

# Looks, Love, and Life

A Guide for Teenage Girls on Making Jewish  
Decisions about their Bodies and Relationships

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## Rationale

Teenagers today are coming of age in an era of online social networking<sup>1</sup> and sexually explicit movies and music.<sup>2</sup> While their parents may have been part of the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, they often feel incapable of talking to their children about sex because they may appear to be hypocritical. But in school, teenagers learn about abstinence and the possibility of sexually transmitted diseases. The result: our youth may not receive sufficient ethical messages about their bodies and their sexuality. Pre-teenage girls are offering oral sex at bar mitzvahs to “be cool.”<sup>3</sup> Youth leaders are “hooking up” at NFTY conventions –using their bodies to receive a popular status, but never learning what it means to be in a healthy relationship. Girls are starving themselves to look like airbrushed and computer-edited pictures of supermodels.<sup>4</sup>

Teenage girls today need guidance regarding how to ethically use and think about their bodies. We, as educators, have the exciting opportunity to open the pathways of communication about these difficult issues. This curriculum guide will give students the opportunity to use Jewish texts and Jewish values as tools for decision-making about how they use their bodies, and how they approach relationships with others.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/11165576/>, 12.1.2006 Offers a general warning to the MySpace phenomena, reminding parents that more than just teenagers view the web sites – potential sexual predators do as well. Additionally, the article mentions that some MySpace members post sexually suggestive pictures on their profiles.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15905527/> 12.2.2006 Explains, “Sex, violence and foul language that used to be relegated to late-night viewing and R-rated movies are expected fixtures in everyday TV.”

<sup>3</sup> Kramer, Ilana. “They Say ‘It’s Not Sex’” and “Teen Sex That’s ‘No Big Deal.’” *Lilith*, winter 2003, pp. 14-19.

<sup>4</sup> Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty has drawn a spotlight on this issue, reporting that “90% of all women 15-64 worldwide want to change at least one aspect of their physical appearance (with body weight ranking the highest).” (<http://www.campaignforrealbeauty.com/flat4.asp?id=6126>)

Rabbi Eric Yoffie emphasized the importance of these issues in his 2005 Union for Reform Judaism Biennial sermon. He quoted a Reform teenage girl who has serious questions about what Judaism can tell her about relationships:

“I have the opinion that [my Judaism] should have a lot to say about my relationship with a guy. It’s not just whether or not to have sex. What about honesty? What about communication? What about touching? What about respecting and being respected? No one helps you with this. The Torah has all these confusing teachings. Which parts really apply to life today?”<sup>5</sup>

The girl quoted above asks legitimate questions of Judaism and sex. Ultimately, she wants to know what Judaism teaches her about relationships with others: not just about sex, but what does Judaism say to the other intricacies of relationships. Rachel Adler describes this distinction as the language *about* sexuality and the language *of* sexuality. Language-about is formal, and “distanced from the experience”<sup>6</sup> – this is the language we are familiar with from stuffy sex-ed classes in middle school. Language-of, on the other hand, is the language of desire – this is the language of passion, trust, and commitment. In addition to presenting the mechanical and scientific answers about sexuality, we are able to offer the emotional as well; Judaism is capable of demonstrating ways to treat others, how to show love, and how to look inside oneself for strength. We can strike this balance between language-about and language-of in order to reflect on what our sexual experiences mean and how we want to make choices about our sexuality.

Adler’s distinction of language-about and language-of can be expanded to other aspects of our lives. For example, in school teenagers learn about the details of eating disorders, but they don’t talk about the nagging thoughts so many women have, *if only I*

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<sup>5</sup> <http://urj.org/yoffie/biennialsermon05/>, 10.28.2006

<sup>6</sup> Adler, Rachel. *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1998, pp. 107.

*was that skinny, or I am so fat, I don't deserve to eat that.* Judaism can respond to these language-of issues with an ethical answer that commands us to see our bodies as holy vessels. Moreover, body image and relationships are intimately connected – a girl who is uncomfortable with her appearance may go further sexually in order to feel better about herself. Alternatively, she may become withdrawn and not allow others to be close with her. Further, the way a girl is treated in a relationship may affect the way she views her body. Educating girls to feel confident in their bodies will in turn have a positive impact on their self-esteem and how they approach relationships.<sup>7</sup> Public schools and pop culture superficially address the issues of body image and relationships. What is lacking is the explanation and exploration of the spiritual and ethical underpinnings behind these issues.

We have a responsibility to give our teenagers Jewish tools in order to help them navigate these issues. Judaism has much to teach us about relationships and body image: through biblical, rabbinic, and modern Jewish texts, we can gain insight into the Jewish perspectives on body image and relationships. Jewish values and prayer can also frame discussions about how we treat ourselves and others. When girls begin to see themselves *b'tzelem Elohim*, in the image of God, they can explore how this essential concept can affect how we relate to ourselves and to others. These are just some of the ways this curriculum guide seeks to help girls make Jewish decisions about how they use their bodies and how they relate to others.

This curriculum guide is shaped by the following enduring understandings:

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.campaignforrealbeauty.com/DoveBeyondStereotypesWhitePaper.pdf>, 12.2.2006. One conclusion from this study is that there is a “significant relationship between a woman’s satisfaction with her overall physical appearance and body weight and shape, and her sense of self-worth.” (p. 14)

1. The biblical concept *b'tzelem Elohim* (humans are made in the image of God) indicates that we are holy vessels and can be interpreted as a mandate to treat our bodies with *kavod* (honor).
2. Our national name “*Yisrael*” (the one who struggles with God) serves as a paradigm in which we can embrace the inherent struggle in our developing sense of self.
3. Jewish values such as *shmirat haguf* (taking care of your body) and *ometz lev* (courage) are tools that can help girls build confidence in their perspectives about their own body image and decisions about relationships.

This curriculum guide is designed as a course for high school girls to explore their Jewish identity relating body image, and relationships. The material is geared toward a religious school, and can be offered as part of the ongoing religious school program, but ideally would be a separate unique educational opportunity for women in grades 9-12. The class should be taught by a woman, preferably one who is closer in age to the students so that she may have greater insight into the realities the students face. Ideally, the teacher would have some experience in working with teenagers and thinking about these issues – she would need to be open-minded, non-judgmental, and able to talk openly about issues of body and sexuality. Additionally, the teacher should have a modest background in Jewish studies, including some knowledge of Jewish values, relationships in Tanakh, etc.

The course will run once weekly throughout the school year, and will offer teenage girls the chance to sit together and explore these issues without the presence and pressures of boys. The choice to offer this class only to girls is a conscious effort to create holy bonds of community between the learners; it is difficult to discuss issues of body image and healthy relationships when students are busy trying to impress one another, or too scared they are being judged on their answers. It is my belief that the girls

will be able to create a safe space and explore these issues with more depth in a girls-only setting than they would be able to with boys in the room.

Girls are developing at a much younger age than they used to. Without a solid foundation of self-esteem and self-worth, girls may have difficulties making healthy decisions about their bodies and relationships. This curriculum provides girls with the means to confront these issues and respond to them with Jewish values.

## Enduring Understandings

1. The biblical concept *b'tzelem Elohim* (humans are made in the image of God) indicates that we are holy vessels and can be interpreted as a mandate to treat our bodies with *kavod* (honor).
2. Our national name “*Yisrael*” (the one who struggles with God) serves as a paradigm in which we can embrace the inherent struggle in our developing sense of self.
3. Jewish values such as *shmirat haguf* (taking care of your body) and *ometz lev* (courage) are tools that can help girls build confidence in their perspectives about their own body image and decisions about relationships.

## Goals, Objectives, and Expressive Outcomes for the Curriculum

This curriculum guide is intended to help boost self esteem and confidence of the students. It is important for the teacher to remember that this is a process – some of the participants might appear to change a lot during the course, and others may be soaking in the information, and processing it on their own, or using it at a later time in their lives. Know that this course has the potential to make a large impact on the students’ lives, even if they do not show the “signs” immediately.

### Unit 1: What is Beauty?

#### Goals:

- Begin to create a safe classroom environment.
- Introduce the concept of *b'tzelem Elohim* and demonstrate how it impacts one's self-understanding.
- Show that media images can give us an unreasonable image of attainable beauty, thereby impacting our own body image in negative ways.
- Have students begin to express their own feelings and opinions on beauty and body image.
- Introduce the biblical characters of Rachel, Leah, and Esther as Jewish images of beauty.
- Explore the concept of the Jewish American Princess and Mizrahi/Sephardi issues with body image.
- Show the students that beauty should be defined by more than our looks and our bodies.

#### Objectives:

At the end of this unit, students should be able to:

- 1) Explain the concept of *b'tzelem Elohim* and demonstrate how it impacts their self-understanding.
- 2) Construct their own definition of beauty.
- 3) understand that beauty is more than just physical looks.
- 4) apply the beauty and identity issues of biblical characters (such as Leah, Rachel, and Esther) to their own lives.

### Unit 2: How Do I Care for My Body?

#### Goals:

- Introduce the Jewish value of *Shmirat HaGuf* through text and activities.
- Get girls talking about how they take care of their own bodies.
- Discuss destructive behaviors that are counter to the value of *Shmirat HaGuf*.
- Introduce students to Jewish value of *tzni-yut* (modesty).
- Develop connection between caring for the soul and caring for the body.
- Introduce yoga and meditation experiences for learners.

**Objectives:**

At the end of this unit, students should be able to:

- 1) give examples of how they can/will care for their bodies, and explain how Judaism supports their answers.
- 2) describe some Jewish perspectives on body image.
- 3) define *Shmirat haguf* and explain its personal significance.
- 4) offer a modern interpretation of *tzni-yut* and explain its impact on their dress.
- 5) explain why Judaism links the body and the soul.

**Unit 3: How Does What I Say Impact Others?**

**Goals:**

- Explain *shmiat ha-ozen* and facilitate class discussion about experiences with listening.
- Introduce idea to students that in addition to *shmiat ha-ozen*, our words can also have a large impact on others.
- Introduce the idea that not only what we say, but how we say it, affects others.
- Have students practice using passive, assertive, and aggressive language.
- Introduce the idea that *tochechah* (rebuke) is a mitzvah.
- Demonstrate positive uses of *tochechah*, and negative uses of *tochechah*.
- Discuss coping mechanisms both in giving and receiving *tochechah*.

**Objectives:**

At the end of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Define *shmiat ha-ozen*, *tochechah*, and *Shmirat halashon* in their own words, giving examples of each.
2. Present potential coping mechanisms to *tochechah*, and *Shmirat halashon*.
3. Explain how their language affects their relationships.
4. Offer ways to improve their communication skills - both by being a better listener and by use of language (aggressive/assertive/passive).
5. Reflect on their own inner dialogue, and judge whether or not it is “healthy,” and what they can do to improve it.

**Unit 4: How Do I Express Love?**

**Goals:**

- Introduce Buber’s concept of I-it and I-thou relationships.
- Have the girls assess and analyze their relationships according to Buber’s definitions.
- Introduce the students to images of love in Jewish text
- Demonstrate that Judaism values loving relationships
- Develop a safe classroom environment to talk about and question issues of sexuality.
- Make students aware of Jewish ethical dilemmas around promiscuous sexual relations
- Create a code of sexual ethics with the class
- Empower students to regard their bodies and sexuality with *kavod* (honor).

**Objectives:**

At the end of this unit, students should be able to:

1. define I-thou and I-it relationships.
2. apply I-thou and I-it relationships to their own lives.
3. voice a personal “code of ethics” regarding their own sexuality and relationships.
4. identify examples of loving relationships in Jewish text.
5. talk about their own “self-love” and how it relates to their relationships with others.

**Unit 5: How Do I Stay True to Me?**

**Goals:**

- Introduce value of *ometz lev* (courage)
- Discuss biblical examples of *ometz lev* – Daughters of Zelophehad and Vashti
- Revisit Jewish values of *shmiat ha-ozen* (being a good listener) and *tochechah* (rebuke) with a new lens: ourselves.

**Objectives:**

At the end of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Define *ometz lev* (courage).
2. Make a list of ways to be courageous with peers.
3. Relate *tochechah* (rebuke) and *shmiat ha-ozen* (being a good listener) to the self – not only a method of treating others.
4. Reflect on their own sense of self, ideas of beauty, relations to others, and finding their own voice.

## Unit Plan

### Unit 1: What is beautiful?

- 1) Topics:
  - a) *B'tzelem Elohim* – we are made in the image of God
  - b) Biblical images of Beauty:
    - i) Rachel and Leah
    - ii) Esther
  - c) the Jewish American Princess
  - d) Sephardi and Mizrahi beauty
  - e) Identifying negative body images, affirming positive ones
- 2) Assessment:
  - a) Paper-tear Midrash: What is beauty? What does *b'tzelem Elohim* look like?
  - b) *Eshet Chayil* poster
  - c) Journal

### Unit 2: How do I care for my body?

- 1) Topics:
  - a) *Shmirat HaGuf* – Taking Care of Your Body
  - b) Dealing with Stress
  - c) *Tzni-yut* – Modesty
  - d) *Asher Yatzar* – in praise of all of our working parts
- 2) Assessment:
  - a) Prepare a presentation about the Jewish responses to, and methods to finding balance for eating disorders and drug and alcohol abuse
  - b) “What Does *Shmirat HaGuf*” look like closing activity
  - c) Write your own blessing for body/strength
  - d) *Shmirat HaGuf* poster campaign
  - e) Journal
- 3) Memorable Moment:
  - a) Prayer through Yoga workshop

### Unit 3: How does what I say impact others?

- 1) Topics:
  - a) *Shmiat ha-Ozen* – Being a Good Listener
  - b) *Lashon hara* – Gossip
  - c) Assertive/Aggressive/Passive Language
  - d) Ruth’s Communication Skills
- 2) Assessment:
  - a) Role play scenarios with different reactions: assertive, aggressive, and passive
  - b) List of guidelines and responses for *lashon hara*, and *tochechah*.
  - c) Journal:
- 3) Memorable Moments:
  - a) Moving Beyond Words of Hurt and Hate
  - b) Mural: Hurting Words, Healing Words

#### **Unit 4: How do I express love?**

- 1) Topics:
  - a) *V'Ahavta L'rei-echa K'mocha* – Loving others As you Love Yourself
  - b) images of love in Jewish text:
    - i) excerpts from Song of Songs
    - ii) David & Jonathan
    - iii) Reish Lakish & Rabbi Yohanan
    - iv) Rebecca & Isaac
  - c) Intimacy, Sexuality
  - d) How can *Shmirat haguf* (caring for one's body), *kedusha* (holiness), and *tzni-yut* (modesty) impact your sexuality?
- 2) Assessment:
  - a) Personal reflection on Love – create a poem, song, picture of your own interpretations of love (How do you share love? How do you want to be loved?)
  - b) Personal code of ethics regarding sexuality and relationships
  - c) Relationship Brochure
  - d) Journal

#### **Unit 5: How am I true to Me?**

- 1) Topics:
  - a) *Ometz Lev* – Courage
  - b) Biblical examples of courage:
    - i) Daughters of Zelophehad
    - ii) Queen Vashti?
  - c) Breaking Up
  - d) Peer Pressure
  - e) Self-Reflection on *Tochechah* (rebuke) and *Shmiat ha-ozen* (being a good listener)
- 2) Assessment:
  - a) Journal
- 3) Memorable Moment:
  - a) Self Defense workshop
  - b) Me Mosaic

## Unit 1: What is Beautiful?

### Unit Goals:

This unit will confront issues of beauty and body image in the media, Jewish text, and our personal lives. *What is Beautiful?* is the first unit because it intends to begin the process of bolstering the girls' confidence from the very first lesson. This unit should frame the course and help the girls see that a positive image of themselves will affect every part of their lives. (i.e. the way they treat others and let others treat them in a relationship, etc.) In this unit the girls will study the biblical characters Leah, Rachel and Esther, learn about the Jewish value of *b'tzelem Elohim* (that we are all created in the image of God), and confront the image of the JAP (Jewish American Princess) and stereotypes about Sephardi and Mizrahi women. They will also be exposed to media images of beauty.

### Understandings:

- All of us are *b'tzelem Elohim* – made in the image of God, and are therefore holy beings.
- Images of women in the media can leave a lasting negative impact on girls in our society today.
- Biblical women also dealt with complicated body images.
- Beauty is more than good looks and shape – it is about what lies beneath the surface.

### Knowledge:

- Most images of models are doctored to make them look “better” and therefore leave us with an unrealistic understanding of achievable beauty.
- The term Jewish American Princess (or JAP) is a complicated term that many still understand to be anti-Semitic and misogynist.
- *B'tzelem Elohim* is a biblical concept whereby humans are created in the image of God.

### Skills:

At the end of this unit, students should be able to:

- 5) Explain the concept of *b'tzelem Elohim* and demonstrate how it impacts their self-understanding.
- 6) Construct their own definition of beauty.
- 7) understand that beauty is more than just physical looks.
- 8) apply the beauty and identity issues of biblical characters (such as Leah, Rachel, and Esther) to their own lives.

### Authentic Assessment:

- Paper-tear Midrash: What is beauty? What does *b'tzelem Elohim* look like?
- *Eshet Chayil* poster
- Journal:
  - Lesson One:
    - What do you think beautiful is?

- Where do you see this image of beauty?
- Do you think you are beautiful, and why?
- Lesson Two:
  - Describe some Jewish images of beauty.
  - Do you identify with these images? Why or why not?
- Lesson Four:
  - What does a beautiful woman look like to you?
  - How has this changed in the last three weeks?
  - Where does your own beauty fit into your life?
  - How do you define your own beauty?

**Other Evidence:**

- Discussion of body image/self esteem
- Teacher observation of student body language and self-reflection in class participation

## Sequence of Core Activities:

### LESSON 1

#### Understandings

- All of us are *b'tzelem Elohim* – made in the image of God, and are therefore holy beings.
- Images of women in the media can leave a lasting negative impact on girls in our society today.

#### Essential Question

What is beauty?

#### Goals

- Begin to create a safe classroom environment.
- Introduce the concept of *b'tzelem Elohim* and demonstrate how it impacts one's self-understanding.
- Show that media images can give us an unreasonable image of attainable beauty, thereby impacting our own body image in negative ways.
- Have students begin to express their own feelings and opinions on beauty and body image.

#### Materials

- rope (about 10 feet) or tarp for All Aboard! activity
- one index card for each student
- pencils/pens
- copies of text study sheet
- pictures and video clips of images of beauty in the media
- one journal for each student (preferably a nice journal)

#### Activities

(10-15 minutes) Welcome and introductions. Teacher should introduce herself, and have the students introduce themselves with an ice-breaker. (For example, go around the room and have each girl say her name and her favorite singer.) Give a course overview.

(15 minutes) Teambuilding exercise: Choose one – All Aboard! or the Human Knot.

**All Aboard!:** The goal of the game is to get the people in the group to fit in a small area. Once the group succeeds in getting everyone in the small area (within the circle of rope, or on the tarp), decrease the area (make the circle smaller, fold the tarp). This game emphasizes communication and cooperation.

**The Human Knot:** The goal of the game is to unravel the human knot without letting go of people's hands. Have the class stand in a circle, and reach across the circle and hold hands. Each girl's hand should be holding another girl's hand. Tell the girls to unravel their knot, without letting go of anyone's hands. You might want to suggest that the students address each other with their first names. (This will both help to improve communication, and is a way to help the girls remember each other's names.)

(5 minutes) Monitoring: Debrief the activities with the students. Ask:

- How well do you think you worked together?
- What could you have done differently?
- What did you learn from these activities that can be applied to future activities?<sup>8</sup>

(10 minutes) Hand out the index cards and pens/pencils. Ask the students to write down their definition of beauty. Collect the definitions, and hand them back out, so that each girl gets a definition different from what she wrote. Have the class read through everyone's definitions, and ask:

- Are there any common themes?
- What do you think of these definitions?
- Do they speak to one kind of beauty over another?

(20 minutes) Next, introduce the Jewish value of *b'tzelem Elohim* (humans are created in the image of God) with the text study sheet of biblical verses (Genesis 1:26-27) and commentary. Do a guided text study with the students, asking each to read a piece of the text, and ask the questions following each text.

Notes on the text study for the teacher:

- Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchaki, 1040-1105) struggled with the idea of a *tzelem* of God – how could God have a form? He argued that God made humans with a mold that was made especially for humans. The creation of humans was different than any other creation because God created humans with God's own hands.
- Nehama Leibowitz (1905-1997) taught at Tel Aviv University. She is recognized as one of the leading teachers of the Torah of the twentieth century.

