



If not now, when?

A proposal (and invitation) for next steps
in Jewish learning and engagement
for synagogue/part-time programs

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In the midst of every crisis,
lies great opportunity.
Albert Einstein



THE CHALLENGE:

Use this year of disruption from “the normal”
to push synagogue/part-time
Jewish learning and engagement in new directions.

Indeed, if not now, when?

Setting the Stage

April 2021

Stories keep emerging about the impact of the JEC's curriculum, "[La-bri'ut: To Our Health and Wellness.](#)"

Since its launch in fall 2020, there have been numerous reports of children making at-home connections between the Jewish values that anchored the curriculum with events in their daily lives.

- A parent reported (while sheepishly admitting that she might have *sorta* been yelling) that her child looked her straight in the eye and said, "Mom, you need to use your **ometz lev!*"



**Ometz lev* is a *La-bri'ut* anchoring value translated as "tapping into your inner strength when faced with Big Feelings."

Setting the Stage

- In late winter, one synagogue education director posted to the project's Facebook group that in a conversation with second grade parents, "there was much gratitude for the *La-bri'ut* curriculum and how it is meeting the needs of (their) children and families."



- Another director posted that a teacher reflecting about a recent discussion with fourth and fifth graders said that his learners liked grappling with big issues, including the debate back and forth between themselves.
- And, ten months since the curriculum's launch, collaboration remains high among directors – sharing questions, offering resources, and collegial support.

Setting the Stage

Those of us involved in part-time/synagogue educational programs now face a momentous decision – **do we return to pre-Covid curricular models** that focus on what we believe children need to know (this week Abraham, next week Isaac), **or might we build our learning approach in a way that supports learners in gaining understandings and tools** to face life’s challenges, guided by Jewish tradition?

A team of Jewish educators, convened by the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland, has taken on the latter challenge. This group has been working since January 2021 to offer thought-leadership and resources to shift basic assumptions about synagogue learning and engagement, capitalizing on the “ah-ha’s” that emerged from the pandemic. The team began

- by studying [reflections of educators](#) to the many shifts that the pandemic thrust upon us
- by considering the wisdom found in [academic and practitioner articles and books](#), written not only in recent years, but those from decades past
- by exploring successful newer approaches to part-time Jewish learning (for example, [this](#), [this](#), [this](#), [this](#), [this](#), and [this](#), among others), and
- by engaging as a team in spirited debate.

Setting the Stage

One of the biggest take-aways reported by many *La-bri'ut* education directors is **the high impact of Jewish learning that focuses on what children *need*, as compared to the Jewish facts that adults think children *need to know***. For instance, instead of lessons that dedicate two weeks to Abraham and Sarah, then two on Isaac and Rebecca, *La-bri'ut* was organized around five principles central to the work of social service caregivers supporting those faced by mass trauma; *La-bri'ut* attached one Jewish value to each principle.



In addition, while offering strategies and tools that build resilience, *La-bri'ut* introduced relevant stories of people past and present - Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, Queen Esther, Hillel and Shammai, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Leket (Israel's national foodbank), and more.

Quite intentionally, *La-bri'ut's* learning approach focused on “the process of becoming (i.e., nurturing personal growth and fulfillment as an individual), in dialogue with Jewish tradition.”

Setting the Stage

The team believes that next steps for Jewish learning and engagement ultimately must focus on the soul and well-being of each child we are gifted to nurture, in dialogue with Jewish tradition.

The JEC team began its work by creating a north star document that educators, clergy, volunteer leadership, faculty and parents can study, debate, adopt and/or adapt; it is still in draft format, and may always be.

Called, “Gifting – A Framework for Jewish Learning and Engagement” (*see the Gifting tab on the right*) it

B celebrates the power of Judaism to shape who we *become*, and adds two other “b’s” -

B *belonging* in sacred community and *behaving* via sacred routines and hands-on work to

B repair the world. In addition, the framework outlines seven gifts that have the power to

shape Jewish learning and engagement. The team believes that with this framework as a guide, a first grade teacher with a commitment to helping children along the path to *becoming* responsible, is going to find it difficult to justify spending the morning making apple print pictures with six year olds in preparation for Rosh

Setting the Stage



Hashanah. And, like the teacher described on page 4 (above) who noted the power of issues to engage his fourth and fifth graders, the Gifting framework has the power

to stimulate among teachers higher level thinking about the learning process.

