
- It is believed that the Jewish people originated in Mesopotamia / the Fertile Crescent. This is roughly the placement of what is believed to be the “Garden of Eden,” according to many scholars.
- Abraham, father of Isaac and grandfather of Jacob, was the first “Jew.” He circumcised himself at the age of ninety-nine, at the command of God. Abraham also circumcised the men of his household, including Ishmael, his son with the handmaiden Hagar. Ishmael is believed to be the progenitor of the Islamic faith.
- Abraham’s great-grandson, Joseph, (son of Jacob) is responsible for bringing the Jewish people to Egypt. After being sold into Egyptian slavery by his brothers, Joseph eventually rose to power as an advisor to Pharaoh and orchestrated a great rationing of food. The need for food brought his family to Egypt, leading to their eventual reunion with Joseph and the twelve tribes’ settling in the land of Egypt.
- Many generations after the reunion of brothers, the people of Israel were enslaved in Egypt. This led to their liberation by God through the actions of Moses. The Exodus narrative Moses led the people to their freedom, and eventually back to the Promised Land: Israel.
- Throughout the centuries, the Jews have been residents – welcome and not – of many different host nations. Following the expulsion from Jerusalem after the destruction of the First and Second Temples, Jews became residents of what is now known as the “Diaspora,” meaning, the land outside the Holy Land of Eretz Yisrael.
- Diaspora Jewry has both flourished (specifically, American Jewry) and been eliminated (European Jewry during WWII; the Holocaust). Yet, in the year 2012, Jewish life is as diverse, academic, culturally nuanced, and internationally recognized as it has ever been.
- Currently, the three main branches of Judaism are Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox. In addition to these branches are Reconstructionist Jews, Renewal Jews, and many different strands of Orthodoxy.

2) Christianity – The Bare Minimum

- Christianity is a monotheistic faith.
- The roots of Christianity can be traced back to Jesus, a Jewish man born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth. (Both locations in modern-day Israel/Palestine)

- Most Christians agree that Jesus was born to a virgin mother, lived as a teacher and healer in the Galilee region of modern-day Israel, was baptized by John the Baptist, began his ministry just three years before his death, was ordered crucified by the Romans, (ruling body at the time) died on the cross, and rose from the dead three days later.
- Jesus' two core messages were, "love your neighbor" and "live a life of holiness." Jesus believed in social transformation and the power of the individual for good.
- The accounts of Jesus' life are chronicled in the four gospels of John, Matthew, Mark, and Luke.
- The development of Christianity happened entirely after Jesus' death. Christianity eventually moved through the Mediterranean, and by the fourth century CE became the dominant religion of Eurasia.
- Christians believe that Jesus is the Messiah. Christians believe that Jesus died, was buried, and was resurrected from the dead to grant eternal life to those who believe in him.
- In Christian theology, grace is God's gift of God's self to humankind. It is understood by Christians to be a spontaneous gift from God to man - "generous, free and totally unexpected and undeserved."⁷
- The sacred text of Christianity is the New Testament. The New Testament builds upon Torah/N'vi'im/K'tuvim (the TaNaKh, also referred to as the Old Testament) with twenty-seven separate books making up the whole of Christian sacred literature.
- What is now known as Catholicism was once the dominant form of Christianity throughout the world. In the 1500s, the theologian and German monk Martin Luther led the Protestant Reformation through his Ninety-Five Theses; a tirade against what he claimed were the indulgences of the Roman Catholic Church. This led to the Protestant Reformation and the formation of multiple sects of Christianity, including Protestantism, Presbyterianism, and Lutheranism, to name a few.
- Today, there are over 2.2 billion Christians around the world.

3) Islam – The Bare Minimum

- Islam is a monotheistic faith.
- The roots of Islam are attributed to Ishmael, son of Abraham with his handmaiden Hagar.
- The early beginnings of Islam involve a man named Muhammad. Muhammad (born in 570 CE) was living in the wilderness outside Mecca when he received a vision from the prophet Gabriel. This vision occurred during what was to become the month of Ramadan. This vision included early revealing of the Qu'ran, which Muslims believe is the sacred, unaltered word of God.
- Mecca, the holiest site in the world for Muslims, is in modern-day Saudi Arabia.
- The Qu'ran, in its entirety, is about as long as the Torah or the New Testament. It is composed of 114 chapters of unequal length, called *suras*.
- Muslims believe that Muhammad was the final prophet in a long list of prophets, including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Following the vision from Gabriel, Muhammad began to preach the teachings of the Qu'ran to all who would listen. Muhammad eventually died in the year 632 CE.

⁷ 'Grace', Komonchak et al (eds), Joseph A (1990). The New Dictionary of Theology. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan. 437

- Islam and Muslim both originate from the same Arabic word meaning, “one who submits to God.”
- Islam is entirely built around submission and devotion to one God, who is known as “Allah.”
- Muslims believe that Allah is beyond human comprehension.
- Islam is built upon five pillars, or principles. Each of these is a sign of commitment to the Muslim faith. They are:
 - 1) Belief in the unity of God
 - 2) Praying five times a day (*salat*)
 - 3) Giving charity (*zakat*)
 - 4) Fasting during the holy month of Ramadan
 - 5) Pilgrimage to Mecca⁸ (Hajj)
- Islam features two main sects: Sunni and Shia. There are currently 1.5 billion followers of Islam, and it is the fastest-growing religion in the world.

⁸ Reuven Firestone, *An Introduction to Islam for Jews*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2008)

Unit 2: God

This unit focuses on the notion of “God” as a core entity in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It begins by asking students to articulate their feelings and questions about God, and moves into an exploration of how God manifests in these religious belief systems. The goal of this unit is not to convince students that God should appear a certain way, or should play a role in their lives. Rather, this unit serves to educate students on how most Jews, Christians, and Muslims each perceive or value the entity of God with regards to their religion.

Much of this unit is experiential. It begins and ends with submissions to the online video journal. Content will be derived from different sources, mainly articles and book excerpts. However, the instructor should feel free to incorporate as many “alternative” sources as he or she deems necessary, from television shows to comic books to Broadway theater productions. The key to this unit is *creativity*. The more creative the method of engagement, the more comfortable students will feel relating to the topic of God.

Enduring Understandings:

- There exists a common unifying principle in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: God as one central, eternal entity.
- Human beings each perceive of God in unique ways, including a lack of belief in God.

Knowledge:

- In Judaism, God is One; the source of unity.
- In Judaism, God exists from the first page of Torah.
- Christianity promotes the idea of “The Trinity:” God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- In Christianity, Jesus is part human *and* part God.
- Islam teaches that God is the creator of all; all begins and ends with God.
- “Muslim” means “One who submits to God.”

Unit Objectives:

- Students will be able to recognize their own feelings and beliefs about God.
- Students will be able to describe their own relationship (or lack thereof) with God.
- Students will be able to develop questions about God’s existence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.
- Students will be able to distinguish between the God of Judaism, God of Christianity, and God of Islam.
- Students will be able to connect God and prayer (the next unit in this guide); prayers are ways of communicating with God.

Evidence of Learning:

- Students will submit entries to their online video journals twice – at the beginning and end of this unit. Instructor can feel free to give students a copy of their assessment rubric, or simply write the student an email with comments and observations following the submission of the video.
- These two separate videos will give students the opportunity to demonstrate visually and creatively their own unique and acceptable perceptions of God – both before and after this unit.
- At the conclusion of the unit, students will participate in facilitated dialogue groups with members of other faiths. This will be their opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned and ask questions about that which they are still curious.

Assessment #2: God Unit

Pre-Unit Video

For this installment of your online video journal, you will be asked to express yourself on the topic of God. Looking ahead to unit as a whole, we will be looking at what Judaism, Christianity, and Islam each say about God. Does God exist in these three religions? How? Where does God exist for Christians, for Muslims, or for Jews? What does God look like? How are notions of God similar in these three religions? Where are they different? How is God used as a force of good? Where might God be seen as a source of negativity or pain?

Before starting this unit, **you** have the opportunity to think about your own personal conception of God. Do you have a relationship with God? Why or why not? What do you, as a student in this course, personally believe about God's role in these three religions?

By first clarifying your own personal beliefs and convictions, you can then dive fully into what these different religions say about the topic. Remember that **everything** is fair game, as long as you approach each topic with a sense of maturity and respect – for yourself, your religion, and the religious beliefs of others.

Videos should be no longer than 10 minutes. However – preparing for the video, including gathering your supplies, picking your setting, and writing down your answers *before* answering them on-camera, should take between 45 minutes and an hour, if not longer.

Please save this prompt and your answers in your course folder. It will come in handy during our Culmination workshop at the conclusion of the course.

Here is your prompt:

Name: _____

Date of Filming: _____

Setting: Where are you going to film yourself, and why did you choose that location?

Clothing: What are you going to wear in your video, and why did you choose this outfit?

Participants: Who else is joining you in this video, and why are they joining you?

Props: What props are you going to use in this video, and why are you using them?

Additional: What other additional people, props, artifacts, or personal stories will you include to tell your feelings about God?

Questions to Address in your Pre-Unit Video:

- 1) Prior to the start of this unit, what do you personally believe about God?

- 2) Does God exist?

- 3) Where does God exist?

- 4) When do you feel/see/experience God?

- 5) Is your understanding of God a “Jewish” understanding?

- 6) What do you think Christianity says about God?

- 7) What do you think Islam says about God?

- 8) What are you most looking forward to learning about God in this unit?

- 9) What are you most apprehensive about learning about God in this unit?

- 10) What is one question you hope to answer by the end of this unit?

Lesson 1: What's Up with God?

Essential Focus: An introduction to the concept of “God” in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Objectives:

- Students will be able to articulate their position on the notion of God.
- Students will be able to recall a moment in which they themselves felt aware of God in some way.
- Students will be able to defend the beginnings of a personal theology
- Students will begin to create a bond with their peers, instilling in them a sense of camaraderie and community as they study together

Resources Needed:

Quotes from 10-15 individuals (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim) on God (see Resource 2.1, below)

Post-it notes

Thick black markers or pens

Pens or pencils

Bold-colored tape

Timeline:

00-05 – Set Induction

05-15 – Introduction

15-40 – Activity 1

40-50 – Snack and Socializing

50-70 – Activity 2

70-80 – Conclusion

Set Induction: Instructor will say to the class, “I want you to take a moment to close your eyes, get comfortable, and open up your mind. Clear it of your thoughts. Fire up your imagination. When you have done that, I want you to do the following:” (wait a beat) “I want you to picture God in your mind.”

Instructor should prepare for student pushback or discomfort. Resist by saying, “the floor is open. God can look any way you want God to look. There’s no set answer, no rules, just a mind visual that you keep for yourself in your own brain. What does God look like to you?”

After giving students a few more moments to think and visualize, instructor will then say: “I want you to know that each and every one of you – your visualization was completely valid, acceptable, kosher. No matter what you thought about or what God looked like to you, each of you was completely valid. You passed!”

Instructor will then move into the Affinity Grouping activity.

Introduction to Affinity Grouping

Instructor will then pass out post-it notes and pens or pencils to the entire class. They will engage in an activity called “Affinity Grouping,” where they will take that mental image of God one step further.

Affinity grouping involves participants writing their individual thoughts about a specific topic on different post-it notes, and then affixing those post-its to one wall in no particular order. The grouping comes when the participants step back to look at everyone’s individual post-its and then *group them together* according to where they see commonalities and separations. Post-its must be written in **thick black marker** and big so participants can see the words from far away. The bigger, the better.

Step One: Instructor will prompt students with a few different questions about God (questions are below) Students will be given a few moments to write **a few words** about the first thing that comes to mind. Then, they will place their post-it on the board in no particular order. After posting their post-its, students will step back from the board.

Questions and Possible Answers:

1. Who, or what, is God? (*An almighty being, the big man in the sky, a nonexistent force, a deity*)
2. What qualities or characteristics set God apart? (*Compassion, omnipotence, ability to see everything*)
3. Where does God “live?” (*In the heavens, in the sky, between all of us, under a rock*)
4. What is God’s job, or role in the world? (*To create harmony, to help humans*)
5. What is one word – and one word only – which encompasses your relationship with God? (*Complicated, fulfilling, nonexistent*)

Step Two: Instructor will then say, “Now I want you to re-group the post-its, silently, in a way that makes sense to you. Things to consider: where are the similarities, and where are the differences amongst these answers? Which comments go together? What comments have nothing to do with one another? The choice is yours but you have to do it silently – and you have until I call “time” to do this.”

This step should result in a board full of post-its grouped into some sort of interesting way.

Step Three: Instructor should ask two or three students to say a few words about the groupings they collectively created and what they might say about this community’s approach to God. Is this a collective feeling of uncertainty, blind faith, trepidation, lack of faith, etc.? Is everyone on board with God in the same way?

This activity should provide a great “launch pad” for the rest of the unit.

Activity 1: Where Do You Stand on God?

Essential Question: Where are you personally “at” in your understanding of God?

Instructor will have a list of statements and comments about God from various people, (Resource 2.1) from theologians to comedians. A wide variety of perspectives on God is essential, and instructor should feel free to add to the list provided.

Instructor will have all students stand near a line in a large room. A line of tape on the floor will denote an ascending agreement line: one end will say “strongly agree,” the other “strongly disagree,” and in the very middle, “agree.” Instructor will read out the statements **without sharing who wrote them**. Allow participants to take a minute, think about where they belong on the line, and then stand where they choose. Once everyone has found their “place,” educator will ask for 2-3 people to offer their reasoning for why they chose their area on the line.

Educator should *not* share the author of the quote; that part comes next.

Activity 2: Meet the Thinkers

Essential Question: What do these thinkers think about God, and how do you relate?

Educator will then have students sit in two circles, one inside the other, inner facing outer. Educator will distribute each of the quotes he or she read aloud, written on a strip of paper *with* the author’s name, to students. Students will have about 6-7 minutes to read the quote and study it with the person sitting across from them. Once time has been called, the inner circle will rotate in one direction and the outer circle will hand the paper to the person sitting next to them. New pairings will study new quotes together until time is up.

Questions to consider:

- 1) Do you agree with this quote? Why or why not?
- 2) Is this a perspective you share on God?
- 3) What type of perspective on God is this quote? (Humorous, satirical, scientific, etc.)
- 4) If you knew who this particular thinker was before, does this quote go with your perception of them?
- 5) Can you share a particular time in your life when this quote really captured your understanding of God?

The lesson will end with the community sharing with one another what they discovered and studied with their peers. Discussion will include which quotes resonated, which quotes did not, and what, if any, they would add to the ones that struck a chord.

Conclusion: Instructor will then ask the entire group, “**What is one word – and only one – which encompasses your feelings on God after this lesson?**”

Lesson 2: God in Judaism

Essential Focus: The Jewish perception of God, rooted in the book of Genesis.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to articulate God's presence in Judaism as stemming from the first page of Torah.
- Students will be able to categorize two distinct representations of God in the book of Genesis: God of creation and God of destruction
- Students will be able to reflect on their past experiences with God, either in Bar/Bat Mitzvah experiences or other encounters.
- Students will be able to compose a prayer to God

Introduction: TBD by Instructor

Activity 1: Let There Be God

Essential Question: Who is God, according to the Jewish people?

Students will study B'reshit 1 and B'reshit 6 (Resource 2.2). Instructor should consider an alternate form of studying the text, such as asking students to "pantomime" each text, act it out, have small groups, go to the sanctuary and read it directly from the Torah, etc.

B'reshit 1 details the beginnings God's creation of the world. B'reshit 6 details God's decision to destroy the world. Students will compare and contrast these two seemingly disconnected concepts of God.

Questions for students upon completing both texts:

- What are some of the ways in which these two texts paint contradicting pictures of God?
- Why do you think God wanted to destroy the Earth so soon after creating it?
- Do these texts humanize God? How so? How not so?
- How might these texts portray God in positive ways? In negative ways?

Activity 2: God is One

Essential Question: How does the "Shema" prayer bring us closer to God, or closer to each other?

Instructor should photocopy the Shema resource (Resource 2.3) or project it on the board. The focus of these questions is on the concept of God as One in Judaism. What does it mean that God is one? What is God's connection to Am Yisrael? Do we agree or disagree that God is a source of unity in Judaism?

Activity 3: God on the Ground

Essential Question: How do we communicate or engage with God outside the synagogue?

Students will read and analyze a prayer from Rabbi Naomi Levy's book, "Talking to God." (Resource 2.4) This book is an entire collection of poetry and prose meant to help human beings communicate with God.

The prayer included is a Morning Prayer written by Rabbi Levy. Instructor should use this prayer to connect students with the idea that God is an entity with which we *can* communicate, no matter our state of mind. Whether we are happy, sad, frustrated, angry, or confused, God is there for us. We *can* communicate with God.

Instructor should also have students tell a story about their own individual experiences with God. Bar/Bat Mitzvah may be a great entry point for this conversation.

To conclude this activity, instructor should have students compose their own prayer to God.

Conclusion: TBD by Instructor

Lesson 3: God in Christianity

Essential Focus: The Christian perception of God

Objectives:

- Students will be able to recount the story of Jesus' birth and his connection to God.
- Students will be able to describe what makes up the Trinity, and what the Trinity means to Christians
- Students will be able to differentiate between Christian and Jewish approaches to God.
- Students will be able to describe how the number "three" can be powerful within different contexts

Introduction: TBD by Instructor

Activity 1: Who is God, for Christians?

Essential Question: How do Christians view God?

Instructor should present Resource 2.5 to students. Have students read the text out loud, in pairs, or act it out as one class. The essential question boils down to, how does God exist for most Christians? How does this one writer choose to portray God? Where does the concept of free will come in for Christians, and what does it have to do with God? What is Judaism's take on the notion of free will?

Activity 2: Jesus Christ, Superstar

Essential Question: Who was Jesus Christ?

Instructor should first decide which portrait of Jesus he or she wishes to present, and the best method for that presentation. Should instructor present a skit which details the birth of Jesus? Is a written biography of Jesus more appropriate? Are there songs, plays, or movies which demonstrate the portrait of Jesus the teacher wishes to present?

Some questions to consider while prepping the activity are:

- Who was Jesus?
- Where was Jesus born? Who were his parents?
- How did Jesus of Nazareth become "Jesus Christ," the son of God?
- How has Jesus become the "center" of Christianity?

Most modern historians agree that Jesus existed, that he was born and lived in the Galilee (Roman Judea at the time) and that he was born Jewish. He was crucified in Jerusalem by order of the Romans. He is viewed by many Christians as having been born to a virgin; (immaculate conception by way of the Holy Spirit) performed miracles, founded the Christian Church, and

died as a sacrifice of sorts to achieve atonement. Traditionally, Christians believe that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, from which he will return.

Activity 3: The Trinity

Essential Question: What is the Trinity?

The Trinity is the idea that God in Christianity is somehow a combination of three separate entities – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father is believed to symbolize Jesus’ father or the “father-like omnipotent God,” the Son is Jesus Christ himself, and the Holy Spirit is believed to be the source of Mary (Jesus’ mother)’s immaculate conception. (Virgin birth)

This is a confusing and puzzling idea that even Christian philosophers have trouble wrestling with. In Resource 2.6, below, there is a diagram of the Trinity. The questions instructor may want to pursue are:

- Why is the Trinity such a powerful symbol in Christianity?
- Why is three a significant number in religion?
- Where does the number three play a significant role in Judaism?
- Where does the number three play a significant role in your life?

Conclusion: TBD by Instructor

Lesson 4: God in Islam

Essential Focus: A lesson on the Muslim perception of God

Objectives:

- Students will be able to articulate God’s centrality in Islam
- Students will be able to recount the story of Muhammad’s encounter with Gabriel
- Students will be able to debate the connection between “Allah” and “Muslim”
- Students will be able to compare and contrast the figure of Muhammad with that of Jesus
- Students will be able to hypothesize a possible conversation between God, Jesus, and Allah

Introduction: TBD by Instructor

Activity 1: Allah Who?

Essential Question: Who or What is Allah, and how is Allah the center of Islam?

The Muslim belief that God is the only “ultimate reality” draws comparisons in both Judaism and Christianity. All begins and ends with God, according to the Qu’ran. This exercise should introduce students to the concept of Allah, conceiver of the Qu’ran. Different methods for doing this include:

- Looking up different descriptions of Allah in Islam and doing learning stations with students
- Presenting different videos (check YouTube) on what individuals say about Allah (Cat Stevens’ “A is for Allah” is a great example. This video specifically teaches the Arabic alphabet through Muslim terms)
- Have students act out the story of Muhammad receiving the Qu’ran from the angel Gabriel (see <http://www.holidays.net/ramadan/muhamd.htm> for more information)

Activity 2: Introducing: Muhammad

Essential Question: Who was Muhammad, and what does he have to do with Allah?

Muslims believe Muhammad was a prophet –the final prophet in a long succession of prophets including Moses and Jesus. Muhammad encountered the angel Gabriel in the wilderness near Mecca. It was there that Gabriel “revealed” the Qu’ran to Muhammad, who then promoted these teachings and began the religion of Islam. Muhammad was not a god, nor do Muslims consider Muhammad to *be* God. Rather, Muslims credit Muhammad as the great prophet who brought forth the teachings of the Qu’ran.

In introducing Muhammad to students, instructor may want to consider:

- Dressing up (or asking another teacher/member of the clergy) as Muhammad and speaking with students
- Watching a film that introduces the life and times of Muhammad

- Exploring references to Muhammad in the Qu’ran (Resource 2.7)
- Inviting someone well-versed in the life of Muhammad to come in to speak

Activity 3: Synthesis

Essential Question: What do God, Jesus, and Allah have in common?

This is an opportunity for students to synthesize what they have learned thus far in the unit. By staging a comparison between God, Jesus, and Allah, students have the opportunity to discuss the similarities and differences between them.

The best way to do this is by way of a three-way conversation. Two ways of doing this are:

- Instructor prepares, ahead of time, a three-way conversation between Jesus, Allah, and “God.” (Try to be as respectful and even-handed as possible with these outfits/representations). What would the three say to each other if they were all in the same room? Would this look like an interview?
- Have students split into three groups. (A groups) Each group writes a short biography of either Jesus, Allah, or “God.” Then A groups break into B groups – at least one member of A must be present in each “B” group. A group students teaches their character’s biography and engages in a discussion with their B group about their specific character. Students should likely be provided with supplementary materials. (This is a modified “Jigsaw” activity)

Conclusion: TBD by Instructor

Lesson 5: Encounter

Memorable Moment – Interfaith Dialogue

Students will visit a house of prayer or community center separate from their own to meet with a group from that institution or organization. Though it is preferred that this group be around the same age as the participants in this course, this may not always be possible. The group should be representative of the “folk” sector – not clergy or senior staff; rather, congregants, members, or relatively-to-regularly involved participants or religious school students.

This meeting will involve facilitated dialogue, a shared meal, and an opportunity to debrief the learning which has taken place throughout the unit. The first step in planning this meeting (after scheduling the visit at the start of the school year) is to get in touch with the facilitator of whatever group you will be working with. Discuss with them how things have gone thus far, where students are at in their learning processes, and any concerns or lingering questions each group may have.

A few logistical questions to consider ahead of time are:

- How will your group be getting to the facility?
- What part of the facility will the group be meeting in?
- Will there be time for a tour of the facility?
- Who is providing the meal? Are there any expenses that need requesting ahead of time?
- Will families be invited to participate?
- Who is responsible for making and creating resources ahead of time?

A few thoughts regarding appropriate practice in a house of worship are:

- What should guests wear at this facility?
- What types of food should or should not be served? (In the event of a potluck, make sure to communicate this clearly ahead of time to those bringing food)
- What is the appropriate way for guests to address clergy members, lay leadership, etc.?

Please note that the structure below is meant as a helpful guide for setting up a successful encounter with another group. Please also note that whichever group is hosting will, in all likelihood, not be focusing their yearlong learning or programming on learning about Judaism. However – this should not matter. The sole purpose of these encounter sessions is to introduce students to what “the people actually do,” providing a realistic backdrop to the knowledge they have acquired thus far in this course.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to articulate their learned knowledge on the topic of God – meaning, they will be able to identify key themes, topics, names for God, and representations or lack thereof of God in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
- Students will be able to identify lingering questions they have regarding God.

- Students will be able to compare and contrast the attitudes of the folk (average day-to-day followers of a particular religion) with the elite (clergy and heavily involved lay people) on the topic of God.
- Students will be able to create relationships – hopefully, lasting ones – with members of a faith community different from their own
- Students will be able to evaluate a connection to their own Jewish identity through these dialogue groups.

Timeline: (Approximation)

00-10 – Welcome and Introductions

10-40 – Concentric Circles

40-80 – Meal

80-110 – Facilitated Dialogue Groups

110-120 – Closure and Dismissal

Activity 1: Concentric Circles (~30 minutes)

When the entire group is gathered together, begin by thanking everyone for coming / hosting. Instruct the group to make two circles, one inside the other, inner facing outer. Facilitator will ask a series of questions which each pair has to address. Before getting to the questions, participants must introduce themselves to one another and say a little bit about themselves. Where do they go to school, where do they work, what’s their favorite thing to do on the weekend, favorite ice cream flavor, etc.

Questions:

- 1) Tell each other about the history of your involvement in your congregation/school/community center, etc.
- 2) Tell each other about family – what are your family’s origins, how long have you lived in this community, etc.
- 3) Tell each other about the first time you remember encountering the word “God.”
- 4) Tell each other about whether or not God plays a role in your daily life.
- 5) Tell each other one piece of knowledge you have acquired about God that is separate from your own faith’s beliefs.
- 6) Tell each other about a time in which you felt truly connected to your community.
- 7) Tell each other about a time in which you questioned something everyone around you appeared to simply accept.
- 8) Tell each other what you respect most about the other’s faith’s perspective on God.
- 9) Tell each other what lingering question you may have about the other’s perspective on God or their faith.
- 10) Tell each other something very few people know about you.

Activity 2: Breaking Bread (~40 minutes)

Once everyone enters the dining area, ask participants to sit next to someone they have not yet spoken to. On each person’s plate should be one of the ten questions listed above. Ask

participants to address the questions in front of them before eating, and feel free to let that be a conversation opener for the rest of the meal.

Before and after the meal should be prayers/blessings customary to each religion with a brief explanation. (For example: Ha Motzi, Birkat HaMazon, Grace)

Activity 3: Breakout Groups (~30 minutes)

Instructor(s) should break participants into as many groups as there are facilitators – this could mean instructors, teachers, parents, lay leaders, clergy. Once participants have been grouped, facilitator should take their group to a secluded part of the facility so there is more privacy. Participants should be comfortable and sit however they wish to.

For the breakout groups, the facilitator should be aware of their role as facilitator, but also the need for emotional safety and comfort. Facilitator should keep in check the various emotional temperatures of each participant and ensure that they set right from the start an environment of respect and tolerance.

Questions:

- 1) Talk about a time in which you were moved by the actions of another religion, or someone of another religion.
- 2) Talk about a time in which you were perplexed or challenged by another religion.
- 3) Talk about a time in which you felt proud of your religion or religious background.
- 4) Talk about a time in which you were embarrassed or uncomfortable with your religion or ethnic background.
- 5) Talk about a time in which you felt God was present, or a part of your life in some way.
- 6) Talk about a time in which you struggled with the idea of God.
- 7) Talk about a time in which you challenged the idea of God.
- 8) Talk about a time in which you questioned the status quo, or “the way things are” of your religion.

Conclusion:

For the conclusion of this encounter visit, instructor(s) may want to facilitate some sort of activity which focuses on the community coming together to share with one another. Some suggestions:

- A candle-passing activity where everyone says something they learned or are still curious about.
- Teaching and singing a popular song within each respective community – about gratitude, blessings, thanksgiving, etc.
- Teach and sing the “Traveler’s Prayer,” by Debbie Friedman (Resource 2.8)

Assessment #3: God Unit

Post-Unit Video

Congratulations on finishing the “God” unit! For this video installment, you will be asked to reflect on what you learned during these lessons. First, please review your pre-unit submission to the Online Video Journal. This will help you answer some of the questions posed below. Next, sit down with these questions and really think about your answers. Look back over your notes and readings and recall some of the activities you did to help answer these questions.

Please save this prompt and your answers in your course folder. It will come in handy during our Culmination workshop at the conclusion of the course.

Here is your prompt:

Name: _____

Date of Filming: _____

Setting: Where are you going to film yourself, and why did you choose that location? How is it different, or is it the same, as your previous location? Why?

Clothing: What are you going to wear in your video, and why did you choose this outfit? How is it different, or is it the same, as your previous outfit? Why?

Participants: Who else is joining you in this video, and why are they joining you? Are they the same individuals or different individuals than those in your previous videos? Why?

Props: What props are you going to use in this video, and why are you using them? Are they the same props you used in the first video, or not? Why?

Additional: What other, additional people, props, artifacts, or personal stories will you include to tell how you have progressed or not progressed in your understanding of God?

Questions to Address in your Post-Unit Video:

- 1) Following the conclusion of this unit, what do you personally feel about God? Have your feelings changed?

- 2) What do most Jews believe about God? What is the Jewish conception of God?

- 3) Do Christians believe in God? How does God appear in the Christian tradition?

- 4) Do Muslims believe in God? How does God appear in the Islamic faith?

- 5) How is the portrayal of God similar for Jews, Christians, and Muslims? Name one example.

- 6) How is the portrayal of God different for Jews, Christians, and Muslims? Name one example.

- 7) What is one thing that surprised you in this unit?

8) What is one stereotype you confronted or preconceived notion you addressed during this unit?

9) Did you answer the one question you had moving into the God unit? If so, how?