Ask:

- How does God have an image?
- What does it have to do with beauty?
- How is your idea of beauty affected by this Jewish value?

(10 minutes) Introduce media images of beauty. You can present the students with clips from shows (such as "The Biggest Loser" and "America's Next Top Model"), magazine ads, pictures of model and movie stars. Be sure to include a variety of women in all shapes and sizes. This will give the girls the opportunity to talk about what the media deems as beautiful, and compare it to their own idea of what beautiful is. Ask:

- According to the media, what is beauty?
- What language is used to describe some of the women?
- How does the media place a value on size and weight? Hair? Color?
- Does the Jewish value of *b'tzelem Elohim* correspond to the media's definition of beauty? If so, where?

(10 minutes) Hand out the journals to each student. Explain that throughout this course, the girls will have guided journal time to write or draw about their thoughts. These journals are private and only the teacher will look at them. At times the teacher will write

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<sup>8</sup> Adapted from <http://wilderdom.com/games/descriptions/HumanKnot.html>, 1/31/2007.

comments and more questions for students in their journals. This gives the students the opportunity to have one-on-one “conversations” with the teacher about the important issues covered in this class. The teacher will provide questions to help guide journal entries, but if the students would like to write about more than what’s asked in the questions, they should. Guiding questions:

- What do you think beautiful is?
- Where do you see this image of beauty?
- Do you think they are beautiful, and why?

## **B'tzelem Elohim: We are Made in the Image of God**

*And God said, let us make humans in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth. And God created humans in God's image, in the image of God, God created him: man and female, God created them.*  
(Genesis 1:26-27)

The greatness of the Holy One, blessed be God, is thus demonstrated. For whereas when humans print many coins from one die, each one is a replica of the other, but the Supreme Ruler, the Holy One, blessed be God stamped every human with the die of Adam and yet no one exactly resembles another.  
(Mishnah Sanhedrin 37a)

### **According to this Mishnah, what does it mean to be created *b'tzelem Elohim*?**

*And God created humans in God's image (Genesis 1:27)* – In the mold that was made for humans. Because everything [else] was created through a statement of God, but humans were created with God's hands. As it says, “*You formed me, back and front, and You placed Your palm upon me.*” (Psalms 139:5) Humans were made with a stamp, like a coin...*in the image of God, God created him (Genesis 1:27)* – The verse explains that the image which is fixed for humans is the image of the semblance of God.  
(Rashi, on Genesis 1:27)

### **According to Rashi, what does it mean to be created *b'tzelem Elohim*?**

Nehama Leibowitz explains that every person has a personal relationship with God, and “every individual is equally significant before God” because every person was created in God's image.<sup>9</sup>

### **According to Rashi, what does it mean to be created *b'tzelem Elohim*?**

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<sup>9</sup> Leibowitz, Nehama. Studies in Bereshit (Genesis). Israel: Maor Wallach Press, p.3.

LESSONS 2 & 3

**Understandings**

- All of us are *b'tzelem Elohim* – made in the image of God, and are therefore holy beings.
- Images of women in the media can leave a lasting negative impact on girls in our society today.
- Biblical women also dealt with complicated body images.
- Beauty is more than good looks and shape – it is about what lies beneath the surface.

**Essential Question**

How do Jewish images and stereotypes of beauty affect our identity?

**Goals**

- Introduce the biblical characters of Rachel and Leah as Jewish images of beauty
- Explore the concept of the Jewish American Princess

**Activities**

(This lesson is intended to take place over the course of two sessions)

(10 minutes) Set induction: Free write. Are there people to whom your beauty is compared? Who makes these comparisons? How does this make you feel? How does it affect the other person?

(20-25 minutes) Rachel & Leah – Biblical examples of beauty compared. Read the biblical story of Rachel and Leah (Genesis 29:9-30:24). Ask the students what the text says about each woman's beauty:

- Is there more to the women's beauty than just their physical look?
- How do other characters' opinions of their beauty affect the sisters?

Explain that the Torah leaves much room for interpretation – rabbis and artists and authors continue to expound the stories in the Bible from ancient times until today.

(20-25 minutes) Rachel & Leah – interpretations. Hand out copies of various artists' images of Rachel and Leah. Ask:

- How do the various artists envision the sisters?
- Does the art present a different picture of Rachel and Leah's beauty?

Next hand out the Rachel & Leah sources page.

- How do the rabbis deal with the beauty of the sisters?
- How is it possible that one sister is ugly if we are all made in the image of God?

(30 minutes) Jewish American Princess – JAP. Rachel and Leah are one biblical example of beauty. Since World War II, American Jewish women have been facing a new “image of beauty” in the idea of the Jewish American Princess (JAP). The JAP was originally seen as the “daughter of an upwardly mobile, doting immigrant father...on the

receiving end of the best in life.”<sup>10</sup> The JAP identity is a series of contradicting negative traits:

- shallow but powerful
- sexually frigid but able to use sex as a tool of manipulation
- stupid but cunning (always got her way)<sup>11</sup>

There are a plethora of media images of the JAP – Rachel in *Friends*, and Brenda Patimkin in *Goodbye Columbus* are just two examples. You can introduce the idea of the JAP to the class by show media clips and asking:

- According to these clips, what are the characteristics of a JAP?
- What did you think of the “JAP” character – did you like this character? Why or why not?
- Did you think she was realistic? Why or why not?
- What traits of this character would you want to emulate? Why?
- Which traits would you reject? Why?

(25 minutes) JAP and Your Identity. Explain that while today we might identify with some aspects of the “JAP-y” character, in the 1980s, “JAP” was an incredibly derogatory term. On college campuses there was offensive graffiti (“Slap a JAP”), t-shirts, anti-JAP song lyrics, and even housing ads that read “No JAPs.”<sup>12</sup> Discuss with the girls the complicated image of the JAP – it is both something that many Jewish women strive for (success, a certain look, etc.), and it is also a term placed on Jewish women – an offensive stereotype. Ask:

- Where do we fit into the JAP image?
- How does the concept of JAP affect what we think of ourselves?
- What are the “beauty” ideals that you strive for? (in comparison to the ideals of the JAP)

(10-15 minutes) Journal:

- Describe some Jewish images of beauty.
- Do you identify with these images? Why or why not?

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<sup>10</sup> Newhouse, Alana. “The JAP: Reclaim her or Reject her?” *Lilith* 30.2, 2005, 28.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

## Rachel & Leah Sources

***And Leah's eyes were weak [rakkot]*** (Genesis 29:17). Rabbi Yohanan's amora translated this before him: And Leah's eyes were [naturally] weak. Said he to him: Your mother's eyes were weak! But what does "*rakkot*" mean? That they had grown weak through weeping, for [people used to say]: This was the arrangement; the elder daughter [Leah] is for the elder son [Esau], and the younger daughter [Rachel] for the younger son [Jacob], while she used to weep and pray, 'May it be Thy will that I do not fall to the lot of that wicked man.' Rabbi Huna said: Great is prayer, that it annulled the decree (of her marriage to Esau), and she even took precedence of her sister. (Midrash Rabbah 70:15)

***But Rachel was of beautiful form. And Jacob loved Rachel*** (Genesis 29:17-18).

"What Rachel sees reflected in Leah's soul are the unloved parts of herself. We don't read of Rachel as the unloved one. Yet her father offers her older sister to her beloved Jacob, callous to the feelings of his youngest daughter. God has presumably blessed Rachel with beauty... Yet God does not bless her with the children from whom she yearns. She can claim neither her father's love nor God's. Her anger, her jealousy of Leah, is self-hatred for the love she cannot find in herself."

(Women's Torah Commentary, Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, 82)

"Rachel and Leah teach us that reconciliation involves struggle, not only with the external enemy but also with ourselves. It asks that we see what we hate in the other as part of us."

(Women's Torah Commentary, Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, 84)

Rashi

Five Books of Miriam

## Rachel & Leah Art



Marc Chagall – Jacob Meeting Rachel at the Well



Raphael – Rachel meets Jacob at the Well



Carolsfeld – Rachel and Leah



Dante – Rachel & Leah



Ratner – Rachel & Leah



Terbrugghen – Jacob Reproaching Laban (Leah in crown on the right)



Falk – Rachel



Falk – Leah

#### LESSON 4

##### Understandings

- All of us are *b'tzelem Elohim* – made in the image of God, and are therefore holy beings.
- Images of women in the media can leave a lasting negative impact on girls in our society today.
- Biblical women also dealt with complicated body images.
- Beauty is more than good looks and shape – it is about what lies beneath the surface.

##### Essential Question

How do Jewish images and stereotypes of beauty affect our identity?

##### Goals

- Introduce Esther as another biblical example of beauty.
- Discuss Mizrahi/Sephardi issues with body image.

##### Activities

(10-15 minutes) Set Induction: Esther. Esther's beauty has been interpreted to be as much about her physical beauty as her sexuality. Ask the students to recount what they know about Esther – they probably know it best from the Purim story. Most will probably say that she won a beauty contest in order to become queen. Explain that Esther is also judged on her sexuality – how “pleasing” she was to the king.

- Warning: This lesson is not about judging others based on “how good they are in the sack.” Rather, this lesson is about the power of our sexuality, and how some people judge beauty by sexuality. You will want to assure students that you are not advocating judging others by their sexual performance – that would only serve to increase tension in the class and personal anxieties about sex.

(25 minutes) Text study: What was beautiful about Esther? Pair the students into *chevruta* (small learning groups, preferably two students to a group), and have them read through Esther 2:2-17, and the various *Midrashim* and have them answer the questions in *chevruta*. Ask the students to report back on what they discussed.

(30 minutes) A Closer Look: Sephardi and Mizrahi women. Explain that in the last session we talked about the JAP – a stereotype about Ashkenazi (Eastern European) women. There are also stereotypes about Sephardi and Mizrahi (Spanish, French, North African, and Middle Eastern) women.

- Warning: You might live in an area of the country where there are few to no Jews of Sephardic or Mizrahic descent. You might need to do some more research and explanation on this particular issue.

Split the class into X groups. Hand each group an excerpt from The Flying Camel, by Loolwa Khazzoom. Have each group read their section, and answer the questions:

- What stereotypes did you read about?
- What stories or stereotypes were challenging/new to you?

- Were there stereotypes that you had heard of already? Did reading these stories change the way you think about Sephardi and Mizrahi women?

(30 minutes) Inside/Outside activity. Further develop the idea that Esther used her beauty to hide her own identity (according to Rabbi Yehuda) – and that similarly we sometimes use our “outside” image to hide what is below the surface. Give each student a small box. Explain: On the outside, draw or write what others see about you. On the inside, draw or write what others may not see in or about you. Encourage the students to be creative.

- Provide a variety of art supplies – crayons, markers, pens, construction paper, glue, etc. Once the girls have completed their box, have each one present her box.

## Esther Text Study

### Esther 2:2-17

The king's servants who attended him said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for Your Majesty. Let Your Majesty appoint officers in every province of your realm to assemble all the beautiful young virgins at the fortress Shushan, in the harem under the supervision of Hegai, the king's eunuch, guardian of the women. Let them be provided with their cosmetics. And let the maiden who pleases Your Majesty be queen instead of Vashti." The proposal pleased the king, and he acted upon it.

In the fortress Shushan lived a Jew by the name of Mordecai...he was foster father to Hadassah—that is, Esther—his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The maiden was shapely and beautiful; and when her father and mother died, Mordecai adopted her as his own daughter.

When the king's order and edict was proclaimed, and when many girls were assembled in the fortress Shushan under the supervision of Hegai, Esther too was taken into the king's palace under the supervision of Hegai, guardian of the women. The girl pleased him and won his favor, and he hastened to furnish her with her cosmetics and her rations, as well as with the seven maids who were her due from the king's palace; and he treated her and her maids with special kindness in the harem. Esther did not reveal her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had told her not to reveal it. Every single day Mordecai would walk about in front of the court of the harem, to learn how Esther was faring and what was happening to her.

When each girl's turn came to go to King Ahasuerus at the end of the twelve months' treatment prescribed for women (for that was the period spent on beautifying them: six months with oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and women's cosmetics, and it was after that that the girl would go to the king), whatever she asked for would be given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. She would go in the evening and leave in the morning for a second harem in charge of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, guardian of the concubines. She would not go again to the king unless the king wanted her, when she would be summoned by name. When the turn came for Esther daughter of Abihail—the uncle of Mordecai, who had adopted her as his own daughter—to go to the king, she did not ask for anything but what Hegai, the king's eunuch, guardian of the women, advised. Yet Esther won the admiration of all who saw her.

Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, in his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she won his grace and favor more than all the virgins. So he set a royal diadem on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

### The Rabbis said...

"The verse calls her Hadassah, and the verse calls her Esther. Which was actually her name? It was taught, Rabbi Meir says: Her name was actually Esther. And why was she

called Hadassah? After the designation of the righteous, who are called myrtles. And so it says, ‘And He was standing among the myrtle bushes.’ (Zechariah 1:8)”

Talmud Megillah, 13a

*(Divine Presence standing in myrtle bushes – righteous people become associated with myrtle)*

“Rabbi Yehuda says: Her name was actually Hadassah. And why was she called Esther in this verse? Because she used to conceal the facts about her origins, by not revealing that she was Jewish. As it says, ‘Esther told nothing of her people...’ (Esther 2:20)

Talmud Megillah, 13a

*(Hebrew word for concealment is הסתיר – she is called אסתר because she concealed her background.)*

“Rabbi Nechemyah says: Her name was actually Hadassah. And why was she called Esther in this verse? Because the nations of the world used to call her Esther, naming her after the moon, as if to say she is as beautiful as the moon.”

Talmud Megillah 13a

*(Shir HaShirim 6:10 – the moon is used as an image of beauty)*

“Ben Azzai says: Esther was neither tall nor short, but of average height, like a myrtle. Therefore, though her true name was Esther, she was called Hadassah.”

Talmud Megillah 13a

“Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korchai says: Though her true name was Esther, Esther was of a greenish complexion, like a myrtle; however, she was endowed with a touch of grace by God, which made her appear beautiful to the nations and to Achashverosh.”

Talmud Megillah 13a

*Questions:*

1. What are the ways that each rabbi describes Esther’s beauty?
2. What are the various significances of Esther’s name(s)?

## LESSON 5

### Understandings

- All of us are *b'tzelem Elohim* – made in the image of God, and are therefore holy beings.
- Beauty is more than good looks and shape – it is about what lies beneath the surface.

### Essential Question

What is beauty?

### Goals

- Show the students that beauty should be defined by more than our looks and our bodies.
- Introduce the students to idea of *Eshet Chayil* (Woman of Valor)

### Activities

(15-20 minutes) Set induction: Beauty affinity grouping. Start by asking the girls to write 2-3 definitions of beauty on post-it notes. Encourage them to include one (or more) of their own definitions, and also their definition prior to starting this course. When they are done writing their definitions, tell them to stick them on the wall, and then silently split them into “groupings.” (This encourages the students to work together as a team, while at the same time they are doing an intellectual exercise.) After a few minutes, ask them to explain the groupings, and what they would “title” them if they could place a label on each category. Ask:

- What inspired these definitions of beauty?
- Which one(s) do you most agree with?
- Are there any that you think are “unrealistic”? (i.e. *you* may like this definition, but most people use a different definition?)

Analyze the groupings with the girls – what is there, what is missing? You should look for definitions based on looks and weight (“outside” traits) and personality and virtues (“inside” traits).

(10 minutes) Relating it back to *b'tzelem Elohim*. Explain that beauty can be more than looks and size. Refer back to lesson one – where the girls learned about *b'tzelem Elohim*. The value of *b'tzelem Elohim* is not just about physical form, but about a divine spark inside of each human being. Ask:

- What does this imply about beauty?
- What else can we look for to define beauty?
- Is there anyone in your life that you see as beautiful, not based on her looks but based on her virtues and ethics?

(15-20 minutes) Introduction of *Eshet Chayil*. *Eshet Chayil* is the song traditionally sung to one’s wife and mother before dinner on Shabbat. Explain that *Eshet Chayil* presents the idea of the “woman of valor” – a different model of beauty for women to strive for. Pair the girls in *chevruta* and have them read through the text, and answer the questions on the page. Have the students share their answers.

(20 minutes) Each *chevruta* can create an “*Eshet Chayil*” poster to hang in the classroom. On a big piece of butcher paper, have one member of the pair trace the other member. Ask each pair to write the qualities of the *Eshet Chayil* that they look up to. What makes a woman of valor?

(15 minutes) Journal:

- What does a beautiful woman look like to you?
- How has this changed in the last three weeks?
- Where does your own beauty fit into your life?
- How do you define your own beauty?

## Woman of Valor

### In Praise of a Woman

A woman of valor, seek her out;  
she is to be valued above rubies.  
She opens her hand to those in need  
and extends her help to the poor.  
Adorned with strength and dignity,  
she faces the future cheerfully.  
Her speech is wise; the law of kindness is on her lips.  
Those who love her rise up with praise and call her blessed:  
“Many have done well, but you surpass them all.”  
Charm is deceptive, and beauty is short-lived,  
but a woman loyal to God has truly earned praise.  
Honor her for all of her offerings;  
her life proclaims her praise.<sup>13</sup>  
(Adapted from Proverbs 31)

### Questions:

1. According to this text, what is “beautiful” about a woman of valor?
2. What does this text suggest about beauty itself? What do you think about these suggestions?
3. What are some qualities of this kind of “beautiful” that you look for in others?
4. What are some qualities of this kind of “beautiful” that you strive for?

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<sup>13</sup> Translation from *Birkon Mikdash M'at: NFTY's Bencher*, URJ Press, 2005, p. 3.

## Unit 2: How Do I Care for My Body?

### Unit Goals:

This unit will address different ways participants can take care of their bodies. Topics in this lesson include *shmirat haguf* (taking care of your body), modesty, and how to deal with stress. This unit intends to deepen the participants' understanding of *b'tzelem Elohim* (we are created in the image of God) by showing that caring for one's own body is Jewish because it is a form of honoring God. The unit also introduces the idea that caring for body and caring for soul are one in the same, because Judaism considers the body as the home for the soul.

### Understandings:

- The biblical concept *b'tzelem Elohim* (that humans are made in the image of God) indicates that we are holy vessels and can be interpreted as a mandate to treat our bodies with *kavod* (honor).
- The Jewish value of *shmirat haguf* (taking care of your body) is a tool that can help girls build confidence about their own body image and how they treat their bodies.
- The Jewish value of *tzni-yut* (modesty) can remind us that our bodies are holy and have immense value.

### Knowledge:

- *Shmirat haguf* is a Jewish value that emphasizes the importance of caring for one's own body.
- The body and soul are linked as one – we must treat our bodies well so we can carry out our soul's good intentions.<sup>14</sup>
- One of the morning prayers, *Asher Yatzar*, praises God for all of our working parts.
- Yoga is one way to care for your body and can be a time for prayer and spirituality.
- *Tzni-yut* (modesty) is “being respectful, humble, and not showing off.”<sup>15</sup> *Tzni-yut* offers a way of living that helps to preserve our bodies.

### Skills:

At the end of this unit, students should be able to:

- 1) give examples of how they can/will care for their bodies, and explain how Judaism supports their answers.
- 2) describe some Jewish perspectives on body image.
- 3) define *Shmirat haguf* and explain its personal significance.
- 4) offer a modern interpretation of *tzni-yut* and explain its impact on their dress.
- 5) explain why Judaism links the body and the soul.

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<sup>14</sup> Pasachoff, Naomi. *Basic Judaism for Young People, Volume 3: God*. New Jersey: Behrman House Publishing, 1996.

<sup>15</sup> Freeman, Lauren. *Teaching Hot Topics*. New Jersey: Behrman House Publishing, 2003, p. 289.

### **Authentic Assessment:**

- Prepare a presentation about the Jewish responses to, and methods to finding balance for eating disorders and drug and alcohol abuse
- “What Does *Shmirat HaGuf*” look like closing activity
- Write your own blessing for body/strength
- *Shmirat HaGuf* poster campaign
- Journal:
  - Lesson 1:
    - Define *shmirat haguf*. What things do you do to keep *shmirat haguf*, what things do you that don’t keep *shmirat haguf*?
    - Finish the sentence, and write freely: “I am caring/not caring for my body when…” Look over what you wrote. Are there new insights? Surprises? Lessons? Any changes you want to make in your own actions/behaviors? (Adapted from Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities)
  - Lesson 3:
    - Respond to this quote: “The Holy One did not create anything that is not beautiful and potentially good. The human body in itself is never to be considered an object of shame or embarrassment. It is the manner and context in which the body is utilized, the ends to which it is used, which determine condemnation or praise.” (*Iggeret Ha-Kodesh*)
    - What is modern about *tzni-yut* (modesty)?
    - How do my clothes affect my self esteem?
    - How can I dress with *tzni-yut* while still being true to me?