We invite you and your education program's stakeholders to join the conversation. This booklet shares the JEC's vision of an "if not now, when?" learning process that pushes educators to reconsider definitions of:

- **Learners** - with children as engaged and empowered learners.
- **Teachers/Learning guides** - with the adults (and teen assistants) taking on the role of guide, as well as a partner in the learning process.
- **Gifting** - with a new conception of Jewish learning and engagement, built on a framework that includes seven of Judaism's incredible gifts.
- **Learning** - with a reshaping of the learning process for kindergarten through grade six, moving beyond content lists to relevant and engaging foci.

Consider this

As you read through the upcoming sections in this booklet, consider:

- How your educational program might adopt this thinking.
- How you might adapt it.
- How the conversation might unfold in your setting and with whom.
- What low-hanging fruits could lead your change process and what will take time to explore with stakeholders.

Consider this

- Whether you might
 - transform your entire program,
 - have this become a “yes, and” addition, or
 - choose another path.

AND CONSIDER THIS: In recent decades, certain structural assumptions have been at the heart of part-time/synagogue education. Examples include: three hours of grade level instruction over the course of 30ish Sunday mornings; splitting that time between Hebrew decoding instruction and Judaics; scheduling “specials” for K-2 (this week library, next week art, etc.); multiple years of decoding practice; one or two days of midweek learning; etc. But the pandemic and its resulting restrictions [gave us the opportunity](#) to explore other learning structures and content on behalf of our children and their families.

- Rather than return to “what was,” through what process might you boldly consider other structures for “what could be”?

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LEARNERS



Learner Characteristics

For too long, students have been perceived as passive receptacles, needing to be stuffed with knowledge. Yet, today, Jewish facts, information and even sacred texts are in our pockets and at our fingertips with a quick tap on a smartphone. With this reality, learning approaches must shift, as well as expectations for learners. If not now, when - it is time to embrace the challenge of creating learning opportunities in which our children:

1. Are empowered:
 - They are given independence
 - They have agency, a sense of purpose
 - They can relate what they are learning to their own lives
2. Are actively engaged – questions are genuinely perplexing
3. Are challenged and curious as a result of being immersed in complex experiences
4. Have ownership
 - When given the tools to self-navigate
 - When provided with opportunities to follow personal interests



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Learner Characteristics

5. Are co-learners, not just with other children, but also with the adults and teens guiding their learning
6. Take on leadership
7. Develop a voice
8. Gain a point of view
9. Engage in critical thinking
10. Innovate, taking on the roles of
 - Innovative designer
 - Bold thinker
 - Problem-solver
11. Are accountable for their work
12. Develop collaborative ownership
13. See themselves as continuous learners, instead of “done” once they possess answers



Consider this

“The challenge today is not access to information ... [Rather] how do our learners learn to think with the mindset that will help them utilize their Jewish wisdom to navigate the world, to develop their identities, to develop their values, develop their passions, to build community and to think creatively about the problems they face in society, to bring that Jewish lens to bear because there is so much richness, so many texts and so many ideas that can help us in this moment...”

Dr. Miriam Heller-Stern, [podcast](#)

1. How closely do you feel your current learning program aligns with Dr. Heller-Stern’s vision?
2. If you adopted or adapted this vision, what do you imagine learning might look like for five or eleven year olds?

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TEACHERS

... in the role of Learning Guides

Teacher/Learning Guide

One of the challenges for some adults working with the *La-bri'ut* curriculum, was shifting from a giver-of-information to a facilitator-of-learning. A person called a “teacher” expects to teach, to impart information. Thus, changing the name of the role/profession to “learning guides” signals a very different conception of the learning relationship between adult and child.