10) What is one question you have moving forward into our next unit? (Prayer)

Resources

Resource 2.1: What'd they Say? Different Quotes on the Topic of God

1. “We need to find God, and [God] cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence. See how nature – trees, flowers, grass – grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence... We need silence to be able to touch souls.”
-Mother Teresa, Roman Catholic nun
2. “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: It is [God’s] megaphone [which] rouses a deaf world”
-C.S. Lewis, British Scholar and Novelist, Writer of “The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe.”
3. “God, to me, it seems, is a verb, not a noun, proper or improper.”
-Richard Buckminster Fuller, American engineer and architect
4. “We turn to God for help when our foundations are shaking, only to learn that it is God who is shaking them.”
-Charles West, British author
5. “Of all created comforts, God is the lender; you are the borrower, not the owner.”
-Samuel Rutherford, 17th century Presbyterian theologian
6. “We attempt to gain and express knowledge of God by describing what God is *not*; rather than by describing what God *is*. We can never truly know God; we can only know what God *isn't*.”
-Moses ben Maimon, (Maimonides) 12th century Jewish theologian (paraphrased)
7. “Everyone praises what he believes; his God is his own creature, and in praising it, he praises himself.”
-Muid ad-Din ibn al-Arabi, Sufi philosopher

8. "God is a thought who makes crooked all that is straight."
-Frederic Nietzsche, 19th century German philosopher

9. "God is not only true, but Truth itself."
-Pope Leo XIII, Pope from 1878 to 1903

10. "God helps those who help themselves."
-Benjamin Franklin, one of America's founding fathers

11. "God is a comedian playing to an audience too afraid to laugh."
-Voltaire, 17th century French philosopher and writer

12. "God... a being whose only definition is that he is beyond man's power to conceive."
-Ayn Rand, Russian-born American writer and novelist

13. "People fashion their God after their own understanding. They make their God first and worship him afterwards."
-Oscar Wilde, Irish writer, poet, and playwright

14. "God writes...not in the Bible alone, but also on trees, and in the flowers and clouds and stars."
-Martin Luther, 15th century German priest and scholar, responsible for the Protestant Reformation

15. "If God has created the world, his primary worry was certainly not to make its understanding easy for us."
-Albert Einstein, German-born American physicist

Resource 2.2 – God of Creation / God of Destruction

B'reshit 1:1-5: The God of Creation

Below we find the first five lines of B'reshit, which detail the beginning of God's creation of the world. These are the first five lines of the Torah:

1. בְּרֵאשִׁית, בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים, אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם, וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ
2. וְהָאָרֶץ, הִיְתָה תְהוֹ וְבִהוּ, וְחֹשֶׁךְ, עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם; וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים, מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם
3. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים, יְהִי אוֹר; וַיְהִי-אוֹר
4. וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאוֹר, כִּי-טוֹב; וַיְבַדֵּל אֱלֹהִים, בֵּין הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ
5. וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאוֹר יוֹם, וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ קָרָא לַיְלָה; וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר, יוֹם אֶחָד

“When God began to create heaven and earth – the earth began unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water – God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness God called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, a first day.”

-Etz Chayim Torah and Commentary

Questions:

- How does God appear in this text?
- What may be some of the assumptions this text makes of God?
- According to this text, what are some of the things God controls or is responsible for?

B'reshit 6:9-13: The God of Destruction

Just six chapters later, we witness a very different God. This episode depicts God in a very different light:

9. אֵלֶּה, תּוֹלְדוֹת נֹחַ--נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים הָיָה, בְּדַרְתָּיו: אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים, הִתְהַלֵּךְ-נֹחַ
10. וַיּוֹלֶד נֹחַ, שְׁלֹשָׁה בָנִים--אֶת-שָׁם, אֶת-חָם וְאֶת-יָפֶת
11. וַתִּשְׁחַת הָאָרֶץ, לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים; וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ, חָמָס
12. וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָרֶץ, וְהִנֵּה גִשְׁחָתָהּ: כִּי-הִשְׁחִית כָּל-בָּשָׂר אֶת-דַּרְכּוֹ, עַל-הָאָרֶץ
13. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְנֹחַ, קַץ כָּל-בָּשָׂר בָּא לִפְנֵי--כִּי-מָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ חָמָס, מִפְּנֵיהֶם; וְהִנְנִי מִשְׁחִיתָם, אֶת-הָאָרֶץ

“This is the line of Noah. – Noah was a righteous man; he was blameless in his age; Noah walked with God. Noah begot [fathered] three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

The earth became corrupt before God; the earth was filled with lawlessness. When God saw how corrupt the earth was, for all flesh had corrupted its ways on earth, God said to Noah, “I have decided to put an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with lawlessness. Because of them, I am about to destroy them with the earth.”

-Etz Chayim Torah and Commentary

Questions:

- How does God appear in this text?
- What may be some of the assumptions this text makes of God?
- According to this text, what are some of the things God controls or is responsible for?
- How can we compare and contrast these two seemingly opposing portraits of God?

Resource 2.3– Shema Yisrael: God is One

שְׁמַע | יִשְׂרָאֵל, * יְהוָה | אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְהוָה | אֶחָד: *

ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד. —In an undertone

וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ * אֶת יְהוָה | אֱלֹהֶיךָ, בְּכָל-לִבְּךָ, וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ,
וּבְכָל-מְאֹדְךָ: וְהָיָה הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, אֲשֶׁר | אָנֹכִי
מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם, * עַל-לִבְּךָ: וְשָׁנַנְתָּם לְבְנֵיךָ, וּדְבַרְתָּ בָּם, בְּשַׁבְּתֶךָ
בְּבֵיתְךָ, וּבְלִכְתֹּךָ בְּדַרְךָ, וּבְשֹׁכְבֶךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ:
וְקִשַׁרְתָּם * לְאוֹת | עַל-יָדְךָ, וְהָיָה לְטָטְפֹת
בֵּין | עֵינֶיךָ: וּכְתַבְתָּם | עַל-מְזוּזֹת בֵּיתְךָ, וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ:
Touch the arm-tefillin at ... and the head-tefillin at ... then kiss your fingertips.

Hear o Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One.
Blessed is God's great name, forever and ever.

You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart,
With all your soul and with all your might.
Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day.
Impress them upon your children.
Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away,
When you lie down and when you get up.
Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead;
Inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.⁹

Questions:

- What does it mean that “God is One?”
- Why is God's name “blessed?”
- How might this text be a symbol of unity and togetherness amongst Jews across the world?
- Why is it important to “bind them as a sign upon your eyes and upon your hands?”
- How does the theme of “unity” relate to Jewish identity today?

⁹ Mishkan T'filah, a Reform Siddur. (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2007) 154

Resource 2.4 – Talking with God

A Morning Prayer

Rabbi Naomi Levy¹⁰

There are so many things I take for granted. May I not ignore them today.

Just for today, help me, God, to remember that my life is a gift, that my health is a blessing, that this new day is filled with awesome potential, that I have the capacity to bring something wholly new and unique and good into this world.

Just for today, help me, God, to remember to be kind and patient to the people who love me, and to those who work with me too. Teach me to see all the beauty that I so often ignore, and to listen to the silent longing of my own soul.

Just for today, help me, God, to remember you.

Let this be a good day, God, full of joy and love. Amen.

Questions:

- How does God appear in this text? What is God's role in the universe, according to the author?
- How does this text expect God to respond?
- What is this prayer attempting to do? What is its purpose?
- How might reciting this prayer make *you* feel closer to God in some way?

¹⁰ Rabbi Naomi Levy. Talking to God: Personal Prayers for Times of Joy, Sadness, Struggle, and Celebration. (New York: Doubleday Press, 2002) p.23

Resource 2.5 – God in the Christian Faith

“Christians believe in what they all the one True God, who is perfect, has existed forever, and created the world and all its itty-bitty little creatures. But when God created humans, he came up with something extra special; he not only gave people pinky toes and eyebrows, but also the one-of-a-kind-gift of *free will*.

God gave people the ability to choose whether to follow him and have a relationship with him or to go our own separate ways. The reason he did this seems pretty obvious to me: Suppose you desired a relationship with a special someone. Would you prefer a person who decidedly picked you out of a crowd, or would you rather have a robot that was programmed to do nothing else? I’d prefer the chooser. I often wonder why my wife decided on me, but I won’t argue; I’ll just prefer the voluntary, albeit semi-crazy, decision she made. So, too, God opted for a humanity with free choice. But when he did so, he took a risk, because people can decide to go their own ways and forget about him.

God made it clear from the get-go that following him meant letting the good times roll, while going against him would be a major bummer for all parties involved.”¹¹

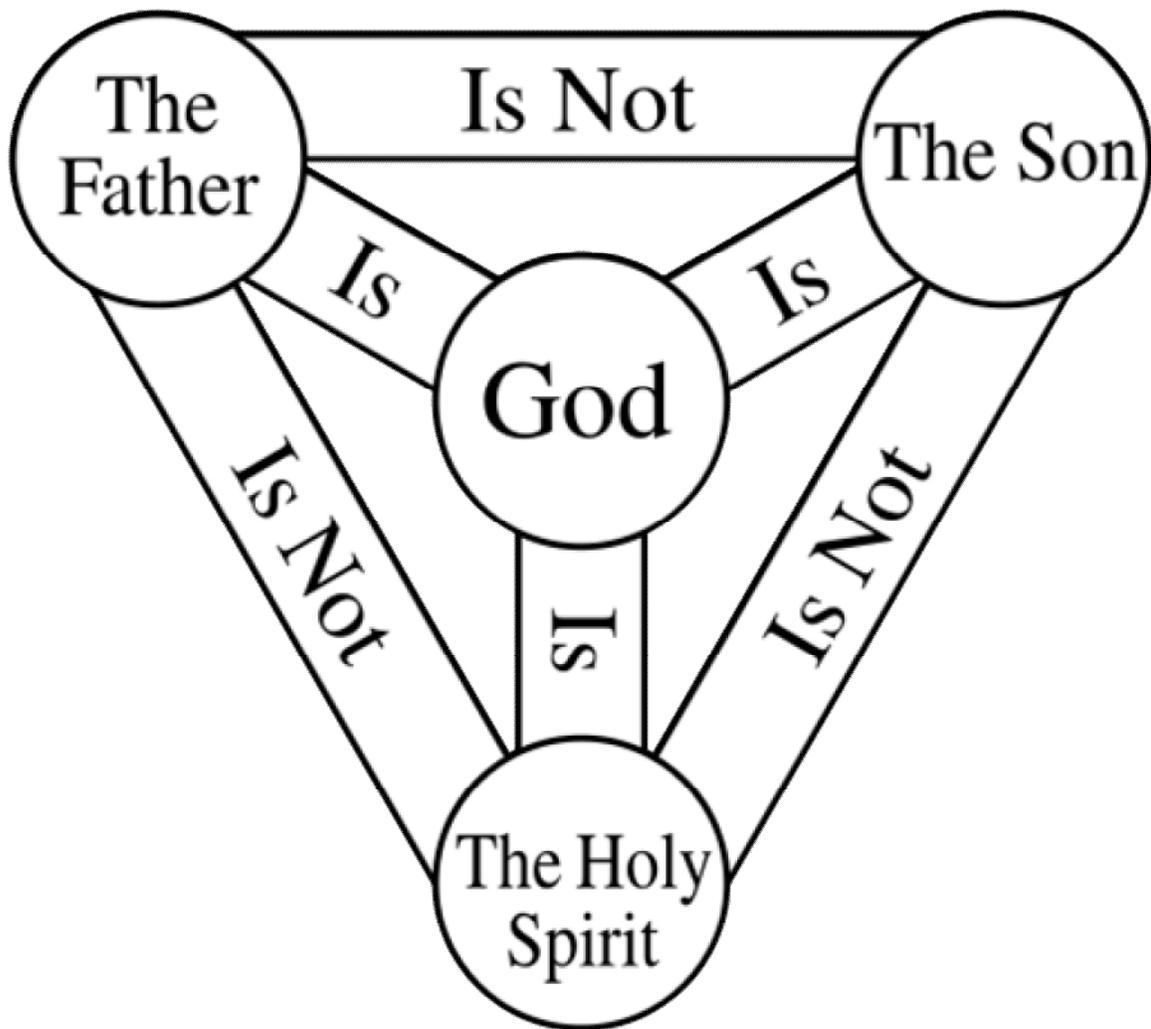
-Richard Wagner, *Christianity for Dummies*

Questions:

- How does this text make God appear?
- How are God and humans connected in Christianity?
- What does this text say about God’s role in the universe?
- Do you agree or disagree that “following [God] me[ans] letting the good times roll, while going against [God] would be a major bummer for all parties involved?”

¹¹ Richard Wagner. *Christianity for Dummies: A Reference for the Rest of Us*. (Hoboken: Wiley Publishing, 2004) p.12

Resource 2.6 – The Trinity



Resource 2.7 – Muhammad in the Qu’ran

Qu’ran 3:144

وَمَا مُحَمَّدٌ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ أَفَإِنْ مَاتَ أَوْ
قُتِلَ أُنْقَلَبْتُمْ عَلَىٰ أَعْقَابِكُمْ وَمَنْ يَنْقَلِبْ عَلَىٰ عَقْبَيْهِ فَلَنْ يَضُرَّ
اللَّهَ شَيْئًا وَسَيَجْزِي اللَّهُ الشَّاكِرِينَ ﴿١٤٤﴾

Muhammad is not but a messenger. [Other] messengers have passed on before him. So if he was to die or be killed, would you turn back on your heels [toward unbelief]? And he who turns back on his heels will never harm Allah at all; but Allah will reward the grateful.

Qu’ran 33:40

مَا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَا أَحَدٍ مِنْ رِجَالِكُمْ وَلَكِنْ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَخَاتَمَ
النَّبِيِّينَ ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا ﴿٤٠﴾

Muhammad is not the father of [any] one of your men, but [he is] the Messenger of Allah and last of the prophets. And ever is Allah, of all things, Knowing.

Qu'ran 47:2

وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَءَامَنُوا بِمَا نُزِّلَ عَلَيَّ مُحَمَّدٍ وَهُوَ الْحَقُّ
مِن رَّبِّهِمْ كَفَّرَ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَأَصْلَحَ بَالَهُمْ ﴿٢﴾

And those who believe and do righteous deeds and believe in what has been sent down upon Muhammad - and it is the truth from their Lord - He will remove from them their misdeeds and amend their condition.

Qu'ran 48:29

مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ أَشِدَّاءُ عَلَى الْكُفَّارِ رُحَمَاءُ بَيْنَهُمْ تَرَاهُمْ
رُكَّعًا سُجَّدًا يَبْتَغُونَ فَضْلًا مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانًا سِيمَاهُمْ فِي وُجُوهِهِمْ
مِنْ أَثَرِ السُّجُودِ ذَلِكَ مَثَلُهُمْ فِي التَّوْرَةِ وَمَثَلُهُمْ فِي الْإِنْجِيلِ كَزَرْعٍ
أَخْرَجَ شَطْأَهُ فَفَازَرَهُ فَاسْتَغْلَظَ فَاسْتَوَىٰ عَلَىٰ سُوقِهِ يُعْجِبُ الزُّرَّاعَ
لِيَغِيظَ بِهِمُ الْكُفَّارَ وَعَدَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ مِنْهُمْ
مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٢٩﴾

Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; and those with him are forceful against the disbelievers, merciful among themselves. You see them bowing and prostrating [in prayer], seeking bounty from Allah and [His] pleasure. Their mark is on their faces from the trace of prostration. That is their description in the Torah. And their description in the Gospel is as a plant which produces its offshoots and strengthens them so they grow firm and stand upon their stalks, delighting the sowers - so that Allah may enrage by them the disbelievers. Allah has promised those who believe and do righteous deeds among them forgiveness and a great reward.

Resource 2.8 – The Traveler’s Prayer, by Debbie Friedman

May we be blessed as we go on our way
May we be guided in peace
May we be blessed with health and joy
May this be our blessing, amen.

May we be sheltered by the wings of peace
May we be kept in safety and in love
May grace and compassion find their way to every soul
May this be our blessing, amen.¹²

140. T’FILAT HA-DERECH

Music: Debbie Friedman
Text: Based on the Liturgy
Capo/Key: o/C

C C7 F G7
May we be blessed as we go on our way
C Bbmaj7 F G
May we be guided in peace
C C7 F Fm
May we be blessed with health and joy
Dm G C
May this be our blessing Amein
C7 F G E7 Am F G C C7(C)
A–mein a–mein, may this be our blessing Amein (2x)

May we be sheltered by the wings of peace
May we be kept in safety and in love
May grace and compassion find their way to every soul
May this be our blessing Amein
© 1988 Deborah Lynn Friedman (ASCAP) Sounds Write Productions, Inc. (ASCAP)

¹² Union for Reform Judaism. Shireinu: Our Songs – A Songbook for Camps, Conclaves, Kallot, and Retreats. (New York: Transcontinental Music Publications, 2000) 81

Unit 3: Prayer

This unit focuses on the notion of “prayer” as a core component of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This Curriculum Guide takes a twofold perspective on prayer: prayer is a way of encountering the Divine, and it is a method of engaging the community; of connecting, coming together, and uniting as one cohesive whole. Altogether, prayer is a positive act which enables and empowers human beings and entire communities. It is this point of view which guides and shapes this unit.

Students will undeniably be coming from a variety of positions on the topic of prayer. Most, if not all, will have already had the experience of leading a community in prayer at their Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Many will also have likely experienced prayer on different sacred occasions. Some will be familiar with Shabbat prayer, others with High Holiday worship. Students may have mixed emotions about prayer, or see it as something “forced” upon them. The objective of this unit as a whole is to guide students to a place where they see prayer as something meaningful and positive for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. It should appear approachable, accessible, and worthwhile to students.

This unit focuses on the core elements of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim prayer; essentially, when to pray, how to pray, and to whom *do* we pray? What does prayer do? Does one have to believe in God in order to pray? The unit will build upon the content explored in the previous unit, “God.” It will empower students to feel that prayer is something both universal and wholly private; an act of building community, and a deeply personal act they can make their own.

Enduring Understandings

- Prayer offers ways to communicate with the Divine; both individually and in a group setting.
- Prayer enables sacred encounters which engage all the senses.
- Prayer inspires human beings to care, to heal, to act, to praise, and to join together as one community.
- All organized group prayer involves a set rubric; a combination of poetry and prose.

Knowledge: - Key concepts/ definitions

- Jewish, Christian, and Muslim prayer occurs at specific times and under specific conditions.
- Jewish prayer consists of three daily prayer sequences – Shacharit, Mincha, and Ma’ariv
- Christian worship is the act of showing God that one is in awe of and devoted to him.
- Muslim prayer occurs five times daily, and follows a prescribed sequence called *salat*.
- Prayer both inspires and challenges – it can be a source of joy, pain, thanksgiving, and forgiveness.

Unit Objectives:

- Students will be able to articulate the commonalities and differences between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim prayer.
- Students will be able to identify the nineteen benedictions of the Amidah.
- Students will be able to define “T’filah,” “grace,” “worship,” and the Arabic word “*salat*.”
- Students will be able to compare and contrast Jewish, Christian, and Muslim prayer experiences.

Evidence of Learning:

- Students will submit two entries to their online video journals. At the beginning of the unit, they will ask themselves what prayer means to them. When has prayer helped them? When has prayer hurt them, or let them down? To whom are they praying when they are in synagogue, or out in nature, or praying alone in their room? Why is prayer significant?
- At the end of the unit, students will submit an entry which focuses on what they learned. What can now they articulate about Jewish, Christian, or Muslim prayer? How has this knowledge enhanced what they have already learned about these religions?
- Additionally, students will be able to engage with members of other faith-based communities in the fifth lesson of the unit. By participating in facilitated interreligious dialogue with members of another synagogue, church, or mosque, students will demonstrate to themselves, their peers, and their teachers the knowledge they have accumulated thus far.

Assessment #4: Prayer Unit

Pre-Unit Video

This new unit examines prayer as it exists in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Looking ahead to the unit as a whole, we will be looking at what each of these religions says about prayer. What is prayer *for*? What is its purpose? How is prayer used as a way of bringing the community together? Is there space for personal prayer in Judaism, Christianity, or Islam?

For this installment of your online video journal, you will be asked to express yourself on the topic of prayer. Before starting this unit, **you** have the opportunity to think about your own personal relationship with prayer. How do you personally feel about prayer? Does it have a place in your life? Is it a source of good, of confusion, a mystery, or something with which you cannot connect? Where is God in all this?

By first clarifying your own personal beliefs and convictions, you can then dive fully into what these different religions say about the topic. Remember that **everything** is fair game, as long as you approach each topic with a sense of maturity and respect – for yourself, your religion, and the religious beliefs of others.

Videos should be no longer than 10 minutes. However – preparing for the video, including gathering your supplies, picking your setting, and writing down your answers *before* answering them on-camera, should take between 45 minutes and an hour, if not longer.

Please save this prompt and your answers in your course folder. It will come in handy during our Culmination workshop at the conclusion of the course.

Here is your prompt:

Name: _____

Date of Filming: _____

Setting: Where are you going to film yourself, and why did you choose that location?

Clothing: What are you going to wear in your video, and why did you choose this outfit?

Participants: Who else is joining you in this video, and why are they joining you?

Props: What props are you going to use in this video, and why are you using them?

Additional: What other additional people, props, artifacts, or personal stories will you include to tell your feelings about prayer?

Questions to Address in your Pre-Unit Video:

- 1) Prior to the start of this unit, what do you personally believe about prayer?

- 2) Do you pray? When do you pray?

- 3) Where is God in your idea of prayer?

- 4) Is your understanding of prayer a “Jewish” understanding?

- 5) What do you think Christianity says about prayer?

- 6) What do you think Islam says about prayer?

- 7) What are you most looking forward to learning about prayer in this unit?

- 8) What are you most apprehensive about learning about prayer in this unit?

- 9) What is one question you hope to answer by the end of this unit?

Lesson 1: What is Prayer?

Essential Question: What is prayer?

Objectives:

- Students will be able to identify that “prayer” – or, connecting with the Divine – has a variety of definitions and interpretations
- Students will be able to demonstrate different methods of praying.
- Students will be able to show how prayer is a way of connecting with something greater than one’s self.
- Students will be able to compare three different ways of praying.
- Students will be able to deduce the difference between individual and communal prayer.
- Students will be able to develop a body movement, facial expression, or sound which encompasses their feelings on prayer.

Resources Needed:

Sound amplification

A recording of Madonna’s “Like a Prayer”

Lyrics of “Like a Prayer,” projected or copied for participants

Yoga mats or body towels – enough for 1/3 of the class

Small hand drums

A candle

Timeline:

00-05 – Set Induction

05-20 – Introduction

20-35 – Rotation 1

35-50 – Rotation 2

50-60 – Snack and Socializing

60-75 – Rotation 3

75-80 – Conclusion

Core Learning Experiences:

Set Induction: Like a Prayer

Students will enter their learning space; the lights will be turned off or dimmed. Students will be instructed to sit comfortably. Instructor, without saying anything, will begin to play the song “Like a Prayer,” written by Madonna and Patrick Leonard. The song will play in its entirety.

Introduction: Analyzing “Like a Prayer”

When the song has concluded, instructor will put the lights back on and either project the lyrics on the board or pass out song sheets to all students. (Resource 3.1) Instructor will have one or

two students read the song lyrics in their entirety. If time allows, instructor can guide a more in-depth analysis of each stanza of the song.

Then, teacher will ask:

Questions:

- How did it feel to listen to this song being played? (*Cool, weird, fun, I don't know, surreal, ethereal, awesome, etc.*)
- What were some of the emotions you experienced in this song? (*Happy, energized, moved*)
- Can you describe what is going on in this song? What emotions is the singer trying to convey? (*There's a lot of music, it's very dramatic, it's powerful, something is really stirring her*)
- What do you think is "like a prayer?" In other words, what do you think the singer singing about? (*Love, a relationship, some sort of encounter, an allegiance to something greater than oneself*)
- Does prayer – for you – compare to the feelings and emotions expressed in this song? How? (*Feels like I'm connecting with something greater than myself, I feel energized, I feel moved, I don't connect with this at all; I feel frustrated, blocked, stuck*)

Instructor will say: this song is our introduction to the study of prayer. For some of you, prayer feels a lot like this song: happy, joyous, exciting, powerful. For others of you, prayer feels like something completely foreign or uncomfortable; something less joyous, less approachable, less like "home." Our goal in this new unit is to explore not only what prayer means for Jews, Christians, and Muslims, but also – how can prayer be a positive, approachable, energizing, and meaningful experience for all of us?

Rotations:

Today's learning will focus on three separate manifestations of "prayer." Students will be split into three groups, and in their groups they will cycle through three stations. They will have fifteen minutes at each station; ample time to interact with whatever elements of prayer are represented at that station.

If there is more than one "instructor" present, please have them be present at the station to lead the group. However – recognizing that this may not be possible, instructor will want to print out directions for each rotation group to guide themselves.

The goal of this endeavor is to have students access creative and unique ways of "praying" that look different from the traditional *siddur*-in-the-synagogue model. This lesson should leave students with positive feelings about prayer.

Rotation 1: Yoga Prayer

Involves: Yoga mats or towels, video projection or yoga poses + prayers

Intro: As yoga has grown as a popular form of exercise in the non-religious world, yoga prayer has grown as an authentic way of praying. Yoga involves the entire body, deep breathing, and tuning out the world around you. Yoga is about connecting to something greater than yourself. But since a participant is following the same pattern as everyone else, emphasis is *also* on the communal.

For this rotation, instructor should find either a video which students can follow on their own similar to the one shown below *or* a series of poses students can follow on their own. Resource 3.2, below, is an example.

Video: <http://www.prayerandyoga.com/1/post/2011/02/first-post.html>

Rotation 2: Drum Circle

Involves: As many hand drums as there are students

Intro: Drumming is all about rhythm. Drumming is all about keeping time for others. Drumming is also about self-expression. In this rotation, one “leader” will guide the drummers through a series of rhythmic moves. They will vary in timber and tone. The whole point is that everyone is doing it together, making it sound good. The emphasis is on the communal.

Rotation 3: Meditation

Involves: A quiet, isolated room, a lit candle (preferred)

Intro: Sometimes quiet spaces are the hardest places for us to be. In those quiet moments, we are alone with our thoughts. We are alone with ourselves. When we meditate, we look inward. We listen to ourselves. We communicate with that which needs our attention, and our love. When we mediate, we focus on our own personal, private prayer. What in our body, or in our mind, needs quieting? What in our body needs joy? Meditation is our way of praying with ourselves. The emphasis is on private prayer.

Have students spend fifteen minutes doing silent meditation, followed by a five minute reflection. (Resource 3.3)

Conclusion: The Last Squish

All students will come back together. Instructor will ask each student to take a moment and think of one “squish:” one noise, movement, sound, facial expression, or gesture that represents how they feel about prayer following this activity. After giving some wait time, have each student share theirs.

In final summary, **instructor will say:** Prayer is all about connection. Prayer is all about expression. Prayer is all about turning inward, examining ourselves, and expressing the things we carry inside us out to the rest of the world. These are all ways of accessing something greater than ourselves. What this “final squish” was intended to do was have us share our internal thoughts and feelings with the greater group.

Lesson 2: Prayer in Judaism

Essential Focus: A lesson on the Jewish approach to prayer

Objectives:

- Students will be able to locate key symbols, artifacts, prayers, and objects in their synagogue's sanctuary
- Students will be able to deduce the importance of said symbols and artifacts in their synagogue's sanctuary and certain prayers in their synagogue's *siddur*
- Students will be able to define *t'filah* (prayer)
- Students will be able to define *Shacharit* (morning prayer) *Mincha* (afternoon prayer) and *Ma'ariv* (evening prayer)
- Students will be able to describe a specific part of the *Shacharit* service
- Students will be able to arrange the *Shacharit* service from memory
- Students will be able to identify the nineteen benedictions of the *Amidah*
- Students will be able to describe how God is present in the nineteen benedictions of the *Amidah*

Set Induction: TBD by Instructor

Activity 1: Prayer Scavenger Hunt

Essential Question: Where do we find prayer in our synagogue?

For this activity, instructor should prepare some sort of scavenger hunt which involves either the *siddur* used by the synagogue/religious school, the physical space in which students pray (sanctuary, chapel, etc.) or both. This scavenger hunt should challenge students to pay new attention to their prayer environment, the objects they typically use during prayer, and the prayers themselves.

A sample “prayer scavenger hunt” can be found in Resource 3.4. This sample scavenger hunt combines questions about both the *siddur* and the prayer setting for the synagogue.

Activity 2: Ordering the Prayer Service

Essential Question: How is the [Daily *Shacharit*] Jewish prayer service constructed?

Instructor should house this activity in the sanctuary or request several copies of the synagogue's *siddurim*. In this activity, students (alone or in pairs) will each be assigned one prayer from the *Shacharit* service. They will be asked to write a short blurb of that prayer – essentially, what that prayer is all about in three sentences – on the back side of an index card. Students will also need to identify where their prayer falls in the *Shacharit* service. (What comes before, what comes after)

At this time, instructor should make clear that *Shacharit* is just one of three daily prescribed prayer sequences for Jews. In addition to *Shacharit*, Jews traditionally gather for *Mincha*

(afternoon prayer) and *Ma'ariv* (evening prayer) every day. These sequences are part of a Jewish experience called *T'filah* – prayer. Jews are instructed to face toward Jerusalem when they pray.