### **Other Evidence:**

- Discussion of body image/self-esteem
- Text study
- Teacher observation of student body language and self-reflection in class participation.
- Answers and reasoning with case studies

### **Memorable Moment:**

- Prayer through Yoga Workshop

## Sequence of Core Activities:

### LESSON 1

#### Understanding:

The Jewish value of *shmirat haguf* (taking care of your body) is a tool that can help girls build confidence about their own body image and how they treat their bodies.

#### Essential Question:

What does it mean to care for my body?

#### Goals:

- Introduce the Jewish value of *Shmirat HaGuf* through text and activities.
- Get girls talking about how they take care of their own bodies.

#### Materials:

- copies of text study pages for each student
- pens/pencils
- student journals

#### Activities:

(10 minutes) Set induction: Ask the girls how they deal with stress. Do you have a system of rewards for yourself? What are they? Write all answers on the board.

- You might consider offering some of your own coping mechanisms here as well. This will allow the students to see you as a real human being, a real *woman* who faces the same challenges and stresses that they do.

Explain that dealing with stress is just one way that we care for our bodies.

(20 minutes) Defining *Shmirat HaGuf* – *Shmirat HaGuf* is the “Jewish answer” for how to deal with stress. *Shmirat HaGuf* is a Jewish value that emphasizes the importance of caring and respecting our bodies.<sup>16</sup> It is linked to the value *b’tzelem Elohim* that we learned in the last unit. We are supposed to care for our bodies (perform *Shmirat HaGuf*) because our bodies are made in the image of God. The rabbis took this idea one step further, explaining that our bodies are actually a gift from God, therefore, we must care for our bodies because they are “on loan” from God.

- Where do the rabbis get this idea? The rabbis took *biblical* quotes (written before their time) and used them as justification for this value. Hand out the text study page and read through the texts and questions together.

(30 minutes) *Shmirat HaGuf* – A Practical Guide. What did the rabbis mean by *shmirat haguf*? How do you put the value into practice?

- Split the class into *chevruta* partners – hand out the text sheets and have the students study the texts and answer the questions in *chevruta*.

(10-15 minutes) What can we do to practice *Shmirat HaGuf*? Ask: What does it mean to take care of your body? What can you do to take care of your body? Write all of the

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<sup>16</sup> Freeman, Susan. Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities. ARE Publications, 1999.

answers on the board. As a class, have the students pick a few from this list that they believe are most relevant to their peer group. Discuss responses in small groups, and as larger class. Are there a few behaviors that come through as concerns/themes?

- You might want to mention that the next class will address some of these issues (alcohol, drugs, eating disorders)
- Be sure to only write answers on half of the board – you’ll need the other half of the board for the next list...

(10-15 minutes) *Shmirat HaGuf* is not only about “mechanical” things we can do to take care of our bodies; “we also need to have attitude toward the body that is respectful, responsible, and appreciative.”<sup>17</sup> Now that we’ve listed some “mechanical” things we can do to observe *Shmirat HaGuf*, we’re going to make a list of the qualities people need to observe *Shmirat HaGuf*.

- Write all of the answers on the board.
- Some answers to look for include:
  - respect
  - responsibility
  - appreciation

When done, ask: Do you think *Shmirat HaGuf* requires mechanical actions and attitudes towards the body, or is one of those things enough? Defend your answer.

(This activity is adapted from Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities.)

(10-15 minutes) Journal: Have the girls privately journal about *Shmirat HaGuf*. Guiding questions or ideas include:

- Define *shmirat haguf*. What things do you do to keep *shmirat haguf*, what things to do you that don’t keep *shmirat haguf*?
- Finish the sentence, and write freely: “I am caring/not caring for my body when...” Look over what you wrote. Are there new insights? Surprises? Lessons? Any changes you want to make in your actions/behaviors? (Adapted from Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities)

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, pp. 274.

***Shmirat HaGuf –***  
**Where Did the Rabbis Get this Idea From, Anyway?<sup>18</sup>**

Read the following biblical texts about God and our bodies. Then answer the questions.

“If you find honey, eat only what you need. Otherwise, you’ll overdo it, and throw up.”  
Proverbs 25:16

*Questions:*

1. What specific warning is given concerning overdoing it?
2. What are the more general implications – that is, is there a greater principle hinted at?

“The Eternal...will make your bones strong.”  
(Isaiah 58:11)

*Questions:*

1. What is your role in keeping your body strong? What is God’s role?
2. Should exercise be considered a *religious* duty?

“Take heed, and guard your soul diligently...Take good care of your lives.”  
(Deuteronomy 4:9, 15)

“I praise You, for I am awesomely, wondrously made. Your work is wonderful; I know it very well.”  
(Psalms 139:14)

*Questions:*

1. What is God’s role in shaping our bodies? What is our own?
2. How did the rabbis use these verses to justify the value of *shmirat haguf*?

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<sup>18</sup> Adapted from Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Art Activities.

### ***Shmirat HaGuf – A Practical Guide***

Read through the following sources with your *chevruta* partner. Answer the questions together.

“One should aim to maintain physical health and vigor, in order that the soul may be upright, in a condition to know God. For it is impossible for one to understand sciences and meditate upon them, when one is hungry or sick, or when any of one’s limbs is aching.”

(Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Ethics 3:3)

“A person should maintain physical health and vigor in order that his soul may be upright.”

(Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Ethics 3:3)

“One’s sleep is service of the Almighty.”

(Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Ethics 3:3)

*Questions:*

1. What are Maimonides suggestions for observing *Shmirat HaGuf*?
2. What do you think of his ideas? Are they feasible? Are these ways you care for your body?
3. According to Maimonides’ statements, what are some concrete ways one can observe *Shmirat HaGuf*?

“Rabbi Akiba said, ‘A person is not permitted to harm him/herself.’”

(Baba Kama 90a)

*Questions:*

1. What are some ways that we harm ourselves when we think we’re doing something that’s “good for us” or “important”? (*For example, staying up late in order to finish our homework*)
2. What are some things you can do to follow Rabbi Akiba’s statement?

“Since it is the will of the Almighty that man’s body be kept healthy and strong, it is therefore his duty to shun anything that may waste his body, and strive to acquire habits that will help him to become healthy.”

(Code of Jewish Law, Condensed Version, chap. 32)

*Questions:*

1. What are some things that may “waste” your body?
2. Give examples of a few healthy habits. Do you try to follow these habits? Why or why not?

“When Hillel had finished a lesson with his students, he accompanied them part of the way. They said to him, “Master, where are you going?” He answered, “To perform a religious duty.” They asked, “Which religious duty?” He responded, “To bathe in the bath house.” They questioned, “Is this a religious obligation?” He replied, “If somebody is appointed to scrape the statues of the king that are set up in the theaters and circuses, and is paid to do the work, and furthermore associates with the nobility, how much more so should I, who am created in the divine image and likeness, take care of my body.” (Leviticus Rabbah 34:3)

*Questions:*

1. According to the Leviticus Rabbah story about Hillel, why can bathing be considered a religious duty?
2. Do you agree with his reasoning?
3. Are there other things that the concept of being created in the image of God should remind you to do? What are they?

LESSONS 2 & 3

**Understanding:**

The Jewish value of *shmirat haguf* (taking care of your body) is a tool that can help girls build confidence about their own body image and how they treat their bodies.

**Essential Question:**

How can *shmirat haguf* impact the decisions I make about my body?

**Goals:**

- Discuss destructive behaviors that are counter to the value of *Shmirat HaGuf*.
- Further apply value of *Shmirat HaGuf* to our own behavior today.

**Activities:**

(This lesson is intended to take place over the course of two sessions)

(20 minutes) Set induction: Have the girls call out everything they know about anorexia and bulimia. Write answers on the board.

- You may want to do a bit of your own research on this subject first, so you can be sure to correct any “myths” about the diseases that the girls offer. See the following web sites for more information:
  - <http://www.something-fishy.org/default.php>
  - <http://www.anred.com/>
  - <http://www.mirror-mirror.org/eatdis.htm>

Ask the girls to raise their hands for the following questions:

- Have you ever looked in the mirror and felt like you wanted to change part of your body?
- Have you ever looked in the mirror and thought, I’m so fat?
- Have you ever woken up in the morning and felt so fat that you tell yourself you won’t eat that day?
- At a meal, have you ever restricted what you were eating, or would eat (or order)?
- Do you feel that others watch you while you eat, and judge you based on how much or what kind of food you eat?
- Do you ever feel guilty about eating a certain amount or kind of food?

You could also raise your hand for your own answers, because again, this helps the students see you as a real woman.

- If you’re worried about the girls feeling to shy, embarrassed, or ashamed to share, have them close their eyes, and write the totals on the board.

Ask for reactions.

- The point of this activity is to help the girls realize that some feelings of poor body image are, unfortunately, normal. The issue comes in when we take those feelings to the extreme and do things that hurt our bodies.

(15 minutes) Drugs and Alcohol – Other abuses that are contrary to *Shmirat HaGuf*. Drinking is a Jewish problem – we have as many alcoholics and drug addicts as every other segment of the population. Let’s read through these stories from Jews who are now in recovery.

- Hand out the Real Stories sheet.

When you're done reading through the stories, ask:

- What did you learn from these stories?
- Do you have any new insights?

(Adapted from Torah Aura's Body Ethics: Drugs and Alcohol)

(40 minutes) Connection between Food and Alcohol. Food and alcohol are very present in Jewish life. From the stereotype of a Jewish grandmother who wants you to "Eat some more" to the spread at Jewish holidays, to four cups of wine at Passover and the commandment to drink on Purim. Our task is to find a balance between celebration and abuse. Split the class in half – one half will study eating disorders, the other drug and alcohol addictions. Hand out the source sheets to each group. Move around between the groups serving as a resource and helping to keep the groups on track.

(10 minutes) Presentation from each group.

(20 minutes) Role play scenarios/You be the judge. In Reform Jewish Ethics and the Halakhah, the authors argue that one has a Jewish obligation to intervene and do whatever she can to discourage a friend's self-destructive behavior. Now it's your turn – how would you intervene?

- Hand out the case studies and have the class read and discuss.
- Be sure to ask the students what is Jewish about their answers.

(5-10 minutes) Closing activity – What does *Shmirat HaGuf* look like? Have the students make a circle. Ask one volunteer to move to the middle and make a pose that reflects someone who does not take care of his/her body. Choose another student to gently reshape the body of the person in the middle. (*Alternatively, have the other student give verbal commands to the person in the center, so they person in the center moves but no touching is involved.*) The second student should make the person in the middle look more like someone who does take care of their body. Repeat several times with different participants.

- Ask: What makes a person look as if he/she follows *Shmirat HaGuf*? Can we always see whether or not someone takes care of his/her body?

(Adapted from Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities)

## Real Stories

I got drunk at my brother's bar mitzvah, and everyone thought I was cute! I got a lot of attention, and no one really got mad at me. The one thought that I still remember is that I wasn't afraid of anything. From then on I was on a downward spiral and never knew it, just like a real alcoholic.

*Mark B.*

My name is Aaron, and I'm a Jewish addict. I didn't plan on being either, of course, although I had to work considerably harder to become the latter. Being Jewish had very little to do with my active drug-using days. There were, to be sure, a few Jewish-related incidents – taking LSD at Lubavitch headquarters during Simhat Torah, the closing down of a Jewish summer camp because of a drug scandal I had been a part of, taking more than a healthy share of free flowing schnapps at Purim – but they were just a few asterisks in a whole dirty laundry list of incidents. Ultimately, my active addiction was about as anti-Jewish an act as I could have engaged in – idolatry at its most degrading.

*Aaron Z.*

I quickly discovered that Ritalin filled a hole in me if I took “a few too many,” and I quickly burned through prescriptions. At around ten I discovered my true love in the bottle of Jack Daniel's pre-made iced tea. By the age of eleven I was drinking almost every day, whenever and whatever I could get my hands on. I had already crossed the line. I started smoking pot in the beginning of the ninth grade on a daily basis. I needed something in my system that could get me out of myself at every waking hour. I went off to Israel with the hope of maybe staying there to finish up my schooling. I had been clean for three weeks longer than I had ever been. When free weekends came around I slipped back into my old ways. I thought that one drink can't kill me. What a big mistake, because I know it is the first drink that gets you drunk. I used alcohol and cocaine and blacked out. I came out in a rain gutter in Tel Aviv nowhere near where I was staying. I knew then I had a problem and it was time to come home.

*Eric K.*

## What Does Judaism Say About Eating Disorders?

“If a man would take care of his body as he takes care of the animal he rides on, he would be spared many serious ailments. For you will not find a man who would give too much hay to his animal, but he measures according to its capacity. However, he himself will eat too much without measure and consideration. Man is very attentive to his animal’s movement and fatigue in order that it should continue in a state of health and not get sick, but he is not attentive to his own body...

We should eat only when justified by a feeling of hunger, when the stomach is clear and the mouth possesses sufficient saliva. Then we are really hungry. We must not drink water unless we are truly justified by thirst. This means that if we feel hungry or thirsty we should wait a little, as occasionally we are led to feel so by a deceptive hunger and deceptive thirst.”

(Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Ethics 4)

### Questions:

1. Write or explain Maimonides’ ruling in your own words.
2. What is Maimonides’ overall message?
3. Could you read these two paragraphs as having two different points? What would they be?
4. Do you favor one reading over the other (one message vs. two)
5. What would you say to Maimonides?

“It is our duty to avoid whatever is injurious to the body; therefore food should not be taken to repletion. We should not be gluttons, but eat food conducive to health; and of such food we should not eat to excess; we should not be eager to fill our stomachs, like those who gorge themselves with food and drink until the body swells. Overeating is like a deadly poison to any constitution and is the principal cause of all diseases. Most maladies that afflict humankind result from bad food, or are due to the patient filling the stomach with an excess of foods even though these be (in themselves) wholesome.”

Compilation of Rabbinic views by Abraham S. Abraham, adapted *The Comprehensive Guide to Medical Halachah*, Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1996, p. 26.)

### Questions:

1. Write or explain Abraham’s opinion in your own words.
2. What is Abraham’s overall message?
3. What do you think of his message? How is it similar and/or different from Maimonides’ message?
4. What is missing from these two perspectives? Why do you think it’s missing?

“The Sages forbade many things that involved mortal danger. Anyone who does these things and says, ‘I am endangering myself and what does it matter to others,’ or ‘I don’t care,’ is to be flogged [by the Rabbinical court.]”

(Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Rotzayach* 11:5)

*Questions:*

1. What does Maimonides think should happen to people who choose to endanger themselves?
2. Do you agree with Maimonides?
3. What should our response be today to someone who says, “It’s my business what I do with my body”?<sup>19</sup>

Read the Lilith article *Jewish Women & Food: Eat, Eat, Diet, Diet*, and answer the following questions:

1. What are Sharon’s issues surrounding food?
2. How would Maimonides and Abraham respond to her?
3. What would you want to say to her?

Your group should prepare a short presentation on the Jewish attitude surrounding food. Be sure to include:

- Jewish opinions from texts
- Modern responses
- Your group’s response
- How do you recommend finding the balance of eating healthy? What is Jewish about your proposal?

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<sup>19</sup> Adapted from Teaching Hot Topics.

## What does Judaism Say About Drugs and Alcohol?

First, complete this **Self-Evaluation:**<sup>20</sup> (on your own)

This is what I think... (Yes or No answers)

1. Jewish events should only include kiddush wine.
2. Too much drinking shows a lack of self-discipline.
3. Synagogues should not serve alcohol at all.
4. Adults are being hypocritical when they forbid teenagers to use alcohol and other substances.
5. Prescription drugs are no different than illegal drugs.
6. Drugs like Ecstasy are only bad because they are illegal.
7. Using marijuana eventually leads to the use of harder drugs.
8. It is okay to use drugs or alcohol to make you feel better.
9. Getting drunk is no big issue as long as you don't drive.
10. Drinking and substance abuse should be a matter of personal decision and not a question of law.

As a group, talk about your answers. What surprised you? How do your opinions differ? Was anyone able to convince another person of her own reasoning? Keep these opinions in mind as you read through the texts and prepare your presentation.

“Do not take drugs because they demand periodic doses and your heart will crave them. You will also lose money. Even for medicinal purposes, do not take drugs if you can find a different medicine that will help.”

(Rabbi Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam), commentary on *Pesachim* 113a)

“When the wine goes in, intelligence takes its leave. Wherever there is wine, there is no intelligence.”

(*Numbers Rabbah* 10:8)

*Questions:*

1. Rashbam argues for total abstinence from drugs and alcohol. Is his view realistic? Why or why not?
2. Do you agree with Rashbam? Why or why not?
3. What is the message of the quote from *Numbers Rabbah*?
4. Do you agree with *Numbers Rabbah*? Why or why not?

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<sup>20</sup> Olitzky, Kerry M. and Grishaver, Joel Lurie. Body Ethics: Drugs and Alcohol. Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 2002, p. 3.

“The benefits of wine are many if it is taken in the proper amount, as it keeps the body in a healthy condition and cures many illnesses...  
Young children should not come close to it because it hurts them and causes harm to their body and soul...”

(Maimonides, *The Preservation of Youth*)

*Questions:*

1. Maimonides argues for a sort of moderation. How would one find this balance, or know when to stop drinking?
2. What do you think about Maimonides’ comment about wine and children? How is what he says similar and/or different to the quotes you read above?

Rava said, “A person should get so drunk until that person does not know the difference between the phrase ‘Cursed be Haman’ and ‘Blessed be Mordechai.’ Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira once partied on Purim together. They got drunk and Rabbah cut Rabbi Zeira’s throat. In the morning, Rabbah prayed to God and brought Rabbi Zeira back to life. Rabbah invited Rabbi Zeira to party again the following year. ‘No thank you, said Rabbi Zeira. A miracle may not happen every time.’”

(Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 7b)

*Questions:*

1. What do the rabbis of the Talmud recommend for Purim behavior?
2. Why is the story of Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira juxtaposed to this ruling?

“Recovery from alcohol and drug abuse is like *T’Suvah* (repentance). It is about turning away from one direction and heading (back) towards another.”

*Question:*

1. This text speaks to the mitzvah of recovery. How can it help define the Jewish attitude about drugs and alcohol?

Your group should prepare a short presentation on the Jewish attitude surrounding drugs and alcohol. Be sure to include:

- Jewish opinions from texts
- Modern responses
- Your group’s response
- How do you recommend finding the balance of drinking in moderation? What is Jewish about your proposal?

## Case Studies

### Case #1:

“Joan is seventeen. She has a friend, Rob, sixteen, whom she believes has a serious drinking problem. She believes that he is drinking just about every day and may be an alcoholic. Liquor is hidden all over his room, and he is always finding ways to buy more. Not only is he majorly drunk at every party, but often when they talk on the phone at night, it seems that he is drunk. Joan has talked to Rob about it, and he says, “Don’t worry, I can handle my liquor.” He says, “Just forget about it. It is not your problem – and there is no problem.” She wants to know if she should do something more.”<sup>21</sup>

**What should Joan do?**

### Case #2:

“A student notices that a friend eats huge amounts at the cafeteria each day at lunch. Afterward, the friend hurries to the bathroom. The student strongly suspects the friend is regularly purging (vomiting) the food he/she has just consumed.”<sup>22</sup>

**What should the student do?**

### Case #3:

“The older brother of a student you know buys alcohol for a group of underage teens. On a couple of occasions recently, you have seen these teens driving around town, obviously while under the influence of alcohol.”<sup>23</sup>

**What would you do?**

### Case #4:

“A friend has been gaining weight and seems very unhappy about it. He/she always tries to engage you in talk about diets and how ugly he/she feels. You are really getting tired of this, yet you see what bad eating habits your friend has (eating overly large portions, eating lots of junk food, barely exercising, etc.)

**What would you do?**

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<sup>21</sup> Grishaver, Joel Lurie. *You Be the Judge 3*. Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 2004, p. 44.

