

# Approaching Transitions: Ending our Year with Positivity, Reflection, and Ritual

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*Excerpt  
from Leonard  
Cohen's song  
“Anthem”*

Ring the bells that still can ring,  
Forget your perfect offering,  
There is a crack, a crack in everything  
(there is a crack in everything);  
That's how the light gets in...

# Why are rituals important?

- ▶ Help us mark and acknowledge special transitions, milestones, and Simchas
- ▶ Provide a chance for us to take part in a collective experience providing sacred bonds between groups of people
- ▶ Rituals are coordinated events that “produce an emotionally laden experience—create a feeling of unity and sacredness that bonds us together with others” (Shira Gabriel)
- ▶ Rituals provide us with a special moment that transcends- we feel part of a larger community and sacred traditions that have been passed on for decades
- ▶ Rituals help us make meaning out of transitional experiences

# Appreciative Inquiry- Spotlight on strengths

- ▶ During this time, we should be thinking about what makes our organization special. Focus on your school's core value and collective strengths.
- ▶ While it is easy to focus on what is going wrong, have your team reflect on what is going right. Focus on your strengths and core values as you plan these ceremonies
- ▶ Find ways to virtually tap into your core values to mark this transition: community, connection, relationships, creativity, Judaism.
- ▶ Example: If music is important at your school, have a student open up the ceremony with a special song or performance. If your school is small and personalized, allow each graduate to speak during the ceremony. If you pride yourself on school spirit, mail students flags or yard sticks to place outside their homes. Get creative!

# Positive Psychology as a Guide for Meaningful Transitions

- ▶ Positive psychology is the scientific study of well-being and human flourishing. Many schools, universities, and Jewish organizations are now incorporating positive psychology into the curriculum and community culture. Core themes include: gratitude, optimism, resilience, character strengths, and meaning.
- ▶ Now more than ever relationships, well-being, and resilience are core pillars of our programs. As we close out our years virtually, positive psychology can provide us with a guide of the core elements we should be focusing on.
- ▶ Positive psychology takes a strengths based approach. Instead of focusing on what is going wrong, positive psychology provides us with tools and positive interventions to help cultivate positive emotions and resilience.

# The Power of Positive Emotions

- ▶ Positive emotions can still be activated during this time and are more important than ever. Positive emotions are like super vitamins for our well-being and can help boost resilience and optimism.
- ▶ Examples of positive emotions that we can help our students activate: gratitude, hope, awe, love, interest, inspiration (Fredrickson, 2009).
- ▶ Ideas: create a virtual playlist for your school on Spotify, gratitude letter campaign (have students and teachers each write a letter or come up with a virtual gratitude board), encourage parents to write letters to their children, random acts of kindness challenges, create a slideshow celebrating the achievements of the year, strength-spot in your students to help them cultivate pride.

# Finding Meaning during virtual transitions

## Emily Smith's Four Pillars of Meaning

- ▶ Belonging (Core component to our Jewish communities)
- ▶ Purpose (How does your organization and Jewish values instill a sense of purpose)
- ▶ Transcendence - What Jewish practices allow your students to feel like they are part of something larger than themselves?
- ▶ Story-Telling- How can we weave in story-telling to end our year?

# Finding Meaning During Virtual Transitions:

## Four Pillars to focus on based on “The Power of Meaning” by Emily Smith

- ▶ **Belonging** (Core component to our Jewish communities)
- ▶ **Purpose** (How does your organization and Jewish values instill a sense of purpose)
- ▶ **Transcendence** - What Jewish practices allow your students to feel like they are part of something larger than themselves?
- ▶ **Story-Telling**- How can we weave in story-telling to end our year?



# Belonging and Purpose

- ▶ What are your communities doing to create a virtual sense of belonging?
- ▶ Create virtual social events for students to help foster a sense of belonging (talent shows, grade level Zoom meetings, virtual game night)
- ▶ Have a teacher or administrator call a student to check-in and congratulate them
- ▶ Allow each student to feel like their voice is heard
- ▶ It is important for students to both feel valued and add value to this experience
- ▶ Celebrate what makes your organization unique and how you are instilling a sense of values and purpose
- ▶ Some schools are lining photos of seniors on the lawn of their school, others are doing “adopt a senior” campaigns, what can you do?

# Transcendence

- ▶ Transcendence can be activated through prayer, mindfulness and meditation, time in nature, creativity, and powerful community events
- ▶ Help your students find transcendence through a virtual Havdalah ceremony
- ▶ Tap into different mediums during your celebration: songs, music, video montage, prayer, poems, mindful moment.
- ▶ The power of spreading light- have each student light a candle together with their families to start or end the ceremony. Power of seeing everyone do this activity on their screens at once and it signifies a sacred moment.
- ▶ Can you invite students with musical talents to share a song or performance during this ceremony?

# Story-Telling

- ▶ Virtual montage, allowing each graduate to speak during the ceremony if possible
- ▶ Story-telling allows us to be in control of the narrative. We are the author and have the power to edit our story and make meaning out of these experiences. Story-telling is a powerful way for us to make meaning out of adversity.
- ▶ Teacher can write a letter to each student and spotlights their character strengths and share stories about them during the years
- ▶ Parents write a letter about thinking of their student graduating and reflect on their hopes, dreams, and pride
- ▶ Students need to also express gratitude to teachers who have gone above and beyond during this time
- ▶ Collective gratitude challenge/ virtual tree/ shout-out message board . Each layer is important and each fulfills a different part of acknowledgment, meaning, purpose

# Tips from a Celebrant (Jan Stanley)

- ▶ Jan Stanley, who works as a celebrant—someone who designs rituals suggests:
- ▶ Ask people to bring to their online gathering something symbolic to share, like a candle to light, a memory or story, a picture, or a poem. Getting people to contribute in that way can help create a sense of oneness.
- ▶ Mark the moment by having someone provide an opening statement that designates the beginning of any ritual and explains the purpose of being there. That sets the tone and makes people realize that this is a special moment in time and not just another online meeting.
- ▶ Create emotional highs, perhaps using music, dancing, poetry, moments of silence, or something else with high emotional resonance to augment the experience.
- ▶ Always have a distinct ending that includes an emotional peak, because people [tend to remember](#) an event better that way.

[greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/what\\_happens\\_when\\_we\\_lose\\_our\\_social\\_rituals?fbclid=IwAR04doUkZaZC3-BRV\\_HCwsMDtJJOvvcxgQlyQFvnQ2bltYRv1AxmLjLmYXg](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/what_happens_when_we_lose_our_social_rituals?fbclid=IwAR04doUkZaZC3-BRV_HCwsMDtJJOvvcxgQlyQFvnQ2bltYRv1AxmLjLmYXg)

# Action Ideas

- ▶ Host a socially distanced graduation parade outside your school. Can you incorporate signs, posters, chalk, decorate cars etc?
- ▶ Make your ceremony combine different elements, traditions, and rituals to make this event sacred and unique. Have a combination of speeches, videos, live and pre-recorded content.
- ▶ Create Zoom backgrounds with your school logo or Class of 2020 to help celebrate in a playful manner
- ▶ Create a Spotify playlist and have a virtual dance party
- ▶ Peak- End Rule: People remember the ending of an event more than any other part. The ending is important in creating a lasting positive memory! Can you end with a video montage, a special song or school tradition? Find a way to make the ending especially powerful

# Reflection

- ▶ Share in chat box: When thinking about designing meaningful transitions, what elements are most important for you to include?

# Questions?

Stay in touch! You can reach out to Sarah at [SarahERosenblum@gmail.com](mailto:SarahERosenblum@gmail.com)