Once students have their blurb written, they will then write the name of the prayer on the front of the index card. Holding it in front of them, together, the group will collectively decide the order of the prayers (with the instructor on-hand to help straighten things out). Once the group has assembled themselves in the correct order, students will read out loud – in order – their respective blurbs.

Instructor should feel free to ask students if and how they connect with the prayer they were assigned, or how they feel that prayer is connected to the greater *Shacharit* picture.

Instructor should select as many prayers as there are students are present that day – it does not have to be an expansive, all-inclusive list.

Activity 3: Get up, Stand up: the *Amidah*

Essential Questions: What are the nineteen benedictions of the *Amidah*? Where is God in the *Amidah*?

The *Amidah* contains nineteen benedictions which center on three core themes – praise, petition, and thanksgiving, each of which are directed towards God.

In this activity, students will need to get “up close and personal” with all nineteen of the benedictions. Instructor should use the Larry Hoffman opus “My People’s Prayer Book: The *Amidah*” (Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997) to guide different conversations on the themes explored in the *Amidah*.

Instructor should feel free to structure this time however he/she sees fit. An important focus for this activity should be: where is God in the *Amidah*? How is God a part of this prayer sequence? Why is that relationship important? Do you personally feel connected to God through prayer?

Finally – how is the *Amidah* an opportunity for communication with God? How is the *Amidah* an opportunity for coming together as a community? How is this one particular prayer a chance for students to experience the objectives of this particular unit?

Conclusion: TBD by Instructor

Lesson 3: Prayer in Christianity

Essential Focus: A lesson on the Christian approach to prayer

Objectives:

- Students will be able to recall how a Christian worship service is typically structured
- Students will be able to recall that Christian worship occurs on Sunday
- Students will be able to describe where and how God is present in Christian worship
- Students will be able to discuss different Christian prayer services and analyze what makes them unique
- Students will be able to define “Eucharist” and describe its connection to the Last Supper
- Students will be able to describe how sacraments are a controversial yet significant component of Christian worship
- Students will be able to critique versions of Christian worship

Introduction: TBD by Instructor

Activity 1: What Comprises Christian Prayer?

Essential Questions: How is a Christian prayer service constructed? Where is God in Christian worship?

Unlike in Judaism, Christian worship does not fall neatly into all the same categories. Different denominations, churches, spiritual leaders, and communities conduct prayer in entirely different ways. However – there is one constant theme in all Christian prayer experiences: God is central. (That, and organized, structured church services occur on Sundays)

Some communities attempt to convey this message through liturgy, following the rigid structure of the original Christian Church. This means, following the same pattern week after week, year after year, and repeating the same set of music at each gathering. The emphasis in these liturgically-based churches is on the grandeur and mystery surrounding God. By contrast, there are churches which pride themselves on free worship – the order is more flexible and much less bound to tradition. “The focus or structure of [this type of] service may change based on what’s happening that day – either within the church or in the secular world.”¹³

This activity can introduce students to a typical Christian prayer service in any number of ways. Instructor should consider doing a show-and-tell with hymnals, Psalters (books of Psalms), or any number of prayer-related documents from local churches. Instructor may want to share a videotaped Mass service, or bring in a series of recordings from different churches. Students can evaluate the different documents and books, describe how they are similar to one another and how they are different, discuss common themes in the texts, and focus on the general “gist” of a Christian worship service.

¹³ Richard Wagner. *Christianity for Dummies: A Reference for the Rest of Us*. (Hoboken: Wiley Publishing, 2004) 231

Activity 2: May God Be With You (And Also with You)

Essential Question: What are some examples of how Christians pray?

This is an opportunity to show – not tell – what goes on in an actual Christian worship service. The most effective means for doing so will be to take students to a worship service. If this is possible, make sure to consult with the appropriate parties ahead of time.

If going there isn't possible, YouTube is an excellent substitute. The following are just two videos which capture the essence of [highly musical, performance-based] Christian prayer in these two distinct communities. Instructor should feel free to investigate any and all churches/videos which fit the direction of this lesson.

Lakewood Church in Houston - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qj_e28NYb1Y

Oslo Gospel Choir in Oslo - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KptngBL-JIQ&feature=related>

Following the viewing of these videos, or the prayer service itself, instructor should use the Post-Prayer Reflection piece with students. (Resource 3.5)

Activity 3: Communion in Community

Essential Question: What is the Eucharist all about?

The Eucharist is a significant part of many Christian worship experiences. It is a “sacrament,” “ordinance,” or “rite,” in which humans reenact Jesus’ instructions at the Last Supper¹⁴: “And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” (Luke 22:19) This rite involves the sharing of bread and wine, and it is a call to Christians to enable Christ to be present through their public worship as much as possible.

For this activity, instructor will want to relate this experience to something that is already a part of students’ lives. Instructor may want to parallel the experience of the Eucharist with other activities we do as human beings to be as fully engaged in what we do as possible. For example:

- Using breathing or focus activities to clear our minds before a test
- Going to the batting cages to practice before a big game
- Drinking tea to relax our bodies before going to bed
- Warming up our voices before singing in a concert

What these four activities point to is the notion that we must do certain activities in order to be truly successful at the things we wish to accomplish. We must engage our minds and bodies in order to prepare. In a similar vein, the Eucharist allows Christians to prepare themselves to worship Christ; to allow Jesus to be a part of their daily lives in a more real, honest way.

Conclusion: TBD by Instructor

¹⁴ Please See the Rituals and Celebrations Unit – Lesson 3 for more information on Rites, Sacraments, and Ordinances

Lesson 4: Prayer in Islam

Essential Focus: A lesson in the Muslim approach to prayer

Objectives:

- Students will be able to recall that “*salat*” (prayer) is the second of Islam’s five pillars
- Students will be able to discuss the five times daily in which Muslims pray
- Students will be able to define “*adhan*,” the Muslim call to prayer
- Students will be able to define “*raka’a*,” bowing
- Students will be able to debate why Islam prohibits images of Allah
- Students will be able to compare Muslim prayer with Jewish and Christian prayer

Introduction: TBD by Instructor

Activity 1: The Call to Worship

Essential Questions: What does Muslim prayer look like? Sound like?

Ritual prayer in Islam follows a prescribed sequence of words with accompanying bodily positions. (Singularly called *rak’a*) *Salat*, as prayer is called, is the most important means of worshipping God in Islam.¹⁵ As the second of the Five Pillars, prayer is as essential to a practicing Muslim’s life as testifying God’s existence, the giving of charity, reflecting and fasting, and making pilgrimage to Mecca.

Muslim prayer is an activity which takes place at five specific times during the day. They are:

- Early morning, right before dawn
- Noon
- Mid-afternoon
- Sunset
- Evening, between an hour after sunset and midnight.

In areas heavily populated with Muslims, each time of prayer is announced with the “call to prayer,” known as *adhan*. The sound of this call to prayer can be heard here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUHDYIJHaOQ&feature=related>

The words to *Ad’han* can be found in Resource 3.6.

Muslims must face Mecca when they pray. Mecca is the religious center of the Muslim world, located in what is now Saudi Arabia. (Similar to how Jews face toward Jerusalem during prayer)

In this activity, students should be introduced to the concept that Muslim prayer takes place under these various circumstances. Instructor should consider engaging students in the process of

¹⁵ Malcolm Clark. *Islam for Dummies: A Reference for the Rest of Us*. (Hoboken: Wiley Publishing, 2003) 141

Muslim prayer. Or, perhaps students visit a nearby mosque and engage in *salat* themselves. Either way, students should experience this unique method of praying, so different from the typical Jewish prayer service.

Activity 2: Unity

Essential Question: How are “*Tawhid*” and the “*Shema*” prayer similar?

In Islam, there exists the concept of “*Tawhid*,” meaning unity or oneness of God.

Tawhid, also spelled **Tauhid**, Arabic **Tawhīd**, (“making one,” “asserting oneness”), in **Islām**, the oneness of God, in the sense that he is one and there is no god but he, as stated in the **shahādah** (“witness”) formula: “There is no god but God and Muḥammad is His prophet.” Tawhid further refers to the nature of that God—that he is a unity, not composed, not made up of parts, but simple and uncompounded. The doctrine of the unity of God and the issues that it raises, such as the question of the relation between the essence and the attributes of God, reappear throughout most of Islāmic history. In the terminology of Muslim mystics (Ṣūfīs), however, tawhid has a pantheistic sense; all essences are divine, and there is no absolute existence besides that of God. To most Muslim scholars, the science of tawhid is the systematic theology through which a better knowledge of God may be reached, but to the Ṣūfīs, knowledge of God can be reached only through religious experience and direct vision.¹⁶

This concept relates to the First Pillar of Islam: Testifying that there is only one God, and Muhammad is His prophet. This concept also relates to the Jewish prayer, the Shema, which proclaims God’s oneness in the universe.

In this activity, students should compare the idea of Tawhid with the idea behind the Shema, which they presumably studied in Unit 2: God. Resource 3.7 compares the two, with questions.

Activity 3: Putting it All Together

Essential Question: How are Jewish, Christian, and Muslim prayer sequences related? How are they different?

For this activity, instructor should create three separate groups: Jewish prayer, Christian prayer, Muslim prayer. Each of these groups must meet separately to address the questions below. They will research their answers to the questions, and when all groups come back together they will discuss and debate the connections and distinctions among the three groups. Students may need to consult the internet, classroom documents, or their SmartPhones as a way of answering some of the questions. (This is a modified “Jigsaw” activity)

Essentially, this activity should demonstrate clearly the commonalities and differences among the three religions’ perspectives on prayer.

Questions for each group:

- Where does prayer typically happen?
- When does prayer typically happen?

¹⁶ Encyclopedia Britannica, Ed. Unknown, s.v. “Tawhid”

- How often per day does prayer typically happen?
- Who leads a prayer service?
- What are a few typical prayers or Psalms in the service?
- How is God a part of the prayer service?

Conclusion: TBD by Instructor

Lesson 5: Encounter

Memorable Moment – Interfaith Dialogue

Students will visit a house of prayer or community center separate from their own to meet with a group from that facility. Though it is preferred that this group be around the same age as the participants in this course, this may not always be possible. The group should be representative of the “folk” sector – not clergy or senior staff; rather, congregants, members, or relatively-to-regularly involved participants.

This meeting will involve facilitated dialogue, a shared meal, and an opportunity to debrief the learning which has taken place throughout the unit. The first step in planning this meeting (after scheduling the visit at the start of the school year) is to get in touch with the facilitator of whatever group you will be working with. Discuss with them how things have gone thus far, where students are at in their learning processes, and any concerns or lingering questions each group may have.

A few logistical questions to consider ahead of time are:

- How will your group be getting to the facility?
- What part of the facility will the group be meeting in?
- Will there be time for a tour of the facility?
- Who is providing the meal? Are there any expenses that need requesting ahead of time?
- Will families be invited to participate?
- Who is responsible for making and creating resources ahead of time?

A few thoughts regarding appropriate practice in a house of worship are:

- What should guests wear at this facility?
- What types of food should or should not be served? (In the event of a potluck, make sure to communicate this clearly ahead of time to those bringing food)
- What is the appropriate way for guests to address clergy members, lay leadership, etc.?

Please note that the structure below is meant as a helpful guide for setting up a successful encounter with another group. Please also note that whichever group is hosting will, in all likelihood, not be focusing their yearlong learning or programming on learning about Judaism. However – this should not matter. The sole purpose of these encounter sessions is to introduce students to what “the people actually do,” providing a realistic backdrop to the knowledge they have acquired thus far in this course.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to articulate their learned knowledge on the topic of prayer – meaning, students will be able to identify key topics, figures, definitions of prayer as they relate to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
- Students will be able to identify lingering questions they have regarding prayer.

- Students will be able to compare and contrast the attitudes of the folk (average day-to-day followers of a particular religion) with the elite (clergy and heavily involved lay people) on the topic of prayer.
- Students will be able to create relationships – hopefully, lasting ones – with members of a faith community different from their own
- Students will be able to evaluate a connection to their own Jewish identity through these dialogue groups.

Timeline: (Approximation)

00-10 – Welcome and Introductions

10-40 – Concentric Circles

40-80 – Meal

80-110 – Facilitated Dialogue Groups

110-120 – Closure and Dismissal

Activity 1: Concentric Circles (~30 minutes)

When the entire group is gathered together, begin by thanking everyone for coming / hosting. Instruct the group to make two circles, one inside the other, inner facing outer. Facilitator will ask a series of questions which each pair has to address. Before getting to the questions, participants must introduce themselves to one another and say a little bit about themselves. Where do they go to school, where do they work, what’s their favorite thing to do on the weekend, favorite ice cream flavor, etc.

Questions:

- 1) Tell each other about the history of your involvement in your congregation/school/community center, etc.
- 2) Tell each other about family – what are your family’s origins, how long have you lived in this community, etc.
- 3) Tell each other about the first time you remember encountering prayer in your faith community.
- 4) Tell each other about whether or not prayer plays a role in your daily life.
- 5) Tell each other one piece of knowledge you have acquired about prayer that is separate from your own faith’s beliefs.
- 6) Tell each other about a time in which you felt personally moved or uplifted by prayer.
- 7) Tell each other about a time in which you felt disconnected, blocked, or “shut off” during prayer.
- 8) Tell each other about a time in which you questioned something everyone around you seemed to simply accept.
- 9) Tell each other what lingering question you may have about the other’s perspective on God, prayer, or their faith.
- 10) Tell each other something very few people know about you.

Activity 2: Breaking Bread (~40 minutes)

Once everyone enters the dining area, ask participants to sit next to someone they have not yet spoken to. On each person's plate should be one of the ten questions listed above. Ask participants to address the questions in front of them before eating, and feel free to let that be a conversation opener for the rest of the meal.

Before and after the meal should be prayers/blessings customary to each religion with a brief explanation. (For example: Ha Motzi, Birkat HaMazon, Grace)

Activity 3: Breakout Groups (~30 minutes)

Instructor(s) should break participants into as many groups as there are facilitators – this could mean instructors, teachers, parents, lay leaders, clergy. Once participants have been grouped, facilitator should take their group to a secluded part of the facility so there is more privacy. Participants should be comfortable and sit however they wish to.

For the breakout groups, the facilitator should be aware of their role as facilitator, but also the need for emotional safety and comfort. Facilitator should keep in check the various emotional temperatures of each participant and ensure that they set right from the start an environment of respect and tolerance.

Questions:

- 1) Talk about a time in which you were moved by the prayer experience of another religion.
- 2) Talk about a time in which you were perplexed or challenged by another religion's method of prayer.
- 3) Talk about a time in which you felt proud of your religion or religious background.
- 4) Talk about a time in which you were embarrassed or uncomfortable with your religion or ethnic background.
- 5) Talk about a time in which prayer guided you through a difficult time in your life.
- 6) Talk about a time in which you struggled with the idea of God.
- 7) Talk about a time in which you felt challenged by or disconnected from the prayer services of your synagogue, church, mosque, etc.
- 8) Talk about a time in which you questioned the status quo, or "the way things are" of your religion.
- 9) Talk about something you feel your faith does *right*. For example, the rituals surrounding weddings, reaching out to others in need, etc.

Conclusion:

For the conclusion of this encounter visit, instructor(s) may want to facilitate some sort of activity which focuses on the community coming together to share with one another. Some suggestions:

- A candle-passing activity where everyone says something they learned or are still curious about.

- Teaching and singing a popular song within each respective community – about gratitude, blessings, thanksgiving, etc.
- Teach and sing the “Traveler’s Prayer,” by Debbie Friedman (Resource 3.8)

Assessment #5: Prayer Unit

Post-Unit Video

Congratulations on finishing the “Prayer” unit! For this video installment, you will be asked to reflect on what you learned during these lessons. First, please review your pre-unit submission to the Online Video Journal. This will help you answer some of the questions posed below. Next, sit down with these questions and really think about your answers. Look back over your notes and readings and recall some of the activities you did to help answer these questions.

Keep these notes in a safe place so you can return to them in our final unit.

Here is your prompt:

Name: _____

Date of Filming: _____

Setting: Where are you going to film yourself, and why did you choose that location? How is it different, or is it the same, as your previous location? Why?

Clothing: What are you going to wear in your video, and why did you choose this outfit? How is it different, or is it the same, as your previous outfit? Why?

Participants: Who else is joining you in this video, and why are they joining you? Are they the same individuals or different individuals than those in your previous videos? Why?

Props: What props are you going to use in this video, and why are you using them? Are they the same props you used in the first video, or not? Why?

Additional: What other, additional people, props, artifacts, or personal stories will you include to tell how you have progressed or not progressed in your understanding of prayer?

Questions to Address in your Post-Unit Video:

- 1) Following the conclusion of this unit, what do you personally feel about prayer? Have your feelings changed?

- 2) What do most Jews believe about prayer? What is one example of how prayer exists in Judaism?

- 3) What do Christians typically believe about prayer?

- 4) What do Muslims typically believe about prayer?

- 5) How is the concept of prayer similar for Jews, Christians, and Muslims? Name one example.

- 6) How is the concept of prayer different for Jews, Christians, and Muslims? Name one example.

- 7) What is one thing that surprised you in this unit?

- 8) What is one stereotype you confronted or preconceived notion you addressed during this unit?

- 9) Did you answer the one question you had moving into the prayer unit? If so, how?

- 10) What is one question you have moving forward into our next unit? (Sacred Text)

Resources

Resource 3.1: "Like a Prayer"

Music by Madonna and Patrick Leonard. Licensed to Warner Chappell Music

Life is a mystery, everyone must stand alone.
I hear you call my name and it feels like
Home

When you call my name, it's like a little prayer
I'm down on my knees, I wanna take you there
In the midnight hour, I can feel your power
Just like a prayer, you know I'll take you there

I hear your voice, it's like an angel sighing
I have no choice, I hear your voice, feels like flying
I close my eyes, oh God, I think I'm falling
Out of the sky. I close my eyes
Heaven help me.

When you call my name, it's like a little prayer
I'm down on my knees, I wanna take you there
In the midnight hour, I can feel your power
Just like a prayer
You know I'll take you there

Like a child, you whisper softly to me
You're In control just like a child, now I'm dancing.
It's like a dream, no end and no beginning.
You're here with me, it's like a dream
Let the choir sing.

When you call my name, it's like a little prayer
I'm down on my knees, I wanna take you there
In the midnight hour, I can feel your power
Just like a prayer
You know I'll take you there
Life is a mystery, everyone must stand alone.
I hear you call my name and it feels like home.

Just like a prayer, your voice can take me there
Just like a muse to me, you are a mystery
Just like a dream, you are not what you seem
Just like a prayer, no choice, your voice can take me
there.

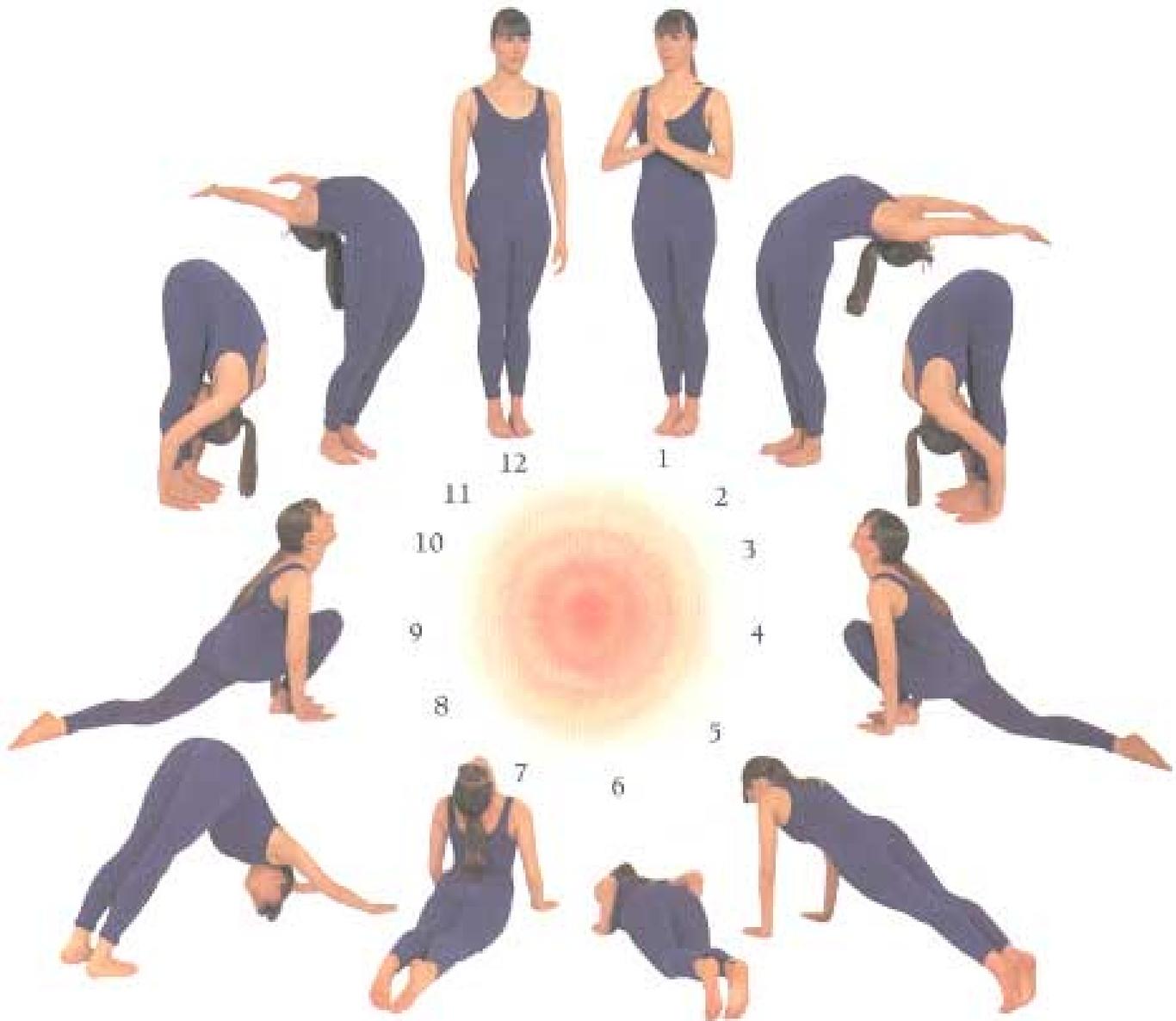
Just like a prayer, I'll take you there.
It's like a dream to me. (repeat)

Life is a mystery, everyone must stand alone.
I hear you call my name and it feels like home.

Just like a prayer, your voice can take me there
Just like a muse to me , you are a mystery
Just like a dream, you are not what you seem
Just like a prayer, no choice,
Your voice can take me there
(Just like a prayer, your voice can take me there)

Just like a dream, you are not what you seem
Just like a prayer, no choice,
Your voice can take me there.

Resource 3.2 – Yoga Prayer / Sun Salutations¹⁷



¹⁷ From <http://www.womenfitness.net/exercises.htm/yoga>

Resource 3.3 – Post-Meditation Reflection Guide

Following your meditation practice, let the following questions guide your reflection:

- 1) What did it feel like to sit in silence for fifteen minutes?
- 2) How did it affect your mind to be silent for fifteen minutes?
- 3) How did it affect your body to be still for fifteen minutes?
- 4) How did you relate to the people around you?
- 5) How did you engage with the space around you?
- 6) Did anything surprise you?
- 7) How would you describe the experience?

Resource 3.4 – Prayer Scavenger Hunt

A fun-filled fact-finding fest meant to challenge your knowledge of how your synagogue prays!

Eitz Chayim Hee... She is a Tree of Life!

Find the oldest Torah in your synagogue. When was it acquired?

What's the first word in the Torah?

What is the Hebrew name for where the Torah is kept?

What prayer does this synagogue chant when the Torah is taken out?

What page in the *siddur* would one find that prayer on?

Aliyah L'Bimah

Where does the *shaliach tzibur* (prayer leader) physically stand during services?

Why do you think he/she/they stand where they do?

What objects do you find on the *bimah*?

Name one object. Why do you think that objects is there?

Shalom, Siddur!

What is the title of your synagogue's *siddur*?

When and where was it published? Who published it?

Flip to a random page. What prayer do you find?

In five words, what is this prayer all about?

Décor, Décor!

What types of symbols do you find in the sanctuary? (On the walls, carpets, by the ark, in the entryway, etc.)?

What specifically Jewish symbols do you find in the sanctuary?

Is God's name present anywhere in the sanctuary? If so, where?

Which direction does the ark face?

Why does the ark face that direction?

Resource 3.5 – Post-Prayer Reflection Piece

Following your viewing or participating in a Christian worship service, reflect on the following:

- 1) What did it feel like to experience Christian worship?
- 2) How did the people participating in the service appear to behave?
- 3) Was this experience familiar and close, or was it totally foreign and unfamiliar to you?
- 4) What words or themes stuck out at you over others?
- 5) How did the service engage with the idea of “God?”
- 6) Did anything surprise you?
- 7) How would you describe the experience?

Resource 3.6 – The *Adhan* – Muslim Call to Prayer⁽¹⁸⁾

Table 9-1	Four Phrases That Make Up the Adhan
<i>English Translation</i>	<i>Spoken Arabic Phrase</i>
God is great (recited four times — this phrase is called the <i>takbir</i>).	Allahu Akbarthis
I witness that there is no god but God.	Ashhadu al-la ilaha illa Llah
I witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God.	Ashhadu anna Muhammadar-rasulu-Llah
Rise up for prayer (twice).	Hayya `al-s-salah
Rise up for salvation (twice).	Hayya `ala-l-falah
God is great (twice).	Allahu Akbar
There is no god but God.	La ilaha illa-Llah

¹⁸ Malcolm Clark. *Islam for Dummies: A Reference for the Rest of Us*. (Hoboken: Wiley Publishing, 2003) 144

Resource 3.7 – The Unity of God

Comparing and contrasting common themes of unity in Islam and Judaism

- 1) **Tawhid**, also spelled **Tauhid**, Arabic **Tawhīd**, (“making one,” “asserting oneness”), in **Islām**, the oneness of God, in the sense that he is one and there is no god but he, as stated in the **shahādah** (“witness”) formula: “There is no god but God and Muḥammad is His prophet.”

Tawhid further refers to the nature of that God—that he is a unity, not composed, not made up of parts, but simple and uncompounded. The doctrine of the unity of God and the issues that it raises, such as the question of the relation between the essence and the attributes of God, reappear throughout most of Islāmic history. In the terminology of Muslim mystics (Sūfīs), however, tawhid has a pantheistic sense; all essences are divine, and there is no absolute existence besides that of God. To most Muslim scholars, the science of tawhid is the systematic theology through which a better knowledge of God may be reached, but to the Sūfīs, knowledge of God can be reached only through religious experience and direct vision.¹⁹ (From Encyclopedia Britannica)

- 2) **The Shema Prayer:**

שמע | ישראל, * יהוה | אלהינו, יהוה | אחד: *

ברוך שמי כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד. —In an undertone

**ואהבת* את יהוה | אלהיך, בכל לבבך, ובכל נפשך,
ובכל מאריך: והיו הדברים האלה, אשר אנכי
מצוה היום, על לבבך: ושננתם לבניך, ודברת בם, בשבתך
בביתך, ובליכתך בדרךך, ובשכבך ובקומך:
וקשרתם לאות | על ירך, והיו לטטפת
בין עיניך: וכתבתם על מזוזות ביתך, ובשעריך:**

Touch the arm-tefillin at ...
... וקשרתם ...
tefillin at ...
והיו לטטפת ...
then kiss your fingertips.

**Hear o Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One.
Blessed is God's great name, forever and ever.**

Questions:

- 1) In what ways are “Tawhid” and the “Shema” prayer similar?
- 2) In what ways are they different?
- 3) How does each of these ideas try to describe God? Is it possible to describe God?
- 4) Islam prohibits followers from creating images of God. Why do you think this is an important value of Islam?
- 5) Does Judaism have the same type of expectation – that Jews will not create images of God?

¹⁹ Encyclopedia Britannica: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/584517/tawhid>

Resource 3.8 – The Traveler’s Prayer, by Debbie Friedman

May we be blessed as we go on our way
May we be guided in peace
May we be blessed with health and joy
May this be our blessing, amen.

May we be sheltered by the wings of peace
May we be kept in safety and in love
May grace and compassion find their way to every soul
May this be our blessing, amen.

Unit 4: Sacred Text

This unit focuses on the notion of sacred text as a significant component of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This unit views sacred text as an artifact of a religion's past. Sacred text provides a snapshot for what a religion looked like at a specific time in its history; it is an example of its principles and practices from many centuries ago. Sacred text can also be method for guiding current faith and practice. Each religion dances with its own sacred texts in different, nuanced ways.

This unit does not assume that the pieces of sacred text represented actually happened at some point in history. Rather, this unit acknowledges and takes at face value the sanctity of the Bible (TaNaKh, New Testament) and the Qu'ran. For many Jews, Christians, and Muslims, these bodies of text represent the ethical and moral foundations of their religious and spiritual lives regardless of historical validity. This curriculum guide upholds that perspective.

Studying sacred text is an opportunity to immerse oneself in the writings which ground each religion; to see physical documentation of its stories and narratives; its core ideas and visions of the future.

Enduring Understandings

- Sacred text offers myriad opportunities to experience the foundational values of a particular religion.
- As an artifact of a particular faith, sacred text provides a window onto a religion's past.
- Certain key players exist within sacred texts and serve as exemplars of each faith.