<sup>22</sup> Freeman, Susan. *Teaching Hot Topics*. A.R.E. Publishing, 2003, p. 96.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

LESSONS 4 & 5

**Understanding:**

The Jewish value of *tzni-yut* (modesty) can remind us that our bodies are holy and have immense value.

**Essential Question:**

What is modern about *tzni-yut* (modesty)?

**Goals:**

- Introduce students to Jewish value of *tzni-yut* (modesty).
- Show students that *tzni-yut* (modesty) is about more than sexuality, but can also relate to dress.

**Activities:**

(This lesson is intended to take place over the course of two sessions)

Note to the teacher – classical (rabbinic) Judaism places a high value on *tzni-yut* (modesty) in order to “reduce rape.”<sup>24</sup> This methodology of thinking leads one to blame the victim for being attacked. While sexual abuse is prevalent today, and is an issue in the Jewish community, this lesson aims at understanding the deeper value of *tzni-yut* as one that can affect the way we dress, speak, and behave. Issues of humility will be covered in future units.

(15 minutes) Set induction: Have the class stand in a circle. As you read questions/statements, students should take a step into the circle depending how much they agree or identify with the statement. (For example, if you say “Blue is my favorite color.” People who love blue should move to the middle of the circle, while people who like blue, but also like a lot of other colors should move in slightly, and people who don’t like blue at all should remain on the edge of the circle.) Statements:

- Watching nudity in movies makes me uncomfortable.
- I think it’s always ok to wear clothing that shows bra straps, cleavage, and belly buttons.
- Really low-cut jeans (the kind where you can see the person’s underwear in the back) don’t bother me.
- It makes me uncomfortable when people discuss their sex life with me.
- etc. – Teachers should feel free to think of more statements.

(Adapted from Body Ethics: Modesty, Torah Aura Productions)

You might want to ask the girls to explain some of their answers, but not all. Some students might be surprised at their classmates’ answers – if you feel that it’s appropriate, let the girls talk about their differences – why one person moved and one person remained on the periphery.

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<sup>24</sup> Olitzky, Kerry M. and Grishaver, Joel Lurie. Body Ethics: Modesty. Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 2001, pp. 1.

(15 minutes) We've talked about *Shmirat HaGuf* and how it guides us in caring for our body. Today we'll talk about the Jewish value of *tzni-yut*, of modesty, and see how caring about how our clothes look and how they make us look is a part of caring for our bodies. We're going to start with some quotes from Jewish sources that indicate that clothing can show a person's character.

- Hand out Clothing & Character page
- Students can work on quotes and questions in pairs, or small groups.
- When the groups are done, come back and discuss their answers. Did they agree or disagree with the Jewish sources, why?

(20 minutes) We're going to look at some texts that deal with modesty, and analyze them according to three characteristics: holiness, humility, and privacy.

- Hand out Modesty Text Sheets
- After the class is done going through the texts and answering the questions, ask more about holiness, humility and privacy – why are these important pieces of modesty?

(20 minutes) Split the class into four groups. Hand each group a Talmud source, and ask them to look for the following:

- 1) The value the author was trying to put into practice.
- 2) Describe any issues involved in applying this rule today.
  - Be sure to explain – the Talmud is a series of books written by rabbis (all men back then) between about 200 and 500 CE.

When each group has their answers to the three tasks, bring the groups back together and make a list on the board of the values the Talmud was trying to promote. Discuss modern issues. Challenge the girls to think: How can the core of each of these values be relevant today?

(Adapted from Body Ethics: Modesty, Torah Aura Productions)

(25 minutes) Best Dressed List: Write Your Own. Split the class into *chevruta*. Have them study Rabbi Maurice Lamm's "Jewish Best Dressed List." Have each *chevruta* develop their own "Best-Dressed List."

(10-15 minutes) Modern Application: Examine the real best and worst dressed in a magazine. Use your new criteria to see how "Best Dressed" the people really are.

(15 minutes) Journaling: Respond to this quote:

"The Holy One did not create anything that is not beautiful and potentially good. The human body in itself is never to be considered an object of shame or embarrassment. It is the manner and context in which the body is utilized, the ends to which it is used, which determine condemnation or praise." (*Iggeret Ha-Kodesh*)

Answer the following questions:

- What is modern about *tzni-yut* (modesty)?
- How do my clothes affect my self esteem?
- How can I dress with *tzni-yut* while still being true to me?

## Clothing & Character

“A scholar should always wear modest garb, not too costly or ornate, so that people should not stare at him, and not too shabby, lest he be mocked.”

(*Menorat HaMaor*)

“A man’s clothes are the index of his character.”

(Nachman of Bratzlav)

“The glory of men is the clothes that they wear.”

(Talmud, *Derech Eretz Zuta* 10)

“A person’s honor is his garment.”

(Exodus Rabbah 96)

“Every person has outer clothes and inner clothes. The outer clothes are his material garments and the inner clothes are his character traits and mannerisms.”

(Nachum Chaimovitz, Timeless Fashion)

### *Questions:*

1. Try to summarize the first four quotes in one sentence. Do you think that the fifth quote has a different meaning than the other four? Why or why not?
2. Do you agree with these sayings? Why or why not? (Try to give evidence based on other Jewish sources, ideas, or values)
3. According to these sources, what does what you wear say about you?

## Modesty Source Sheet

(Adapted from Body Ethics: Modesty, Torah Aura Productions)

Balaam was a wizard who was hired by Balak, the king of Moab, to curse the Jews. He went up on the mountaintop and was all set to speak words that would mess up Israel's future. Then he looked at Israel and something changed. We don't know what the curse would have been, but we do know that we wound up with a blessing that we sing at the beginning of many services, *Ma Tov*. Balaam said, "*Your tents are good Jacob, your dwelling places are wonderful Israel.*" (Numbers 24:5)

The rabbis asked, "What did Balaam see that changed his mind?" They answered, "Each tent was carefully arranged so that no doorway faced another doorway. No one could ever easily look into another's tent. Balaam was so impressed that Israel valued privacy and modesty that he changed his curse into a blessing."

Rashi Numbers 24:5, *Torah Temimah*

### What is the moral of this story?

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Ruth was a Moabite widow who came back to Israel with her aged mother-in-law Naomi. Every day she went to work in the fields as a gleaner. Gleaners were not paid by the farmer, but harvested for themselves the things that the paid workers forgot or dropped. (This was one way the ancient community of Israel took care of their poor, a form of *tzedakah*.) Boaz, the owner of the field, fell in love with Ruth and eventually went through some difficult steps to marry her. The story leads us to believe that he did so either because she was young and beautiful (whereas he was older), or because he wanted to protect Naomi and did so via Ruth. But the Midrash has another idea: Boaz was impressed with Ruth's modesty. How was she modest? All of the other women bent over to pick up the forgotten grain, Ruth kneeled. All of the other women lifted their skirts when they worked and lowered them afterwards. Ruth kept her skirt lowered. All of the other women fraternized with the male pickers, but Ruth kept to herself. Genesis Rabbah 5:6

### What is the moral of this story?

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"For Jews, modesty consists of three different characteristics: holiness, humility, and privacy."

Nahum Amsel, The Jewish Encyclopedia of Moral and Ethical Issues

How is *tzni-yut* (modesty) about...

*Try to use examples from these stories and other Jewish texts we've studied!*

Holiness:

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Humility:

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Privacy:

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### **Talmud Sources**

(Hand one to each group)

A man is to divorce his wife without alimony if he sees her going out in public with uncovered hair or catch her spinning in the street...Rav Yehuda stated in the name of Samuel, "A woman is only forbidden to weave in public where doing so exposes her arms, and men who see her might desire her and be brought to sin."

(*Ketubot* 72a, b)

Rabbi Yohanan said in the name of Rabbi Bana'ah, "People who share a courtyard can stop one another from using the shared space for most purposes, but they cannot stop the washing of clothes. Washing has to be done at least in semi-private, since it is not fitting that the daughters of Israel should expose themselves to the public view while washing [clothes]." It is written in the Bible, "One who walks in righteousness shuts his eyes from looking on evil." (Isaiah 33:15) Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba explained, "This refers to a man who does not look at women when they are washing clothes."

(*Bava Batra* 57b)

Rabbi Yohanan asked Rabbi Bana'ah, "How long should the underwear of a Torah student be?" Rabbi Bana'ah replied, "Long enough to hide the flesh." "How long should the outer clothes of a Torah student be?" "So long that not more than a little bit of his underwear should be visible."

(*Bava Batra* 57b)

Said Rabbi Hanan bar Rabbah, "Everyone knows what a husband and wife do in a wedding chamber, yet anyone who speaks obscenely about it, God will sentence to seventy years of unhappiness..." Rabbi ben Shila said in Rav Hisda's name, "One who speaks trash is provided with a deep hole in *Gehena* [Jewish hell]. That is why it says in Proverbs 22:14, '*A deep pit is for the mouth that speaks profanity.*'" Rabbi Nahman ben Isaac said, "Anyone who hears [profanity] and remains silent will receive the shame punishment."

(*Shabbat* 33a)

## **Jewish Best Dressed List<sup>25</sup>**

by Maurice Lamm

1. *Dress with tzni-yut* (modesty). Never dress to expose your body or to stimulate or arouse the opposite sex.
2. *Dress with Dignity*. Be understated, not ostentatious.
3. *Dress discreetly*. Let your actions speak more loudly than your clothes. Gaudy is not Godly.
4. *Dress appropriately*. Be guided by the place and the occasion, not merely by whim...honor special events with special clothing.
5. *Do not dress to make others feel inferior*. Be proud of what you wear, but not so proud as to want to outshine others, especially the less fortunate.
6. *Do not dress shabbily*. There is no virtue in wearing the cheapest clothing you can find. You are what you wear.
7. *Do not dress sloppily*. Recognize the difference between casual and sloppy.
8. *Never wear stained clothes*. Let everything you wear reflect the fact that you were created in the image of Ha-Shem (God).
9. *Follow religious guidelines*. Observe the traditions for covering the head. Do not wear leather shoes on Yom Kippur. Follow the prohibitions in the Torah about against wearing *sha'atnez*, fabrics that mix wool with linen.
10. *Remember Hukkat ha-Goy*. Do not dress to hide the fact that you are Jewish. You may dress stylishly, but not with the express purpose of looking like everyone else.

### *Questions:*

1. What do you think of Lamm's list?
2. What speaks to you?
3. What do you question?

On the back of this page, write your own "Best-Dressed" list. You may want to use or change some of Lamm's ideas. Be prepared to explain ways in which your list is Jewish.

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<sup>25</sup> Lamm, Maurice. Living Torah in America: Derekh haToy. Behrman House Publishing, 1993, pp. 24-25.

LESSONS 6 & 7

**Understandings:**

The biblical concept *b'tzelem Elohim* (that humans are made in the image of God) indicates that we are holy vessels and can be interpreted as a mandate to treat our bodies with *kavod* (honor).

The Jewish value of *shmirat haguf* (taking care of your body) is a tool that can help girls build confidence about their own body image and how they treat their bodies.

**Essential Question:**

How does caring for the soul fit in with *Shmirat HaGuf* (caring for the body)?

**Goals:**

- Develop connection between caring for the soul and caring for the body.
- Introduce yoga and meditation experiences for learners.

**Memorable Moment:**

Prayer through Yoga workshop

**Activities:**

(This lesson is intended to take place over the course of two sessions)

(10 minutes) Set Induction: Talking about spiritual moments in our lives. Ask the class to share some spiritual moments they have experienced.

- What made them spiritual?
- When do you turn to spiritual moments? (When do you seek spiritual moments?)
- How do spiritual moments make you feel?

Conduct guided imagery with introduction of what the soul is.

(20-25 minutes) Introduction of the day: Today we're going to explore further the idea that our bodies and souls are connected – that *Shmirat HaGuf*, that caring for our bodies also has to do with caring for our souls. Let's take another look at three quotes that we studied a few weeks ago:

- “Take heed, and guard your soul diligently...Take good care of your lives.” (Deuteronomy 4:9, 15)
- “One should aim to maintain physical health and vigor, in order that the soul may be upright, in a condition to know God. For it is impossible for one to understand sciences and meditate upon them, when one is hungry or sick, or when any of one's limbs is aching.” (Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Ethics 3:3)
- “A person should maintain physical health and vigor in order that his soul may be upright.” (Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Ethics 3:3)

What do these quotes tell us about the connection between the body and the soul?

And a new source:

- The body houses the soul: “The body is the soul's house. Therefore, shouldn't we take care of our house so that it does not fall into ruin?” (Philo Judaeus, *The Worse Attacks the Better*, section 10)

Ask:

- Do you think about your body as being the house for your soul?
- Does this idea influence any of your practices, any of your personal habits?

(Adapted from Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities)

Ask the students to “illustrate” this connection in a paper-tear midrash. If time permits, ask students to share and explain their paper-tear midrash.

(20 minutes) *Asher Yatzar* Text Study – there is a blessing in the morning prayer services that thanks God for our working bodies. Split the girls into *chevruta* or small groups.

Hand out the *Asher Yatzar* pages.

- After the students finish the study sheet, have them share their answers with each other.

(45 minutes) Guided Yoga Experience. Yoga is a way to care for our bodies while connecting it to our soul. Yoga can be a workout for our bodies, it can decrease stress, and it can be a spiritual experience.

(10 minutes) Write your own blessing for body and soul/spirit. You can have the students share their blessings with each other and/or put them into their journals.

- You might want to have source sheets from the unit on hand so students can use “Jewish language” about the body and soul in their prayer.

(10-20 minutes) Closing Activity for Unit: *Shmirat HaGuf* Campaign – make a list on the board of all the things involved in taking care of one’s body. Have each person choose a topic from the list and create a poster based on that topic. Display the posters around the room or in another more public area (i.e. the school hallway).

- Ask: If you could take one poster home as a reminder to improve one of *your* health habits, which would it be, and why?

(Adapted from Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities)

### **Asher Yatzar: Thanking God for our Bodies**

(Adopted from Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities)

Blessed is our Eternal God, Sovereign of the Universe, who has made our bodies with wisdom, combining openings and closings – arteries, glands and organs – into a finely balanced network. Should but one of them, by being blocked or opened, fail to function, it would be impossible to exist. Wondrous Fashioner and Sustainer of life, Source of our health and our strength, we give You thanks and praise.

*Questions:*

1. Why do we give thanks for our bodies?
2. In what ways might giving thanks make a difference in how we treat our bodies?

### **Elohai N'Shama: Thanking God for our Souls**

My God, the soul You have given me is pure. You created it, You shaped it, You breathed it into me and You protect it within me. For as long as the soul is within me, I offer thanks before You, Adonai, my God and God of my ancestral fathers and mothers, Source of all Creation, Sovereign of all souls. Praised are You, Adonai, in whose hands is every living soul and the breath of humankind.

*Questions:*

1. Why do we give thanks for our souls?
2. In what ways might giving thanks make a difference in how we treat our souls?

### **Suggestions on How to Deal with Stress**

(Adapted from Kedushat HaGuf: The Sanctity of the Body (URJ 2006))

1. Exercise – listen to your body’s appetite for movement
2. Fool your body into thinking you are relaxed
  - a. breathe deeply and slowly
  - b. put your body in a relaxed position
  - c. visualize and center
3. Get good sleep – listen to your body’s need for down time!
4. Don’t procrastinate
5. Take time out for yourself – listen to your body’s need for solitude
6. Be creative – sing, dance, journal, play music, write poetry
7. Let it out – talk to someone. Keep a journal, keep a “worry box” – write morning pages
8. Volunteer – get out of your own head – feed your body’s appetite for community
9. Pray, meditate, change the music in your head to something positive and upbeat

## Unit 3: How Does What I Say Impact Others?

### Unit Goals

This unit will cover how our language affects other people. Students will learn about Jewish values such as *shmiat ha-ozen* (being a good listener), *tochechah* (rebuke), and *shmirat halashon* (guarding your words). Conversations and activities are intended to allow the girls to rethink their communication styles, and find their own “voice” in relationships with friends and partners.

### Understandings

- Our national name “*Yisrael*” (the one who struggles with God) serves as a paradigm in which we can embrace the inherent struggle in our developing sense of self.
- Jewish values such as *shmiat ha-Ozen* (being a good listener) and *tochechah* (rebuke) are tools that can help girls build confidence in their perspectives about their own decisions regarding relationships.

### Knowledge

- The value *Shmiat ha-Ozen*, or being a good listener, as is about “being compassionate, understanding, open-minded and unbiased.”<sup>26</sup> *Shmiat ha-Ozen* can also be practiced with oneself – by being conscientious of one’s own thoughts and feelings, one can have a stronger sense of self-understanding.<sup>27</sup>
- *Tochechah*, or rebuke, is hard to give and receive criticism, even when it is constructive.
- Knowing how to give and receive *tochechah* and avoiding *lashon hara* (gossip) are part of the value of *Shmirat halashon*, or guarding your words.
- Passive, aggressive, and assertive language affect our communication skills and our relationships with other people.

### Skills

At the end of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Define *shmiat ha-Ozen*, *tochechah*, and *Shmirat halashon* in their own words, giving examples of each.
2. Present potential coping mechanisms to *tochechah*, and *Shmirat halashon*.
3. Explain how their language affects their relationships.
4. Offer ways to improve their communication skills - both by being a better listener and by use of language (aggressive/assertive/passive).
5. Reflect on their own inner dialogue, and judge whether or not it is “healthy,” and what they can do to improve it.

### Authentic Assessment

- Role play scenarios with different reactions: assertive, aggressive, and passive

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<sup>26</sup> Freedman, Susan. Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities. Denver: A.R.E. Publishing, 1999, p. 256.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

- List of guidelines and responses for *lashon hara*, and *tochechah*.
- Journal:
  - Lesson 1:
    - In what ways are you already a good listener?
    - Do you listen in different ways to different people? Explain.
    - How could you improve your listening style?
  - Lesson 2:
    - Can you think of examples of gossip or negative speech that you either said or heard? What made you say it? Did it have an impact on anyone else? What was your reaction when you heard it? Did you eagerly listen?

### **Other Evidence**

- Discussion of language, gossip, and criticism.
- Teacher observation of student body language and self-reflection in class participation

### **Memorable Moment**

- Moving Beyond Words of Hurt and Hate (lesson 2)
- Mural: Hurting Words, Healing Words (lesson 5)

## Sequence of Core Activities

### LESSON 1

#### Understandings:

- Our national name “*Yisrael*” (the one who struggles with God) serves as a paradigm in which we can embrace the inherent struggle in our developing sense of self.
- Jewish values such as *shmiat ha-Ozen* (being a good listener) and *tochechah* (rebuke) are tools that can help girls build confidence in their perspectives about their own decisions regarding relationships.

#### Essential Question:

What does it mean to be a good listener?

#### Goals:

- Explain *shmiat ha-Ozen* and facilitate class discussion about their own experiences with listening.
- Students should start to think about how their language and listening skills affect their relationships.

#### Activities:

(5-10 minutes) Set induction: Pair up the girls and spread them around the room, so they will not distract one another. Have one partner make sounds, while the other “mirrors” the sounds. Make sure each partner in the pair has the chance to make the sounds, and each has the chance to mirror the sounds. Ask:

- What about this experience was difficult?
- Was there anything special you did to listen than you usually do? Explain.

(Adapted from Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities)

(10-15 minutes) Introduction of *shmiat ha-Ozen* as a Jewish value – what is the value in listening? The act of listening is very important to the Jewish community. Traditionally, we say the *Shema* three times a day – a prayer that is all about listening. We are reminded to listen for the still small voice that indicates God’s presence around us. So listening and hearing are somehow connected to a spiritual life – let’s explore where and how. Hand out “Listening and Spirituality” sheet, read through texts, and facilitate class discussion through the questions.

(30 minutes) Listening to others: Text Study I. Split the class into their *chevruta* pairs. Hand out the “Four Types of Listening” Sheet, and have each pair read through the text and answer the questions. Once each pair has discussed the questions, talk about modern examples of listening and not listening. What is lost? Gained? What can you do to bring about more gains than losses in listening?

- You might want to start making a running list of these suggestions on the board.

(Adapted from Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities)

(25 minutes) Listening to others: Text Study II. So how can we listen to each other in order to improve our relationships? Recognizing our own biases and capabilities of

hearing is very important. Hand out the “Biases and Capabilities” sheet. Have the students read through the texts and answer the questions in three small groups. Once each group has talked about their biases in listening to others, and their own biases and capabilities regarding hearing, ask them for some examples of what they look like when they’re listening, or not listening.