By definition, an adult serving as a learning guide is:

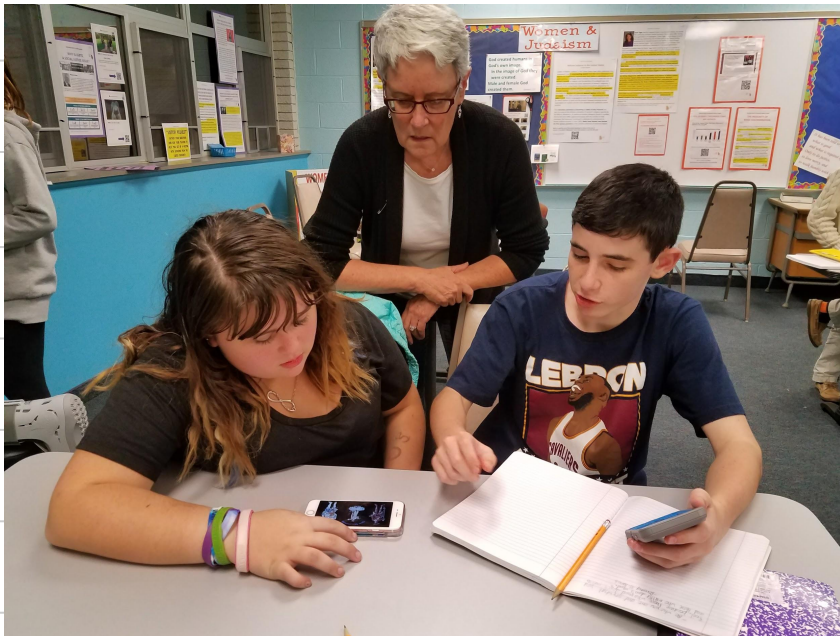
1. A facilitator of learning and personal growth
2. A co-learner
3. A partner in relational learning
4. A relationship builder, creator of community
5. An attuned listener who is receptive and responsive to the learners
6. Visible and active
7. Someone who exhibits care and empathy
8. A facilitator of conversations, especially between learners
9. A facilitator of research



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Teacher/Learning Guide

11. A champion of multiple modalities, learning styles and playful inquiry
12. An encourager of questions
13. Genuinely curious
14. A scaffolder of learner voice, creativity and reflection



15. An inspirer of deep and sophisticated thinking
16. Knowledgeable about Judaism, Jewish life and our traditions
17. A Jewish role model who may not feel up to the label, but is authentically engaged in their own growth as a person, as a Jew, and as a citizen of the world

Consider this

When I design toys I want children to create from their imaginations, rather than following instructions. If I were to give kids parts and tell them to build a car, there would be a right and wrong answer. They already have an understanding, an archetype of what a car is, a finished idea.

On the other hand if I give them the parts and pieces and say build a way to get to school, then there's room for many ideas. Then, they could make a sidewalk or a rocket launcher or a bird saddle.



My work is so they **are free to imagine, explore ideas and invent in new ways.**

Quoted from "Cas Holman: Design for Play"
Abstract: The Art of Design (Netflix)

What are the parallels between this quote from a toy designer, to the work of a learning guide?

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GIFTING LEARNERS OUR TRADITION AND THEIR FUTURE

Giftng

The JEC planning team was intrigued by a definition of Jewish education as “the process of becoming, in dialogue with Jewish tradition.” After much consideration, the team’s framework for learning and engagement starts with three “b’s” (becoming, belonging and behaving), but then offers seven gifts around which learning is designed. Note that:

- The framework moves beyond Jewish learning as an accumulation of Jewish knowledge. [To learn why, read [“Where do we start?”](#)]
- The framework fits well with the conceptualization of learners and teachers (or learning guides) offered in the previous sections of this booklet.
- The framework helps shift the part-time/synagogue enterprise from “Jewish education” (which feels school-like) to a stance of “Jewish learning and engagement.”

Note that the framework is not offered as THE-one-and-only-way. It is imagined as a starting point for education committees and learning councils to open discussion on the focus of learning and engagement in their program. It may be adopted, it may be adapted, or it may be a springboard for developing a different foundation upon which an educational program will build.

Click for a [Google doc of the Gifting framework](#).
A copy is also on the next two pages.