Knowledge:

- Torah is the "Etz Chayim," or Tree of Life; source of knowledge, wisdom, and identity for Jews.
- Mishnah, Talmud, and Midrash are equally significant bodies of Jewish literature which build upon verses found in Torah.
- The New Testament is a combination of TaNaKh, (Torah, N'vi'im, and Ketuvim) the canonical gospels of Mark, Matthew, John, and Luke, the Book of Acts, Epistles, and Book of Revelation.
- The Qu'ran is the revelation of God through Gabriel to Muhammad, and it is a combination of 114 units called *Suras*.
- Muslims view Muhammad as the final prophet in a long list of prophets including Moses and Jesus.

Unit Objectives:

- Students will be able to identify key characters in Torah, the New Testament, and the Qu'ran
- Students will be able to describe the scriptural and historical connections between Judaism and Torah, Christians and the New Testament, and Muslims and the Qu'ran, respectively.
- Students will be able to analyze the development of sacred texts from Torah to the Qu'ran
- Students will be able to compare the Torah, New Testament, and Qu'ran.
- Students will be able to evaluate the impact of sacred text on world religions today.

Evidence of Learning:

- Students will submit two entries to their online video journals. At the beginning of the unit, they will ask themselves what Torah means to them. What has their encounter with Torah been, up until this point? Where has Torah provided them with guidance and meaning? Where has Torah challenged them? Have they ever studied sacred text that was not Torah?
- At the end of the unit, students will submit an entry which focuses on what they learned. What can now they articulate about Jewish, Christian, or Muslim sacred texts? How has this knowledge enhanced what they have already learned about these religions?
- Additionally, students will be able to engage with members of other faith-based communities in the fifth lesson of the unit. By participating in facilitated interreligious dialogue with members of another synagogue, church, or mosque, students will demonstrate to themselves, their peers, and their teachers the knowledge they have accumulated thus far.

Assessment #6: Sacred Text Unit

Pre-Unit Video

For this contribution to your online video journal, you will be prompted with questions about the presence of sacred text in each religion we are currently studying. Looking ahead to the unit as a whole, we will be exploring what Judaism, Christianity, and Islam each say about sacred text. What are the sacred texts of these respective religions? What place does sacred text have in the religious and daily lives of Jews, Christians, and Muslims? Where are the sacred texts connected? Where are they separate and distinguished from one another? What meaning do they provide for Jews, Christians, and Muslims?

Before starting this unit, **you** have the opportunity to think about your own personal relationship with Torah, the Etz Chayim. Do you have a connection with the body of Jewish sacred text known as Torah? (This includes other sacred texts, such as Mishnah, Midrash, and Talmud) Where might the Torah guide you through your everyday life? What do you think are the similar and differing sacred texts of the Christian and Islamic faiths?

By first clarifying your own personal beliefs and convictions, you can then dive fully into what these different religions say about the topic. Remember that **everything** is fair game, as long as you approach each topic with a sense of maturity and respect – for yourself, your religion, and the religious beliefs of others.

Videos should be no longer than 10 minutes. However – preparing for the video, including gathering your supplies, picking your setting, and writing down your answers *before* answering them on-camera, should take between 45 minutes and an hour, if not longer.

Please save this prompt and your answers in your course folder. It will come in handy during our Culmination workshop at the conclusion of the course.

Here is your prompt:

Name: _____

Date of Filming: _____

Setting: Where are you going to film yourself, and why did you choose that location?

Clothing: What are you going to wear in your video, and why did you choose this outfit?

Participants: Who else is joining you in this video, and why are they joining you?

Props: What props are you going to use in this video, and why are you using them?

Additional: What other additional people, props, artifacts, or personal stories will you include to tell your feelings about sacred text?

Questions to Address in your Pre-Unit Video:

- 1) What do you personally believe about Torah?

- 2) What does the Torah mean to you, and what is its role in your life?

- 3) When do you typically interact with Torah? Is it a [mostly] positive or negative interaction?

- 4) What do you believe are Christianity's sacred texts?

- 5) What do you believe are Islam's sacred texts?

- 6) What are you most looking forward to learning about sacred text in this unit?

- 7) What are you most apprehensive about approaching in this unit?

- 8) What is one question you hope to answer by the end of this unit?

Lesson 1: The Significance of Sacred Text

Essential Question: How is sacred text an “artifact” of a religion’s past?

Objectives:

- Students will be able to articulate the importance of artifacts as relics of an individual, group, or religion’s past
- Students will be able to describe how sacred text is an artifact of a religion’s past
- Students will be able to identify similarities and differences between Torah, the New Testament, and the Qu’ran – specifically, the Old/New Testament link and the view of Muhammad as the final prophet in a line including Moses and Jesus
- Students will be able to critique three similar yet distinct versions of a biblical quote featured in the Torah, New Testament, and Qu’ran
- Students will be able to evaluate the impact of sacred text in the world today – negative and positive

Resources:

5-10 of instructor’s own personal artifacts

Resource 1.4 (From introduction unit)

6 news articles – current events where sacred text is used as a form of discrimination *and* a form of peace/love/unity

Timeline:

00-15 – Introduction: Artifacts

15-30 – Activity 1

30-50 – Activity 2

50-60 – Snack and Socializing

60-75 – Activity 3

75-80 – Conclusion

Introduction

Prior to student’s arrival, instructor will set up a table with anywhere between 5-10 of his or her own personal artifacts. These can be small things – like a piece of jewelry or an antique pen – or big things – a picture frame with loved ones, or a book, etc. The importance of these artifacts is that they tell a story of the instructor’s past; they have some sort of meaning to the instructor and convey a sense of who he or she is.

Students will enter the learning space and surround a table at the center with artifacts on it. Instructor will ask students to pair up or form trios and take one of the artifacts off the table. In their pairs or small groups, students will be asked to come up with a story that they think goes with this particular artifact. For example – if it’s a picture frame, then who do they think the people in the picture are? Where or when was this photo taken? Students can be as creative as

they want to be – the idea is for them to engage with the artifact in some sort of communal, multi-perspective way.

For example: *We believe this picture was taken at someone’s college graduation. You have one person wearing a cap and gown and holding flowers, and three other people smiling with their arms around that person – so we think they’re all related. They’re a family. Maybe this picture was taken in the late eighties? The clothes are kind of... you know... eighties!*

After giving each group a few moments, instructor will then have each pair or trio go around and share their supposed background story for the artifact. Once a group has shared, instructor will then tell them the true story of the artifact, for the sake of clarity and transparency.

For example: *Wow, this picture was taken a few years ago at my sister’s high school graduation! I can tell what you thought of our outfits! Clearly we aren’t the most fashion-forward family! Oy. Well, I remember how happy and proud we were that day, and it was the first time our family had been together in the same place in so long... so this picture really means a lot to me. It reminds me of a special moment that my family shared.*

Once all groups have shared, **instructor will say:** *“I hope this activity got you to see how my personal artifacts tell you something about who I am as a person. And as each of you proved, you all have your different interpretations of my artifacts which may or may not go along with the story they actually tell...”*

“... It is the same case for sacred text, our new unit in this curriculum. Sacred text is an artifact of a particular religion’s past. And just as my artifacts told you certain things about who I am, and what matters to me, sacred text tells the story of what Judaism is, or Christianity, or Islam, and what matters to its followers. Human beings have their own interpretations – their own readings, if you will, of each of these sacred texts. But at their core, these texts represent the formation of the religion, and the meaning behind it in the days when these texts were written.”

Activity 1: Review

Students will likely need a refresher on the history of the three types of sacred text being examined – Torah, New Testament, Qu’ran. While this will likely work as a frontal lecture, instructor should feel free to make this as creative as possible. For content, please refer back to Resource 1.4 in the Introduction unit for the timeline and historical development piece.

The suggested mode of presenting this information is: Instructor should project Resource 1.4 on the board and walk students through the major developments of the religions. Emphasis should be placed especially on the overlapping segments of each religion, such as the Old Testament/New Testament development and the idea that Muhammad is the last prophet in the line, including Moses and Jesus Christ. Instructor may want to structure some type of memory game, or simply assign reading to students prior to the lesson.

As a way of reinforcing the timeline, instructor may feel compelled to ask students to recreate (in pairs or trios) from memory their own timeline. This should not feel like an exam or a pop quiz; this should merely encourage students to work together and recall the significant events of each religion's development.

Activity 2: Text Study – The Golden Rule

In their same trios or pairs, students will be given a text study where there are three separate and similar quotes on the page. One will be from the Torah, one will be from the New Testament, and one will be from the Qu'ran. Students will have about 20 minutes to do the text study and discuss with their group the questions the text study addresses. (Resource 4.1)

This text study should elucidate the relationship between Torah, the New Testament, and the Qu'ran.

Activity 3: When Sacred Text Goes Viral

This activity will be an opportunity for students to see when sacred text is used for means of negativity, discrimination, war, destruction, or genocide. Unfortunately, instructor will likely have no trouble finding a relevant news article or current event to have this idea come to life. As a counter-balance, this activity will also be a way for students to see when sacred text is used as a form of good; of inclusion, peace, and love in the public sphere.

In the year 2012, when this curriculum guide was completed, one of the “hot button” issues regarding this was that of sexuality-based discrimination. An increase of gay teen suicides between 2010 and 2011 rocked America and led to serious examinations of incidents of bullying in schools. In California, Proposition 8 – which would eliminate the right for gay couples to marry legally in the state – was introduced to the state elections ballot in 2008. By March of 2012, this proposition was still being contested in state and federal court. Most recently, the selection of openly gay actress and comedienne Ellen DeGeneres as the new face of retailer JC Penny led to public upheaval and boycotting of stores by conservative groups.

What all these incidents point to is a fundamental rejection of homosexuality; a notion that finds its roots in Torah. In Leviticus 18:22 one reads, “*Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abhorrence.*” (Etz Chayim Torah and Commentary) Countless religious groups have used this piece of text as the basis for their perspective on homosexuality. While freedom of speech enables and encourages the right of groups to express themselves by word of sacred text, the extreme degree of negative discourse and outright discrimination based on one piece of sacred literature is disheartening and controversial.

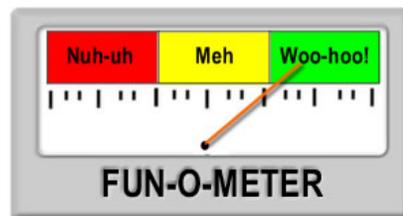
The objective of this activity is to open student's eyes to the possible negative side of literal interpretation of the Torah, New Testament, or Qu'ran. However – it also intends to open's student's eyes to the power of sacred text as a means of unity, cohesion, and peace by presenting the converse side: where is sacred text used as a form of bridge-building and tolerance? The suggested method for doing so is as follows:

- Set up three stations – a “Jewish texts” station, a “Christian texts” station, and a “Muslim texts” station.
- Find six separate articles or news items (online or in print) which exemplify the objectives stated above. (One positive, one negative for each religion)
- Allow students to flow at their own pace through the three stations with their journal.
- Encourage students to journal at each station – what are their feelings when reading or viewing these articles? How does it make them feel as citizens of a “global village?”
- After 15-20 minutes, ask students to sit back down and debrief the experience as one group.

Instructor should prepare for the possibility that there may be students who come from a more traditional or conservative viewpoint. These students may internalize the content of these articles in a different way from their peers. Creating and promoting a safe space and honest, open atmosphere will help immensely. The goal is constructive discourse – and for students to acknowledge the values of acceptance and *b'tzelem elohim* (created in the image of God) as tenets of Reform Judaism. Instructor may want to prepare him or herself with the Reform Movement’s platform about ordaining gay rabbis. (Resource 4.2) For more resources on homosexuality in the Reform Movement, visit: <http://huc.edu/ijs/PoliciesResponsa/>²⁰

Conclusion

For the final five minutes of class, instructor will ask all students to form a “Response-o-Meter” with their arms. Essentially, they will turn their arms into a gage of sorts that looks like this:



Instructor will ask, “Following this activity on sacred text, please show us your response: on a scale of “totally chill, whatever” to “totally passionate, outraged, incensed,” please rate yourself with your arms.

Students will look around the room at their peers’ responses to the subject matter. Instructor will take stock of the responses, summarize, and then tell participants that he or she is looking forward to delving deeper into sacred text in the coming weeks.

²⁰ Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion: Institute for Judaism and Sexual Orientation, 2012

Lesson 2: Sacred Text in Judaism

Essential Questions: What are the advanced texts of the Jewish tradition? How are they connected to Torah? What meaning do they have in my life?

Objectives:

- Students will be able to define *Torah sh'bichtav* (written Torah) and *Torah sh'b'al peh* (oral Torah)
- Students will be able to recognize Mishnah, Midrash, and Talmud as advanced sacred texts in the Jewish tradition
- Students will be able to distinguish later rabbinic texts from TaNaKh texts
- Students will be able to examine a page of Talmud and its structure
- Students will be able to design and compose their own page of Talmud
- Students will be able to critique their own work and the work of their peers

Introduction: Instructor should begin by asking students if they can identify the difference between “*Torah she'bichtav*” (Written Torah) and “*Torah she'b'al Peh.*” (Oral Torah) Likely, few students will be able to answer this. Instructor should consider either sounding out the various words/syllables (ie – *bichtav* is from the root “*katav,*” meaning “to write...” etc.) or simply projecting the definitions on the board.

Activity One: Texts, Texts, and Texts

Essential Question: What are the texts which follow the TaNaKh?

In whatever fashion instructor deems appropriate, students should engage in an activity which familiarizes them with the progression from Torah to Mishnah to Talmud. This may take the form of a lecture, a video, or a presentation from a member of the clergy. Likely, students will be unclear about the connection between the Five Books of Torah and the Mishnah, Gemara, Midrash, etc. This is their opportunity to establish that connection, explore the relationship between the texts, and solidify their status and significance as sacred texts.

Activity Two: Talmud for Beginners

Essential Questions: What is the Talmud? Why is it so often referenced?

This activity should be a fun and engaging toe-dip into the sea of Talmud. Any number of additional resources can help the instructor present the Talmud as a serious method of study and engagement in Jewish tradition and culture. See Resource 4.3 for a sample page of Talmud.

Activity Three: My Talmud, Myself

Essential Question: What’s a modern-day equivalent of the Talmud?

In this activity, students will be choose their own biblical quote – any biblical quote – which resonates with them, or provides them with insight and meaning. That will be their “Mishnah”

text. Students will then write their own personal commentary or elaboration on the quote they chose. That will be their “Gemara” text. Students will spend about fifteen-twenty minutes or so working on their personal page of Talmud, following the structure offered in Resource 4.4.

When everyone has finished working on their own Talmud page, the class will then engage in an activity where each student can offer commentary on their peers’ page. The easiest way to do this is by having students sit at desks in some sort of circular fashion, passing their pages in a counter-clockwise or clockwise direction. Each student reads what has been written – including the commentary of their peers – and offers their own commentary, similar to the structure of the Talmud.

Conclusion: TBD by Instructor

Lesson 3: Sacred Text in Christianity

Essential Questions: What is the New Testament?

Objectives:

- Students will be able to recall that there are twenty-seven books in the New Testament
- Students will be able to explain that “the Gospels” are the life and times of Jesus, according to Matthew, Mark, John, and Luke
- Students will be able to discuss Paul’s influence on the New Testament
- Students will be able to compare and contrast Jesus and Paul as key biblical figures
- Students will be able to critique a key passage from the New Testament and locate it within the canon of Christian sacred literature

Introduction: TBD by Instructor

Activity 1: From Old to New

Essential Question: What does “New Testament” even mean?

This activity should build upon the structure of biblical narrative introduced in the previous lesson. Instructor should refer to the images in Resource 4.5 to display the connection between the “Old Testament,” (TaNaKh) and “New Testament.” This lesson will should build upon the history explored in the guide’s introductory unit; particularly, how Jesus’ treatment of the Hebrew bible as authoritative and the apostle’s belief that their scriptures were of equal importance led to the codification of the New Testament.

For this activity, there should be recognition of certain key definitions and characters. (Resource 4.6) Defining these various components may take the form of students pantomiming them out, or doing a word uncoverage activity featuring various statements and definitions posted around the room. It may mean sending students outside to find artifacts in the natural world which represent their definition. For this activity specifically, creativity is key.

Activity 2: Jesus and Paul: They’re Kind of a Big Deal

Essential Question: What are Paul and Jesus’ contributions to Christianity, respectively?

This activity is intended as a method for engaging students with two key figures in the Christian biblical canon. They will have already been introduced to Paul in the previous activity, and they will already be familiar with Jesus from previous units. Each figure contributed significantly to the development of Christianity in separate ways.

For this activity, instructor should stage a discussion between “Jesus” and “Paul,” after Paul’s decision to convert to Christianity. This might look like the following:

- 1) Separate students into two groups: the Jesus group and the Paul group

- 2) Instruct each group to do twenty minutes worth of research on the person to whom they were assigned (using the computer, Smart Phones, or Resource 4.7's Encyclopedia Article information)
- 3) After doing research, have students come up with questions for the other person, collectively. What do they think each figure would say to the other if they were present in the same room?
- 4) Have each group elect their representative "Jesus" and "Paul"
- 5) Choose a moderator
- 6) Engage the two figures and the rest of the class in a discussion between the two figures, moderated by a fellow student.

This activity should be a creative and fun way to have students grasp the accomplishments of Jesus and Paul, respectively.

Activity 3: Words are Power

Essential Question: How can a passage from the New Testament influence passionate debate?

For this activity, students will be given a short yet powerful passage from the Gospel of John:

John 3:16 - God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life. (Common English Bible)

This passage – which, if you are from California, you may recognize from the bottom of an In & Out Burger plastic cup – is a particularly loaded and oft-quoted one from the New Testament. Questions arise when reading this quote. Should this quote be taken literally? Is Jesus really the Son of God? Can human beings really have eternal life for simply "believing?"

Instructor should ask students to form small groups. Each student should get a copy of this quote and the questions which follow it. (Resource 4.8) In their small groups, students should:

- 1) Locate this text in the corpus of the New Testament
- 2) Establish and agree upon the genre of this text (ie – this is a part of the Gospels, the Gospels were four accounts of the life and times of Jesus)
- 3) Evaluate the validity and significance of this text

Following steps 1-3, students should then share with their peers what each group discussed.

Conclusion: TBD by Instructor

Lesson 4: Sacred Text in Islam

Essential Questions: What is the Qu’ran?

Objectives:

- Students will be able to define “Qu’ran” as recitation
- Students will be able to describe how the Qu’ran was composed
- Students will be able to examine Muhammad’s connection to the Qu’ran
- Students will be able to compose a presentation focusing on Muhammad’s contribution to Islam
- Students will be able to analyze and critique a passage from the Qu’ran

Introduction: TBD by Instructor

Activity 1: (The) Recitation

Essential Question: What is the Qu’ran?

Instructor should begin by projecting the following quote on the board:

“To Muslims, the Qu’ran – meaning *recitation* – is the literal and inimitable word of God. The voice of the Qu’ran is that of God, not Muhammad, who was only a prophet and messenger of God and whose major role was only to convey the divine word of God to the people. The Qu’ran is the product of God and God alone.”²¹

Instructor should then begin a conversation about the content and development of the Qu’ran through the following questions:

- What is a *recitation*?
- Going off of what you have already learned in this course, how do you think the Qu’ran embodies a “recitation?”
- Are there versions of recitations in our corpus of Jewish text?
- Muhammad is a prophet and messenger of God. Who might be a similar figure to Muhammad in Jewish sacred text?
- What does this quote say about God’s presence in Islam? In Islamic sacred text?

Instructor should generate a conversation which allows students to synthesize some background information on the Qu’ran itself.

Activity 2: Muhammad, Muhammad

Essential Questions: Who was Muhammad? What is his connection to the Qu’ran?

²¹ Reuven Firestone. *An Introduction to Islam for Jews*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2008) 100

For this activity, students should begin by reading the biography of Muhammad included in Resource 4.9, from the Encyclopedia Judaica, or any additional biographic information of the instructor's choosing. Students should familiarize themselves with Muhammad's story, and his connection with the holy text of the Qu'ran.

Students should then group up and present some sort of biographical representation of Muhammad. This could take the form of a skit, an art piece, a song, a pantomimed act, or a question-and-answer session.

Activity 3: A Sura from Muhammad

Essential Question: How do we analyze a verse of the Qu'ran?

Instructor should begin by telling students: the Qu'ran is composed of verses making up 114 chapters (called *suras*) of non-equal length. These verses are either categorized as Meccan or Medinan, depending on where and when they were revealed by the angel Gabriel from God to Muhammad. The revealing of these *suras* took place over 23 years, starting in 610 CE, when Muhammad was forty years old, and ending in 632, the year of his death.²² Similar to the TaNaKh and New Testament, Muhammad (like Moses and Jesus before him) is mentioned in the Qu'ran.

Students will analyze the following verse from the Qu'ran: (Resource 4.10)

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَآمَنُوا بِمَا نُزِّلَ عَلَىٰ مُحَمَّدٍ وَهُوَ الْحَقُّ
مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ كَفَّرَ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَأَصْلَحَ بَالَهُمْ

And those who believe and do righteous deeds and believe in what has been sent down upon Muhammad - and it is the truth from their Lord - He will remove from them their misdeeds and amend their condition.

Questions:

- What does this text say about Muhammad?
- What does this text say about Allah's power?
- What does this text say about how believers in Islam should live their daily lives?
- What does this text say about the power of sacred text – specifically the Qu'ran?
- Do we see similar themes to this in Jewish sacred text? In Christian sacred text?
- If so, what are they?

Conclusion: TBD by Instructor

²² Ibid

Lesson 5: Encounter

Memorable Moment – Interfaith Dialogue

Students will visit a house of prayer or community center separate from their own to meet with a group from that facility. Though it is preferred that this group be around the same age as the participants in this course, this may not always be possible. The group should be representative of the “folk” sector – not clergy or senior staff; rather, congregants, members, or relatively-to-regularly involved participants.

This meeting will involve facilitated dialogue, a shared meal, and an opportunity to debrief the learning which has taken place throughout the unit. The first step in planning this meeting (after scheduling the visit at the start of the school year) is to get in touch with the facilitator of whatever group you will be working with. Discuss with them how things have gone thus far, where students are at in their learning processes, and any concerns or lingering questions each group may have.

A few logistical questions to consider ahead of time are:

- How will your group be getting to the facility?
- What part of the facility will the group be meeting in?
- Will there be time for a tour of the facility?
- Who is providing the meal? Are there any expenses that need requesting ahead of time?
- Will families be invited to participate?
- Who is responsible for making and creating resources ahead of time?

A few thoughts regarding appropriate practice in a house of worship are:

- What should guests wear at this facility?
- What types of food should or should not be served? (In the event of a potluck, make sure to communicate this clearly ahead of time to those bringing food)
- What is the appropriate way for guests to address clergy members, lay leadership, etc.?

Please note that the structure below is meant as a helpful guide for setting up a successful encounter with another group. Please also note that whichever group is hosting will, in all likelihood, not be focusing their yearlong learning or programming on learning about Judaism. However – this should not matter. The sole purpose of these encounter sessions is to introduce students to what “the people actually do,” providing a realistic backdrop to the knowledge they have acquired thus far in this course.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to articulate their learned knowledge on the topic of sacred text – meaning, they will be able to identify key terms, topics, individuals, or structural themes
- Students will be able to identify lingering questions they have regarding sacred text.

- Students will be able to compare and contrast the attitudes of the folk (average day-to-day followers of a particular religion) with the elite (clergy and heavily involved lay people) on the topic of sacred text.
- Students will be able to create relationships – hopefully, lasting ones – with members of a faith community different from their own
- Students will be able to analyze a connection to their own Jewish identity through these dialogue groups.

Timeline: (Approximation)

00-10 – Welcome and Introductions

10-40 – Concentric Circles

40-80 – Meal

80-110 – Facilitated Dialogue Groups

110-120 – Closure and Dismissal

Activity 1: Concentric Circles (~30 minutes)

When the entire group is gathered together, begin by thanking everyone for coming / hosting. Instruct the group to make two circles, one inside the other, inner facing outer. Facilitator will ask a series of questions which each pair has to address. Before getting to the questions, participants must introduce themselves to one another and say a little bit about themselves. Where do they go to school, where do they work, what’s their favorite thing to do on the weekend, favorite ice cream flavor, etc.

Questions:

- 1) Tell each other about the history of your involvement in your congregation/school/community center.
- 2) Tell each other about family’s background – what are your family’s origins, how long have you lived in this community, etc.
- 3) Tell each other about the first time you remember encountering sacred text in your faith community. What was the text, if you remember? How did it make you feel?
- 4) Tell each other about whether or not sacred text – Torah, the Bible, the Qu’ran - plays a role in your daily life. If so, what is that role?
- 5) Tell each other one piece of knowledge you have acquired about sacred text that is separate from your own faith’s beliefs.
- 6) Tell each other about a time in which you felt personally moved or uplifted by a piece of sacred text, a prayer, or an artifact of a particular faith.
- 7) Tell each other about a time in which you felt disconnected, blocked, or “shut off” from religion.
- 8) Tell each other about a time in which you questioned something everyone around you seemed to simply accept. Why did you feel compelled to question it?
- 9) Tell each other what lingering question you may have about the other’s perspective on God, Torah, Bible, Qu’ran, etc.?
- 10) Tell each other something very few people know about you.

Activity 2: Breaking Bread (~40 minutes)

Once everyone enters the dining area, ask participants to sit next to someone they have not yet spoken to. On each person's plate should be one of the ten questions listed above. Ask participants to address the questions in front of them before eating, and feel free to let that be a conversation opener for the rest of the meal.

Before and after the meal should be prayers/blessings customary to each religion with a brief explanation. (For example: Ha Motzi, Birkat HaMazon, Grace)

Activity 3: Breakout Groups (~30 minutes)

Instructor(s) should break participants into as many groups as there are facilitators – this could mean instructors, teachers, parents, lay leaders, clergy. Once participants have been grouped, facilitator should take their group to a secluded part of the facility so there is more privacy. Participants should be comfortable and sit however they wish to.

For the breakout groups, the facilitator should be aware of their role as facilitator, but also the need for emotional safety and comfort. Facilitator should keep in check the various emotional temperatures of each participant and ensure that they set right from the start an environment of respect and tolerance.

Questions:

- 1) Talk about a time in which you were moved by the sacred words of another religion.
- 2) Talk about a time in which you were perplexed or challenged by another religion's sacred text.
- 3) Talk about a time in which you felt proud of your religion or religious background.
- 4) Talk about a time in which you were embarrassed or uncomfortable with your religion or ethnic background.
- 5) Talk about a time in which the words of your faith guided you through a difficult time in your life.
- 6) Talk about a time in which you struggled with the idea of God.
- 7) Talk about a time in which you felt challenged by or disconnected from the sacred text of your religion.
- 8) Talk about a time in which you questioned the status quo, or "the way things are" of your religion.
- 9) Talk about something you feel your faith does *right*. For example, the rituals surrounding weddings, reaching out to others in need, etc.

Conclusion:

For the conclusion of this encounter visit, instructor(s) may want to facilitate some sort of activity which focuses on the community coming together to share with one another. Some suggestions:

- A candle-passing activity where everyone says something they learned or are still curious about.
- Teaching and singing a popular song within each respective community – about gratitude, blessings, thanksgiving, etc.
- Teach and sing the “Traveler’s Prayer,” by Debbie Friedman (Resource 3.8)

Assessment #7: Sacred Text Unit

Post-Unit Video

Congratulations on finishing the “Sacred Text” unit! For this video installment, you will be asked to reflect on what you learned during these lessons. First, please review your pre-unit submission to the Online Video Journal. This will help you answer some of the questions posed below. Next, sit down with these questions and really think about your answers. Look back over your notes and readings and recall some of the activities you did to help answer these questions.

Here is your prompt:

Name: _____

Date of Filming: _____

Setting: Where are you going to film yourself, and why did you choose that location? How is it different, or is it the same, as your previous location? Why?

Clothing: What are you going to wear in your video, and why did you choose this outfit? How is it different, or is it the same, as your previous outfit? Why?

Participants: Who else is joining you in this video, and why are they joining you? Are they the same individuals or different individuals than those in your previous videos? Why?

Props: What props are you going to use in this video, and why are you using them? Are they the same props you used in the first video, or not? Why?

Additional: What other, additional people, props, artifacts, or personal stories will you include to tell how you have progressed or not progressed in your understanding of sacred text?

Questions to Address in your Post-Unit Video:

- 1) Following the conclusion of this unit, what do you personally feel about sacred text(s)? Have your feelings changed?

- 2) What do most Jews believe about sacred text, Torah, etc.? What function or purpose does sacred text serve in Judaism?

- 3) What do Christians typically believe about sacred text? What are the sacred text(s) of Christianity?

- 4) What do Muslims typically believe about sacred text? What are the sacred text(s) of Islam?

- 5) How is the concept of sacred text similar for Jews, Christians, and Muslims? Name one example.

- 6) How is the concept of sacred text different for Jews, Christians, and Muslims? Name one example.

- 7) What is one thing that surprised you in this unit?

- 8) What is one stereotype you confronted or preconceived notion you addressed during this unit?

- 9) Did you answer the one question you had moving into the sacred text unit? If so, how?

- 10) What is one question you have moving forward into our next unit? (Rituals and Celebrations)

Resources

Resource 4.1 – The Golden Rule

The following three texts are found in the Torah, New Testament, and the Qu’ran, respectively. Please read the following three texts and address the questions, below.

From the Torah:

לֹא-תִקֶּם וְלֹא-תִטַּר אֶת-בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ, וְאֶהְבֵּתָ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ: אֲנִי, יְהוָה

“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am Adonai.”

-Leviticus 19:18

From the New Testament:

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you; for this summarizes up the Law and the Prophets.”