- You may choose to run this activity as a role play – assigning one student to be the talker (and giving her a short paragraph to read), and the other student to be the listener.

Remind the students to pay close attention to: facial expression, posture, response, body language. Ask:

- How did it feel to be listened to?
- How did it feel to not be listened to?

(25 minutes) Stephen Covey: Active Listening vs. Empathic Listening. Active listening is a method of listening to another person by reflecting back what they say – for example, when your friend tells you she’s really annoyed because she thinks a teacher is being unfair to her, you might respond, “It sounds like you’re very frustrated with your teacher. That must be hard for you.” Practice active listening in pairs – set up some guidelines for the students:

1. One person talks at a time – do not interrupt while another person is speaking.
2. Make eye contact with one another, and try not to break it.
3. Reflect back what your partner said to you, in order to check for understanding.

Stephen Covey says that active listening is not enough, because it only reflects the other person. He argues that even as one is speaking, the other is listening with the “intent to reply, to control, to manipulate.”<sup>28</sup> Instead, Covey makes a case for empathic listening – where you seek first to understand, then to be understood. Covey explains that empathic listening is where you get “inside another person’s frame of reference.”<sup>29</sup> Empathic listening is about listening for feeling and meaning – it involves more than just “hearing” – it involves feeling as well. Ask:

- How would your listening style be different if you were listening simply to understand?

Practice empathic listening in the same pairs as before – with the following guidelines:

1. One person talks at a time – do not interrupt while another person is speaking.
2. Make eye contact with one another, and try not to break it.
3. The listener should clear her own head – don’t try to relate what you hear to your life in some way, rather just listen, and ask questions to clarify.

Ask:

- How did empathic listening differ for you from active listening?
- Was one easier or harder to do? Why?
- Would you employ one more often, or in certain situations? Explain.

(15 minutes) Journal:

- In what ways are you already a good listener?

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<sup>28</sup> Covey, Stephen. The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. New York: Free Press, 2004, p. 240.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

- Do you listen in different ways to different people? Explain.
- How could you improve your listening style?

## **Listening and Spirituality**

(Adapted from Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities)

Hear oh Israel! Adonai is our God, Adonai is One!  
(Deuteronomy 6:4)

*Questions:*

- 1) What does “hear” mean in the context of this verse?
- 2) We say this prayer several times a day. Why have these words become so central in our worship?
- 3) What is the relationship between “hearing” and leading a spiritual life?

Incline your ears and go to Me; listen and your souls will live.  
(Isaiah 55:3)

*Questions:*

- 1) Isaiah is saying that listening is not passive. Explain a situation where listening was active for you.
- 2) In what ways might the ability to listen well to other people bring you closer to God?

## Four Types of Listening

(Adapted from Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities)

Listening also requires reflection and evaluation of what you hear:

There are four types of listening: Listening and losing, listening and gaining, not listening and losing, and not listening and gaining.

Listening and Losing: as in the case of Adam, about whom it is written: And to Adam God said, 'Because you listened to the voice of your wife...' (Genesis 3:17). And what did he lose? 'Because you are dust and to dust will you return. (Genesis 3:19)

Listening and gaining: as in the case of our father Abraham, who was told: 'All that Sarah tells you, listen to her voice.' (Genesis 21:12). And what did he gain? 'For in Isaac shall your seed be called to you.' (Genesis 21:12)

Not listening and gaining: as in the case of Joseph, concerning whom it is written, 'And he did not listen to [Potiphar's wife], to lie by her, to be with her.' (Genesis 39:10) And what did he gain? 'And Joseph was the ruler over the land.' (Genesis 42:6)

Not listening and losing – as in the case of the Jews, concerning whom it is written, 'And they did not listen to Me, and they did not incline their ears.' (Jeremiah 7:26) And what did they lose? 'Such as are for death, to death; and such are for the word, to the sword.' (Jeremiah 15:2)

(*Yalkut Shimoni*, Genesis 32, quoted in *Orchot Tzaddikim*, p. 255)

### Questions:

- 1) How do the biblical citations prove each type of listening?
- 2) Who would you consider to be good listeners in this passage?
- 3) Overall, what are the passages trying to teach about listening?

## **Biases and Capabilities**

(Adapted from Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities)

Rabbi Judah ben Shalom said: If a poor person comes, and pleads before another, that other does not listen to the poor one. If someone who is rich comes, the person listens to and receives the rich one at once. God does not act in such a manner. All are equal before God – women, slaves, rich and poor.

(Exodus Rabbah 21:4)

### *Questions:*

1. According to this passage, what is the difference between the human listener and God?
2. In your experience, are people more likely to listen to people depending on their power? Money? Social status, etc? Why do you think that is so?
3. Are you biased in your listening? Why? How can you get rid of this bias?

The eye is shown only what it is capable of seeing, and the ear is given to hear only what it is capable of hearing.

(Avot d'Rabbi Natan 1:2)

God's voice went forth to everyone in Israel according to their powers of obedience. The elders heard the voice according to their capacity; the adolescents, the youths, the children, the babies, each according to their capacity; the women too, according to their capacity, and also Moses according to his capacity, for it says, 'As Moses spoke, God would answer him with the voice.' (Exodus 19:19) That is [God would answer Moses] with a voice that Moses was able to hear.

(*Tanchuma, Shemot, 25, 90b*)

### *Questions:*

1. What does it mean to hear according to our own capacity?
2. What situations could make people change or grow in their capacity to hear?
3. How has your ability to listen and hear changed in your life?
4. What are some things that are hard for you to hear – what might be beyond your “hearing capability”?

LESSONS 2 & 3

**Understandings:**

- Our national name “*Yisrael*” (the one who struggles with God) serves as a paradigm in which we can embrace the inherent struggle in our developing sense of self.
- Jewish values such as *shmiat ha-Ozen* (being a good listener) and *tochechah* (rebuke) are tools that can help girls build confidence in their perspectives about their own decisions regarding relationships.

**Essential Question:**

How do my words affect others?

**Goals:**

- Introduce idea to students that in addition to *shmiat ha-Ozen*, our words can also have a large impact on others.
- Recognizing that we all talk about others – we are human. But we do have the power to be more aware of our words and actions.

*Note to the teacher: These lessons will focus on lashon hara (gossip), whereas the next lesson will focus on the tone of our words.*

**Activities:**

(This lesson is intended to take place over the course of two sessions)

(15-20 minutes) Set induction: Movie Example. Show a movie clip (from Clueless or Mean Girls or the like) that includes a scene of how telling a story can get out of control.

Without discussion, ask the girls to journal:

- Can you think of examples of gossip or negative speech that you either said or heard?
- What made you say it?
- Did it have an impact on anyone else?
- What was your reaction when you heard it?
- Did you eagerly listen?

Ask for the students to put their pencils down when they are done. Ask if anyone is willing to share what they wrote.

- You might consider asking the girls to use different names in order to keep the stories anonymous.

As the girls share their experiences, you may want to process their responses as a class.

Ask:

- How did this make you feel?
- What did you do about those feelings?
- What would you do the same?
- What would you do differently?

(Journal activity adapted from The J Girl’s Guide: The Young Jewish Woman’s Handbook for Coming of Age)

(10 minutes) Introducing the topic: *Lashon Hara* – gossip. Explain, *Shmirat halashon* is about “paying attention to everything you say and weighing whether it really needs to be said. Could your words possibly hurt someone’s feelings, damage his reputation, diminish her self-esteem?”<sup>30</sup> One way that your words can hurt others is through *lashon hara* – or gossip. The Talmud says, “Why is gossip like a three-pronged tongue? Because it kills three people, the person who says it, the person who listens to it and the person about whom it is said.” (Arakhin 15b) Ask the students to explain what this means, in their own words.

- Have you ever experienced this quote in real life?
- How did you deal with it?
- Looking back, would you have done anything differently?

(20 minutes) Case Study: Miriam, a biblical example. Miriam, Moses’ sister, who is usually lauded for her role in celebrating our exodus from Egypt, is punished for her act of *lashon hara* in the book of Numbers. Split the class into small groups. Hand out the Miriam text study page. Once the groups have completed the questions, ask them to share their answers.

(25 minutes) A story: Admitting our own tendency to gossip. Share this story with the class:

Once there was a woman who said awful things about another person. Realizing later how much she hurt this person, she went to her rabbi and asked, “Rabbi, what can I do?”

The rabbi thought a bit and told the woman to bring him a feather pillow. She brought the pillow and the rabbi said, “Now go outside, rip the pillow open, and shake out the feathers.”

She did just that. As she was shaking out the feathers, the wind caught them, causing them to fly everywhere.

The woman returned to the rabbi and said, “I did as you told me. Now what?”

The rabbi replied, “Now go back outside and pick up all the feathers.”

The woman looked startled and said, “How can I? The wind took them! I don’t even know where they are now.”

The rabbi said, “Exactly. Just like your words. Once they’re out, it’s impossible to get them back.”<sup>31</sup>

Joseph Telushkin, in his book, Words that Hurt – Words that Heal: How to Choose Words Wisely and Well, writes, “That words are powerful may seem obvious, but the fact is that most of us, most of the time, use them lightly. We choose our clothes more carefully than we choose our words, though what we say about and to others can define them indelibly. That is why ethical speech – speaking fairly of others, honestly about ourselves, and carefully to everyone – is so important. If we keep the power of words in the foreground of our consciousness, we will handle them as carefully as we would a loaded gun.” Ask the students:

- What are some words that have hurt you?

<sup>30</sup> Adelman, Penina et al. The J Girl’s Guide: The Young Jewish Woman’s Handbook for Coming of Age. Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005, p. 122.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, pp. 125-126.

- What are some words that have healed you?

Write a running list of words on the board.

(Adapted from The Content of their Character: *Shmirat ha-Lashon* The Ethics of Language)

Next, explain: The ninth commandment forbids lying. When we lie about others, we are committing *lashon hara*. There are other categories of *lashon hara* as well. Write each category (listed below) on the board. Ask the girls for examples of these categories.

1. derogatory statements
2. damaging statements
3. insulting statements
4. emphasizing undesirable traits
5. belittling statements
6. false statements

(30 minutes) Moving beyond words of hurt and hate. Hand out blank strips of paper. Instruct the girls: On these papers, write words that have hurt you, or words you've used to hurt others. Write your own experiences with *lashon hara* – times that you were a “victim” to *lashon hara*, or when you yourself were guilty of *lashon hara*. If you want, you can draw or write the emotions that went along with these experiences. After the students are done writing and drawing on the paper, explain that today we will move beyond words of hurt and hate. Collect all of the papers from the girls, and destroy them.

- Two ideas for destroying the experiences of *lashon hara*:
  - Collect the papers in a metal pail. Go outside with the girls, and burn the contents of the pail.
  - Have the girls write on the paper with pens whose ink will run in water. Collect the papers in a bucket, and pour a pitcher of water over the papers. After a few minutes, have the girls reach in to pick up the papers – they should be clear – “washed clean” of the past.

As you ceremoniously say goodbye to previous experiences with *lashon hara*, you might want to offer the Chafetz Chaim's prayer on being careful in our speech:

“Gracious and merciful God, help me restrain myself from speaking or listening to derogatory, damaging, or hostile speech. I will try not to engage in *lashon hara*, either about individuals or about a group of people. I will strive not to say anything that contains falsehood, insincere flattery, scoffing, or elements of needless dispute, anger, arrogance, oppression, or embarrassment to others. Grant me the strength to say nothing unnecessary, so that all my actions and speech cultivate a love for Your creatures and for You.”<sup>32</sup>

- Consider reflecting with the students after the ceremony: How did that feel?

(25 minutes) Methods for dealing with *lashon hara*. The Chofetz Chaim offered some rules about *lashon hara* – study them in small groups, and explain what is realistic, and what is not realistic. What advice would you add to his “rules?” Ask students to share their answers.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, pp. 124-125.

- In The J Girl's Guide: The Young Jewish Woman's Handbook for Coming of Age, Penina Adelman et al suggest the following ways to combat *lashon hara*.<sup>33</sup> You might want to make sure the students touch on each of these suggestions:
  - When you are speaking about someone to a third party, omit his or her name. It's a start!
  - Before you speak, ask yourself if what you are saying is true. If not, close your mouth or else you'll become known as a liar.
  - Ask yourself why you feel the need to speak negatively about someone to a third party. Are you angry at him or her? Are you insecure about something? Think about it before you open your mouth and allow the words to jump out.
  - Ask yourself, "Are my words going to harm anyone?" and "How would I feel if someone were talking that way about me?"
  - Refrain from jokes that insult others. As Jews, we have often been hurt by anti-Semitic humor.
  - When others start to gossip, leave the room. (If you have the courage, object to what is being said.) Just because everyone is doing it doesn't mean that you have to join them.
  - Stay away from people who constantly engage in *lashon hara*. Bad behavior has a way of rubbing off on others.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 127.

## Miriam the Prophetess, Guilty of Gossip

(Adapted from The J Girl's Guide:  
The Young Jewish Woman's Handbook for Coming of Age)

### Numbers 12:1-15

When they were in Hazereth, Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman he had married: "He married a Cushite woman!"

They said, "Has Adonai spoken only through Moses? Hasn't God also spoken through us as well?" Adonai heard it. Now Moses was a very humble man, more so than any other man on earth. Suddenly Adonai called to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the Tent of Meeting." So the three of them went out. Adonai came down in a pillar of cloud, stopped at the entrance of the Tent, and called out, "Aaron and Miriam!" The two of them came forward; and God said, "Hear these My words: When a prophet of Adonai arises among you, I make Myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; he is trusted throughout My household. With him I speak mouth to mouth, plainly and not in riddles, and he beholds the likeness of Adonai. How then did you not shrink from speaking against My servant Moses!" Still incensed with them, the God departed. As the cloud withdrew from the Tent, there was Miriam stricken with snow-white scales! When Aaron turned toward Miriam, he saw that she was stricken with scales. And Aaron said to Moses, "O my lord, account not to us the sin which we committed in our folly. Let her not be as one dead, who emerges from his mother's womb with half his flesh eaten away." So Moses cried out to Adonai, saying, "O God, pray heal her!"

But Adonai said to Moses, "If her father spat in her face, would she not bear her shame for seven days? Let her be shut out of camp for seven days, and then let her be readmitted." So Miriam was shut out of camp seven days; and the people did not march on until Miriam was readmitted.

### Questions:

1. Was it fair to punish Miriam "actively" and Aaron "passively?" Why or why not?
2. How do you think Miriam felt in the 7 days she was confined?
3. Do you think Miriam thought God was being unfair? Have you ever been singled out for a punishment that you thought was unfair? Have you ever seen this happen to someone else?
4. The rabbis explained that Miriam spoke against Moses in order to defend his wife, Zipporah. They claim that Miriam was disgusted with her brother because she felt that in spending so much time on Mt. Sinai talking to God, he was ignoring his wife. In effect, the rabbis believed that Miriam was saying, "We're prophets too, but we don't ignore *our* spouses!"<sup>34</sup> Does the fact that Miriam had good intentions make a difference? Have you ever bad-mouthed someone out of concern for that person's possible mistreatment of another?

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<sup>34</sup> Adelman, Penina et al. The J Girl's Guide: The Young Jewish Woman's Handbook for Coming of Age. Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005, p. 131.

## Rules about *Lashon Hara* from the Chofetz Chayim

If you are with a group of people and one of them begins to speak *lashon hara*, the best thing to do would be to tell the speaker that *lashon hara* is the wrong thing to do. If that is not possible, the next best thing to do is to walk away. If you are in a situation where providing *tochechah* (telling that gossip is wrong) is not possible and you cannot walk away, the following three things are best response: (a) convince yourself not to believe what you are told, (b) feel unhappy about being made to listen to this information, and (c) do not show any agreement with the speaker.

It is not necessary for you to mention someone's name to be guilty of *lashon hara*. If the other person can figure out whom you are talking about, you have still done wrong. It is better not to make negative comments about anyone.

If your parents or your teachers ask you to "inform" on someone else, even though you are supposed to honor your parents and teachers, you should not give that information because your response would be *lashon hara*. Your job then is to refuse to do so in a respectful manner. The best thing to do is to personally confront the person who did wrong about his/her actions. However, if that person's welfare or the welfare of others is at stake, and you cannot personally intervene, you are obligated to provide this information.

### *Questions:*

1. In your own words, list the Chofetz Chayim's rules about *lashon hara*.
2. What does he suggest we do in certain situations? (Add to your list of rules situations in which they would apply.)
3. Which of these rules seem realistic?
4. Which of these rules seem unrealistic?
5. What advice would you add to these "rules?"

LESSON 4

**Understandings:**

- Our national name “*Yisrael*” (the one who struggles with God) serves as a paradigm in which we can embrace the inherent struggle in our developing sense of self.
- Jewish values such as *shmiat ha-Ozen* (being a good listener) and *tochechah* (rebuke) are tools that can help girls build confidence in their perspectives about their own decisions regarding relationships.

**Essential Question:**

How does the tone of my words affect others?

**Goals:**

- Introduce the idea that not only what we say, but how we say it, affects others.
- Have students practice using passive, assertive, and aggressive language.

**Activities:**

(10 minutes) Set induction: Case Study: the *Ashamnu* prayer. Write the *Ashamnu* prayer from Yom Kippur on the board. Explain that this prayer shows that we have all sinned – it represents the sins committed by the community as a whole. Have the students call out all of the words that have to do with speech. Circle each word as they call it out.

We abuse, we betray, we are cruel.

We destroy, we embitter, we falsify.

We gossip, we hate, we insult.

We jeer, we kill, we lie.

We mock, we neglect, we oppress.

We pervert, we quarrel, we rebel.

We steal, we transgress, we are unkind.

We are violent, we are wicked, we are xenophobic.

We yield to evil, we are zealous for bad causes.

Ask: How are these words similar or different from *lashon hara*? (You are trying to get the students to express that more than just what we say, how we speak can also be a sin. See jeer, unkind, embitter for examples)

(25 minutes) Wounding words: Text study. Sometimes, we speak in a mean way to people – we might be mad at them, or we might not like them. Even if we are not speaking badly *about* them (*lashon hara* – gossip), Judaism still sees this as a sin. Split the class into three groups. Assign each group to text 1, 2, or 3. Have each group answer the questions about their text. One member from each group should be ready to present the meaning of their quote to the class.

(40 minutes) Passive, Assertive, and Aggressive Language. How do you communicate in your relationships? Using language that is overly passive may lead to people taking advantage of you. Using language that is overly aggressive might prevent people from getting close to you. The “happy medium” – being assertive – can often be hard, and intimidating. Keep the group split in the same three groups. Hand each group a copy of

the case study sheet and the communication styles sheet. Assign each group a case study and a type of response. The groups should be prepared to role play the situation employing their assigned communication style.

Once the groups have each presented their case in their assigned communication style, have them present the same case, but with a different communication style. Repeat one more time so that each group has the chance to role play the three communication styles.

Ask:

- What are some words that came up during the passive styles?
- What are some words that came up during the assertive styles?
- What are some words that came up during the aggressive styles?

Keep a running list on the board.

(10 minutes) Closing: Ask the students:

- Which styles felt the most comfortable? The most uncomfortable?
- Were some styles easier than others? Why?
- How can you remain assertive in the face of intimidation?

## Wounding Words: Text Study

1

Wounding with words is worse than wounding with swords because while swords do their damage from nearby, words can wound at a great distance. (Jerusalem Talmud Peah 1:1)

2

Wounding with words is worse than hitting a person. Hitting will affect the body, but words go much deeper. Bruises from a hit heal eventually. Wounds from words may never be healed. (Vilna Gaon)

3

Some one told Rabbi Nahman: “If one puts a neighbor to shame in public, it is just like murder.” Rabbi Nahman added on his own, “Why? When people are embarrassed their face turns first red – drawing blood – and then goes white as that blood is spilled.” (Bava Metzia 58b)

*Prepare these questions to present to the class:*

1. Explain this quote in your own words.
2. What questions does this piece of text raise for you?

## **Communication Skills: Passive, Assertive, and Aggressive Language**

### **Passive**

Being passive, or unassertive, involves us not stating what we really want, or letting others decide for us. It is the hope that we will get what we want, without asking for it. Passive behavior can be marked by avoidance of eye contact, fidgeting, or a bowed head. When we are passive, we often become angry with ourselves or others for not anticipating our needs.