GIFTING - A FRAMEWORK FOR JEWISH LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT

Judaism provides a path for

becoming - personal growth and fulfillment as an individual

belonging - in sacred community, starting with one's family and expanding to other communities, and

behaving - via sacred routines, as well as hands-on work to repair the world

Through the celebration of rituals, study of our sacred texts, and connections to the Jewish community, we have the opportunity to discover - individually and in collaboration with others - meaning and purpose.

THE GIFTS WE GIVE

Within this context, Jewish learning-and-engagement has the opportunity to gift our learners Judaism's:

1. emphasis on the **uniqueness, value and blessing of each individual**
2. avenues for finding **joy, comfort and gratitude**, as well as supports for **making sense of an often times chaotic world**
3. **sense of being part of, and in reciprocal relation to, something bigger than and beyond oneself**
 - a. through the rhythms of sacred Jewish time
 - b. through unique configurations of Jewish space (within one's family, one's local community, and communities beyond)

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- c. in relation to Israel
- d. in relation with the Divine
- 4. **richness of wisdom and memories** gathered over the millennia, manifesting as diverse but interconnected Jewish perspectives, cultures and communities.
- 5. **tradition of questions and questioning**, built on a foundation of the back-and-forth problem-solving discussions found on a page of Talmud or in midrashic stories, and actively engaged today through hugging and wrestling with contemporary dilemmas, challenge and complexity.
- 6. **empowerment of humanity**, opening the door to generating inventive and useful responses to the challenges of our time
- 7. **passion for learning and growth**, especially, but not exclusively, within a Jewish context.

THE GIFTS THEY GAIN

With these gifts in their hands, hearts, and heads, learners gain understandings and tools to face life's challenges, ultimately forging their own meaningful path inspired and guided by Jewish tradition.

Consider this

1. In what ways does the framework for learning resonate with you? What questions does it raise?
2. What do you imagine learning might look like if this was the foundation of synagogue learning and engagement programs? *[Note that the language of this question does not ask about Jewish “education,” but rather “learning and engagement,” signaling a shift from the traditional schooling approach.]*

Consider this



3. How might you use this as a starting point for conversation with clergy, committees and faculty?

- a. What might you learn in doing a “text study” comparing the language of your current guiding document (or those of other programs), with the language of the Gifting framework?

Consider this

b. How does the Gifting framework:

- Create dissonance between what currently is and what could be?

- Offer images of what learning and engagement might look like? For example, if a teacher of six year olds might wish to focus on Noah, how can the framework help them move beyond spending a session painting rainbows?

c. Would you want to tweak the language or do a major rewrite? How?

Consider this

4. In order to facilitate learning in light of the framework, what would your teachers and learners need to be successful?

5. What would the education director need to support the process of change and professional growth?



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JOIN US! AN INVITATION

The JEC planning team is delighted to **invite YOU this Fall to participate in “The 3 + 3 Project,”** named after two texts with similar themes about the power of a good name:

A person is known by **3 names**:

- the name by which their parent(s) call them,
- the name by which other people call them,
- and the one they earn for themselves.

The ***most important name is the one they earn for themselves.***

Midrash Tanhuma

Rabbi Shimon says there are **3 crowns**:

- The crown of Torah
- The crown of the priesthood (*the cohanim*)
- The crown of a ruler (*e.g., a king or queen*).

And ***the crown of a good name is superior to them all.***

Pirke Avot 4:17

Anchored especially in the Gifting framework’s “B-of-becoming,” and with attention to tools and strategies that build resilience, curricular materials for grade clusters (e.g., K-3 and 4-6) will support teachers in guiding learners through iterations of inquiry and action.

Examples of Inquiry: What stories of our past illustrate the importance and power of a good name? Who can I interview today with such a story, especially anchored in Jewish values? Ultimately, what name do I wish to earn for myself?

Examples of action: How might I accomplish my “name” goal? What steps will I take? How did that feel? What will I try next?