-Matthew 7:12

From the Qu’ran:

وَإِذَا حَضَرَ الْقِسْمَةَ أُولُو الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينُ
فَارْزُقُوهُمْ مِنْهُ وَقُولُوا لَهُمْ قَوْلًا مَعْرُوفًا ﴿٨﴾

And when [other] relatives and orphans and the needy are present at the [time of] separation, then provide for them [something] out of the estate and speak to them words of appropriate kindness.

-Qu’ran Sura 4:8-9

Questions:

- 1) What commonalities do you see in these texts?
- 2) What distinctions or nuances do you see in these texts?
- 3) What window (or windows) do you think these texts provide onto each religion?
- 4) How might this suggest interconnectedness between the three religions?
- 5) How might these texts give you a different perspective on our Encounter sessions?

Resource 4.2 – CCAR Resolution on Homosexuality and the Rabbinate

Resolution Adopted by the CCAR

Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE RABBINATE

Composition of the Committee

Chair: Selig Salkowitz; Norman J. Cohen, A. Stanley Dreyfus (RPC), Joseph B. Glaser (CCAR), Walter Jacob, Yoel H. Kahn, Samuel E. Karff, Peter S. Knobel, Joseph Levine, Jack Stern, Richard S. Sternberger (UAHC), Ronald B. Sobel (RPC), Elliot L. Stevens (CCAR), Harvey M. Tattelbaum, Albert Vorspan (UAHC), Margaret M. Wenig, Gary Zola (HUC-JIR).

Origin of the Committee

The committee was formed in response to a resolution proposed by Margaret Holub (then student rabbi) and Margaret Wenig for the June 1986 Convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis in Snowmass, Colorado. The proposed resolution dealt with the admissions policies of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and of the CCAR and with the placement policy of the Rabbinical Placement Commission. The matter was referred for further study.

Given the seriousness of the issues and the broad implications for the Reform rabbinate and for the entire movement, President Jack Stern appointed a broadly-representative ad hoc committee and named Selig Salkowitz as its chair. The committee's first meeting took place in the autumn of 1986. Following that meeting, in order to ensure adequate institutional participation, the committee invited the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the HUC-JIR, and the Rabbinical Placement Commission to appoint official representatives. The committee has met regularly during the past four years. Through extensive study and discussion, the committee has sought to arrive at a unified position on homosexuality and the rabbinate. From the outset, the committee was keenly aware of both the controversial nature and the complexity of the issues. The committee's deliberations have been characterized by vigorous debate carried on in a spirit of warm collegiality. All members found themselves profoundly moved. However, the committee did not achieve consensus on every issue, and recognized that there are legitimate differences of opinion. The committee calls upon members of the Conference to be sensitive to and accepting of those whose positions differ from their own.

The committee undertook a comprehensive investigation of the subject. Its members read studies on the origin and nature of sexual identity, and of homosexuality specifically, and reviewed some of the contemporary legal literature, and studied documents prepared by Christian groups grappling with the status of homosexuals and homosexuality within their own denominations with a specific focus on the question of ordination. Yoel H. Kahn prepared an extensive anthology of articles on Judaism and homosexuality which cut across denominational lines. The committee commissioned Eugene B. Borowitz, Yoel H. Kahn, Robert S. Kirschner, and Peter S. Knobel to prepare working papers.¹ Consultations were held with leaders of other Jewish streams. The committee solicited and received anonymous personal testimony from gay and lesbian rabbis and rabbinic students. It reviewed the admissions policies of the HUC-JIR and the CCAR as well as the placement policy of the Rabbinical Placement Commission. It read previous resolutions of the UAHC biennial conventions and the CCAR conventions, and related Reform Responsa. The work of previous committees was also reviewed. It convened a late night information session at the Tarpon Springs Convention of 1987; submitted a draft resolution to the CCAR Executive Board in 1988 (which was sent back to the committee for further consideration); sponsored a plenary session at the Centennial Convention in Cincinnati in 1989 at which Leonard S. Kravitz and Yoel H. Kahn presented papers² followed by workshops; held consultations at each of the regional CCAR

Kallot and with MaRaM; and requested that the UAHC sponsor workshops at upcoming regional biennials.

This document is meant to summarize the results of our deliberations, to indicate areas of agreement and disagreement, and to encourage further discussion and understanding. It represents four years of struggle and growth. We hope that it will serve as a model for those who take up these matters upon which we have diligently and painstakingly deliberated.

Concern for Gay and Lesbian Colleagues

The committee is acutely aware that the inability of most gay and lesbian rabbis to live openly as homosexuals is deeply painful. Therefore, the committee wishes to avoid any action that will cause greater distress to our colleagues. As a result, the committee has determined that a comprehensive report is in the best interest of our Conference and the Reform movement as a whole.

Publicly acknowledging one's homosexuality is a personal decision that can have grave professional consequences. Therefore, in the light of the limited ability of the Placement Commission or the CCAR to guarantee the tenure of the gay or lesbian rabbis who "come out of the closet," the committee does not want to encourage colleagues to put their careers at risk. Regrettably, a decision to declare oneself publicly can have potentially negative effects on a person's ability to serve a given community effectively. In addition, the committee is anxious to avoid a situation in which pulpit selection committees will request information on the sexual orientation of candidates. The committee urges that all rabbis, regardless of sexual orientation, be accorded the opportunity to fulfill the sacred vocation that they have chosen.

Civil Rights for Gays and Lesbians

All human beings are created *betselem Elohim* ("in the divine image"). Their personhood must therefore be accorded full dignity. Sexual orientation is irrelevant to the human worth of a person. Therefore, the Reform movement has supported vigorously all efforts to eliminate discrimination in housing and employment.³ The committee unequivocally condemns verbal and physical abuse against gay men and lesbian women or those perceived to be gay or lesbian. We reject any implication that AIDS can be understood as God's punishment of homosexuals. We applaud the fine work of the gay and lesbian outreach synagogues, and we, along with the UAHC, call upon rabbis and congregations to treat with respect and to integrate fully all Jews into the life of the community regardless of sexual orientation.

Origin and Nature of Sexual Identity

The committee's task was made particularly difficult because the specific origin of sexual identity and its etiology are still imperfectly understood.

Scholars are not likely to come to an agreement anytime soon about the causes of sexual orientation, or its nature. Various disciplines look at sexuality in different ways and rarely confront each other's ideas.... Short of definitive evidence, which no theory has thus far received, the disagreement is likely to continue. Cognitive and normative pluralism will persist for the indefinite future.⁴

The lack of unanimity in the scientific community and the unanimous condemnation of homosexual behavior by Jewish tradition adds to the complexity of the question. It is clear, however, that for many people sexual orientation is not a matter of conscious choice but is constitutional and therefore not subject to change. It is also true that for some, sexual orientation may be a matter of conscious choice. The committee devoted considerable time in its discussion to the significance of conscious choice as a criterion for formulating a position on the religious status of homosexuality. The majority of the committee believes that the issue of choice is crucial. For some on the committee the issue of choice is not significant.

In Jewish tradition heterosexual, monogamous, procreative marriage is the ideal human relationship for the perpetuation of species, covenantal fulfillment, and the preservation of the Jewish people. While acknowledging that there are other human relationships which possess ethical and spiritual value and that there are some people for whom heterosexual, monogamous, procreative marriage is not a viable option or possibility,⁶ the majority of the committee reaffirms unequivocally the centrality of this ideal and its special status as *kiddushin*. To the extent that sexual orientation is a matter of choice, the majority of the committee affirms that heterosexuality is the only appropriate Jewish choice for fulfilling one's covenantal obligations.

A minority of the committee dissents, affirming the equal possibility of covenantal fulfillment in homosexual and heterosexual relationships. The relationship, not the gender, should determine its Jewish value -- *Kiddushin*.

The committee strongly endorses the view that all Jews are religiously equal regardless of their sexual orientation. We are aware of loving and committed relationships between people of the same sex. Issues such as the religious status of these relationships as well as the creation of special ceremonies are matters of continuing discussion and differences of opinion.

Sexual Morality and the Rabbi

The general subject of sexual morality is important. The committee, in various stages of its deliberations, sought to discuss homosexuality within that larger framework. However, it concluded that while a comprehensive statement on sexuality and sexual morality was a desideratum, it was beyond the mandate of the committee.

Nevertheless, rabbis are both role models and exemplars. Therefore, the committee calls upon all rabbis--without regard to sexual orientation--to conduct their private lives with discretion and with full regard for the mores and sensibilities of their communities, and in consonance with the preamble to the CCAR's *Code of Ethics*:

As teachers of Judaism, rabbis are expected to abide by the highest moral values of our religion: the virtues of family life, integrity, and honorable social relationships. In their personal lives they are called upon to set an example of the ideals they proclaim.

Our Relationship to *Kelal Yisrael* and the Non-Jewish Community

The committee devoted considerable discussion to the effect of any statement on our relationship to *Kelal Yisrael*. The committee expressed deep concern about the reactions of the other Jewish movements and strongly urges that the dialogue continue with them on this issue. Nevertheless, it concluded that our decision should be governed by the principles and practices of Reform Judaism. Similarly, the committee considered and discussed with the members of MaRaM the possible effects of a statement on Reform Judaism in Israel. Again, it concluded that while sensitivity was in order, the committee could address only the North American situation. In addition, the committee attempted to assess how various stands would affect our relationship with non-Jewish groups. Again, the committee was concerned but felt that it had to make its decision independent of that consideration.

Congregational Issues

The acceptance by our congregations of gay and lesbian Jews as rabbis was a topic of discussion. We know that the majority of Reform Jews strongly support civil rights for gays and lesbians, but the unique position of the rabbi as spiritual leader and Judaic role model make the acceptance of gay or lesbian rabbis an intensely emotional and potentially divisive issue. While we acknowledge that there are gay and lesbian rabbis who are serving their communities effectively, with dignity, compassion, and integrity, we believe that there is a great need for education and dialogue in our congregations.

Admissions Policy of the College-Institute

One of the original issues that brought the committee into existence was a concern about the admissions policy of the College-Institute. President Alfred Gottschalk has recently set forth the admissions policy of HUC-JIR. The written guidelines state that HUC-JIR considers sexual orientation of an applicant only within the context of a candidate's overall suitability for the rabbinate, his or her qualifications to serve the Jewish community effectively, and his or her capacity to find personal fulfillment within the rabbinate. The committee agrees with this admissions policy of our College-Institute.

Membership in the CCAR

The CCAR has always accepted into membership, upon application, all rabbinic graduates of the HUC-JIR.

The committee reaffirms this policy to admit upon application rabbinic graduates of the HUC-JIR.

Placement

Since its inception, the Rabbinical Placement Commission has provided placement services to all members of the CCAR in good standing, in accordance with its rules.

The committee agrees with this policy of the Rabbinical Placement Commission which provides placement services to all members of the CCAR in good standing, in accordance with the Commission's established rules.

Respectfully submitted,
Chair: Selig Salkowitz; Norman J. Cohen,
A. Stanley Dreyfus (RPC), Joseph B. Glaser (CCAR),
Walter Jacob, Yoel H. Kahn, Samuel E. Karff, Peter S. Knobel,
Joseph Levine, Jack Stern, Richard S. Sternberger (UAHC),
Ronald B. Sobel (RPC), Elliot L. Stevens (CCAR),
Harvey M. Tattelbaum, Albert Vorspan (UAHC),
Margaret M. Wenig, Gary Zola (HUC-JIR).

Committee Endorsement

The committee expresses its sincere appreciation to the many members of the CCAR who communicated with it in writing and orally. We urge all rabbis to study and reflect on these critical issues in order to lead their congregations and other members of the Jewish community toward greater awareness and sensitivity through education and dialogue. The committee unanimously endorses this report as a fair reflection of four years of deliberation and urges its adoption.

Notes

¹ *Homosexuality, the Rabbinate, and Liberal Judaism: Papers prepared for the Ad-Hoc Committee on Homosexuality and the Rabbinate*, Selig Salkowitz, Chair. "Halakhah and Homosexuality: A Reappraisal" by Robert Kirschner. "On Homosexuality and the Rabbinate, a Covenantal Response" by Eugene B. Borowitz. "Judaism and Homosexuality" by Yoel H. Kahn. "Homosexuality: A Liberal Jewish Theological and Ethical Reflection" by Peter S. Knobel.

Copies of these were distributed to the entire membership of the CCAR prior to the June 1989 convention in Cincinnati. These papers should be consulted for a description of the range of positions considered by the committee.

² Yoel H. Kahn, "The Kedusha of Homosexual Relationships" and Leonard S. Kravitz, "Address." The

papers were distributed to the members of the Conference through the regional presidents as material for discussion at the regional kallot. They should be consulted for an understanding of the two different approaches to the subject of the religious status of homosexual relationships.

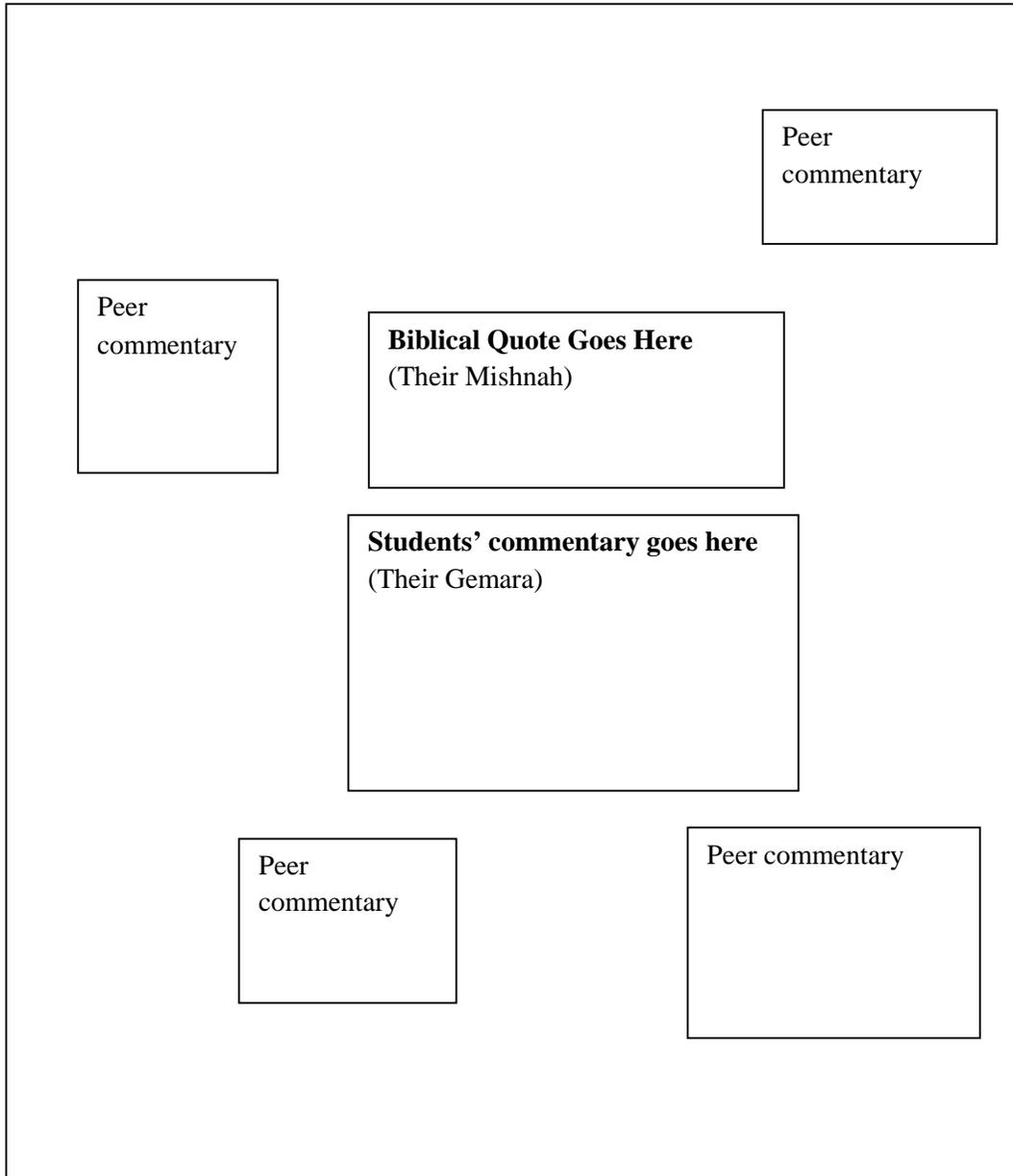
³ CCAR resolution 1977. UAHC resolutions 1975, 1985, 1987, and 1989.

⁴ David Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago, 1988), pp. 480-481.

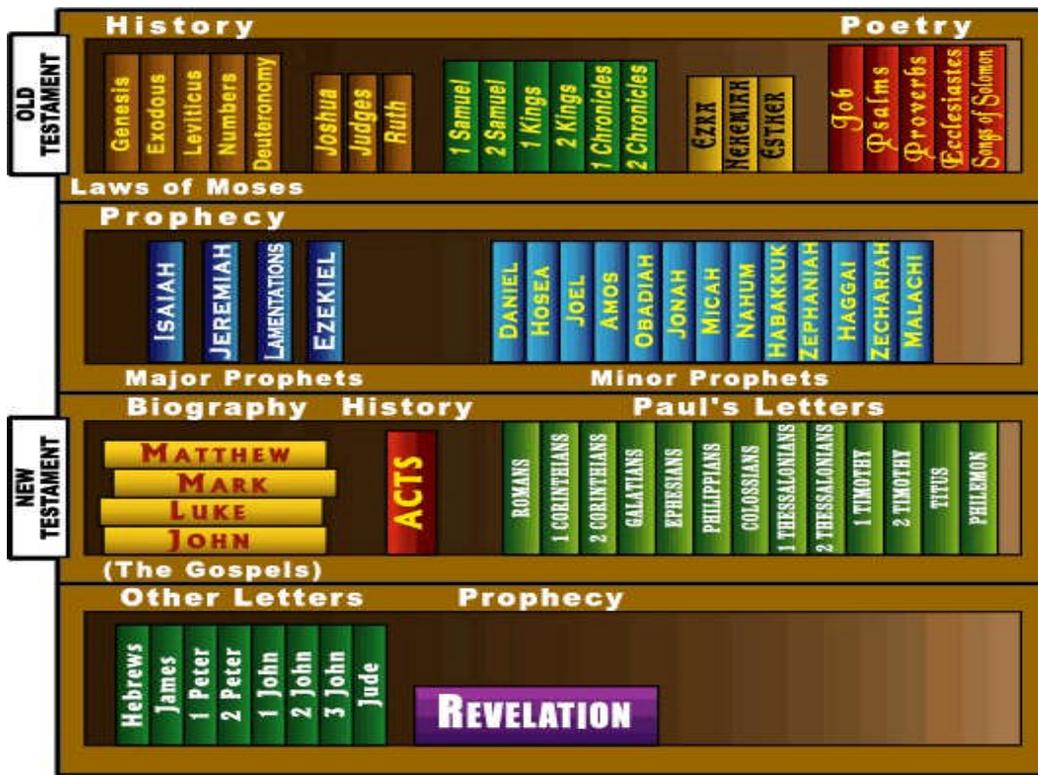
⁵ Cf. *Gates of Mitzvah*, p. 11, note at bottom of page.

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Resource 4.4 – The Structure for “My Talmud, Myself”



Resource 4.5 – Books of the Bible



BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

OLD TESTAMENT - 39 Books			NEW TESTAMENT - 27 Books	
LAW - 5	POETRY - 5	MAJOR PROPHETS - 5	GOSPELS - 4	PAUL'S LETTERS TO INDIVIDUALS - 4
GENESIS	JOB	ISAIAH	MATTHEW	1 TIMOTHY
EXODUS	PSALMS	JEREMIAH	MARK	2 TIMOTHY
LEVITICUS	PROVERBS	LAMENTATIONS	LUKE	TITUS
NUMBERS	ECCLESIASTES	EZEKIEL	JOHN	PHILEMON
DEUTERONOMY	SONG OF SOLOMON	DANIEL		
HISTORY - 12		MINOR PROPHETS - 12	HISTORY - 1	
JOSHUA		HOSEA	ACTS	
JUDGES		JOEL		
RUTH		AMOS	PAUL'S LETTERS TO CHURCHES - 9	GENERAL LETTERS - 9
1 SAMUEL		OBADIAH	ROMANS	HEBREWS
2 SAMUEL		JONAH	1 CORINTHIANS	JAMES
1 KINGS		MICAH	2 CORINTHIANS	1 PETER
2 KINGS		NAHUM	GALATIANS	2 PETER
1 CHRONICLES		HABAKKUK	EPHESIANS	1 JOHN
2 CHRONICLES		ZEPHANIAH	PHILIPPIANS	2 JOHN
EZRA		HAGGAI	COLOSSIANS	3 JOHN
NEHEMIAH		ZECHARIAH	1 THESSALONIANS	JUDE
ESTHER		MALACHI	2 THESSALONIANS	REVELATION

Resource 4.6 - Christian Sacred Text: Key Terms and Definitions

Apocrypha: A Greek word which translates to “hidden away,” this is a collection of biblical writings which are, for various reasons, not included in the accepted canon of biblical literature. They may be of questionable origin or authenticity, or may be considered false or esoteric versions of biblical text. Included in the biblical Apocrypha are: Maccabees I and II, Judith, Tobit, and Baruch, to name a few.

Apostle: In general, the term means “messenger,” similar to the Hebrew term *shaliach*. People technically use it to refer to the group of people whom Jesus trusted to lead the early Church and spread the Gospel. This group included the original disciples (excluding Judas) and Paul.²⁴

Book of Acts: Traditionally believed to be authored by Luke, this part of the New Testament details the times of the Apostles and specifically, the development of early Christianity.

Disciples: A follower of Jesus Christ. While Jesus was practicing as a minister, he had twelve disciples. In the present day, Christians use the term *disciple* to describe someone who is a dedicated follower of Christ.²⁵

The Gospels: In the New Testament, the “Gospels” refers to the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These books chronicle the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus.²⁶

Jesus Christ: Born simply “Jesus” in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, and crucified outside Jerusalem, Jesus Christ was believed to be the son of God. His teachings became the basis for early Christianity.

New Testament: This specific part of the Bible begins with the birth of Jesus, provides teachings of the early Church, and ends with a description of what will happen in the future.²⁷ Christians believe this part of the bible to be of equal importance to the TaNaKh.

Old Testament: This collection of texts is what Jews refer to as “TaNaKh,” and Christians consider the first part of the Bible. The Old Testament begins with the creation of the world and follows the development of the relationship between God and the people Israel. Christians believe the Old Testament and New Testament are of equal importance.

Paul the Apostle: Also known as St. Paul, Paul the Apostle was one of the most influential forces in the development of early Christianity. Originally a persecutor of the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem, Paul converted to Christianity following an encounter with the

²⁴ Richard Wagner. *Christianity for Dummies: A Reference for the Rest of Us*. (Hoboken: Wiley Publishing, 2004) 335

²⁵ Ibid, 337

²⁶ Ibid, 339

²⁷ Ibid, 341

Holy Spirit and preached the teachings of Christ for the rest of his life. The thirteen letters of Paul are significant documents in the corpus of Christian text.

Paul's Letters: A collection of thirteen documents which each begin with the word "Paul," thereby attributing authorship to him. These letters, also known as epistles, provide insight into the early developments and controversies surrounding Christianity. These include, but are not limited to, Romans, First Corinthians, Second Corinthians, and Timothy.

(Book of) Revelation: The final book in the New Testament, this book is attributed to the Apostle John and prophesizes about the future of the world. It is considered part of the apocalyptic literature, meaning it concerns what Christians should do, and how they should act, when the world comes to an end.

Resource 4.7 – Jesus and Paul, Kind of a Big Deal

Jesus

Encyclopaedia Judaica

Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 11. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. p246-251. [David Flusser](#)

Macmillan Reference USA™

JESUS (d. 30 C.E.), whom Christianity sees as its founder and object of faith, was a Jew who lived toward the end of the Second Commonwealth period. The martyrdom of his brother James is narrated by Josephus (Ant. 20:200–3), but the passage in the same work (18:63–64) speaking about the life and death of **Jesus** was either rewritten by a Christian or represents a Christian interpolation. The first Roman authors to mention **Jesus** are Tacitus and Suetonius. The historicity of **Jesus** is proved by the very nature of the records in the New Testament, especially the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The Gospels are records about the life of **Jesus**. John's Gospel is more a treatise reflecting the theology of its author than a biography of **Jesus**, but Matthew, Mark, and Luke present a reasonably faithful picture of **Jesus** as a Jew of his time. The picture of **Jesus** contained in them is not so much of a redeemer of mankind as of a Jewish miracle maker and preacher. The **Jesus** portrayed in these three Gospels is, therefore, the historical **Jesus**.

The Gospels

The precise date of the composition of the Gospels is not known, but all four were written before 100 C.E. and it is certain that Matthew, Mark, and Luke are interdependent. Scholars call these three the Synoptic Gospels because they can be written in parallel columns, such form being called synopsis. It is generally accepted that the main substance of the Synoptic Gospels comes from two sources: an old account of the life of **Jesus** which is reproduced by Mark, and a collection of **Jesus'** sayings used in conjunction with the old account by Matthew and Luke. Most scholars today identify the old account that lies behind Mark with the known Gospel of Mark, but a serious analysis, based especially upon the supposed Hebrew original, shows that Mark had entirely rewritten the material. It may be assumed, therefore, that the old account, and not the revision, was known to both Luke and Matthew. According to R. Lindsey (see bibliography), Matthew and Luke, besides drawing upon the sayings, also drew directly upon the old account; the editor of Mark used Luke for his version, and Matthew, besides using the old account, often drew also upon Mark. Lindsey's conclusions are also supported by other arguments.

Both of the chief sources of the Synoptic Gospels, the old account, and the collection of **Jesus'** sayings, were produced in the primitive Christian congregation in Jerusalem, and were translated into Greek from Aramaic or Hebrew. They contained the picture of **Jesus** as seen by the disciples who knew him. The present Gospels are redactions of these two sources, which were often changed as a result of ecclesiastical tendentiousness. This becomes especially clear in the description of [Page 247 | Top of Article](#) **Jesus'** trial and crucifixion in which all Gospel writers to some degree exaggerate Jewish "guilt" and minimize Pilate's

involvement. As the tension between the [*Church](#) and the Synagogue grew, Christians were not interested in stressing the fact that the founder of their faith was executed by a Roman magistrate. But even in the case of **Jesus'** trial, as in other instances, advance toward historical reality can be made by comparing the sources according to principles of literary criticism and in conjunction with the study of the Judaism of the time.

*The Name, Birth, And Death Date Of **Jesus***

Jesus is the common Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua. **Jesus'** father, Joseph, his mother, Mary (in Heb. Miriam), and his brothers, James (in Heb., Jacob), Joses (Joseph), Judah, and Simon (Mark. 6:3) likewise bore very popular Hebrew names. **Jesus** also had sisters, but their number and names are unknown. **Jesus Christ** means "**Jesus** the Messiah" and according to Jewish belief, the Messiah was to be a descendant of David. Both Matthew (1:2–16) and Luke (3:23–38) provide a genealogy leading back to David, but the two genealogies agree only from Abraham down to David. Thus, it is evident that both genealogies were constructed to show **Jesus'** Davidic descent, because the early Christian community believed that he was the Messiah. Matthew and Luke set **Jesus'** birth in [*Bethlehem](#), the city of David's birth. This motif is made comprehensible if it is assumed that many believed the Messiah would also be born in Bethlehem, an assumption clearly seen in John 7:41–42, which, telling of some who denied that **Jesus** is the Messiah, says: "Is the **Christ** (Messiah) to come from Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the **Christ** is descended from David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" John therefore knew neither that **Jesus** had been born in Bethlehem nor that he was descended from David. The home of **Jesus** and his family was [*Nazareth](#) in Galilee and it is possible that he was born there.

The story of **Jesus'** birth from the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit without an earthly father exists in the two independent literary versions of Matthew and Luke. It is not to be found in Mark or John, who both begin their Gospel with **Jesus'** baptism by [*John the Baptist](#). **Jesus'** virgin birth is not presupposed in other parts of the [*New Testament](#). Apart from Matthew and Luke, the first to mention the virgin birth is Ignatius of Antiochia (d. 107). According to Luke's data, **Jesus** was baptized by John the Baptist either in 27/28 or 28/29 C.E., when he was about the age of 30. On the evidence in the first three Gospels, the period between his baptism and crucifixion comprised no more than one year; although according to John it ran to two or even three years. It seems that on the point of the duration of **Jesus'** public ministry the Synoptic Gospels are to be trusted. Most probably, then, **Jesus** was baptized in 28/29 and died in the year 30 C.E.

***Jesus'** Family And Circle*

Jesus's father, Joseph, was a carpenter in Nazareth and it is almost certain that he died before **Jesus** was baptized. All the Gospels state that there was a tension between **Jesus** and his family, although after **Jesus'** death his family overcame their disbelief and took an honorable place in the young Jewish-Christian community. **Jesus'** brother, James, became the head of the Christian congregation in Jerusalem and when he was murdered by a Sadducean high priest (62 C.E.) for the faith in his

brother, he was succeeded by Simon, a cousin of **Jesus**. Grandsons of **Jesus**' brother, Judah, lived until the reign of Trajan and were leaders of Christian churches apparently in Galilee.