### **Assertive**

Being assertive means expressing our feelings constructively and in an open way, which maximizes the chance that we will achieve our goals personally and professionally. Being assertive also means effectively using compromise and negotiation, in order to achieve your needs and that of a group. The ability to comfortably assert yourself will help to ensure that you feel confident, capable and less frustrated.

### **Aggressive**

Aggressive behavior expresses feeling and opinions in a way which punishes, threatens, or puts the other person down. The aim of this behavior is for the person to get his or her own way, no matter what. This includes sarcastic behavior, manipulative behavior, and gossip. Passive aggressive behavior is what the name implies: it is the act of aggressive action veiled in calm and seemingly passive approach.

**In any form of communication, it's good to be aware of the following body language:**

- facial expression
- eye contact
- posture
- hand movements, not fidgeting
- tone of voice
- “owning your speech”

## **Communication Skills: 3 Case Studies**

### **Case 1:**

You and a few friends are trying to decide what to do on Saturday night. You have a few ideas (go out to dinner, see a movie, go bowling or mini-golf), and need to make up your minds soon.

### **Case 2:**

One of your close friends just had a fight with a mutual friend. She is very upset and ranting about what a terrible person your friend is. Her comments shift from complaining about her hurtful behavior to criticizing her personality.

What do you say?

### **Case 3:**

Your friends are all going to a party, where you know there will be drugs and alcohol. You don't know if you want to go, but they are really pressuring you.

LESSONS 5 & 6

**Understandings:**

- Our national name “*Yisrael*” (the one who struggles with God) serves as a paradigm in which we can embrace the inherent struggle in our developing sense of self.
- Jewish values such as *shmiat ha-Ozen* (being a good listener) and *tochechah* (rebuke) are tools that can help girls build confidence in their perspectives about their own decisions regarding relationships.

**Essential Question:**

If I’m supposed to practice *Shmirat halashon* (guarding my tongue), how can *tochechah* (rebuke) be a value that I practice?

**Goals:**

- Introduce the idea that *tochechah* (rebuke) is a mitzvah.
- Demonstrate positive uses of *tochechah*, and negative uses of *tochechah*.
- Discuss coping mechanisms both in giving and receiving *tochechah*.

**Activities:**

(This lesson is intended to take place over the course of two sessions)

(5-10 minutes) Set induction: Explain and respond to this verse: “Love unaccompanied by criticism is not love. Peace unaccompanied by reproof is not peace.” (Genesis Rabbah 54:3)

(25 minutes) Introduction of the Concept: *Tochechah* (rebuke). We’ve spent some time learning about how our words can have a negative impact on others. We’ve practiced different kinds of communication. Ask:

- So how is it that Judaism says we are supposed to provide *tochechah* (rebuke) to our friends?
- Doesn’t that contradict what we’ve already learned?

Split the class into chevruta. Hand out the *Tochechah* Texts page.

(25 minutes) Gather the class back together to talk about the texts. As you go through the questions on the page, facilitate discussion between the students. If there are questions raised, try to let the students answer the questions first. Ask the students if they can differentiate between successful and unsuccessful *tochechah*. Make a list in two columns – the first list should be “Successful and Worthy Rebukes” whereas the second list should be “Unsuccessful and Unworthy Rebukes.” After the girls make the lists on the board, ask: Do you now have a clearer idea about what is permissible and favorable in *tochechah*? What questions do you still have?

- Examples for Successful and Worthy Rebukes:
  - gentle
  - private
  - direct
  - clear

- honest
- fair
- kind
- forgiving
- responsible
- given for the other's own good
- Examples for Unsuccessful and Unworthy Rebukes:
  - harsh
  - public
  - loud
  - angry
  - condescending
  - ambiguous
  - self-serving
  - resentful

(Adapted from Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Texts and Arts Activities)

(10 minutes) *Tochechah* – Some Lessons on How to Do It. Hand out copies of Gregg Walker's "Dealing with Criticism." Criticism as a kind of *tochechah*. Review the sheet with the class, being sure to stop for questions.

(20 minutes) *Tochechah* – A Royal Example. One important aspect of Judaism is that our leaders and heroes are not perfect – Judaism does not hold people to an impossible standard of perfection...even our greatest legends make mistakes. In 2 Samuel, King David made a big mistake – he slept with Bathsheba, another man's wife, then had the man killed in battle so that he could marry her. It seems as if David is going to get away with this sin, until the prophet Nathan came to speak with him. Read the story from the Bible together as a class. Ask:

- In your own words, summarize Nathan's *tochechah* of David.
- Was Nathan's *tochechah* worthy or unworthy? Explain.
- Was Nathan's *tochechah* successful or unsuccessful? Explain.
- Did Nathan give his *tochechah* in a "Jewish" way? Explain.

(20-30 minutes) How do we honor others who hurt us? It is important to honor other people, because each person is unique (connection back to Unit 1: *b'tzelem Elohim* – made in the image of God).

- You might want to teach the Jewish value of *m'chabed zeh et zeh* (honoring others). At the end of this lesson, are four station worksheets along with a suggestion for teaching this value.

How do we honor others and give *tochechah* (rebuke)? Ask:

- What is the bottom line in terms of honoring others? (i.e. What is the basic behavior you must show others?)

As a class, come up with verbal responses for two situations:

- 1) You break up with your significant other, after s/he did something that hurt you (i.e. cheated on you, wanted you to do something physically you weren't ready to do, treated you badly, etc)

- 2) You and a close friend have a fight, and your not sure if you can be friends with him/her anymore.

What do you say? How do you behave towards the person “in question?” How do you talk about the situation with other friends?

- You can have the students role play the situations, or discuss answers.

(15-20 minutes) Journal:

- How do you work to honor those in your life who have hurt you?
- Write of a situation in which you hurt someone, or they hurt you. What happened? How was the situation resolved? How did it make you feel? What lessons did you learn from it?

(25 minutes) Revisiting Miriam – Did she do the right thing? In this activity, the class will review Miriam’s story of gossip (Numbers 12:1-15) Split the class into two groups. One group will argue that Miriam did the right thing and offered her rebuke in a constructive way. The other group will argue that Miriam did not do the right thing, and will give some examples of what she could have done differently.

## Tochechah Texts

Read these explanations about *tochechah* and answer the following questions.

“One who rebukes another will in the end find more favor than one who flatters that person.”  
(Proverbs 28:23)

*Questions:*

1. Explain this verse in your own words.
2. Why would one who gives *tochechah* “find more favor” than one who gives flattery?
3. Have you ever experienced this verse to be true? When?

“You shall not hate your fellow man in your heart. Rebuke your kinsman and incur no guilt because of him.”  
(Leviticus 19:17)

*Question:*

1. According to this verse, why is it important to provide *tochechah* to your neighbor or friend?

The rabbis explained this verse further:

How do we know that if a person has rebuked a neighbor four and five times [without succeeding in turning the neighbor from sin], that person should continue to rebuke [the neighbor]? Because it says, “rebuke your kinsman.” One might infer that the reproof should be carried so far as to change a person’s face with shame. But it says, “You shall not bring guilt upon the other.” Rabbi Tarfon said, “In this generation there is no one capable of rebuking.” Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah said, “In this generation there is no one capable of receiving rebuke.” Rabbi Akiba said, “In this generation there is no one who knows how rebuke ought to be worded.”

(*Sifra* 89a-89b)

*Questions:*

1. What further understanding or guidelines of *tochechah* do the rabbis give you?
2. What do the rabbis think of their generation? Do you think that your generation is any better or worse at *tochechah*?
3. What questions do you have about the rabbis’ explanation?

Maimonides adds:

*Tochechah* cannot be given in a way that publicly embarrasses or shames the one you are trying to help.

(Maimonides, Laws of Character, 6.7)

*Questions:*

1. What are a few guidelines that Maimonides might provide on how to give rebuke?

## Dealing with Criticism

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Criticism may occur within conflict situations or can foster conflict. Criticism, or the generation of “evaluative judgments,” is often painful or difficult to “give” or “receive.” If handled appropriately by both the person criticized and the person being criticized, critical feedback can promote constructive growth in individuals and relationships.

### Constructive Criticism – Some Assumptions

1. *Criticism arises out of interaction*, rather than simply action. Evaluation is important to improvement, but criticism should follow a “two way street.” Criticism is more valid when all parties involved interact both as the “critic” and the “criticized.”
2. *Those who criticize need to value and invite criticism.* Criticism can be promoted if the critic first invites criticism of his or her own behavior. By inviting criticism, a person can create a situation in which her or his criticism of another is perceived as appropriate.
3. The “critic” and “criticized” *guidelines* that follow *are pertinent to all parties* involved in “criticism” discussion.

### Constructive Criticism – Guidelines for the Critic

1. *Understand why you are offering criticism.* Feel confident that doing so is appropriate to the situation and constructive for the parties involved. Criticism voiced out of self-interest or competition may be destructive.
2. *Engage in perspective taking or role reversal.* As you develop a criticism strategy or response, try to understand the perspective of the person being criticized.
3. *Offer criticism of the person’s behavior, not on her or his “person.”* Refer to what a person does, not her or his “traits” or “character.”
4. Even though criticism implies evaluation, *emphasize description.* Before offering any judgment, describe behavior you see or have experienced.
5. *Focus your criticism on a particular situation, rather than general or abstract behavior.* “Index” and “date” your criticism, much like a “journalist”: deal with who, what, where, and when.
6. *Direct your criticism to the present* (“here and now”) rather than the past (“there and then.”)
7. *Emphasize in your criticism your perceptions and feelings.* Indicate what you think and feel about the other’s behavior that you have described. Use “I” statements.
8. *Invite a collaborative discussion of consequences rather than offering advice.* Form a partnership to deal with problems. Do not compete with the other party; compete with the other person against the problem.
9. *Keep judgments tentative.* Maintain an “open door” of dialogue rather than presenting your “analysis” or “explanation” of another’s behavior.

10. *Present criticism in ways that allow the other party to make decisions.* Do not force criticism on the other. Encourage the other to experience “ownership.” People are more likely to comply with solutions that they generate.
11. *Avoid critical overload.* Give the other an amount of critical feedback that she or he can handle or understand at that time.
12. *Focus criticism on behaviors that the other person can change.*
13. *Include in your critical feedback a positive “outlet.”* Reinforce positive actions and invite the possibility of change.
14. *Invite the other to present criticisms of you.*

### **Constructive Criticism – Guidelines for the Criticized**

1. *Recognize the value of constructive criticism.* Such criticism can improve relationships and productivity.
2. *Engage in perspective taking or role reversal.* Try to understand the perspective of the person offering criticism.
3. *Acknowledge criticism that focuses on your behavior.* Attempt to transform criticism that seems directed at your “person” to specific behavioral issues.
4. *Listen actively.* Even though criticism may hurt, *seek to understand accurately* the criticism being presented.
  - i) Paraphrase what the other is saying.
  - ii) Ask questions to increase understanding.
  - iii) Check out nonverbal displays (check your perceptions).
5. *Work hard to avoid becoming defensive.* Resist any tendency to want to dismiss criticism or retaliate.
6. *Welcome criticism;* use the appropriate criticism to improve.
7. *Maintain your interpersonal power and authority to make your own decisions.* Criticism, when directed at one’s “person,” may weaken one’s resolve. Focus the other’s criticism on your actions. Seek ownership of solutions.
8. *Seek constructive changes to the behavior that prompted the criticism.*
9. *Insist on valid criticism.* Valid criticism: (a) addresses behaviors, (b) is timely, and (c) is specific.
10. *Communicate clearly how you feel and think about the criticism and receiving criticism.* Use “I” messages.

## **Nathan's Tochechah**

### **2 Samuel 12:1-12**

And God sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said, “There were two men in the same city, one rich and one poor. The rich man had very large flocks and herds, but the poor man had only one little ewe lamb that he had bought. He tended it and it grew up together with him and his children: it used to share his morsel of bread, drink from his cup, and nestle in his bosom; it was like a daughter to him. One day, a traveler came to the rich man, but he was loath to take anything from his own flocks or herds to prepare a meal for the guest who had come to him; so he took the poor man’s lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.”

David flew into a rage against the man, and said to Nathan, “As God lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He shall pay for the lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and showed no pity.”

And Nathan said to David, “That man is you! Thus said Adonai, the God of Israel: ‘It was I who anointed you king over Israel and it was I who rescued you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master’s house and possession of your master’s wives; and I gave you the House of Israel and Judah; and if that were not enough, I would give you twice as much more. Why then have you flouted the command of Adonai and done what displeases God? You have put Uriah the Hittite to the sword; you took his wife and made her your wife and had him killed by the sword of the Ammonites. Therefore the sword shall never depart from your House—because you spurned Me by taking the wife of Uriah the Hittite and making her your wife.’ Thus said Adonai: ‘I will make a calamity rise against you from within your own house; I will take your wives and give them to another man before your very eyes and he shall sleep with your wives under this very sun. You acted in secret, but I will make this happen in the sight of all Israel and in broad daylight.’”

## Miriam's Story of Gossip

### Numbers 12:1-15

When they were in Hazeroth, Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman he had married: "He married a Cushite woman!"

They said, "Has Adonai spoken only through Moses? Hasn't God also spoken through us as well?" Adonai heard it. Now Moses was a very humble man, more so than any other man on earth. Suddenly Adonai called to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the Tent of Meeting." So the three of them went out. Adonai came down in a pillar of cloud, stopped at the entrance of the Tent, and called out, "Aaron and Miriam!" The two of them came forward; and God said, "Hear these My words: When a prophet of Adonai arises among you, I make Myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; he is trusted throughout My household. With him I speak mouth to mouth, plainly and not in riddles, and he beholds the likeness of Adonai. How then did you not shrink from speaking against My servant Moses!" Still incensed with them, the God departed. As the cloud withdrew from the Tent, there was Miriam stricken with snow-white scales! When Aaron turned toward Miriam, he saw that she was stricken with scales. And Aaron said to Moses, "O my lord, account not to us the sin which we committed in our folly. Let her not be as one dead, who emerges from his mother's womb with half his flesh eaten away." So Moses cried out to Adonai, saying, "O God, pray heal her!"

But Adonai said to Moses, "If her father spat in her face, would she not bear her shame for seven days? Let her be shut out of camp for seven days, and then let her be readmitted." So Miriam was shut out of camp seven days; and the people did not march on until Miriam was readmitted.

## **Optional Teaching: *M'chabed Zeh et Zeh* (Honoring Others)**

(40 minutes) Introduction of the concept: *M'chabed zeh et zeh* (honoring others). In this activity, students will learn from the sources on *m'chabed zeh et zeh* in learning stations. Split the class into *chevruta* pairs. Assign each pair a station at which to begin. (More than one *chevruta* may start at the same station.) The pairs should work through each station, and should check in with the teacher before moving on to another station.

- Each station could have the selected study quote above it in a large font. Each station should have its own worksheet and activity.

### ***M'chabed Zeh et Zeh* – Honoring Others**

#### **Station 1**

**(Adapted from Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities)**

May it be Your will, O Eternal our God and God of our ancestors, that no hatred against any person come into our hearts, and no hatred against us come into the hearts of any person, and may none be jealous of us, and may we not be jealous of any; and may Your law be our labor all the days of our lives, and may your words be as supplications before You.

(Palestinian Talmud, *Brachot* 8:6)

#### *Questions:*

1. Is this the prayer you would choose to include in your worship services? Why or why not?
2. What about in your own personal prayer?
3. Is prayer the best way for you to reflect on your own feelings and reactions to others? Explain.
4. What are some other ways that you reflect on our actions towards others?

#### *Activity:*

Write your own prayer or meditation asking God to remove hatred from your heart. Add anything else that you feel naturally follows from that. When and how would you say this prayer?

## ***M'chabed Zeh et Zeh – Honoring Others***

### **Station 2**

**(Adapted from Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities)**

Be careful of the honor of all human beings and honor them as they should be, with the thought that you are thereby giving honor to God's own Self, Who is Blessed – because they are the work of God's hands and God's creatures.

*(Derekh Hayim, 7-7)*

*Questions:*

1. Do you think people deserve honor just because they are part of God's creation? Why or why not?
2. Describe a time when this thought influenced you in a practical sense.
3. What does it mean to honor all human beings "as they should be?"

*Activity:*

Make a list of ways you can honor others (through action or word).

## ***M'chabed Zeh et Zeh – Honoring Others***

### **Station 3**

**(Adapted from Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities)**

Never speak derogatorily of any creature of God, not even a cow or a wild animal or birds.

*(Derekh Hayim, 7-44)*

#### *Questions:*

1. Why is it important not to *speak* derogatorily about animals even though they can't understand human speech?
2. Is there any part of creation you think people tend to overlook as being worthy of honor?
3. Is there a part of creation toward which you should show more honor?

#### *Activity:*

Individually, write down 5-10 animals that you don't like, or understand why they exist. Trade your sheet with your partner's. Now write down one positive comment about each animal on your *chevruta* partner's list. When you're each done, go over your lists together. Has this helped you to see these creatures in a new light?

## ***M'chabed Zeh et Zeh – Honoring Others***

### **Station 4**

**(Adapted from Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities)**

In every person there is something precious, which is in no one else. And so we should honor each for what is hidden within him/her, for what only that person has, and none of his/her comrades.

(Adapted from Martin Buber, Ten Rungs: Hasidic Sayings, p. 80)

#### *Questions:*

1. Do you believe that each person has something precious and unique hidden within?
2. In what ways do you treat others as if you believe this is so?
3. In what ways do you honor and appreciate what is precious and unique about *you*?

#### *Activity:*

Either:

Draw a self-portrait that shows what is unique and precious about *you*.

*or*

Illustrate the following sentence: “In every person there is something precious, which is in no one else.”

Share and explain your work with your *chevruta* partner.

LESSON 7

(Optional Lesson – might depend on setting)

**Understandings:**

- Our national name “*Yisrael*” (the one who struggles with God) serves as a paradigm in which we can embrace the inherent struggle in our developing sense of self.
- Jewish values such as *shmiat ha-Ozen* (being a good listener) and *tochechah* (rebuke) are tools that can help girls build confidence in their perspectives about their own decisions regarding relationships.

**Essential Question:**

How does what I say impact others?

**Goals:**

- Help students to synthesize what they’ve learned in this unit to an art project for the entire school/synagogue.

**Activities:**

(Time varies) Mural: Hurting words, healing words. For the last few weeks we’ve talked about how our language affects other people. Today and next week we’re going to illustrate what we’ve learned in a mural for the entire school. Brainstorm: What are words that hurt others? What are words that hurt us? How do these words hurt? What are words in which we heal others? What are words that heal us? How do these words heal?

Decide as a class how to represent these issues in a painted mural (other media can be used as well).

- Try to clear room on a major school or synagogue wall for the mural. If space is not available, use fabric or butcher block paper, and hang it prominently in the building.

## Unit 4: How Do I Express Love?

### Unit Goals:

This unit is intended to delve into the topic of healthy relationships and healthy sex habits. Participants will explore various biblical examples of loving relationships, and name qualities or aspects of these relationships that make them so “successful.” They will learn of the biblical ideal *v’ahavta l’rei-echa k’mocha* (loving others as you love yourself) and begin to discuss the importance of loving oneself before getting involved in a relationship. Lastly, participants will revisit the values of *tzni-yut* (modesty) and *shmirat haguf* (caring for the body) as a model for healthy sexual practices.

### Understandings:

1. The biblical concept *b’tzelem Elohim* (that humans are made in the image of God) indicates that we are holy vessels and can be interpreted as a mandate to treat our bodies with *kavod* (honor).
2. Our national name “*Yisrael*” (the one who struggles with God) serves as a paradigm in which we can embrace the inherent struggle in our developing sense of self.
3. Jewish values such as *shmirat haguf* (taking care of your body) and *m’chabed zeh et zeh* (honoring others) are tools that can help girls build confidence in their perspectives about their own body image and decisions about relationships.
4. Understanding one’s own contributions in a relationship can help to develop successful relationships.

### Knowledge:

- Having a good sense of self is an important component to a healthy relationship.
- In an I-it relationship, the “it” is treated as an object – one that is observed or known.
- I-thou relationships are about the relationship itself – and are about understanding, appreciation, and participation.
- Every person is involved in I-it and I-thou relationships. I-thou relationships account for moments in the course of a partnership.
- *V’ahavta l’rei-echa k’mocha* (loving others as you love yourself) is a biblical concept that can illustrate the significance of loving oneself before getting involved in a relationship.
- The values *Shmirat haguf* (taking care of your body) and *b’tzelem Elohim* (we are made in the image of God) can impact our relationships, both emotional and sexual, with others.
- Judaism values a healthy sexual relationship between two partners; one which involves consent, emotional maturity, and respect.

