

## Ethical Wills

**Narrative:** This lesson was written as part of the Shomer Fellowship by the Shomer Collective, Cohort 1. It is designed as a one shot for a Hebrew High program on a weekday evening. The program itself starts with dinner, has an hour of teaching time, and ends with Ma'ariv. An additional conversation with families could occur in advance of this lesson.

**Goal:** Families will begin a conversation about ethical wills.

**Big Idea:** Explicit communication removes assumptions

**Essential Questions:**

- What values do I prioritize?
- What do I want to hear from others?
- What do others want to hear from me?
- What is my legacy for my family?

**Objective:** Participants will be able to explore what they want to pass on to their children, and what they wish to hear from their parents.

**Procedure:**

**Set Induction:** We all have things that we care about. As a group, come up with as many things and values that you care about as you can in 5 minutes, writing each one on a sticky note. The group with the greatest number, without duplicates, wins some chocolate. (5 min)

After groups have written them, have them pick out the following. Put a different sticker on each category (10 min)

1. The first term they wrote
2. The three most important ones
3. The funniest one
4. Have the children in the group note which would be the most important for them to hear their parents' viewpoints or discuss with them
5. Have the parents pick out which would be the most important one they would want to explain or discuss with their children

Bring the group back together, and assemble all of the post it notes. Organize all similar terms together. Are there any patterns? Any similarities on what the groups picked out? Are there any that the majority of the group identifies as universally important? Discuss (15 min)

Explain the concept of Ethical wills. Read the quote from Genesis on the Ethical Will Prompt Sheet. Ask if anyone has already written one. Has anyone received one? Explain that oftentimes, these are rushed discussions at the end of life. Today is a chance to explore what it would be like to begin the discussion without the time pressure. (5 min)

Have participants split out into family groups. Have the families begin the process of working on ethical wills. Have children ask for what they want to hear, and explain why. Have parents share what they want to explain, and explain why. Provide a series of questions that might help prompt the conversation. (15 min)

**Wrapup** - Bring everyone back. Ask groups to share what that experience was like. Had you had discussions like these before? (5 min)

Explain that this is not the end of the process, but rather a beginning. Encourage them to continue the conversations, and even for families to write or record ethical wills for their families.

**Exit Ticket:** Have everyone fill out a short survey. (5 min)

Have you ever heard of Ethical wills before this?

Do you plan to write one? Why or Why not?

Do you plan to ask a relative to write one? Why or Why not?

Would you like me to follow up with you in 2 months?

Assessment: Exit Ticket

Materials: Writing materials, large room for families to engage in discussion in small groups. Post its. 5 kinds of stickers. Copies of the survey. Copies of Ethical Wills Prompt. Chocolate.

Additional Resources: Zaiman, E. (2017). *The forever letter: Writing what we believe for those we love*. Llewellyn Worldwide, Ltd.

Riemer, J., & Stampfer, N. (2015). *Ethical wills & how to prepare them: A guide to sharing your values from generation to generation*. Jewish Lights Publishing.



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### Ethical Wills:

כָּל־אֵלֶּה שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר וְזֹאת אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר לָהֶם אֲבִיהֶם וַיְבָרֶךְ אוֹתָם אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר כָּבְרָתוֹ בָּרוּךְ אַתֶּם:

All these were the tribes of Israel, twelve in number, and this is what their father said to them as he bade them farewell, addressing to each a parting word appropriate to him.

-Genesis 49:28, the conclusion of Jacob speaking to his children at the end of his life

### Prompts for Discussion:

- Have you had an experience where an ethical will might clear up a messy situation?
- Had an experience where it might clear up their wishes?
- Have you ever experienced a time where you thought someone should be able to read your mind in your family?
- Have you given the reason why you feel or believe any particular thing?
- What do you think your children might want to hear from you in terms of advice, emotions, ethics or values?
- What would you want to hear from your parents, in terms of advice, emotions, ethics or values?
- What Jewish values and traditions do you hope your families continue?



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