John the Baptist, who baptized **Jesus** in the river Jordan, was an important religious Jewish personality; he is recorded in Josephus (Ant. 18:116–9) as well as the New Testament. From Josephus it is seen that John's baptismal theology was identical with that of the **Essenes*. According to the Gospels, in the moment of **Jesus**' baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon him and a voice from heaven proclaimed his election. When he left John the Baptist, **Jesus** did not return to Nazareth, but preached in the area northwest of the Sea of Galilee. Later, after his unsuccessful visit to his native Nazareth, he returned again to the district around **Capernaum*, performed miraculous healings, and proclaimed the Kingdom of Heaven. From his closest disciples he appointed 12 **apostles* to be, at the Last Judgment, judges of the 12 tribes of Israel. After the death of **Jesus** the 12 apostles provided the leadership for the Jerusalem Church.

Paul the Apostle

Encyclopedia of Religion

Ed. Lindsay Jones. Vol. 10. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005. p7013-7021. [Robert Jewett](#)

**Macmillan
Reference USA™**

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PAUL THE APOSTLE (d. 62 CE), also called **Paul** of Tarsus, known to Jewish Christians as Saul, was a Christian **apostle** and saint. A controversial missionary, **Paul** provoked intense opposition both during his career and after. His letters, which make up a substantial portion of the New Testament canon, stimulated diverse reactions and attracted problematic adherents to his beliefs. Modern research has uncovered the efforts of the post-Pauline church to soften his legacy of theological radicalism.

Some of **Paul**'s letters, such as *1 Corinthians* and *2 Corinthians*, were edited a generation after **Paul**'s death in an effort to mold them in directions suitable for the conservative consolidation of Christianity. Other letters, for example, *1 Timothy*, *2 Timothy*, and *Titus*, were composed in **Paul**'s name to serve the same purposes. In addition, several interpolations, such as *1 Corinthians* 14:33b–36 and *Romans* 16:17–20, skew **Paul**'s message in authoritarian and sexually chauvinistic directions. *Acts of the Apostles* also presents a conservative picture of **Paul**.

The result is that the indisputably genuine letters (*Romans*, *1 Corinthians*, *2 Corinthians*, *Galatians*, *Philippians*, *Philemon*, *1 Thessalonians*, and, with less unanimity, *2 Thessalonians*) have traditionally been interpreted in light of the later writings. This has resulted in serious confusions concerning **Paul**'s theology, his relations with his churches and with other early Christian leaders, his outlook on major ethical issues, and the chronology of his life. Scholars

have tended to be divided along ideological lines in resolving these issues, eliminating the possibility of consensus even on the most elemental facts about **Paul's** life.

Another problem is the tradition of theological abstraction in interpreting the Pauline letters. Because Christian theology has been shaped so largely by Pauline thought, the tendency has been to argue over every nuance, on the premise that **Paul** was a systematic theorist setting down doctrinal truth for all time. In fact, his letters are highly situational responses to complex congregational problems. The letters should be interpreted in light of those social realities, requiring the interpreter to reconstruct the situation largely on the basis of evidence within the letters themselves. This is rendered more difficult by traditional scholarly biases against the charismatic, sectarian, apocalyptic, and mystical experiences that animated **Paul** and his communities. Modern scholarship has detected the long-standing "fallacy of idealism," to use Bengt Holmberg's expression in *Paul and Power* (Philadelphia, 1978), by which **Paul's** theological response to problems arising from these sectarian communities has been wrongly interpreted as if it were the structuring principle of those communities.

The application of modern research techniques has allowed the **apostle Paul** to emerge from the mists of later orthodoxy and hagiography so that the fusion of his charismatic religious experience, his cooperative missionary activities, and his dialogical theology can be grasped. In contrast to traditional preferences that still persist among interpreters, **Paul's** view of salvation was cosmic rather than individualistic. His worldview was apocalyptic rather than bourgeois. He *Page 7014* | [Top of Article](#) participated along with his churches in sectarian experiences of radical transformation, spiritual enthusiasm, and the expectation of future vindication. The preaching that evoked those experiences is accessible only by inferences from his letters, while his theology was the inspired but largely impromptu response to missional and congregational imperatives. The vitality and profundity of **Paul's** occasional remarks in the letters led to recognition of "the genius of **Paul**," which is the title of Samuel Sandmel's significant study (Philadelphia, 1979).

Resource 4.8 – John 3:16

Please read the following quote in your small groups:

John 3:16 - *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life.*
(Common English Bible)

First, please locate this text in the corpus of the New Testament:

Then, establish and agree upon the genre of this text: (ie – this is a part of the book of X)

Third, evaluate the validity and significance of this text within your small groups. Use these questions to guide you:

- 1) What does this text say about the connection between God and Jesus?
- 2) Should this quote be taken literally? Why or why not?
- 3) Do you believe human beings can gain eternal life for simply “believing?”
- 4) Do we see a parallel with this text in Jewish sacred text?
- 5) How might this text be used as a source of positivity or creation?
- 6) How might this text be used as a source of negativity or destruction?

Resource 4.9 – Muhammad

Muhammad^o

Encyclopaedia Judaica

Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 14. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. p601-605. [Michael Lecker](#)

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MUHAMMAD^o (**Muhammad** ibn ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib ibn Hāshim ibn ‘Abd Manāf ibn Quṣayy; c. 570–632), founder and prophet of [*Islam](#). **Muhammad** was born in Mecca around 570 C.E. In his twenties he married Khadīja, in whose service he was trading; she was a few years older and bore him several children. According to the traditional account, he received his first revelation at the age of 40, following which he preached his religion with little success in his hometown Mecca for about a decade. The turning point was **Muhammad**'s conclusion of an agreement with Arabs from [*Medina](#) who adopted the new religion and provided him with a new basis for continuing his mission. The *hijra* that followed the agreement marks the beginning of **Muhammad**'s Medinan period, namely the decade that made Islam a world power. It is mainly with regard to the Medinan period that a student of **Muhammad**'s biography finds himself on relatively firm ground.

The scholarly struggle with central issues of **Muhammad**'s biography has not yet gone far beyond the starting point, because the accounts about specific events in **Muhammad**'s life, their chronology, and their sequence are often incoherent or contradictory. In addition, they reveal legal and exegetical biases beside political and tribal ones. The famous biography of **Muhammad** by Ibn Hishām and several other early mainstream compilations were the mainstay of Western scholarship regarding the life of **Muhammad**. But in recent decades an increasingly critical attitude to these sources has been adopted by several scholars, which for the time being rules out the writing of a narrative biography along the lines of the medieval ones. The creators of the accounts that make up the medieval biographies were not unsophisticated and often had agendas of their own, beside their wish to tell the story of the Arabian Prophet. Students of these accounts cannot afford to be gullible or unsophisticated. Moreover, one has to bear in mind that many of the medieval scholars, on whom we sometimes pass judgment as if they were fellow historians, did not consider themselves as such, or in any case they were not historians in the modern sense of the term. The liberty with which these compilers treated the received texts, for example in creating "combined reports" by putting together fragments from the texts of their predecessors, is most revealing with regard to their concept of history. Besides, their compilations were products of their own time. Their foundations had been laid well before they came into being, and in the cultural context of early Islam that was marked by extreme conservatism, the compilers had little room for self-expression and creativity.

The sheer amount of evidence found in **Muhammad's** biography is misleading; for example, one looks in vain for the name of a fortress in which a certain tribe was besieged. To some extent the lack of concrete evidence in the biography can be remedied by resorting to other sources, since accounts about **Muhammad's** life are found everywhere in the vast Islamic literature. Even relatively late sources sometimes contain valuable evidence, because compilers who lived several centuries ago still included in their compilations extracts from much older works which have meanwhile been lost. In sum, one has to throw one's net beyond **Muhammad's** medieval biographies and employ relatively late sources, too.

Paradoxically, as more and more texts on the Prophet's life are being made available electronically or through the publication of texts hitherto unknown to science, Western scholars seem to be less and less interested in finding concrete evidence in this huge repository of source material. Such evidence does exist, mainly in the form of background information regarding the society of Arabia at the time of **Muhammad**. The thousands of persons mentioned in the sources, their families and property, in addition to the geographical and topographical data, provide a firm starting point for the study of events in **Muhammad's** life, their chronology, and their sequence. Between the naiveté of certain past scholars who were unaware of the complexity of Islamic accounts, and the total rejection of these accounts as historical sources, there are several interim positions. A rigorous scrutiny of the sources does point out problematic areas in the evidence, but enough playing cards remain in our hands to facilitate step-by-step progress in the study of **Muhammad's** life.

Many Jews are mentioned in the chapters of **Muhammad's** Medinan period. The amount of evidence about their relations with **Muhammad** is enormous and some of it goes back to Jewish converts or their descendants. It makes up a sizeable "Jewish chapter" in every medieval biography of **Muhammad**. Only a small number of Jews are treated positively Page 602 | [Top of Article](#) in the biography and elsewhere in the Islamic literature. They include several Jews who adopted Islam and several others who helped **Muhammad** in one way or another. Other Jews who appear in the sources were hostile to him: this has major implications to this very day, far beyond the spheres of literature and culture.

Muhammad In Mecca

Arabia in general and Mecca in particular were not isolated from the rest of the world, mainly because of the rivalry between Byzantium and the Sassanian Empire. Being a significant Arabian cultic and trade center, Mecca and its vicinity must have attracted international traders of all religions. But because of lack of interest on the part of Muslim informants, and perhaps due to self-censorship and an apologetic attitude, concrete details about indigenous Meccans who abandoned idol worship and adhered to other religions, or about foreigners living in Mecca, is scarce; after all, **Muhammad** was accused by his Meccan adversaries of having had a human teacher rather than a heavenly one. There is evidence about a Jewish trader in Mecca who announced **Muhammad's** birth, lamenting the fact that prophecy had forsaken the Children of Israel. This may well have been a legendary person created in the context of the literary genre known as "the proofs of **Muhammad's** prophecy." But he represents the Jewish trader in Mecca and elsewhere in Arabia that must have been a well-known figure. A

relatively more convincing account concerns a Jew from Najrān by the name of Udhayna who was a protégé of **Muhammad's** grandfather 'Abd al-Muttalib and was trading on the latter's behalf in the markets of Tihāma or the Arabian coast. When the Jew was murdered, 'Abd al-Muttalib saw to it that blood money be given to the Jew's cousin. Off the beaten track one also finds relatively reliable data of Jewish women who before Islam married prominent members of **Muhammad's** tribe, Quraysh. For example, two elder brothers of **Muhammad's** grandfather are said to have had a Jewish mother. Since **Muhammad** himself was a trader, there can be no doubt that he had had some contacts with Jews before becoming a prophet. Also his family's links with Medina, which had a large and dominant Jewish population, point in the same direction. His great-grandfather Hāshim married a Medinan woman, Salmā, of the Arab tribe of Khazraj. **Muhammad's** grandfather 'Abd al-Muttalib was born in Medina and stayed there with his mother for several years. Other Qurashīs, too, had close links with Medina in which both trade interests and politics were involved. For example, when Abū Sufyān had married Hind, who in due course gave birth to the future caliph Mu'āwiya, the bride's father, 'Utba ibn Rabī'a, borrowed the jewelry of the Banū Abīl-Ḥuqayq, a leading family of the Jewish tribe **Nadīr*.

Muhammad At Medina

Negotiations between **Muhammad** and men from Medina of the Khazraj and Aws tribes (mainly of the former, which was stronger than the latter), referred to in Islam as *al-Anṣār* or "the helpers," preceded by several months the *hijra* that brought **Muhammad** from Mecca to Medina. The crucial agreement was concluded during the annual pilgrimage to Mecca at nearby al-'Aqaba. Reportedly, the Jews of Medina told their Arab neighbors about the imminent appearance of a prophet. This sounds like yet another example of "the proofs of **Muhammad's** prophecy," but it may reflect historical fact. At the 'Aqaba meeting, twelve of the Medinan Arabs were designated as *nuqabā'* or tribal representatives, nine of the Khazraj and three of the Aws. Seven out of the twelve *nuqabā'* shared a common denominator: they were literate. Now since in pre-Islamic Medina literacy was acquired at the Jewish *bayt al-midrās*, this means that the literate *nuqabā'*, while they possibly did not convert to Judaism, were educated by the Jews, and hence were prepared to accept **Muhammad** as the messiah expected by the Jews. This conclusion, arrived at by comparing the list of *nuqabā'* with that of literate people, has a stronger claim to historicity than a direct statement found in a literary source.

Some have argued that the fate of the Jews of Medina was raised at the 'Aqaba meeting and that **Muhammad** had a predetermined plan to wipe them out. But this assumption is based on a corrupt text: the word *yahūd* or "Jews" in the story of the meeting on which this argument was based is wrong and should be replaced by *'uhūd* or "treaties" found in better versions of the same text. It is doubtful that **Muhammad** had such plans; in any case it is somewhat naive to expect to find **Muhammad** accused of insincerity in an Islamic source otherwise devoted to the protection of his image.

Resource 4.10 – A Sura on Muhammad

The following passage is from the Qu'ran, Surat Muhammad 47:2:

وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَءَامَنُوا بِمَا نُزِّلَ عَلَيَّ مُحَمَّدٍ وَهُوَ الْحَقُّ
مِن رَّبِّهِمْ كَفَّرَ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَأَصْلَحَ بَالَهُمْ ﴿٢﴾

And those who believe and do righteous deeds and believe in what has been sent down upon Muhammad - and it is the truth from their Lord - He will remove from them their misdeeds and amend their condition.

Questions:

- What does this text say about Muhammad?
- What does this text say about Allah's power?
- What does this text say about how believers in Islam should live their daily lives?
- What does this text say about the power of sacred text – specifically the Qu'ran?
- Do we see similar themes to this in Jewish sacred text? In Christian sacred text?
- If so, what are they?

Unit 5: Rituals and Celebrations

Merriam Webster defines celebration as, “The action of marking one's pleasure at an important event or occasion by engaging in an enjoyable, typically social activity.”²⁸ For Jews, Christians, and Muslims, ritual and life cycle celebrations are rooted in either a historical, time-sensitive event, socially constructed norm, or both. While families and respective communities typically celebrate these holidays and events in their own unique ways, their core value is constant. Celebrations are expressions of identity. They are manifestations of the human desire to belong – whether to a family, community, congregation, or entire people.

Additionally – life cycle events, according to theologian and philosopher Dr. Rachel Adler, are “liminal moments; a time when one is standing on a precipice between one and the other.”²⁹ A life cycle event is often a celebrated, ritualized, marked transition. As this unit will launch students into preparations for their unique Confirmation ceremony, much of its content will feature explorations of ritualized liminal life moments.

This unit will further highlight the connection between the three religions. It will draw a link between the Jewish Yamim Nora'im (High Holidays), Christian Lenten Season, and Muslim month of Ramadan; periods of time which focus on similar themes of reflection, abstention, and renewal. The unit will also demonstrate how religions mark liminal life moments for young and old. Depending on time, the instructor of this course should feel free to add on to or modify this unit with holidays and life cycle events which have been omitted. Or – depending on the timing of these lessons, instructor should feel free to include celebrations apropos to the time of year in which these lessons are conducted.

Enduring Understandings

- Rituals and celebrations exemplify the human desire to belong; to family, community, congregation, and worldwide people.
- As the cornerstone of celebration, joy unites and enlivens many religious ceremonies and holidays.
- Life's transitional moments deserve ritualized ceremonies and celebrations.

Knowledge:

- Many Jews, Christians, and Muslims engage in historically rooted or socially constructed celebrations and rites of passage.
- Jewish, Christian, and Muslim life cycle events each include similar yet distinct celebrations of transition.
- The Days of Awe (“Yamim Nora'im”) begin the new Jewish year, focusing on themes of reflection and forgiveness

²⁸ Merriam Webster Online Dictionary. Edition Unknown. s.v., “Celebration.”

²⁹ Dr. Rachel Adler. Class Lecture. August 27, 2009

- Similar to the Yamim Nora'im, Christianity's Lenten season is a forty day-plus period of reflection and renewal culminating in the holiday of Easter.
- The month of Ramadan – the ninth month in the Muslim calendar – is a holy month which involves fasting from sunrise to sunset.

Unit Objectives:

- Students will be able to define Yamim Nora'im, Lenten Season, and Ramadan
- Students will be able to explain the common and differing themes of the Yamim Nora'im, Lenten Season, and Ramadan
- Students will be able to identify certain life cycle events in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
- Students will be able to describe the significance of holidays and ceremonies in religious life and practice
- Students will be able to compare selected Jewish, Christian, and Muslim ritualized life cycle events
- Students will be able to critique certain Jewish, Christian, and Muslim ritualized life cycle events
- Students will be able to compose an outline for their own completely new, unique ritual ceremony

Evidence of Learning:

- Students will submit two entries to their online video journals. At the beginning of the unit, they will ask themselves which Jewish rituals and celebrations are most familiar to them. What have they learned or gleaned from their experiences with ritual celebrations in Judaism? Have they ever participated in ritual celebrations in other religions? What were they like?
- At the end of the unit, students will submit an entry which focuses on what they learned. What can now they articulate about Jewish, Christian, or Muslim celebrations, rituals, sacraments, and rites? How has this knowledge enhanced what they have already learned about these religions?
- Additionally, students will be able to engage with members of other faith-based communities in the fifth lesson of the unit. By participating in facilitated interreligious dialogue with members of another synagogue, church, or mosque, students will demonstrate to themselves, their peers, and their teachers the knowledge they have accumulated thus far.

Assessment #8: Rituals and Celebrations

Pre-Unit Video

This new unit examines certain rituals and celebrations in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It is by no means an exhaustive list of every ritual and/or holiday in each religion. The unit simply focuses on certain rituals, ceremonies, periods of time, and life cycle events with similar themes in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious life. This unit is also springboard for a greater conversation about the Confirmation ceremony which will take place at the conclusion of the course. The unit which follows Rituals and Celebrations is Culmination Workshop; this unit will prepare all of you for the Confirmation ceremony you will create and produce, together as one class.

For this installment of your online video journal, you will be asked to express yourself on the topic of rituals and celebrations. **You** have the opportunity to think about your own personal relationship with ritual. What are strictly “Jewish” rituals? What are broader, more universal rituals in which you have participated? What function to rituals and celebrations serve? How are they connected with holidays?

By first clarifying your own personal beliefs and convictions, you can then dive fully into what these different religions say about the topic. Remember that **everything** is fair game, as long as you approach each topic with a sense of maturity and respect – for yourself, your religion, and the religious beliefs of others.

Videos should be no more than 10 minutes long. However – preparing for the video, including gathering your supplies, picking your setting, and writing down your answers *before* answering them on-camera, should take between 45 minutes and an hour, if not longer.

Please save this prompt and your answers in your course folder. It will come in handy during our Culmination workshop at the conclusion of the course.

Here is your prompt:

Name: _____

Date of Filming: _____

Setting: Where are you going to film yourself, and why did you choose that location?

Clothing: What are you going to wear in your video, and why did you choose this outfit?

Participants: Who else is joining you in this video, and why are they joining you?

Props: What props are you going to use in this video, and why are you using them?

Additional: What other additional people, props, artifacts, or personal stories will you include to tell your feelings about prayer?

Questions to Address in your Pre-Unit Video:

- 1) What is a ritual, in your own words?

- 2) What rituals or celebrations have you recently participated in?

- 3) Name and describe one meaningful ritual ceremony or holiday celebration in which you have participated:

- 4) Is God present in Jewish rituals? If so, where? How?

- 5) What do you think are some Christian rituals?

- 6) What do you think are some Muslim rituals?

- 7) What are you most looking forward to learning about rituals and celebrations in this unit?

- 8) What are you most apprehensive about in this unit?

- 9) What is one question you hope to answer by the end of this unit?

Lesson 1: Ceremonies and Celebrations

Essential Question: What are rituals and celebrations, and how are they a part of religious practice?

Objectives:

- Students will be able to define “ritual” and “celebration” according to the definitions presented by Merriam Webster’s online dictionary
- Students will be able to tell their peers about a ritual celebration in which they have participated
- Students will be able to construct a bare-bones version of their own new ritual celebration or life cycle event
- Students will be able to distinguish between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim celebratory and life cycle events
- Students will be able to formulate an opinion or observation about the various holidays and life cycle events which they explored

Resources:

Celebrapardy Questions / Board

Materials for different learning stations (examples from different Jewish, Christian, and Muslim rituals)

Student journals

Pens

Timeline:

00-05 – Set Induction

05-15 – Ritual Celebration Creation

15-25 – Pair and Share

25-30 – Defining Ritual Celebrations

30-45 – Activity 1

45-55 – Snack and Socializing

55-70 – Activity 2

70-75 – Wrap up

75-80 – Conclusion

Core Learning Experiences:

Set Induction: Instructor will ask students to think about the most creative, interesting, or unique ceremony they ever participated in or witnessed. This could be a graduation, a confirmation, a “coming of age,” a hair-cutting, a baby naming, or something else totally out-there. Give them a few moments to think about it, and then have participants share the ceremony they thought of and why it was unique or interesting.

Ritual Celebration Creation: Once students have shared the unique ceremony they thought of, do the following:

Ask: “Students, how do you define ceremony?” (*A boring service, an event like a graduation or a Bat Mitzvah, an occasion that has to do with transition, something my parents make me sit through*)

Respond to their suggestions. Add your definition of the word “ceremony.” (*A formal occasion, typically one celebrating a particular event or holiday, an act or series of acts performed according to a traditional form*)³⁰

Say: “Today, I’m going to ask you to do something totally unique and creative. Imagine that you have the power to create your own entirely new ceremony, focusing on anything you want. It can be anything under the sun – any ceremony which **marks some sort of transition or event**. It can be as crazy or as simple as you can imagine. Think of what it is and **give us a name for that ceremony**. Remember – you are only thinking of the idea, the concept. You don’t have to draw out an entire ceremony, only the general idea of it.

Give students about ten minutes to think of their ceremony.

Ask students to give a thumbs-up when they are done.

Say: “Let’s go around the room and share our ceremony name.”

Go around the room and have students share the name of the ceremony WITHOUT explaining it.

Say: “These are some super interesting -sounding names of ceremonies! Now I’m going to ask you to partner up with the person next to you and share with each other what your ceremony is all about. Go!”

Pair and Share / Share with Class:

Give students five minutes to share with their partner. Once the five minutes are up, ask the pairs to resume their conversations and turn back to the entire class.

Ask: “How many of you heard some creative, interesting ceremonies?” (*Students should raise their hands*)

Ask: “Can someone please summarize for me a ceremony they found interesting and unique, and explain why? (*Have students share the ceremonies they found interesting or unique*)

Say: “Many of you are probably wondering why we started with this activity. Well, our new unit is all about ritual celebrations – holidays and ceremonies which Jews, Christians, and Muslims observe. But before we begin this unit, we have to get to the bottom of what a ceremony actually *is* – and what it’s rooted in. Holidays, celebrations, ceremonies – they’re not just random, arbitrary, disconnected things. They’re connected in some way to something that happened, or to an important event in the religion’s history. Today we are going to explore how these ceremonies and rituals manifest themselves before jumping in to the rest of our unit.

Defining Ritual Celebrations

Instructor will then put the following two quotes on the board:

Ritual: A religious or solemn ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed according to a prescribed order.³¹

³⁰ Merriam Webster Online Dictionary. Ed. Unknown. s.v., “Ceremony.”

Celebration: The action of marking one's pleasure at an important event or occasion by engaging in an enjoyable, typically social activity.³²

Instructor will **Ask:** Please tell us of a time when you have encountered a ritual before. (*At my Bat Mitzvah, a wedding, a cousin's funeral, a close friend's Confirmation, graduation*)

Instructor will **Ask:** Please tell us of a time when you have encountered a celebration before. (*Bat Mitzvah afterparty, a wedding reception, birthday party for my mom, graduation party*)

Instructor will **Say:** These are all great examples of rituals and celebrations. I can tell (if you can tell) that some are religious and others are secular. (not religious) For the religious examples, some of them could be Jewish, some could be Christian, some could be Buddhist, it's all up in the air.

My question is, how do we distinguish ritual celebrations amongst the three religions we are studying? In other words, what would make a Jewish wedding "Jewish?" What would make a Catholic funeral Catholic? And – why do you think it's important to distinguish between these different types of religiously-rooted ceremonies?

Instructor will ask: How do we separate these different life cycle events and holidays from one another?

Celebrapardy (Resource 5.1) (a la Jeopardy)

Celebrapardy is a game where participants will be presented with a description of some sort of life cycle event or holiday and they have to guess whether it's within the tradition of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. This game is an opportunity for students to encounter different elements of other religions' celebrations and draw lines of comparison and distinction among them.

Please make clear to participants that some of the answers might be true to all three religions. Additionally – your students may not know the answers to some of these questions, even if they were covered earlier on in the guide. The objective of this game is to demonstrate the similarities and differences between the religious rituals and ceremonies practiced by Jews, Christians, and Muslims. It's a combination exercise in process and content.

First, the instructor should divide up participants into two, three, or four teams. Have students come up with a team name, and make sure there is a dedicated scorekeeper on-hand to document point tallies. Students will likely get enthusiastically into this game – which is great! Instructor should feel free to add to or modify the list of celebrations, depending on the time allotted.

Learning Stations

Following the conclusion of the game, instructor will have already set up as many learning stations as time/resources/space will allow. These stations are a chance for participants to explore, at their own leisure, different elements or examples of ritual celebrations or life cycle events in each respective religion represented. Ahead of time, instructor should gather together different tangible representations of Judaic, Christian, and Muslim celebrations. This can include

³¹ Merriam Webster Online Dictionary. Ed. Unknown. s.v., "Ritual"

³² Ibid, s.v. "Celebration"

wedding programs from religious ceremonies, pictures of Muslims in prayer, wafers from Christian communion, etc. Instructor should put these stations together in a thoughtful, intentional way.

A suggestion for how to set up the learning stations:

Station 1: Jewish Wedding – Wine glass, pictures, piece of a chuppah, Ketubah, “The New Jewish Wedding,” by Anita Diamant, picture of couple on two chairs at their reception.

Station 2: Christmas Eve – Picture or diagram of the Nativity Scene, picture or YouTube video of Christians in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve, Christmas tree ornaments, copy of Christmas Mass service.

Station 3: Ramadan Feast – Pictures from Ramadan evening celebrations, copy of Qu’ran verses for that time of year, a prayer rug, recipe for a festive dish.

And so forth...

This is only a suggestion for what can be explored during this time. Instructor should investigate ahead of time what resources are available, plus whether or not technology can be used during this time. (For example, pre-loading YouTube videos, showing a slideshow of pictures from a specific place or celebration, playing music from the specific rituals or celebrations represented)

As students make their way through the learning stations, they should be writing in their own journals their various thoughts, observations, and questions on the learning stations they are observing.

Instructor should feel free to play appropriate music in the background, should music not be playing from any one of the learning stations represented.

Conclusion

After students have concluded the learning station activity, instructor should ask participants to sit down next to their partner from the opening activity. Instructor will **ask**, “Please share with your partner one completely new observation – something you never knew before – that you have acquired from one of these learning stations.”

Participants will share with one another.

Instructor will **ask**, “I would love to hear some of the questions or observations that came up after these activities today. Please share them with me. (*Students will share with instructor*)

Instructor will conclude by **saying**, “It’s been really fun getting to explore some of these rituals and holidays and different types of celebrations today in class. I look forward to the rest of our unit and delving deeper into the meaning behind these celebrations.”

Lesson 2: Rituals and Celebrations in Judaism

Essential Questions: How do we mark the passage of time, specifically at the Jewish High Holidays? How do we mark the transition from single to married in a Jewish wedding?

Objectives:

- Students will be able to identify Yamim Nora'im as the Days of Awe
- Students will be able to list the main elements of the Jewish wedding
- Students will be able to generally explain the rituals of the Jewish wedding
- Students will be able to analyze key passages from the High Holiday *machzor* (prayer book)
- Students will be able to compose their own personal response to a prompt for their upcoming Confirmation ceremony
- Students will be able to evaluate the presence of ritual at a Jewish wedding

Introduction: Instructor should consider playing two recognizable pieces of music – perhaps from the liturgy of High Holidays or a joyous, upbeat Jewish wedding melody. For example, *Kol Nidre*, *Avinu Malkeinu*; *Sheva Brachot*, *Dodi Li*. Instructor should use these musical moments to introduce the rituals surrounding the High Holidays and a Jewish wedding. For example, after playing this music, instructor should ask what mood each piece is trying to set, if students recognize words, what feeling they think the composer was trying to evoke, etc. This should be a lead-in to the following activities.

Activity 1: Holidays on High

Essential Question: What do the High Holidays signify?

The High Holidays, the Yamim'Noraim, the Days of Awe; whatever students wish to call them, these specific days in the Jewish calendar are the most awe-filled, holy days of our spiritual calendar. They are an extended period of reflection, repentance, and renewal. And they are about much more than apples dipped in honey on Rosh Hashanah and banging our chests to repent on Yom Kippur.

As Reuven Hammer writes, “*The Yamim Nora'im have two main foci: judgment and forgiveness... While the focus on Rosh Hashanah is on human responsibility and divine judgment, that of Yom Kippur is on human failure and divine forgiveness.*”³³

This activity should introduce students to the themes behind the Days of Awe. One way to do this is to have students analyze key passages from a High Holiday *machzor*: Unetaneh Tokef, Avinu Malkeinu, Areshet Tzfateinu, Kol Nidre, etc. These passages should be used as lenses for deeper analysis; students should be able to discuss amongst themselves how and in what ways these passages focus on the themes of the Yamim Nora'im. See Resource 5.2 for a sample passage with questions.

³³ Reuven Hammer. *Entering the High Holy Days: A Complete Guide to the History, Prayers, and Themes*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998) 22

Activity 2: The New Jewish Wedding

Essential Question: What makes a Jewish wedding “Jewish?”