### Skills:

At the end of this unit, students should be able to:

1. define I-thou and I-it relationships.
2. apply I-thou and I-it relationships to their own lives.

3. voice a personal “code of ethics” regarding their own sexuality and relationships.
4. identify examples of loving relationships in Jewish text.
5. talk about their own “self-love” and how it relates to their relationships with others.

**Authentic Assessment:**

- Paper-tear midrash interpretation of I-Thou or I-it relationships
- Personal reflection on Love – create a poem, song, picture of your own interpretations of love (How do you share love? How do you want to be loved?)
- Personal code of ethics regarding sexuality and relationships
- Relationship Brochure
- Journal:
  - Lesson 1:
    - Explain Buber’s idea of I-it and I-thou relationships.
    - Sentence completion: “I have been in an I-it relationship when...” and “I have been in an I-thou relationship when...”
    - How does being in these two kinds of relationships feel different?
    - Do you feel like one of these relationships is more realistic than the other? Would you favor one more than the other? Why or why not?
  - Lesson 3:
    - How do you think of your own sexuality?
    - What messages does our society give you about sex, and how do these affect you?

**Other Evidence:**

- Discussion of self esteem, relationships, sexual ethics
- Teacher observation of student body language and self-reflection in class participation

## Sequence of Core Activities:

### LESSON 1

#### Understandings

- Our national name “*Yisrael*” (the one who struggles with God) serves as a paradigm in which we can embrace the inherent struggle in our developing sense of self.
- Understanding one’s own contributions in a relationship can help to develop successful relationships.

#### Essential Question

What aspects of my relationships are I-it? What aspects of my relationships are I-thou?

#### Goals

- Introduce Buber’s concept of I-it and I-thou relationships.
- Have the girls assess and analyze their relationships according to Buber’s definitions.

#### Materials

- Buber on Relationship sheets
- Construction paper
- glue
- journals
- pens/pencils

#### Activities

(5-10 minutes) Set Induction: Free write. Have the students write about a relationship they are in. (It can be with anyone: parents, friends, partner, etc.) How long have you known this person? What about the relationship is special? What is your role in the relationship? (What do you do to make the relationship work?)

- Ask for volunteers to share their writing. Let the students know they can keep their writing “anonymous” by not mentioning the name of the person they are talking about.

(45 minutes) Introduce Buber’s I-it and I-thou relationship concepts. Martin Buber was a Jewish philosopher who was born at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and lived until 1965. He was influenced by Hasidism and believed that relationships were of utmost importance. Hand out the “Buber on Relationship” sheets and ask for volunteers to read through Buber’s excerpts.

Facilitate a class discussion based on Buber’s writings. Ask the provided questions after the excerpt, and then ask for examples of I-It relationships. You might have to give some of your own first.

- Keep in mind:
  - Buber does not place judgment of “better” or “worse” on either of these relationship types. In fact, he argues that the I-it relationship is necessary for living, “without *It* man cannot live. But he who lives with *It* alone is not a man.” (Dorff and Newman, 63)

- I-Thou relationships are really moments in relationship – nothing can be eternally I-Thou.
- The idea of people “experiencing” the world is I-it, whereas the idea of life being about encounters is I-Thou
- I-Thou is about action
- I-Thou moments cannot be forced

Read the second text and ask the second round of questions. Ask students to give some examples of the I-Thou relationships or moments in the students’ lives. Ask the students to think of a time they were in an I-It relationship:

- How did it feel to them?
- How do they think it felt for the other person?
- What made it an I-it relationship?

Write all the answers down on half of the board. Then ask the same questions, regarding I-thou relationships. Write the answers down on the other half of the board. Ask: Are there any generalizations we can make about these two different kinds of relationships?

(20 minutes) Paper-Tear Midrash: Ask the students to depict their interpretation of I-it or I-thou relationships through paper-tear midrash. Have the girls explain their pictures at the end of the activity.

(15 minutes) Journal:

- Explain Buber’s idea of I-it and I-thou relationships.
- Sentence completion: “I have been in an I-it relationship when...” and “I have been in an I-thou relationship when...”
- How does being in these two kinds of relationships feel different?
- Do you feel like one of these relationships is more realistic than the other?
- Would you favor one more than the other? Why or why not?

## **Buber on Relationships**

(Adapted from Sex in the Texts, UAH Press)

“According to Buber, an I-Thou relationship is an equal relationship. An I-Thou moment is a moment with no labels. Once you realize you are having one, it is, by definition, over. When you know another as a ‘Thou,’ you cannot want to gain anything for yourself from the relationship or to use the other person in any way. When we treat another person as an object, Buber calls this an I-It relationship.”

### *Questions:*

1. In your own words, describe an I-It relationship.
2. What does it mean that once you realize you’re having an I-Thou relationship, the moment is over?

“When I experience another person as a Thou, and have an I-Thou experience with him/her, then s/he is not a thing among things, nor does s/he consist of material qualities. S/he is not longer merely a pronoun (a He or a She), limited by others Hes and Shes, a dot in the universal grid of time and space. Nor is s/he a characteristic that can be experienced and then described. S/he is not merely a loose bundle of labeled qualities. Standing alone and whole, s/he is Thou, and fills my universe. It is not as if there were nothing but s/he. Rather it is as if everything else lives in his/her light.

“This is true in the same way as a song is not merely a collection of tones, nor a verse a mere collection of words, nor a statute a collection of lines. One must tear and break apart in order to make a unified whole revert back to its component parts. So it is with the person whom I call Thou. I can abstract from him/her the color of his/her hair of the shadings of his/her speech, or the aura of his/her graciousness, and in fact I must often to this, but as soon as I do, s/he is no longer Thou.”

### *Questions:*

1. In your own words, describe and I-Thou relationship.
2. What characteristics does an I-Thou relationship or moment have?

## LESSONS 2 & 3

### Understandings

- The biblical concept *b'tzelem Elohim* (that humans are made in the image of God) indicates that we are holy vessels and can be interpreted as a mandate to treat our bodies with *kavod* (honor).
- Our national name “*Yisrael*” (the one who struggles with God) serves as a paradigm in which we can embrace the inherent struggle in our developing sense of self.
- Jewish values such as *shmirat haguf* (taking care of your body) and *m'chabed zeh et zeh* (honoring others) are tools that can help girls build confidence in their perspectives about their own body image and decisions about relationships.

### Essential Question

What are some Jewish examples of loving relationships, and what do they mean to me?

### Goals

- Introduce the students to a few images of love in Jewish text
- Demonstrate that Judaism values loving relationships
- Connect the Jewish texts to participants' lives

### Activities

(This lesson is intended to take place over the course of two sessions)

**Note: As you begin to teach these lessons on relationships and sexuality, it is important to think about who is in your classroom. Avoid making any assumptions about students' sexual identities or sexual experiences. Be sensitive to what is sure to be a diverse class through your language, body language, and facial expressions.**

(10 minutes) Set Induction: What is a loving relationship? Ask students to free-write, and share answers. Write the students' answers on the board.

(15 minutes) Introducing a concept: *V'ahavta l'rei-echa k'mocha* – loving others as you love yourself. Believe it or not, loving yourself allows for a strong basis of friendship.

- “You are a better friend when you are able to be good to yourself.”<sup>35</sup>
- Susan Freeman explains, “in loving others – YOU are the standard of love and honor – you must love yourself before you can love others.”<sup>36</sup>

Ask: In what ways do you love yourself? What do you think this means? (Give an example of it)

(15-20 minutes) Examples of Love in Jewish Texts. Split the class into three groups. Assign each group a “couple” (Rebecca & Isaac, David & Jonathan, and Reish Lakish &

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<sup>35</sup> Adelman, Penina et al. *The J Girl's Guide: The Young Jewish Woman's Handbook for Coming of Age*. Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Freeman, Susan. *Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities*. Denver: A.R.E. Publishing, 1999.

Rabbi Yohanan) and hand them their corresponding study page. Have each group read through the stories and answer the questions.

(30 minutes) Applying Ancient Texts to Modern Times. Each group will retell their story for the rest of the class, with a modern twist. Ask the participants to re-write the story in a modern setting. (For example, David and Jonathan are best friends, and Jonathan's Dad does not like David because he thinks David is a bad influence on Jonathan.) The groups will then "perform" their story for the class. After each performance, ask the class:

- What are the characteristics that make this relationship a loving one?

Write all answers on the board. Leave these answers up – they will help the students in creating their personal reflection on love.

- Note: The nature of David and Jonathan's relationship is left ambiguous on purpose. Some people claim they were best friends. If your students understand the story as one of intense friendship, it shows them how close and dedicated friends can be. Some people claim they were gay lovers. If your students understand the story as one of homosexuality, it's a good way to introduce homosexuality as a natural expression of love between two people of the same gender.
  - Warning: Many believe that David was bisexual – he had a relationship with Jonathan, then married a number of different women. While you might be explaining that as your body changes you experience different feelings and experiment expressing love in different ways, be careful not to imply that homosexuality is a "stage" that one "grows out of."
  - Warning: You might want to be open about the fact that while you provide two examples of gay love, there are no examples of lesbian love in the Bible. This could make some of the students feel that they cannot relate to the material, or their Jewish heritage, and should therefore be done delicately.

(10 minutes) Song of Songs – the Ultimate Love Story. Start by asking students to express different ways that one person can verbally express love for another. Encourage the students to use poetic language. You may choose to make a list of their answers on the board (if there is room) or on another piece of large paper. Explain that there is a book of the bible that includes love poetry, such as the examples they gave – the book *Shir HaShirim* (Song of Songs).

- Song of Songs is in the third section of the bible, known as *Ketuvim* (Writings). According to tradition, the poetry that comprises Song of Songs was written by King Solomon.

(Adapted from Paul Yedwab, Sex in the Texts)

(35 minutes) Song of Songs – A Text Study. Hand out the Song of Songs source pages. You may do a text study as class, or split the class into smaller groups.

(Adapted from Paul Yedwab, Sex in the Texts)

(20-30 minutes) Song of Songs – Desire. Song of Songs is one of the few books in the Bible where no one person is in control.<sup>37</sup> This book shows us the importance of mutuality in relationships. And, as you can see, Song of Songs is a very sexy book. One of the things it brings to Judaism is the idea that being sexual is beautiful. (Remind students: beauty and each part of the lovers' bodies were described through nature.) Part of becoming who we are is getting in touch with our desires. Song of Songs is also about naming our own desires.

- In Song of Songs 1:7, the narrator says, “Tell me, you whom I love so well; Where do you pasture your sheep? Where do you rest them at noon?” This is an example of the narrator voicing her desires in an open and frank way.

We are created *b'tzelem Elohim* (in the image of God), and so our sexuality and desire can be seen as a reflection of God's image.<sup>38</sup> Right now, you're in a stage where your bodies are changing, and you're beginning to explore your own sexuality. There's a lot of pressure for sex, and pressure to make choices that you might not feel ready for. You do not need to make a choice about your sexuality right now. Your actions and thoughts now do not label you as something forever. Some women find they are attracted to men. Some women find they are attracted to women. Some women find they are attracted to men and women. What's important for you is to be able to “name your desire” – to express what you want, and not be judged or feel judged for it. Take some time now to write in your journal, reflecting on:

- What is attractive to you?
- What do you like, sexually? What do you want, sexually?

(10 minutes) Song of Songs – One last Look. Read: “I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.” (Song of Songs 6:3) Ask:

- Which is the highest level of love – loving others freely and unconditionally without expectation of receiving love in return, or being involved in a relationship of mutual love? Explain.

(20-25 minutes) Creating Personal Reflections on Love. Ask the students to create a poem, song, picture of their own interpretations of love. Questions they might try to address could include:

- How do you share love?
- How do you want to be loved?
- What does love mean to you?
- What characteristics do you hope for in a loving relationship?

(15-20 minutes) Journal:

- How does love figure into your close relationships?
- Are love and sex different aspects of the same thing?
- Do they mean an intimate relationship, or can they be totally separated?

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<sup>37</sup> Adler, Rachel. *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1998, p. 135.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 134.

- What is your definition of love?
- Are there different kinds of love?
- Can we be obligated to love someone?
- Do you believe in “love at first sight?”
- How do you show someone that you love him or her?

(Adapted from Adelman, Penina et al. The J Girl’s Guide: The Young Jewish Woman’s Handbook for Coming of Age. Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005, p. 111-112.)

## Rebecca & Isaac

After Sarah died, Abraham realized how distraught and lonely his son was; he wanted to find a wife for his son, Isaac. He sent his servant, Eliezer, to find a wife for Isaac. Eliezer met Rebecca at a well – she was beautiful, kind, generous, and hospitable: she offered to water his camels, and invited him to her home. Eliezer decided this was the perfect woman for Isaac. As they returned to Abraham and Isaac's tents,

Then Rebecca and her maids arose, mounted the camels, and followed Eliezer. So the servant took Rebecca and went his way.

Isaac had just come back from the vicinity of Beer-lahai-roi, for he was settled in the region of the Negev. And Isaac went out walking in the field toward evening and, looking up, he saw camels approaching. Raising her eyes, Rebecca saw Isaac. She alighted from the camel and said to the servant, "Who is that man walking in the field toward us?" And the servant said, "That is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself. The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he took Rebecca as his wife. Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother's death.

(Genesis 24:61-67)

### **The rabbis added to this story in midrash:**

*Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah (Genesis 24:67).* You find that as long as Sarah lived, a cloud hung over her tent (signifying the Divine Presence); when she died, that cloud disappeared; but when Rebecca came, it returned. As long as Sarah lived, her doors were wide open; at her death that liberality ceased; but when Rebecca came, that openhandedness returned. As long as Sarah lived, there was a blessing on her dough, and the lamp used to burn from the evening of the Sabbath until the evening of the following Sabbath; when she died, these ceased, but when Rebecca came, they returned. And so when he saw her following in his mother's footsteps, separated her *challah* in cleanness and handling her dough in cleanness, right away *Isaac then brought her into the tent.*

(Genesis Rabbah 60:16)

*after his mother's death (Genesis 24:67).* It is the way of the world: All the while that a man's mother is alive, he is attached to her, and when she dies, he is consoled through his wife.

(Rashi)

Later, Rebecca and Isaac had trouble getting pregnant. Isaac is famous for praying on his wife's behalf:

Isaac pleaded with Adonai on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord responded to his plea, and his wife Rebecca conceived.

(Genesis 25:21)

**The rabbis added to this story in midrash:**

*Isaac pleaded with Adonai (Genesis 25:21).* Rabbi Yohanan and Reish Lakish explained this. Rabbi Yohanan said, “It means that he poured out his petitions in abundance. Reish Lakish said, “He reversed her destiny...”

*on behalf of his wife (Genesis 25:21).* This teaches that Isaac prostrated himself in one spot and Rebecca in another (opposite him), and he prayed to God, “Sovereign of the Universe! May all the children which You will grant me be from this righteous woman.” She too prayed likewise.  
(Genesis Rabbah 63:5)

*Questions:*

1. What qualities of Rebecca & Isaac’s relationship show love?
2. According to this story, how would you define love?

## David & Jonathan

Jonathan was King Saul's son. David was the son of an Israelite named Jesse, and was brought in to King Saul to play music and help soothe the king. David proved himself on the battlefield against the Philistines, and in I Samuel 17, he fought and defeated Goliath. Immediately following that incident:

When David finished speaking with Saul, Jonathan's soul become bound up with the soul of David; Jonathan loved David as himself...Jonathan and David made a pact, because Jonathan loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the cloak and tunic he was wearing and gave them to David, together with his sword, bow, and belt...

(I Samuel 18:1-4)

A few chapters later, King Saul is threatened by how much the people love David. He fears that David will become king, usurping him and his family – and taking Jonathan's place at the throne. King Saul plans on killing David, in order to ensure that his own son will become the next king. Jonathan hears of his plans, and helps David flee to safety:

In the morning, Jonathan went out into the open for the meeting with David, accompanied by a young boy. He said to the boy, "Run ahead and find the arrows that I shoot." And as the boy ran, he shot the arrows past him. When the boy came to the place where the arrows shot by Jonathan had fallen, Jonathan called out to the boy, "Hey, the arrows are beyond you!" And Jonathan called after the boy, "Quick, hurry up, don't stop!" So Jonathan's boy gathered the arrows and came back to his master. The boy suspected nothing; only Jonathan and David knew the arrangement. Jonathan handed the gear to his boy and told him, "Take these back to the town." When the boy got there, David emerged from his concealment at the Negev. He flung himself face down on the ground and bowed low three times. They kissed each other and wept together; David wept the longer. Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace! For we two have sworn to each other in the name of Adonai: 'May Adonai be witness between you and me, and between your offspring and mine forever!'" David then went his way, and Jonathan returned to town.

(I Samuel 20:35-21:1)

### *Questions:*

1. What qualities of David & Jonathan's relationship show love?
2. According to this story, how would you define love?

## Reish Lakish & Rabbi Yohanan

One day Rabbi Yohanan was bathing in the Jordan. Reish Lakish saw him and jumped into the Jordan after him. Rabbi Yohanan knew that Reish Lakish was a renowned criminal. Rabbi Yohanan said to him: Your strength should be for the Torah. Reish Lakish knew that Rabbi Yohanan was a famous rabbi. He replied: Your beauty should be for women [and not for Torah study].

Rabbi Yohanan said to him Reish Lakish: If you will change your ways, I will let you marry my sister, who is more beautiful me. Reish Lakish took it upon himself to repent of his life as a robber. Rabbi Yohanan taught him Torah and Mishnah, and made him into a great person.

One day in the Beit Midrash [House of Study] the rabbis disagreed about a law. Rabbi Yohanan and Reish Lakish argued about which one was right, saying mean words that made them each so angry that one would not talk to the other.

Instead of apologizing to one another, each man held his grudge, which caused Reish Lakish to become very sick. Rabbi Yohanan's sister [Reish Lakish's wife] came crying and said to him: “If you don’t forgive my husband, he will die. Forgive him for the sake of my children, so they do not lose their father.” He said to her: “Do not worry about your children. I will care for them.” She cried further, “Forgive him for my sake, because I do not want to become a widow!”

Reish Lakish died, and afterward, Rabbi Yohanan was very upset that he had not forgiven him. The rabbis in the Beit Midrash said: “Who will go and talk to him? Let Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat go, because he is smart and will be able to learn with Rabbi Yohanan.”

So Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat went and sat before Rabbi Yohanan. Whenever Rabbi Yohanan spoke, Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat said to him: “I know a text that supports you.” Rabbi Yohanan said: “Why aren’t you like Reish Lakish? When I would say a word, Reish Lakish would ask questions and we would learn the answers together. Thus we learned with each other and from each other. But you say: ‘A text supports you.’ Of course I know a text supports me – what do you bring to our learning?”

Rabbi Yohanan went on ripping his clothes [in mourning] and crying and saying: “Where are you, Reish Lakish? Where are you, Reish Lakish?” He went on crying until he went crazy, and eventually died.

(Adapted from Talmud, Baba Metzia 84a)

### *Questions:*

1. What qualities of Rabbi Yohanan & Reish Lakish’s relationship show love?
2. According to this story, how would you define love?

## Song of Songs

The song of songs, which is Solomon's. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love is better than wine. Your anointing oils are fragrant, your name is oil poured out. Therefore the maidens love you. Draw me after you and we will run. The king has brought me into his chambers. We will be glad and rejoice in you. We will praise your love more than wine; rightly they love you.  
(Song of Songs 1:1-4)

*Question:*

From these four verses, what do you think this poem is about? Does it surprise you that it is part of the Tanakh? Why or why not?

I compare you, O my love, to a mare of the chariots of Pharaoh. Your cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, your neck with strings of beads. We will make you ornaments of gold studded with silver.  
(Song of Songs 1:9-11)

*Questions:*

1. What are some images that you might use if you were writing a love poem? What images of beauty are being used here?
2. How would your significant other react to being compared to a horse? What does that say about the nature of beauty?

I am the rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.

Like a lily among thorns, so is my love among the maidens.

Like the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among young men. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. Sustain me with raisins, comfort me with apples, for I am sick with love. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me. O adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the hinds of the field, that you stir not up, nor awake my love, until it please.