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The “3 + 3” curricular materials are being written with scaffolding that offers teachers avenues for engaging children with comfortable-enough “teacher-moves,” BUT the materials will also push the adults and teens to stretch professionally in the role of learning guides. The goal is to ultimately empower children as learners, not teach at them.

The Jewish Education Center of Cleveland anticipates offering the following:

- **Multiple supports for exploring the Gifting framework document**, with discussion and idea-processing guidance provided for four different groups:
 - Education directors
 - Synagogue professionals (e.g., clergy, other educational leaders on staff)
 - Committees
 - Faculty
- **Professional development for directors** including webinars, materials and peer-supported communities of practice (perhaps via local educator networks).



Join Us!

- **Professional development for teachers** that introduces the skill of uplifting learning via the Gifting framework (especially the B-of-becoming), as well as the power of iterative reflection when supported within a community of practice. The JEC will provide a professional development toolkit that includes a variety of materials like vignettes, infographics, charts, checklists, rubrics, video examples, etc.). There will also be a kick-off webinar for teachers, but the intention is for directors to support their own staff.



BUDGET NOTE:

THE JEC DOES NOT ANTICIPATE CHARGING ANY FEES FOR THE CURRICULUM OR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT. ALSO, WE ARE NOT ANTICIPATING HEAVY SUPPLY NEEDS (E.G., , NO ACTIVITY BOXES, AS WITH LA-BRI'UT). HOWEVER, THERE MAY BE SUPPLIES NEEDED FOR THE FINAL ACTION PROJECT, DEPENDING ON CHOICES MADE. IF YOUR BUDGET ALLOWS, IT COULD BE HELPFUL FOR TEACHERS TO HAVE A MINI-PROJECTOR IN THEIR ROOM.

Tentative Calendar

- July and August
 - Early supports provided to directors (curriculum, prof'l development materials)
- August and September
 - Updates from the JEC
 - Synagogue-based stakeholder conversations on the Gifting Framework and “The 3 + 3 Project” (continuing throughout the fall)
- October 10 - December 12
 - National teacher webinar to launch “The 3 + 3 Project”
 - Directors begin and continue with site-based PD for “The 3 + 3 Project”
- October 17 – December 12
 - Learning launches and then continues. Not all synagogue programs will choose to work with “The 3 + 3 Project” for all these weeks. However, those engaged in the inquiry and action will want to schedule the full time.
- December 13 and beyond
 - Evaluation and reflection, with next step options considered by synagogues

Consider this

Check back to the questions on pages 9 & 10, and consider these new ones as well:

1. Which current teachers on your staff do you imagine are most open to this kind of experimentation and why? What do you think might be holding back your other faculty members?
2. Which clusters of children/families would be most receptive to a learning process of inquiry and action, anchored in Jewish tradition and creative in scope?
3. What support is needed from clergy, volunteer leadership and faculty to successfully experiment with “The 3 + 3 Project?” How will you help the stars align?
4. Which local or national colleagues might become thought-partners with you? Do you have a city-wide educators network or connections with a national Jewish professional organization?

The (almost) final word

As noted several times in this booklet, the JEC is still in the early stages of project development. Our team is working from the Gifting framework, as well as the conception of teachers as learning guides and children as empowered and engaged learners. We are committed to the spirit of inquiry and action - to authentic and relevant learning opportunities that start from what children need, as compared to lists of what we think they need to know.

The team feels confident that it can have the “The 3 + 3 Project” project ready to go in the summer of 2021, and yes, we will share updates along the way.

After the main project is completed, the team *may* have time to offer additional ideas for next step learning, albeit in less detail. That said, our fervent hope is that, as with *La-bri'ut*, those involved in the “The 3 + 3 Project” experiment will understand the JEC’s intention to offer it as a launch pad. We hope that colleagues will collaborate, develop and share other learning modules that fit the spirit of “becoming, in dialogue with Jewish tradition.”

We invite you to join us in exploring the Gifting framework and experimenting with “The 3 + 3 Project.” On behalf of our young learners, if not now, when?

Nachama Skolnik Moskowitz, JEC

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The JEC planning team is still in the process of defining the intertwined roles of learners and their teachers/guides, as well as beginning to experiment with the curricular and PD supports needed by all.