First, an introduction: There is a wonderful story of a rabbi and her two students passing by a wedding as it is concluding. They overhear some guests leaving and commenting to each other on what a wonderful wedding it was – the food was fantastic. Other guests are overheard saying, what a wonderful wedding – the music was divine. Finally, some guests leave the wedding and turn to each other to say: “what a wonderful wedding – thank God those two got together.”³⁴

This quote beautifully captures the sentiment and primary aim of the Jewish wedding. It’s not about the food, the flowers, the band, or the party; far from it. A wedding – and specifically, a *Jewish* wedding – is the celebration of a liminal moment in which two distinct souls become one. There is perhaps no other ritualized life cycle event in the whole of Jewish tradition with this level of *oneg* (joy).

For this activity, students will have already (likely) been introduced to the Jewish wedding in one of the learning stations of Lesson 1. The primary goal of this activity is for students to go beyond it. Essentially, students must answer: what are the nuts and bolts of the Jewish wedding ceremony? What are *kiddushin* and *erusin*? Why do we break the glass – what does that signify? What is the general flow of the Jewish wedding ceremony?

For all this, instructor should first photocopy certain segments of Anita Diamant’s *The New Jewish Wedding* (Fireside Books, 2001) for students to read. Instructor should also prepare photocopies of the Jewish wedding outline in either the Reform or Conservative Rabbi’s Manual. (Contact the Rabbinical Assembly or Central Conference of American Rabbis, or ask your synagogue’s rabbi) Students may also want to read the translated text of one traditional and one egalitarian *ketubah*.

Instructor may want to consider having students split up into different groups and have each group focus on a different aspect of the wedding ceremony. Depending on instructor’s comfort level, he or she may want to bring in photographs from their own wedding or that of a close friend, their *ketubah*, the rabbi who officiated, their wedding ceremony video, etc.

Another suggestion is to have students attend a Jewish wedding ceremony. This would obviously need to be coordinated well in advance, and approval would need to come from all parties. However – seeing the ritual with their own eyes can help students grasp the outline and common themes of this particular life cycle event.

By the end of this activity, students should be able to generally explain the various rituals of a Jewish wedding.

Activity 3: Marking our Transition

Essential Question: How will we incorporate our own rituals in our Confirmation Ceremony?

³⁴ Story attributed to Rabbi Don Goor of Temple Judea in Tarzana, CA.

For this activity, students will first ponder the following question:

For our upcoming Confirmation ceremony, what rituals do we wish to invoke? What prayers, music, unique religious elements, or personal compositions will we use to mark the passing of time as we become Confirmands of this temple? How will we involve this yearlong course? Where will we explain and involve what we have learned?

Have students reflect on this question for a few minutes, and then spend 15-20 minutes writing a thoughtful response. The goal of this exercise is to help students begin the conversation on what their Confirmation ceremony will look like.

Conclusion: Instructor should consider closing with students reading their personal responses aloud to one another.

Lesson 3: Rituals and Celebrations in Christianity

Essential Questions: How are rituals, rites, sacraments, and ordinances significant to Christianity? What is the Lenten Season, and what does it signify? What is a baptism?

Objectives:

- Students will be able to define rites, sacraments, and ordinances and explain why they are controversial in Christianity
- Students will be able to recall the progression from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday
- Students will be able to summarize the themes of the Lenten Season
- Students will be able to compare baptism with the Jewish ritual of *mikveh*
- Students will be able to generate questions about the Lenten Season, such as “From where does the Easter Bunny tradition emerge?”
- Students will be able to evaluate the presence of Jesus in the celebration of Easter

A Word before this Lesson: To an outsider, sacraments and ordinances may look like similar manifestations of Christian ritual. However, they are not. “Sacraments are perhaps the most divisive issue in the Christian Church and are a primary cause for the historical split between the Catholics and Protestants. Therefore, although ... the core beliefs of the ordinances that all Christians affirm [are similar], the differences and subtleties between them ... are important. It’s important to maintain a balanced perspective.”³⁵

Introduction: TBD by Instructor

Activity 1: The Rite Stuff

Essential Question: What are rites, sacraments, and ordinances?

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, in addition to many other religions of the world, possess rites. Rites can be defined in any number of ways. There are “rites of passage,” including religious and secular events which mark the passage of time for a young person. There are “rites of worship,” which include various ways of worshipping – from Shabbat services to Christmas mass. And there are “rites of devotion,” including religious pilgrimages. (ie – *Hajj* for Muslims)

In the Christian community, “sacraments are acts of worship that are understood by the worshipers to give access to an intimate union with the divine and to be efficacious for salvation.”³⁶

This activity should introduce students to the concept of rites, sacraments, and ordinances. How this is done is entirely up to the Instructor. See resource 5.3 for the Encyclopedia Judaica’s section on Christian sacraments and their theology. Instructor may want to stage some sort of

³⁵ Richard Wagner. *Christianity for Dummies: A Reference for the Rest of Us*. (Hoboken: Wiley Publishing, 2004) 140

³⁶ Encyclopedia of Religion, 2nd edition, s.v., “Sacraments.”

sacramental ceremony, show a YouTube video, invite a figure from a local church to give a lecture on sacraments and ordinances, etc.

Activity 2: Baptism

Essential Questions: What is Baptism? Where did it originate? How is it similar to the Jewish ritual of *mikveh*?

Many students will likely be familiar with the term *baptism* – which “comes from the Greek *baptein*, which means to plunge, to immerse, or to wash; it also signifies, from the Homeric period onward, any rite of immersion in water. The baptismal rite is similar to many other ablution rituals found in a number of religions, but it is the symbolic value of baptism and the psychological intent underlying it that provides the true definition of the rite, a rite usually found associated with a religious initiation.”³⁷

A baptism is typically an immersion in a body of water which signifies entry into some aspect of the Christian faith. While a baptism ceremony takes different forms and shapes in different sects of Christianity, the one constant is the presence of water. The New Testament claims that Jesus was baptized. We read this in the canon of John, 1:29-33.

The Jewish ritual of *mikveh* is similar in nature to baptism. *Mikveh* is typically done under three different circumstances:

- For traditional Jewish women following their menstrual cycle; this follows the Halachic laws of family purity or *niddah*
- For brides (and some grooms) just before their wedding
- For converts to Judaism

What each of these rituals symbolizes is some sort of recognition of a liminal life moment. For a baptism, it may be the welcoming of an infant into the Christian faith. For *mikveh*, it may be welcoming a new convert into the religion. In both these circumstances, water is the method of initiation; the symbol of the rite of passage.

This activity can take any number of shapes. Students may be inclined to witness a *baptism* or visit a nearby *mikveh*. (Most Jewish communities will have some form of a *mikveh*. Ask around) Students may be inclined to study passages from the New Testament which describe or allude to baptism. Students may wish to interview a recent convert – to Judaism, Christianity, or both – who engaged in the act of baptism or *mikveh* for themselves. The emphasis in this activity is on students understanding the basis of baptism and its link with the act of *mikveh*.

Activity 3: The Lenten Season

Essential Question: What is the Lenten Season all about?

The Lenten Season is a 40+ day period similar to the Yamim Nora'im in its themes. It begins with Ash Wednesday and ends with Easter, the holiday which marks Jesus' resurrection; the most significant day in the Christian religious calendar. This period focuses on abstention, self-denial, and contemplation. It is a time in which observant Christians prepare themselves mentally

³⁷ Encyclopedia of Religion, 2nd edition, s.v., “Baptism.”

and physically to recognize and honor Jesus' death and resurrection. It culminates in the holiday of Easter, which celebrates the resurrection of Christ following his crucifixion.

This activity may best be done with learning stations, or instructor may wish to present different "artifacts" from the Lenten Season. This may include:

- Pictures of individuals with ash on their foreheads for Ash Wednesday and explaining the symbolism
- Showing videos or playing music from Easter celebrations
- Taking students through the time period between Ash Wednesday and Easter, including Maundy Thursday and Good Friday
- Posing a question to students: "What would you give up for forty days and nights?"
- Addressing, "Where did the Easter Bunny come from?"
- Examining other places in Jewish tradition where we see extended periods of abstinence or contemplation (*time period leading up to Revelation, the counting of the Omer, etc.*)

This activity should connect students with the idea that Lent and Easter are inherently intertwined. They mark the time period in which Jesus' life came to an end and celebrate his supposed return to Earth.

Conclusion: Instructor may wish to close by asking students to share one similarity or distinction between Judaism and Christianity they observed in this lesson.

Lesson 4: Rituals and Celebrations in Islam

Essential Questions: What rituals, important time periods, and celebrations are significant to Islam? What is Ramadan?

Objectives:

- Students will be able to define “Ramadan” as the ninth month of the Muslim calendar in which individuals fast from sunrise to sundown
- Students will be able to define “*iftar*” as break-fast
- Students will be able to summarize the intention behind Muslim naming ceremonies
- Students will be able to distinguish Ramadan as being separate from the rest of the Muslim calendar
- Students will be able to contrast naming ceremonies in Islam from the Jewish ritual of *brit milah*
- Students will be able to compare Ramadan with the Lenten Season and Yamim Nora'im
- Students will be able to compose an individual outline for one aspect of their Confirmation ceremony

Introduction: TBD by Instructor

Activity 1: Ramadan

Essential Questions: What is Ramadan? Why is it significant for Muslims?

Ramadan is a month long period of fasting (from sun-up to sundown) and abstention from pleasurable activities. For Muslims, it is a period which solidifies and enhances individuals' connections to God. As breaking the fast (*iftar*) is typically done with one's family or congregation, it is also a time period which emphasizes connection to community. Resource 5.4 provides a brief background on Ramadan.

Similar to the High Holidays and Lenten Season, Ramadan is a period in which a person contemplates his or her relationship with the greater world and their faith. The importance of Ramadan to a practicing Muslim is substantial; fasting during Ramadan is one of the Five Pillars of Islam.

At this point in the course, students will hopefully be able to articulate why Ramadan is such a significant time period. They will also likely be able to compare the themes of Ramadan with those of the Yamim Nora'im and Lenten Season. This activity should take students back to the fundamentals of each faith. The first unit of content in this course was God; now, here, in the rituals and celebrations unit, students can explore manifestations of God's presence in the day-to-day.

Activity 2: Birth and Naming

Essential Questions: How does birth and naming a baby happen in Islam?

When a baby is born in any culture, typically there are rites and rituals associated with welcoming that child. In Judaism, boys have the ritual of *brit milah*, or a *bris*, to welcome them into the Covenant of Abraham. For girls in Judaism, there is typically a baby naming or *brit bat*, which attempts to make an equivalent ceremony as the *bris*. In Christianity, many families baptize their infant children. In Islam, the customs are mostly similar.

In resource 5.5, one can read how birth and naming occur in Moroccan culture, simply for a specific window onto the practice in one Islamic community. Instructor should note that the act of circumcision, or *khitan* in Arabic, is a controversial practice with no time-bound commandment. Children – boys *and* girls – can be circumcised at any point in their lives. For that reason, *khitan* has been omitted from this Guide.

Instructor can choose any way to introduce birth and naming in Islam to students. The prevailing message should be, Muslim communities typically welcome babies into their faith in a similar fashion to Judaism and Islam. Different Islamic communities – specifically for this activity, Morocco – typically welcome their newborns in specific, ritualized ways.

Activity 3: Marking our Transition

Essential Question: How will we take all these rituals to which we have been exposed and incorporate them into our Confirmation ceremony?

For this final activity, instructor should consider having students take one of the rituals or customs explored during this unit and analyzing it in the following manner:

Name of Ritual or Holy Period: _____

- When does this ritual / holy period typically occur?
- What themes does this ritual / holy period cover?
- How is this ritual / time period typically recognized? Is it celebrated, or is it a solemn occasion?
- What are some creative ways one could celebrate or recognize this ritual?
- How might this ritual / time period better connect an individual with God? With community?

This should be a springboard for a discussion or a further activity on the topic of rituals and transitions. Students' minds should be left percolating about how best to create their own unique Confirmation ceremony in the following unit.

Activity 4: Outlining our Ceremony

Essential Question: What general feeling do we wish to create at our Confirmation ceremony?

For this additional activity in the lesson, instructor should consider having students examine different outlines for previous years' Confirmation ceremonies. What is the typical outline or rubric for each Confirmation? What are students expected to do? What place does ritual have in these ceremonies? How open is the congregation to trying something new? Where and how is student input received?

Students should be able to, at this point, outline in pairs or small groups what they wish to create for their Confirmation ceremony. Students should be able to compose some sort of document which outlines their goals and objectives for the ceremony they wish to create. More information will be given at the start of Unit 6: Confirmation Workshop. This activity should merely get their minds percolating on what's to come.

Conclusion: TBD by Instructor

Lesson 5: Encounter

Memorable Moment – Interfaith Dialogue

Students will visit a house of prayer or community center separate from their own to meet with a group from that facility. Though it is preferred that this group be around the same age as the participants in this course, this may not always be possible. The group should be representative of the “folk” sector – not clergy or senior staff; rather, congregants, members, or relatively-to-regularly involved participants.

This meeting will involve facilitated dialogue, a shared meal, and an opportunity to debrief the learning which has taken place throughout the unit. The first step in planning this meeting (after scheduling the visit at the start of the school year) is to get in touch with the facilitator of whatever group with whom you will be working. Discuss with them how things have gone thus far, where students are at in their learning processes, and any concerns or lingering questions each group may have.

A few logistical questions to consider ahead of time are:

- How will your group be getting to the facility?
- What part of the facility will the group be meeting in?
- Will there be time for a tour of the facility?
- Who is providing the meal? Are there any expenses that need requesting ahead of time?
- Will families be invited to participate?
- Who is responsible for making and creating resources ahead of time?

A few thoughts regarding appropriate practice in a house of worship are:

- What should guests wear at this facility?
- What types of food should or should not be served? (In the event of a potluck, make sure to communicate this clearly ahead of time to those bringing food)
- What is the appropriate way for guests to address clergy members, lay leadership, etc.?

Please note that the structure below is meant as a helpful guide for setting up a successful encounter with another group. Please also note that whichever group is hosting will, in all likelihood, not be focusing their yearlong learning or programming on learning about Judaism. However – this should not matter. The sole purpose of these encounter sessions is to introduce students to what “the people actually do,” providing a realistic backdrop to the knowledge they have acquired thus far in this course.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to articulate their learned knowledge on the topic of rituals and celebrations – meaning, students will be able to identify key rituals or celebrations in Jewish, Muslim, or Christian daily life, plus any key definitions or important terms
- Students will be able to identify lingering questions they have regarding rituals and celebrations.

- Students will be able to compare and contrast the attitudes of the folk (average day-to-day followers of a particular religion) with the elite (clergy and heavily involved lay people) on the topic of religious ritual.
- Students will be able to create relationships – hopefully, lasting ones – with members of a faith community different from their own
- Students will be able to analyze a connection to their own Jewish identity through these dialogue groups.

Timeline: (Approximation)

00-10 – Welcome and Introductions

10-40 – Concentric Circles

40-80 – Meal

80-110 – Facilitated Dialogue Groups

110-120 – Closure and Dismissal

Activity 1: Concentric Circles (~30 minutes)

When the entire group is gathered together, begin by thanking everyone for coming / hosting. Instruct the group to make two circles, one inside the other, inner facing outer. Facilitator will ask a series of questions which each pair has to address. Before getting to the questions, participants must introduce themselves to one another and say a little bit about themselves. Where do they go to school, where do they work, what’s their favorite thing to do on the weekend, favorite ice cream flavor, etc.

Questions:

- 1) Tell each other about the history of your involvement in your congregation/school/community center, etc.
- 2) Tell each other about family – what is your family’s background, religiously and culturally?
- 3) Tell each other about the first time you remember encountering a ritual or a religious celebration of some sort in your faith community.
- 4) Tell each other one piece of knowledge you have acquired about ritual that is separate from your own faith’s beliefs.
- 5) Tell each other about a time in which you felt personally moved or uplifted by a ritual in which you participated.
- 6) Tell each other about a time in which you felt disconnected, blocked, or “shut off” from your own faith.
- 7) Tell each other about a time in which you questioned something everyone around you seemed to simply accept.
- 8) Tell each other what lingering question you may have about the other’s perspective on God or their faith.
- 9) Tell each other something very few people know about you.

Activity 2: Breaking Bread (~40 minutes)

Once everyone enters the dining area, ask participants to sit next to someone they have not yet spoken to. On each person's plate should be one of the ten questions listed above. Ask participants to address the questions in front of them before eating, and feel free to let that be a conversation opener for the rest of the meal.

Before and after the meal should be prayers/blessings customary to each religion with a brief explanation. (For example: Ha Motzi, Birkat HaMazon, Grace)

Activity 3: Breakout Groups (~30 minutes)

Instructor(s) should break participants into as many groups as there are facilitators – this could mean instructors, teachers, parents, lay leaders, clergy. Once participants have been grouped, facilitator should take their group to a secluded part of the facility so there is more privacy. Participants should be comfortable and sit however they wish to.

For the breakout groups, the facilitator should be aware of their role as facilitator, but also the need for emotional safety and comfort. Facilitator should keep in check the various emotional temperatures of each participant and ensure that they set right from the start an environment of respect and tolerance.

Questions:

- 1) Talk about a time in which you were moved by a ritual experience of another religion.
- 2) Talk about a time in which you were perplexed or challenged by the ritual(s) of another faith.
- 3) Talk about a time in which you felt proud of your religion or religious background.
- 4) Talk about a time in which you were embarrassed or uncomfortable with your religion or ethnic background.
- 5) Talk about a time in which a connection to your faith guided you through a difficult time in your life.
- 6) Talk about a time in which you struggled with the idea of God.
- 7) Talk about a time in which you felt challenged by or disconnected from a ritual in your synagogue, church, mosque, etc.
- 8) Talk about a time in which you questioned the status quo, or “the way things are” of your religion.
- 9) Talk about something you feel your faith does *right*. For example, the rituals surrounding weddings, reaching out to others in need, etc.

Conclusion:

For the conclusion of this encounter visit, instructor(s) may want to facilitate some sort of activity which focuses on the community coming together to share with one another. Some suggestions:

- A candle-passing activity where everyone says something they learned or are still curious about.

- Teaching and singing a popular song within each respective community – about gratitude, blessings, thanksgiving, etc.
- Teach and sing the “Traveler’s Prayer,” by Debbie Friedman (Resource 3.8)

Assessment #9: Rituals and Celebrations Unit

Post-Unit Video

Congratulations on finishing the “Rituals and Celebrations” unit! For this video installment, you will be asked to reflect on what you learned during these lessons. First, please review your pre-unit submission to the Online Video Journal. This will help you answer some of the questions posed below. Next, sit down with these questions and really think about your answers. Look back over your notes and readings and recall some of the activities you did to help answer these questions.

Here is your prompt:

Name: _____

Date of Filming: _____

Setting: Where are you going to film yourself, and why did you choose that location? How is it different, or is it the same, as your previous location? Why?

Clothing: What are you going to wear in your video, and why did you choose this outfit? How is it different, or is it the same, as your previous outfit? Why?

Participants: Who else is joining you in this video, and why are they joining you? Are they the same individuals or different individuals than those in your previous videos? Why?

Props: What props are you going to use in this video, and why are you using them? Are they the same props you used in the first video, or not? Why?

Additional: What other, additional people, props, artifacts, or personal stories will you include to tell how you have progressed or not progressed in your understanding of ritual and celebration?

Questions to Address in your Post-Unit Video:

- 1) Following the conclusion of this unit, what do you personally feel about ritual and celebration in religious practice? Have your feelings changed?

- 2) What is one Jewish ritual, custom, or celebration which you did not already know about?

- 3) What is one Christian ritual, custom, or celebration which you did not already know about?

- 4) What is one Muslim ritual, custom, or celebration which you did not already know about?

- 5) What is one observation you have made about how each religion recognizes life cycle moments in a similar way?

- 6) What is one observation you have made about how different religions recognize life cycle moments in differing, unique ways?

- 7) What is one thing that surprised you in this unit?

- 8) What is one stereotype you confronted or preconceived notion you addressed during this unit?

- 9) Did you answer the one question you had moving into this unit? If so, how?

- 10) This is your last formal submission to the Online Video Journal. What **one message** do you have to say to those viewing these journal submissions, at the conclusion of this course?

Resources

Resource 5.1 – Celebrapardy

Categories:

Holidays
Ritual Moments
Dos and Don'ts
Historical Roots

Holidays:

(100) This holiday celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ, falling in *most* but not *all* parts of the world on December 25 each year. (Christmas)
200) This holiday, whose name means “weeks,” recognizes God giving the Torah to the Jewish people. (Shavuot)
300) This pious, solitary day commemorates the day of crucifixion of Jesus Christ. (Good Friday)
400) This month-long Muslim holiday involves fasting from sunup to sundown. (Ramadan)
500) This Jewish holy day takes place during the summer and commemorates the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. It involves fasting and reading the book of “Eicha,” Lamentations. (Tisha b’Av)

Ritual Moments:

100) This ceremony takes place on the eighth day of a Jewish boy’s life, marking his entry into the Covenant of Abraham. (Bris)
200) In order to read from the holy Qu’ran, Muslims must first engage in this activity in order to be pure and clean. (Wudu, meaning ritual cleansing of the hands and feet)
300) This ritual, also called an ordinance, involves the “taking” (eating) of bread and wine, which are believed to represent the pure body and soul of Jesus Christ. (Eucharist or Sacrament)
400) This is the name for the ritual slaughter of animals according to the Jewish laws of Kashrut. (Schitah)
500) This ritual activity involves a person dipping themselves in water for the sake of physical and spiritual renewal. (Mikveh (Jewish), Baptism (Christian), Ghusl (Muslim))

Customs and Garb:

100) When visiting a Jewish house of worship on a Saturday morning, men and boys are usually expected to what? (Put a kippah on their head)
200) When one is praying in a mosque or Muslim house of worship, one is expected to first do what? (Take their shoes off)
300) In most churches, when the prayer leader says “God be with you,” the typical response is what? (And also with you)
400) On what day of the year is it common to see people sporting black soot on their foreheads? (Ash Wednesday)
500) This is the name for the traditional garment worn by many observant Muslim women in public. (Burqa)

Historical Roots

100) The modern Jewish prayer service is believed to emulate services and celebrations in what city in Israel thousands of years ago? (Jerusalem)

200) The Qu'ran was believed to be written by God and given to what major Muslim figure around the year 600? (Muhammad)

300) The crucifixion of Christ occurred at the same time as what major Jewish holiday? (Passover)

400) This religion counts Moses as one of its prophets. (Judaism *and* Islam)

500) This person is largely responsible for introducing Christianity and its customs to the rest of the world, particularly the Roman Empire. (Paul the Apostle)

Resource 5.2 – Analyzing the High Holidays

The Prayer: Unetaneh Tokef³⁸

Hebrew Text	Translation
<p>וַיִּתְנַהֵּן תְּקַרְףּ קִדְּשֵׁת הַיּוֹם כִּי הוּא נוֹרָא וְאִיּוֹם וְבוֹ תִּשְׁאַ מִלְּכוּתְךָ וַיִּכּוֹן בְּחַסְדְּךָ כְּסֵאֲךָ וְתִשָּׁבַע עָלָיו בְּאַמְתּוֹ. אֲמַת כִּי אַתָּה הוּא דִּין וּמוֹכִיחַ וַיּוֹדַע וְנָעַד וְכוֹתֵב וְחוֹתֵם וְסוֹפֵר וּמוֹנֵה. וְתִזְכֵּר כָּל הַנְּשִׁכְחוֹת, וְתִפְתַּח אֶת סֵפֶר הַזְּכוּרוֹת. וּמֵאֲלִיו יִקְרָא. וְחוֹתֵם יָד כָּל אָדָם בּוֹ. וּבְשׁוֹפֵר גָּדוֹל יִתְקַע. וְקוֹל דְּמָמָה דַּקָּה יִשְׁמַע. וּמִלְּאֲכִים יִחַפְּזוּן. וְחֵיל וְרַעְדָה יֵאֱחָזוּן. וַיֵּאמְרוּ הִנֵּה יוֹם הַדִּין. לִפְקֹד עַל אָבָא מְרוֹם בְּדִין. כִּי לֹא יִצְפוּ בְּעֵינֶיךָ בְּדִין.</p>	<p>"Let us now relate the power of this day's holiness, for it is awesome and frightening. On it Your Kingship will be exalted; Your throne will be firmied with kindness and You will sit upon it in truth. It is true that You alone are the One Who judges, proves, knows, and bears witness; Who writes and seals, (counts and calculates); Who remembers all that was forgotten. You will open the Book of Chronicles—it will read itself, and everyone's signature is in it. The great shofar will be sounded and a still, thin sound will be heard. Angels will hasten, a trembling and terror will seize them—and they will say, 'Behold, it is the Day of Judgment, to muster the heavenly host for judgment!'—for even they cannot be vindicated in Your eyes in judgment."</p>

The Unetaneh Tokef is chanted during the Shacharit service on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The prayer occurs during the *Amidah*.

Questions:

- 1) What do you think are some core themes of this prayer?
- 2) What does this prayer say about God's role in the universe?
- 3) How does this prayer connect with the Yamim Nora'im themes of judgment and forgiveness?
- 4) What does this prayer make you think about God?
- 5) What does this prayer say about human beings' capability and fallibility?

³⁸ The Jewish Study Bible, Oxford University Press, 2004, commentary to Deuteronomy 29:19 and elsewhere

Resource 5.3 – Sacraments

Sacrament: Christian Sacraments

Encyclopedia of Religion

Ed. Lindsay Jones. Vol. 12. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005. p7958-7964. [Monika K. Hellwig](#)

**Macmillan
Reference USA™**

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In the Christian community **sacraments** are acts of worship that are understood by the worshipers to give access to an intimate union with the divine and to be efficacious for salvation. The term **sacraments** is sometimes used in a very broad sense for places, persons, things, ceremonies, and events that mediate, or are intended to mediate, the presence and power of the divine. In this broad sense, Christians acknowledge **sacraments** in other religious traditions and also in the particular circumstances of the lives of individuals and groups. A simple illustrative story in the Hebrew scriptures (the Old Testament of Christians) is that of Jacob setting up a stone in the desert and calling the place Bethel, house of God (*Gn. 28:10–22*).

More usually the term **sacraments** refers to a limited number of ancient rituals understood to be the acts of Jesus Christ carried out through the continuing ministry of the church. The Eastern Christian and Roman Catholic churches enumerate these rituals as seven: baptism, confirmation (or chrismation), eucharist, penance (sacrament of reconciliation), matrimony, ordination (or holy orders), and the anointing of the sick (extreme unction). Protestant churches usually enumerate the **sacraments** (in the narrower sense of the term) as only two, namely, baptism and eucharist, because these two are clearly identified in the New Testament.

The word *sacrament* derives from Latin *sacramentum*, meaning "oath," "pledge," or "bond." As a Christian term applied to rituals of worship, it is found no earlier than the third century, when it came into use in Western churches as a translation of the Greek term *mustērion*, which had the religious connotation of effecting union with the divine, even before Christians used the term in that sense. When the word *sacrament* is used in the singular without contextual specification, it may be assumed to mean the Eucharist.

JEWISH ROOTS

At the time of Jesus of Nazareth the people of Israel, the Jewish community, enjoyed a rich accumulation of symbolism and ritual. Jesus and his early followers participated in that heritage and followed the observances. Characteristically, Christian rituals were shaped not only out of the immediate experience of the early Christian community but also out of the stories,

imagery, and ritual observances of their Jewish tradition. This influence can be seen in Christian perceptions of sacred space and sacred time, and it also appears in the configuration of sacred actions.

The core of the Christian sacramental system is the Eucharist, also known as the Divine Liturgy, the Lord's Supper, the Communion service, and the Mass. The ritual is based directly on the table grace of Jewish observance as solemnized in the Passover Seder. There are several common elements: the community is gathered to respond to God's call and to fulfill a commandment; the gathering is at a ritual meal at which prescribed foods are blessed, shared, and consumed; the accompanying prayers and ceremonies ritually reenact a past saving event so that the present worshipers become part of that past event and it becomes present in their experience; the doing of this anticipates a fulfillment that still lies in the future; the ritual (though not it alone) constitutes the participants as God's holy people. In the Jewish understanding and also in the Christian, the ritual is not effective in isolation from the community's daily life; on the contrary, it is effective precisely in its reshaping of the imagination and sense of identity of the worshipers, bringing about a transformation of individual and social life.

Other sacramental rites that have clear antecedents in Jewish observances are baptism in water as a ritual of spiritual regeneration, the imposition of hands in blessing, and the action of anointing to confer an office or mission. Beyond the direct influence of ritual actions of Jewish life, there is the much more extensive and pervasive indirect influence of stories, prayers, and symbols from the Hebrew scriptures. Thus, baptism is not easily understood without knowledge of the Hebrew stories of creation and sin, of the Deluge, and of the [Page 7959 | Top of Article](#) passing through the waters of the Red Sea at the Exodus and through the waters of the Jordan River as Israel took possession of the Promised Land. Similarly, confirmation (chrismation) is not readily understood without reference to the theme of the breath of God, which runs through the Hebrew scriptures.

EARLY HISTORY

Although there are references to sacramental activity in the New Testament, and these are accompanied by a sacramental theology (e.g., *1 Cor.*), little is known about the form of early Christian ritual except through late second-century sources. By the fourth century most of the rituals were elaborate and well established in the patterns that were to endure, though they were not numbered explicitly as seven until the twelfth century in the West and the seventeenth century in the East.

Early Christian Rites

The central sacrament has always been the Eucharist. From early times it has consisted of a ritual meal of small amounts of bread and wine, commemorating the farewell supper of Jesus before his death and extending the presence and friendship of Jesus to his followers through the ages. The celebration begins with readings from the Bible, prayers, usually a sermon on

the biblical texts read, and sometimes, hymns. Then follows a great prayer of praise and thanksgiving, recited by the one who presides over the ritual; in this context the story of the farewell supper is recited and reenacted. The bread and wine are consecrated, the bread is broken and distributed to the worshipers, who consume it immediately, and the wine is likewise consumed. This eating and drinking is known as "communion."

Admission to the community formed around the Eucharist is by baptism and confirmation. In the early centuries baptism was by total immersion of the candidate, preferably in running water, accompanied by a formula of profession of faith. This going through the water symbolizes a death and a spiritual rebirth. Baptism was surrounded by lesser ritual elements: a divesting of old clothes and donning of a new white robe (which was worn for about one week), an anointing, and the receiving of a lighted candle. The ritual was generally preceded by a fast of some days and an all-night vigil. A further step of the initiation into the community was a confirmation of the baptism by the bishop (the leader of the local church) with a laying on of hands, a further anointing, and a prayer that the Holy Spirit (the breath of God that was in Jesus) might descend upon the candidate.

In the early centuries, there were also many reconciliation (penance, repentance) rituals: the recitation of the Lord's Prayer was one. However, there was also a more formal ritual of reconciliation, later modified radically, that applied to those excommunicated from the Eucharist and the company of the faithful for some grave offense. A period of exclusion, accompanied by the wearing of a special garb and the performance of prescribed works of repentance that were supported by the prayers of the community, was concluded by a ceremony in which the bishop led the penitents back into the worship assembly to readmit them to the Eucharist.

The custom was established in the early centuries of the laying on of hands not only in confirmation but also in the designation of persons to certain ministries or offices in the life and worship of the community. Such laying on of hands symbolized the passing on of authorization understood to come in a continuous line from Jesus and his earliest followers. It was performed in the context of a worship assembly and was accompanied by prayers and solemnity.

From the fourth century onward there is evidence of the blessing of marriages, at least in certain cases, by bishops, although the ritual of marriage was otherwise performed according to local civil custom. Of the anointing of the sick there is, despite the injunction found in the New Testament (*Jas. 5:14*), no clear evidence from the early centuries of the church.

Theology of The Rites

Christian **sacraments** are based on the understanding that human existence in the world as human beings experience it is not as it is intended by God, its creator; hence they stand in need of salvation (redemption, rescue, healing). If all were in the harmony of God's creation, all things would speak to humanity of God and would serve its communion with God. However,

because of a complex legacy of the misuse of human freedom (a legacy known as original sin), the things of creation and the structures of human society tend to betray humans, turning them away from their own true good. Jesus Christ is seen as the savior (redeemer and healer) in his life, actions, teachings, death, and resurrection. The **sacraments** are understood as continuing his presence and redeeming power.

In the New Testament and the other writings extant from the earliest period of Christian history, known as the patristic period, the community dimension of the **sacraments** is inseparable from the communion with God that they offer. **Sacraments** are redemptive because they draw people into the fellowship in which salvation is found. Baptism is the outreach of God through Jesus in his community whereby it is possible for a person to turn (convert) from the ways and society of a world gone astray to the ways and society of the community of the faithful. That this is the meaning of baptism is evident in the New Testament in the early chapters of the *Acts of the Apostles* and in the instructions given in the early community, for instance, in the *Didache*. Similarly, the Eucharist is seen as fashioning worshipers into "one body" with Jesus Christ, which has far-reaching consequences for their lives and their relationships (as the apostle Paul explains in *1 Corinthians*, chapters 11–13).

In the patristic period, the theology of the **sacraments** was more inclusive and less specific than it later became, because the terms *mysterion*, among Greek writers, and *sacramentum*, among Latin writers, were being used rather generally for all Christian rituals, symbols, and elements of worship. But the emphasis is clearly on the Eucharist and the initiation into the fellowship of the Eucharist, with the understanding that it constitutes a dynamic in history. Not only does it commemorate the past event of the death and resurrection Page 7960 | [Top of Article](#) of Jesus, and put the worshiper in intimate communion with that event, but it anticipates a glorious fulfillment of all the biblical promises and hopes in the future, and puts the worshiper into intimate communion with that future, thereby transforming the quality of life and action within the historical present.

SACRAMENTS IN THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN TRADITION

The sacramental practice and theology of the Orthodox churches is in direct continuity with the Greek patristic writings, emphasizing wonder and reverence in the presence of the holy.

Orthodox Rites

Besides the seven **sacraments** enumerated above, Eastern Christianity recognizes a wide range of ritual considered sacramental in a broader sense: the anointing of a king; the rite of monastic profession; burial rites; blessing of water on the

feast of the Epiphany; and blessings of homes, fields, harvested crops, and artifacts. These are not, however, all of equal importance.

Although, since the seventeenth century, the Orthodox churches have accepted the Western enumeration of seven rites, the manner of celebration of Orthodox **sacraments** does not correspond closely to the Western celebrations. The first sacramental participation of an Orthodox Christian is that of initiation, usually in infancy. The children are baptized by total triple immersion with an accompanying formula invoking the triune God. This is followed immediately by the chrismation (anointing) of forehead, eyes, nostrils, mouth, ears, breast, hands, and feet, with words proclaiming the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit. As soon as possible thereafter, the infant is given Communion (either a small taste of the wine, or both bread and wine). This initiation is performed by a bishop or a priest.

The Eucharist, also known as the Divine Liturgy, is ordinarily celebrated daily, though the community as a whole is more likely to participate on Sundays, special feasts, and weekdays of Lent. It is performed in a highly elaborated way with processions, candles and incense, congregational singing, and the wearing of special vestments by the celebrating clergy.

The ordinary ritual of repentance and reconciliation is not a public ceremony as in the early church but a private conversation between a Christian and a priest who acts in the name of the church. The penitent, the person seeking forgiveness and reconciliation through the ministry of the church, ordinarily stands or sits before a cross, an icon (sacred image) of Jesus Christ, or the book of the Gospels. The priest, who stands to one side, admonishes the penitent to confess his or her sins to Christ, because he, the priest, is only a witness. Having heard the confession, and having perhaps given advice, the priest lays his stole (a type of scarf used as a ritual vestment) on the head of the penitent, lays his hand on it and pronounces a prayer of forgiveness. Besides this ritual of repentance, which can be repeated many times by the same person, the anointing of the sick is available to all who are ill, whether or not they are in danger of death. Anointing of the sick has the double purpose of prayer for healing from illness and forgiveness of sin.

The Orthodox churches ordain men only to their ministries, as bishops, priests, deacons, subdeacons, and readers. Ordinations are performed by a bishop during the Liturgy, and the consecration of a bishop is normally performed by three bishops. Essentially the rite is that of imposition of hands, but this is preceded by an acclamation of the congregation in which the faithful approve the candidate and consent to his ordination. The candidate is then brought to the altar to kiss its four corners and the hands of the bishop. The bishop lays hands on the candidate with a prayer invoking God's blessing.

The Orthodox marriage ceremony, celebrated by a priest, has two parts, the Office of Betrothal and the Office of Crowning, and includes the blessing and exchange of rings, the crowning of the bride and groom, and the sharing of a cup of wine by the couple.

Theology of The Rites

Orthodox liturgy is concerned with making the beauty of the spiritual an element of experience, even a haunting element of experience. Liturgy is "heaven on earth," an anticipation of the glorious future. The fundamental sacramental principle is that in Jesus Christ a process of divinization has begun that continues in the sacramental mysteries and draws the worshipers in. Christ himself is the first sacramental mystery, continuing to live in the church, whose sacred actions reach forward to a glorious fulfillment in the future. The sacramental actions are the realization or becoming of the church as heavenly and earthly community. Therefore, they establish communion with the redemptive events of the past, communion among persons, and communion with the heavenly realm.

In the theology of the Orthodox church there is a strong sense of the organic wholeness, continuity, and pervasive presence of the redemption in the world, and therefore an unwillingness to draw some of the sharp distinctions that the West has been willing to draw concerning the sacramental mysteries.

Resource 5.4 – Ramadan

Worship and Devotional Life: Muslim Worship

Encyclopedia of Religion

Ed. Lindsay Jones. Vol. 14. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005. p9815-9820. [Vernon James Schubel](#)

Ramadan

Muslims fast during the lunar month of Ramaḍān, abstaining from food, drink, and sexual intimacy from sunrise until sunset. They should also attempt to avoid negative and hostile emotions. The fast is incumbent upon all adult Muslims, although the sick, the aged, pregnant and nursing women, and travelers are exempt from its demands. The Ramaḍān fast acts to remind believers of their dependence upon God and affirms their servitude before the divine will. According to some Muslim commentators, it also helps to build an attitude of self-discipline and patience (*ṣabr*) and nurtures a sense of empathy and compassion for the sufferings of the poor.

The fast has both individual and social dimensions, as individual believers experience the fast in the context of community. Families tend to wake collectively to prepare breakfast before sunrise. The breaking of the fast at sunset, called *iftār*, is the occasion for shared meals with family and friends. It is not unusual for people to gather in the evening to listen to recitations of the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān is, in fact, traditionally divided into thirty equal portions, each called a *juz'*, so that the entire text may be recited over the month-long period of the fast. The end of the Ramaḍān fast is marked by the festival of 'Īd al-Fiṭr. This is a day for giving charity, exchanging gifts and cards, and visiting one's friends and relatives. The sense of a shared ritual duty helps to create the sense of a single community bound by common practice and belief.

Resource 5.5 – Birth and Naming in Islam

Rites of Passage: Muslim Rites

Encyclopedia of Religion

Ed. Lindsay Jones. Vol. 11. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005. p7824-7828. Dale F. Eickelman

BIRTH AND NAMING in MOROCCO

In Morocco, if a woman wishes to induce pregnancy or fears a difficult one, she visits the sanctuaries of marabouts (*walīs*) reputed for their efficacy in dealing with such difficulties. She will often leave a strip of cloth from her own dress as a promise that, if her childbirth occurs, she will return and sacrifice a sheep or goat, distributing its meat either to descendants of the *walī* or to the poor. Once a woman knows she is pregnant, she begins to eat special foods and to receive visits from female neighbors and relatives, practices that are common elsewhere in the Islamic world.

After she has given birth, a woman is confined to her house for a period that varies from a week to forty days. During this period she is regarded as ritually unclean and is unable to pray and fast, an indication of her marginal status. At the end of her confinement she is taken by female friends and relatives to the public bath, resumes normal activities, and is able once again to leave her house. The child is kept in its swaddling clothes during this period and is constantly guarded for fear that he or she might be exchanged for a malevolent spirit (*jinnī*). Most women unaffected by modernist Islamic belief and practice perform a series of rituals designed to propitiate any such spirits that might be nearby.

The most important event in the child's life is the naming ceremony (*subū*), which ideally occurs a week after the birth of a child of either sex. On this day the child is named, usually by its father but in agreement with the mother and other relatives. The mother is bathed, dressed in new clothes, and painted with henna, often by the midwife who has delivered the child. The child also has henna applied to its face, hands, and feet, both because henna is thought to be pleasing to the eye and because it is thought to protect the child's spirit from harm. The mother receives visits from female relatives and neighbors on this occasion.

There is no fixed set of relatives involved in the naming of a child in Morocco. The choice is primarily a personal one and may also involve consultation with patrons or close friends. Likewise, the selection of names reflects a variety of influences and personal choices. Some persons prefer distinctly religious names such as Muḥammad (Mḥā in Berber-speaking regions) or 'Abd Allāh ("servant of God") for men, and Fāṭimah, the name of the Prophet's daughter, for women. Other children are named after a religious feast day, such as Mulūdī for a man born on or near the Prophet's birthday (colloquially, 'Īd al-Mulūd). Other names reflect a commitment to nationalism, as in using the name 'Allāl, after the Moroccan nationalist leader 'Allāl al-Fāsi. The name chosen may honor a recently deceased relative; it is a bad omen to name a child after a living

relative. In non-Arabic-speaking countries, such as Indonesia and Bangladesh, the growing use of Arabic names instead of non-Islamic ones or names in local languages is a direct result of a growing commitment to reform Islam.

For boys in Morocco, the naming ceremony is always accompanied by the sacrifice of a sheep or goat, although a blood sacrifice is often omitted in the case of girls. This sacrifice is known as the *'aqīqah* ceremony. The male relatives and friends of the father are invited to a midday feast, the child's hair is cut for the first time, and alms are distributed to the poor. A separate feast is held for female relatives in the evening. This rite of passage is so significant that in wealthy families it is not unusual for hundreds of guests from throughout the country to attend. In many villages, each part of the sacrificed animal has a special significance and is designated for particular persons. The liver is eaten only by members of the household, and the heart and stomach fat are eaten by the mother alone. Other parts of the animal, usually including the skin and entrails, are destined for the midwife.

Moroccans consider the sacrifice for the naming ceremony to be an Islamic obligation, although of the four legal schools of Sunnī Islam only the Ḥanbali school regards it as compulsory. The other schools merely allow the practice, although Islamic tradition ascribes the sacrifice, which has pre-Islamic antecedents, to the prophet Muḥammad (d. 632). The sacrifice, like the haircutting, is thought to avert evil from the child by offering a substitute sacrifice. At the same time, with the acquisition of a name, the child becomes a full social person.

Unit 6: Culmination Workshop

This is the final unit in this course. This unit's purpose is to give the instructor and students structure with which to plan the end-of-course Confirmation ceremony. By the time students have reached this unit, they will have already completed twenty-three lessons on the following topics: Introduction to the Course (including an introduction to the study of religion), God, Prayer, Sacred Text, and Rituals and Celebrations. The unit they will have just completed was their launch pad for planning their own ritualized ceremony. Their Confirmation should be a synthesis of the many different learning experiences in which they have participated throughout this course.

Enduring Understandings:

- A culmination ceremony can function as the ritualized, concrete recognition of an ending.
- Culmination ceremonies serve as syntheses of extended periods of learning.

Unit Objectives:

- Students will be able to describe, in detail, key moments and experiences from this course
- Students will be able to construct their own portion of a unique Confirmation ceremony
- Students will be able to distinguish their own personal connection with Judaism following this course
- Students will be able to design, collectively, a Confirmation ceremony marking the end of this course
- Students will be able to defend their connection to Judaism following this course

Evidence of Learning:

Students will produce a collaborative-effort Confirmation ceremony which features the following:

- Highlights from their online video journal project
- Written descriptions of the course's impact on them, spoken aloud
- Music composed or written by students wishing to express themselves creatively
- Dance sequences prepared and choreographed by students
- Summaries of the Encounter experience
- Invitations to participants from other houses of worship who participated in the Encounter experience

Lesson One: Introducing the Workshop

Essential Question: How do we start this workshop?

Objectives:

- Students will be able to recognize the general pattern of a Confirmation ceremony
- Students will be able to describe how they wish to portray their experience in this course in a congregational Confirmation ceremony
- Students will be able to construct an idea of how they wish to culminate their experience
- Students will be able to compose a first draft of their own contribution to the ceremony
- Students will be able to evaluate past Confirmation ceremonies
- Students will be able to assess their own contributions to the Online Video Journal project

Resources:

Access to computers / online video journals

Paper

Pen

Musical instruments

Past years' Confirmation ceremonies – outlines, booklets, examples of student work, etc.

Copies of the Table of Contents or EUs of the guide

Timeline:

00-05 – Set Induction

05-15 – Introduction: What is a Confirmation ceremony?

15-35 – Rotation 1

35-55 – Rotation 2

55-75 – Rotation 3

75-80 – Conclusion

Set Induction: Instructor should begin by reading the following or playing the song “Time of Your Life,” by Green Day. In addition – instructor may want to present this as a slide show, projecting pictures taken throughout the course for all students to see.

Time of your Life, Words and Lyrics by Green Day

Another turning point a fork stuck in the road
Time grabs you by the wrist directs you where to go
So make the best of this test and don't ask why
It's not a question but a lesson learned in time

[Chorus] It's something unpredictable but in the end
It's right I hope you've had the time of your life

So take the photographs and still frames in your mind
Hang it on a shelf in good health and good time \\
Tattoos and memories and dead skin on trial
For what it's worth it was worth all the while

[Chorus: x3]

Ask: Why am I reading these lyrics to you? (*To make us cry, because they're super-cheesy, to get us to think about the end of this course, to remind us that things come to an end*)

Say: All these answers are correct. This song is a reminder that we should “take the photographs and still frames in our mind,” and hold on to them. We should use them as ways to remember the experience of this course, and take it with us always. This new unit – our Culmination Workshop – will help us do just that.

Introduction:

This should be the time when someone – whether it's the instructor or a member of the clergy, or both – addresses the typical series of events which accompanies Confirmation at this particular synagogue. This could mean inviting the senior rabbi to speak to the class about the evolution of the Confirmation ceremony at the synagogue, how the collective congregation hopes to celebrate this specific time period for all its students, etc. Essentially, students should walk away from this introduction with an understanding of:

- How Confirmation typically occurs at the synagogue
- What the congregation is looking for in this ritualized ceremony
- How the congregation, parents, clergy, teachers, etc., expects to learn about what students have experienced in this course
- What expectations the congregation, parents, clergy, teachers, etc. have for students

Rotations:

Instructor should split students into three equal groups. Each group will rotate through three separate mini-workshops once. Each workshop should describe some element of the Confirmation ceremony and its preparatory work. Looking ahead, there will be four separate committees working on different elements of the Confirmation service. (Subject to the instructor's discretion) They are:

- The Audio and Visual Group (Incorporating recorded audio and visual in the ceremony)
- The Music and Dance Group (Incorporating live music and/or dance into the ceremony)
- The Written Word Group (Incorporating written responses, including poetry, into the ceremony)
- The Prayer and Ritual Group (Working with the rabbi and instructor on which pieces of liturgy – Jewish, Christian, and Muslim) to incorporate into the ceremony)

Rotation 1: Evaluating Ceremonies

Instructor should prepare ahead of time a table with copies of either Confirmation ceremonies themselves or outlines of past Confirmation ceremonies done at the synagogue. Students should spend twenty minutes evaluating them, noting common themes, recognizing the prayers which are typically done, reading any written statements from students about the Confirmation experience, and generally evaluating the process as both a ritual and a life cycle event.

Some questions for students to consider:

- What is the general theme of this ceremony?
- How involved are students in this ceremony?
- What elements of this ceremony do we wish to incorporate into our ceremony?

This activity should incorporate the list generated by students in Unit 5 (Rituals and Celebrations), Lesson 4.

Rotation 2: Evaluating Ourselves

During this rotation, students will access their own personal Online Video Journal submissions throughout the course. Students will need to watch as many of them as possible in twenty minutes – or simply focus on one or two that they recall being particularly strong. Students will need to determine the following:

- Which of these videos best represents me and my perspective on the content of this course?
- Which of these videos best captures my creativity and integration of the unit topic?
- Which of these videos do I feel demonstrates an articulate and passionate commitment to this course?

Students should emerge from this rotation with a concrete answer to all three questions; they must be able to articulate to the Audio/Visual group which video they feel most comfortable showing the greater community.

Rotation 3: A First Shot

This activity should allow students to spend twenty minutes reflecting and writing: which of the many topics covered this year do they wish to write about? Students should look over a copy of the Table of Contents to refresh their memories as to what was covered. Students should spend about twenty minutes reflecting and writing a first draft to be presented at the Confirmation.

Conclusion: Selecting groups

In the order deemed most appropriate and fair by instructor, students should separate themselves into the four groups for the remainder of the workshops. They are:

- The Audio and Visual Group (Incorporating recorded audio and visual in the ceremony)
- The Music and Dance Group (Incorporating live music and/or dance into the ceremony)
- The Written Word Group (Incorporating written responses, including poetry, into the ceremony)
- The Prayer and Ritual Group (Working with the rabbi and instructor on which pieces of liturgy – Jewish, Christian, and Muslim) to incorporate into the ceremony)

After being placed in a group, students should be given the following instruction from instructor as they are dismissed: Between now and our next meeting, think about further ideas for how to integrate this course's content into your group's presentation. Be prepared to work on your group's contribution to the Confirmation ceremony. Also – be prepared to do some outside work, at home or in your peers' homes, on your respective contributions to the Confirmation ceremony.

Final Conclusion: Instructor should devote a final two minutes to having students go around in a circle, offering one word which encapsulates their feelings moving into the Culmination workshop.

Lesson 2: Workshop 1

Essential Focus: Putting the nuts and bolts of the ceremony together

Objectives:

- Students will be able to identify their role in the Confirmation service
- Students will be able to describe what they wish their contribution to the Confirmation service to be
- Students will be able to develop communal and individual ideas which support their contribution to the service
- Students will be able to compose their respective pieces for the Confirmation service
- Students will be able to produce, as one group, their collective aim for their portion of the service
- Students will be able to debate the theme of the service, as well as the foci of each group

Introduction: TBD by Instructor

Activity 1: Collectively Picking a Theme

Essential Question: What will the theme of our culmination service be?

This activity should allow space for the entire group of students to debate with each other: what do they want to be the theme of the Confirmation service? Students should have an open, facilitated discussion about what shape they wish their service to take. Additionally, this will help each group (A/V, Music and Dance, Written Word, and Prayer/Ritual) focus on their individual theme in their separate meetings.

Some suggestions for the theme of the service:

- Living in a Global Village
- Understanding Others/Understanding Ourselves
- Shalom/Salaam/May God Be With You
- It's a Small World
- We Are Family

Each of these themes attempts to grasp at similar straws – yet it is up to the students to determine which they feel most appropriately captures the essence of the Confirmation they are trying to create.

Activity 2: Choosing Foci

Essential Focus: Each group must choose the general ideas they wish to explore in their portion of the Confirmation service

Once the theme of the ceremony has been picked, students will then move into their separate groups. The following groups (assigned during the previous lesson) will meet separately:

- The Audio and Visual Group (Incorporating recorded audio and visual in the ceremony)
- The Music and Dance Group (Incorporating live music and/or dance into the ceremony)
- The Written Word Group (Incorporating written responses, including poetry, into the ceremony)
- The Prayer and Ritual Group (Working with the rabbi and instructor on which pieces of liturgy – Jewish, Christian, and Muslim) to incorporate into the ceremony)

Each group will meet for a period of time to discuss what they collectively wish to focus on during the Confirmation ceremony. Their focus should integrate the theme chosen by the entire class. Each group should meet with instructor – or any other people facilitating these workshops – to discuss ideas.

Students should address the following two criteria:

- The theme of our culmination service is X. Our group wishes to incorporate that theme in the following way...
- Our group is collectively going to work on X. Each individual is going to work on the following...

Depending on how much time the two activities take, instructor should consider giving students as much time as they need (which may include at-home work) to compose, construct, work, and piece together their respective pieces of their group's puzzle.

Instructor should consider helping students set their own due dates for the various pieces for which each person is responsible.

Conclusion: TBD by Instructor

Lesson 3: Workshop 2 / Siyum

Essential Questions: With what are we leaving this course? In what way are we entering this sacred Confirmation ceremony?

Objectives:

- Students will be able to define “*siyum*” as conclusion
- Students will be able to recall specific memories from this course
- Students will be able to develop and finalize their respective contributions to the Confirmation
- Students will be able to hypothesize how this course will impact them in the future
- Students will be able to justify the significance of interfaith learning in their lives

For the Instructor: This is the last organized lesson in the course. It will be an opportunity for meaningful dialogue and reflection. It will serve both a functional purpose – to help students finish their respective pieces of work for the Confirmation – and an emotional purpose – to give students the opportunity for a course *siyum*. (Conclusion)

Introduction: Instructor should have students form a circle. Going around the circle, ask each student to say *one word* – and only one word – which captures their feelings on the course.

Activity 1: Workshop

Essential Focus: Getting work done

For this part of the lesson, students should meet with their groups and work on their respective projects. Instructor should allow for as much time as he or she deems necessary.

Activity 2: Siyum

Essential Focus: Closing the chapter

For this part of the lesson, instructor should first introduce the concept of “*siyum*,” meaning conclusion. Then, allow space for and encourage the process of reflection. What does this mean? Students should be able to address the following questions in some sort of methodological way. What that looks like is entirely up to the instructor.

- How did this course impact me as a person?
- How did this course impact me as a Jew?
- How did this course prepare me for life beyond high school?
- How did this course enhance my perception of God, prayer, sacred text, or rituals and celebrations?
- In what ways did this course help me identify/articulate/recognize my Jewish identity?
- How did this course help me articulate my membership in the “global village?”

- In what ways did this course leave a lasting impression on me? How will it prepare me for the future?
- Did this course make me an advocate for interfaith learning? In what ways?

Conclusion: Instructor should close the day by distributing the letters written at the beginning of the course. Students should take a few moments to read through them and process their words from nine months prior. Instructor should consider having students share with the class any observations or commentary they have.

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Annotated Bibliography

Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qu'ran and Its Interpreters: Volume 1* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984)

A dense yet informative presentation of the Qu'ran as both a holy, sacred document and source of academic study. This book goes into detail on the sources of the Qu'ran, as well as individual, specific *suras*. A specific and detailed reference for the "Sacred Text" unit.

Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds. *The Jewish Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004)

An invaluable resource on the topic of sacred text, this collection of commentaries and academic explanations of passages in TaNaKh will be of great help in the "Sacred Text" unit. Additionally, diagrams, maps, and pictures will likely be of great help in the "Introduction" unit.

Mary C. Boys and Sara S. Lee, *Christians and Jews in Dialogue: Learning in the Presence of the Other* (Woodstock: SkyLight Paths, 2006)

An excellent pre-course reading for the instructor, this book promotes the idea that learning *with* the "other" is a valuable, worthwhile experience. Contrasted from the idea of learning "about" the other, this book provides a framework for working with members of other faiths to reach common understanding. This book should be used in preparations for "Encounter" sessions.

Malcolm Clark, *Islam for Dummies: A Reference for the Rest of Us* (Hoboken: Wiley Publishing, 2003)

The title does not do this book justice. This is an invaluable resource for an outsider-looking-in on Islam. This book covers everything from its history to praying to daily life within the Islamic faith. With detailed and easy-to-understand descriptions, this book can be a great source for at-home reading for students.

Reuven Firestone, *An Introduction to Islam for Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2008)

A dense yet practical description of Islam as viewed through the lens of a Jewish scholar and rabbi. This book specifically links the practices and beliefs of Islam to Jewish thought and practice. Particularly useful for the "Introduction" and "Rituals and Celebrations" units.

Richard Elliot Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* 2nd ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1997)

The magnum opus of Documentary Hypothesis scholarship, this book can be an excellent resource for the instructor in preparing for the "Sacred Text" unit. This book covers, in detail, the

controversial yet academically rigorous concept that the Bible was not authored by God; rather, it was written by distinct sources at distinct times.

Richard Harries, Norman Solomon, and Tim Winter, eds., *Abraham's Children: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conversation* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005)

An excellent pre-course reading for the instructor, this book is a collection of essays written by various theologians and clergy members in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities. The text approaches similar, common-ground themes and figures which speak to all three religions. It discusses and highlights the inherent meaning and importance of interfaith conversation.

***My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries; Volume 2 – The Amidah*, ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman, 1st ed., 2nd volume (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998)**

In lesson two of the Prayer unit, instructor should reference this book in teaching the various components of the Amidah prayer. This volume – in addition to its other volumes, on many topics related to Jewish prayer – is a fantastic compendium of resources. It spans a wide range of commentaries and observations on specific prayers within the corpus of Jewish liturgy.

Isaac Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1979)

This book is an excellent compendium of Jewish religious practice. It will come into play in various lessons of the guide – particularly, lessons 2 and 3 of the “Rituals and Celebrations” unit. Klein provides a clear cut description of Jewish ritual in the realms of prayer, festivals, daily life, and so on.

Naomi Levy, *Talking to God: Personal Prayers for Times of Joy, Sadness, Struggle, and Celebration* (New York: Doubleday, 2002)

A collection of prayers written by a female Conservative rabbi, this is a resource referenced specifically in Unit 2 of the guide, “God.” However, this book can come into play in various other parts of the guide, as well. It is an excellent resource for modern, applicable prayers pertaining to many life occasions.

Randel McCraw Helms, *Who Wrote the Gospels?* (Altadena: Millenium Press, 1997)

A somewhat dense yet useful book on the authorship of the Gospels. Includes maps and diagrams which may be of use throughout the course, particularly in the “Sacred Text” unit.

M. Jack Suggs, Katherine Doob Sakenfield, and James R. Mueller, eds., *The Oxford Study Bible: Revised English Bible with the Apocrypha*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992)

Similarly to the Jewish Study Bible, the Oxford Study Bible provides an invaluable lens for examining sacred text, particularly the New Testament. Its commentary and translations will be especially useful for the “Sacred Text” unit.

Brandon Toropov and Father Luke Buckles, *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to World Religions*, 4th ed. (New York: Penguin Group, 2011)

Don’t let the title fool you. This is a fantastic first-step into the world of comparative religion. It provides a clear, albeit simple, exploration of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim roots. Instructor may want to assign certain parts of this resource for out-of-class readings.

Richard Wagner, *Christianity for Dummies: A Reference for the Rest of Us* (Hoboken: Wiley Publishing, 2004)

Again, don’t be dissuaded by the title. This book is a phenomenal and easy-to-use compendium on all topics related to Christianity. From the historical roots of the religion to the common practices of its followers to a glossary on the terms one should know, this book is incredibly helpful in explaining Christianity to those with limited to no outside knowledge.