YOUR feedback and questions would be very helpful

Our form is super-easy:

<https://tinyurl.com/JEC-IfNotNow>

Want to be on our email/contact list?

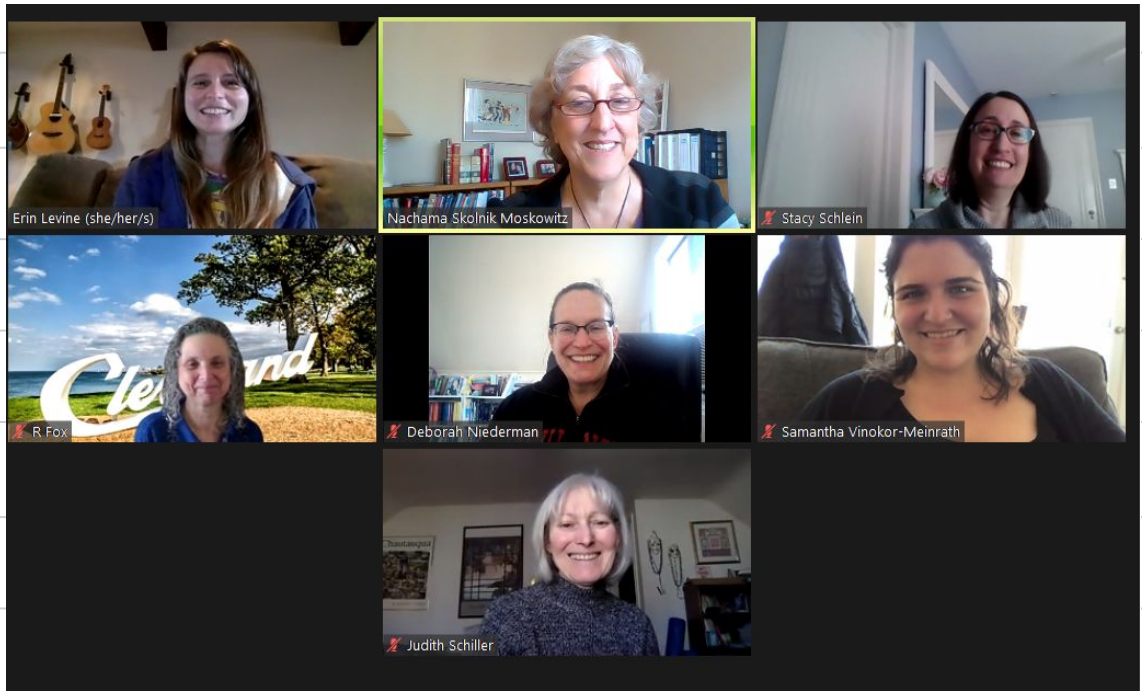
Use this link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/JEC-IfNotNow-ContactList>

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Ideas for more easily using and sharing this booklet with stakeholders

- Share a digital copy of the slides
 - For a less cluttered and easier to read document, ask stakeholders to click on PRESENT in the top right corner of their screen. This will enlarge the pages (and thus font) and eliminate the previews on the left. The booklet will be easier for each to read.
- Print a copy of the slides for various stakeholder groups
 - Set up the document for printing TWO pages per sheet and then print back-to-back. **OR**
 - Download the document as a PDF and then adjust the print layout setting to “booklet.” This will position the cover and all subsequent pages to print booklet-style, half-page size. Consider using a “fast” or “draft” print setting to minimize ink usage.



Major updates on this project will be announced on the following Facebook pages:

- JEC - TO OUR HEALTH AND WELLNESS
- ARJE
- JEDLAB
- RELIGIOUS SCHOOL REBOOT 5781

Temporarily, all documents (including this booklet) will be posted to the

“What’s Next” page of the La-bri’ut website

<https://jec-tohealthcurric.weebly.com/>

[Under the tab: Prof’l Dev Resources]

Conversation is encouraged on the JEC - To Our Health and Wellness Facebook page.

In the late spring or early summer, a dedicated Facebook group and website will be set up for the project.

Notebook Made by
SlidesMania