The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young deer. Behold, he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice. My beloved speaks and says to me, "Arise my love, my fair one, and come away. For now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the songbird has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines in the blossom give forth their scent. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your face is beautiful."

Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom. My beloved is mine, and I am his. He pastures his flock among the lilies. Until the day cools, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young deer upon the mountains of spices.

(Song of Songs 2:1-17)

*Questions:*

1. What emotions are being described here? Have you ever felt these emotions in a relationship?
2. What kinds of metaphors are being used here? How do they work? What do these metaphors mean about love?
3. Why do you think this very sexy book was included in the bible?

#### LESSON 4

##### Understandings

- The biblical concept *b'tzelem Elohim* (that humans are made in the image of God) indicates that we are holy vessels and can be interpreted as a mandate to treat our bodies with *kavod* (honor).
- Our national name “*Yisrael*” (the one who struggles with God) serves as a paradigm in which we can embrace the inherent struggle in our developing sense of self.
- Jewish values such as *shmirat haguf* (taking care of your body) and *m'chabed zeh et zeh* (honoring others) are tools that can help girls build confidence in their perspectives about their own body image and decisions about relationships.

##### Essential Question

What does Judaism have to say about sexuality? Why does it matter to me?

##### Goals

- Develop a safe classroom environment to talk about and question issues of sexuality.
- Offer students Jewish perspectives on sex and sexuality
- Begin to create a code of sexual ethics with the class

##### Activities

(10-15 minutes) Set Induction: Getting it all out there. Talking about sexuality, sex, and other intimate acts and body parts might cause some giggles and uncomfortable moments. In this set induction you invite the students to voice any and all slang and technical vocabulary that they previously would not have thought to talk about in a Jewish setting. Explain – today we’re going to talk about sex. In order to do that, let’s get it all out there – all of the slang and words we use when talking about sex. Write all of the answers on the board. You might have a hard time getting answers in the beginning, in which case you may have to supplement with some of your own vocabulary.

(5 minutes) Sex – What Questions Do You Have? Now that the students have aired their own language for sexual acts, give them the opportunity to ask some questions. Ask:

- Do you have any questions about sex?
- About what Judaism and sex have to do with one another?

Hand out paper. Have students write down any questions they may have, and turn in the papers. Read each question aloud, and make a list of questions that you hope to answer in the coming lessons on a piece of paper.

- At first, students might not have questions. You might want to prepare a question or two of your own, in order to get them thinking. (For example: What does Judaism say about pre-marital sex? Is oral sex acceptable in Judaism?)

(40 minutes) Sex – What Does Judaism Have to Say? Explain that today we’re going to explore some Jewish ideas about sex. Split the class into *chevruta* partners. Hand out the

source sheets, and ask the girls to read through the quotes and answer the questions on the sheet. Then as a class, discuss the following questions:

- What are some common themes?
- What questions do these sources raise for you?
- If you had to state a general “Jewish” view on sex, what would it be?

(30 minutes) We’ve talked about what is holy in sex. In Judaism, *kedusha*, or holiness, implies separation – being mindful of what you’re doing, rather than going from one thing to the next without thinking about it.<sup>39</sup> Ask:

- In what ways are we mindful about sex and our own sexuality?

“Sex preserves every living species, but in Jewish tradition sex also has a greater spiritual meaning. It is one of the things that sustains a marriage and brings two people closer together. The sex drive parallels the spiritual drive that can connect people to a force that is larger than themselves. The Jewish view of sexuality transforms this ordinary act into a sacred one.”<sup>40</sup> Ask:

- How do we ensure that our sexuality remains sacred?

Journal:

- What messages does our society give you about sex, and how do these affect you?
- How do you think of your own sexuality?

(Adapted from The J Girl’s Guide: The Young Jewish Woman’s Handbook for Coming of Age)

(5-10 minutes) Is there a bad context for sex? We’ve already talked about good contexts for Jewish sex, and times when sex can be holy. Brainstorm as a class – in what context would sex be considered bad? Write all of the answers on the board. This is an idea that we’ll pick up on next session.

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<sup>39</sup> Adelman, Penina et al. The J Girl’s Guide: The Young Jewish Woman’s Handbook for Coming of Age. Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005, p. 100.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 102.

## Sex – What Does Judaism Say?

### *Biblical Sources*

Be fruitful and multiply.  
(Genesis 1:28)

Thus shall man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they shall be one flesh.  
(Genesis 2:24)

### *Rabbinic Sources*

Everyone knows why the bride enters the bridal chamber, but if anyone speaks obscenely about it, even if seventy years of happiness have been decreed and sealed for him on High, the decree is changed for him into evil.  
(Ketubot 8b)

Rav Kahana once went in and hid under Rab's bed. He heard Rab chatting with his wife, joking, and fulfilling his marital duty. Rav Kahana said to Rav, "One would think that you've never sipped this dish before." Rav said to him, "Kahana, are you here? Get out, because this is rude." Rav Kahana replied, "I've got to stay. Sex is a matter of the Torah, and I need to learn about it."  
(*Brakhot* 62a)

### *Medieval Sources*

He can do as he wishes with his wife. He can have intercourse any time he wishes. He can kiss any part of her body, and he can have intercourse both in the usual way and in an unusual way or on her limbs, provided that he does not spill his seed...All of these are permitted. Whoever sanctifies himself in that which is permitted is called holy.  
(Moses Isserles in his notes to the *Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer* 25:2)

A holy act (sexual relations) should be performed on a holy day, namely Shabbat. The deepest union of bride and groom, of husband and wife, is attained at midnight on the Shabbat, as the Talmudic mitzvah (*Ketubot* 62b) to engage in marital sex is commanded. The husband and wife symbolically welcome the *Shechina* to this divine mystery.  
(Rabbi Moshe ibn Nachman, *Epistle of Holiness*)

### *Modern Sources*

The biblical word for sex is *ya-da*, knowing someone in the fullest sense of the word – respecting and caring for someone in a physical and spiritual way.  
(Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn, *Little Lower than the Angels*)

### *Questions:*

1. What does the word "knowing" teach us about sex?
2. What contexts for sex should be considered good? Holy?

LESSON 5

**Understandings**

- The biblical concept *b'tzelem Elohim* (that humans are made in the image of God) indicates that we are holy vessels and can be interpreted as a mandate to treat our bodies with *kavod* (honor).
- Our national name “*Yisrael*” (the one who struggles with God) serves as a paradigm in which we can embrace the inherent struggle in our developing sense of self.
- Jewish values such as *shmirat haguf* (taking care of your body) and *m'chabed zeh et zeh* (honoring others) are tools that can help girls build confidence in their perspectives about their own body image and decisions about relationships.

**Essential Question**

What does Judaism have to say about sexuality? Why does it matter to me?

**Goals**

- Offer students Jewish perspectives on sex and sexuality
- Make students aware of Jewish ethical dilemmas around promiscuous sexual relations
- Create a code of sexual ethics with the class
- Empower students to regard their bodies and sexuality with *kavod* (honor).

**Activities**

(20 minutes) Set Induction: What’s the big deal? Hand out the “What’s the big deal?” sheet to the class. Read through the quotes. Ask:

- Is this a realistic portrait of your school?
- Why do these statistics and occurrences bother adults?
- What ethical issues do you think are involved?

(Adapted from Torah Aura’s “Body Ethics: Hooking Up”)

(30 minutes) Sex – Another Look. Last time we briefly talked about “bad contexts” for sex. What does Judaism say about a “bad context” for sex? Hand out the “Sex – What Does Judaism Say? Part II” sheets. Split the class into *chevruta* and have them read through the texts and answer the questions.

(25 minutes) Hand out the slips of paper with quotes from teenage girls about sex. Have a student read her slip of paper, and ask:

- What do you think?
- What issues or questions does this story/quote raise for you?
- How does this make you feel?
- What could a Jewish response be?
- Who is in charge here? (Girls who still “have their clothes on” or boys who choose who “gets” to gratify them?)

You may want to share this startling finding: In the National Survey of Adolescent Males...five out of ten boys had received oral sex from a girl, but only slightly more than

a third had performed oral sex on a girl. In either case, most didn't even consider it "sex." (Idea that girls want to please boys, not vice versa)

(30 minutes) The Reality: Oral Sex and STDs. In "Body Ethics: Hooking Up," Kerry Olitzky writes, "Risky oral sex may be fueling the unprecedented recent rise in sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) among teenagers. A study, published in the May, 2005 issue of the *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, found that teenagers are much more likely to engage in oral sex than sexual intercourse, and they have oral sex with more partners than they have intercourse with. For example, 23% of teens said they had three to four oral sex partners within the last year, but only 13% had the same number of partners for sexual intercourse. The study showed that 40% of teenage boys and girls said they had engaged in oral sex within the past year, and over 25% of those teens had three or more oral sex partners in the last year. Most sexually active teenagers (70%) said they never used protection during oral sex that might reduce their risk of becoming infected with an STD."

- Researchers say nearly three million American teenagers become infected with one or more STDs each year, including viral infections like HIV and herpes. Although the risk of getting an STD through oral sex is lower than through intercourse, it is possible to become infected with all these STDs through oral sex. (Jennifer Warner, Oral Sex Puts Teens at Risk for STDs, WebMDNews)

Ask students:

- What do you know about STDs?
- Which STDs do you know about?
- What are the facts?

Be prepared with information on: Hepatitis (A, B, or C), gonorrhea, Chlamydia, syphilis, genital warts, herpes

Ask:

- What kinds of sexual activities are risky? (Answer: unprotected vaginal or anal sex)
- What are ways of making oral sex safer? (Answer: use protection, talk you're your partner about previous partners, get checked for STDs, etc)
- What are the safest kinds of sexual activities? (Answer: masturbation, kissing, touching, etc.)

(10-15 minutes) Self-Check: Questions to ask yourself about your own sex habits.

Explain that there are some questions the participants can ask themselves when considering their sex lives. Are you having healthy sex/do you have a healthy attitude about sex? Are you having sex for the "right reasons"?

- Are you hooked (on either giving or receiving) and can't say no?
- Does the object of your addiction give you two things: pleasure and an illusion of intimacy?
- Is your sexual behavior secret?
- Is your sexual behavior abusive?
- Is your sexual behavior used to deaden painful feelings?
- Is your sexual behavior empty of genuine commitment and caring?

You may want the students to journal about these questions, or just have a free-write in response to the day.

## What's the Big Deal?

There is an unsettling new fad in which suburban middle-school students regularly engage in oral sex at one another's homes, in parks and even on school grounds. (Stepp, L.S. "Parents are alarmed by an unsettling new fad in middle schools: oral sex", Washington Post, July 8, 1999, A1)

A piece in *Talk* magazine in February 2000 reported on interviews with 12- to 16-year-olds. These students set seventh grade as the starting point for oral sex, which they claimed begins considerably earlier than intercourse. By 10<sup>th</sup> grade, according to the reporter, "well over half of their classmates were involved." (Franks, L. "The Sex Lives of Your Children," *Talk Magazine*, February 2000, pp. 102-107, 157.)

Nearly 3 in 10 (27%) thirteen- to sixteen-year-olds are sexually active and "have been with someone in an intimate or sexual way." Most of these sexually active teens have touched someone else's genitals, and almost have had oral sex and/or had sexual intercourse. Sexual activity is much more common among 15- to 16-year-olds (41%) than 13- to 14-year-olds (14%). (NBC News and *People Magazine* Survey)

USA Today reports an online sex survey in which more than half the 10,000 respondents were under age 14; 25% had participated in oral sex; a psychiatrist speculates that one-third of middle-school girls have performed oral sex on boys. (Kramer, Ilana. "Teen Sex that's 'No Big Deal.'" *Lilith*, Winter 2003, 14)

Experts believe that the type of oral sex practiced by young teenagers is overwhelmingly fellatio (oral sex performed on a male), not cunnilingus (oral sex performed on a female). According to Deborah Tolman, senior research scientist at the Wellesley Center for Research on Women, that distinction is paramount: "We are not fainting in the street because boys are giving girls cunnilingus. That is not to say that girls and boys never have that experience. They probably do, and just rarely do it again for a really long time, because of how girls feel about themselves and their bodies, how boys feel about girls' bodies, and the misinformation they have about each other's bodies." (Tolman, D., Wellesley Center for Research on Women, Wellesley, MA, personal communication, August 18, 2000)

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the US published, "24% of teens surveyed said oral sex was likely to be an activity in their 'casual' relationships." (Kramer, Ilana. "Teen Sex that's 'No Big Deal.'" *Lilith*, Winter 2003, 14)

## Sex – What Does Judaism Say? Part II

You shall not commit adultery (Exodus 20:13)

Just as a lion tramples and devours and has no shame, so a crude man hooks up and copulates and has no shame.  
(Pesachim 48b)

A man should never force himself upon his wife and never overpower her, for the Divine spirit never rests upon one whose sexual relations occur in the absence of desire, love and free will. The Talmud (Pesachim 49b) tells us that just as a lion tears at his prey and eat shamelessly, so does an ignorant man shamelessly strike and sleep with his wife. Rather, act so that you will warm her heart by speaking to her charming and seductive words.  
(*Iggeret Ha-kodesh*, Moses Nachmonides)

Promiscuity is a ‘pseudo’ experience. It is a search for confirmation of being an image of God. However, in the absence of relationship, the act of intercourse is incapable of giving value. It is like the one who eats ghost calories in the hope of gaining weight. One is driven to eat again and again but is still left empty. In Jewish terms, promiscuity is a frantic search for the absent confirmation of one’s self-worth.  
(Rabbi Irving “Yitz” Greenberg)

When a man and woman are united sexually, their sexual union, though natural in the sense of normal, is not natural in the sense of a mere animal copulation. It is a distinctively human relationship – an I-thou relationship of two-persons-in-the-divine-image, each of infinite worth, neither one intended to be exploited as an object of the other’s aggressiveness or selfish satisfaction.  
(Herschel Matt)

Sex is the woman’s right, not the man’s. A man has a duty to give his wife sex regularly and to ensure that sex is a pleasurable act for her. He is also obligated to watch for signs that his wife wants sex, and to offer it to her without her asking for it.  
([www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/sex.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/sex.html))

Sex should only be experienced in a time of joy. Sex for selfish personal satisfaction, without regard for the partner’s pleasure, is wrong and evil. A man may never force his wife to have sex. A couple may not have sexual relations while drunk or quarreling. Sex may never be used as a weapon against a spouse, either by depriving the spouse of sex or by compelling it. It is a serious offense to use sex (or lack thereof) to punish or manipulate a spouse.  
([www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org))

### *Questions:*

1. What is a bad context for sex?
2. Is it ok to have sex just for fun? Why or why not?

## Quotes from Teenage Girls

“Don’t worry, it’s not sex.”

(Kramer, Ilana. “Teen Sex that’s ‘No Big Deal.’” *Lilith*, Winter 2003, 15)

“I’ve been giving blowjobs since I’m 12...It’s the only way to get guys to like you.”

(Kramer, Ilana. “Teen Sex that’s ‘No Big Deal.’” *Lilith*, Winter 2003, 16)

Teen phenomenon – rainbow parties: “All of the girls put on lipstick and each one puts her mouth around the penis of the gentleman or gentlemen who are there to receive favors and makes a mark in a different place on the penis, hence the term rainbow.”

(Kramer, Ilana. “Teen Sex that’s ‘No Big Deal.’” *Lilith*, Winter 2003, 16)

“Elisha, a 13-year-old from southern California, is in the eighth grade at a private school. Oral sex, she says, is ‘so common now, people don’t even think of it as bad anymore. It’s cool if you do it.’ She says girls she knows ‘give blow jobs’ at house parties and dances and sometimes on school grounds as well. She reports that ‘some people have done it in the batting cage at their school, because no one goes near this area.’”

(Kramer, Ilana. “Teen Sex that’s ‘No Big Deal.’” *Lilith*, Winter 2003, 16)

Nora Gelperin, a Rutgers University sex educator, “reports hearing stories ‘all the time’ about seventh-grade girls giving ‘blow jobs’ to tenth-grade boys in order to elevate their social status.”

(Kramer, Ilana. “Teen Sex that’s ‘No Big Deal.’” *Lilith*, Winter 2003, 17)

“Montreal Gazette reporter Donna Nebenzahl...[says], “Some girls say it’s a power thing that they have...In order to give a blow job, you’re in control of it, even though it’s really about servicing the boy. For girls, there’s a certain status, because your friends do it, you’re gonna be cool too, you’ll be part of the group, this is the line.”

(Kramer, Ilana. “Teen Sex that’s ‘No Big Deal.’” *Lilith*, Winter 2003, 17)

Jen, a Manhattan eleventh-grader said, “What girls get from it [oral sex] is reputation, popularity, and guys will stick around more. If you give head to Billy, he’ll make you popular and then he’ll tell more guys and if you give head to them, you’ll get even more popular.”

(Kramer, Ilana. “Teen Sex that’s ‘No Big Deal.’” *Lilith*, Winter 2003, 17)

“One thing is for certain, no matter why girls are giving boys blow jobs, they’re not getting much in return. ‘Although girls say they do it, they don’t say they actually like it,’ says Barbara Victor. And boys are reportedly not so obliging. Daniel Kopf confesses that ‘When I was 14 and first heard one of my friends went down on a girl, we were all like ‘Ewww!’ I think there’s more stigma for guys going down on girls.’ Jen says, ‘The girl always does it because guys say it’s gross by for a girl to do it it’s cool. Also, it’s not considered macho for a guy to do it. Girls also don’t like to get it because they’re insecure about their bodies, it’s always girls doing it to guys.’”

(Kramer, Ilana. “Teen Sex that’s ‘No Big Deal.’” *Lilith*, Winter 2003, 17)

One girl recalled her first experience at the start of eighth grade. At a local park, she and a bunch of friends paired up, and she found herself with a boy she “kinda liked.” He asked her to perform, making her think they’d start going together if she complied.

“I didn’t really know what it was,” she said, but he showed her. “I realized pretty soon that it didn’t make him like me.”

She said she engaged in oral sex twice more that year, including at a party in early spring that eventually led to the principal finding out about the group. The party was held on a Saturday night at a girl’s house. About an hour after the party started, the action moved outside, under the deck, where several couples, including this girl and a boy she didn’t even like, started having oral sex.

“We came back in and sat around and talked about it,” the girl recalled. “It was no big deal.”

The girl said she was modeling herself after two others in the crowd whom she desperately wanted as friends. “They were doing it left and right,” she said. “It started a chain reaction. I knew it was wrong, but these girls were like good friends with you one day, and not the next. I didn’t want to do anything to make them not like me.”

Her friends told her that oral gratification “is like a sexual thing that keeps us from having sex,” she said. She bought the rationale.  
(Laura Sessions Stepp, “Middle School Oral Sex,” *Washington Post*, Thursday, July 8, 1999.)

## LESSONS 6 & 7

### Understandings

- The biblical concept *b'tzelem Elohim* (that humans are made in the image of God) indicates that we are holy vessels and can be interpreted as a mandate to treat our bodies with *kavod* (honor).
- Our national name “*Yisrael*” (the one who struggles with God) serves as a paradigm in which we can embrace the inherent struggle in our developing sense of self.
- Jewish values such as *shmirat haguf* (taking care of your body) and *m'chabed zeh et zeh* (honoring others) are tools that can help girls build confidence in their perspectives about their own body image and decisions about relationships.

### Essential Question

What do *shmirat haguf*, *tzni-yut*, and *kedusha* mean in regard to one’s sexuality?

### Goals

- Create a code of sexual ethics with the class
- Empower students to regard their bodies and sexuality with *kavod* (honor).

### Activities

(This lesson is intended to take place over the course of two sessions)

(10 minutes) Review definitions of *Shmirat haguf* and *tzni-yut* and *kedusha*. How could these values impact our sexuality?

(40 minutes) Values Study. Split the class into two groups. Assign each group a value and hand out the appropriate value sheets to each group. Have the groups read the quotes and answer the questions. Each group should then prepare a commentary page on their value – give each group a copy of one of their quotes on a large piece of paper (butcher block or oak tag). Ask the participants to write their responses to the questions around the quote. Each group will present their commentary page to the rest of the class.

- The quote that should be reproduced on the paper is indicated in bold on the study sheets.

(20 minutes) In Judaism, there is a lot of talk about how to make each partner comfortable during sexual acts. For example, “When you are ready for sexual union, see that your wife’s intentions combine with yours. Do not hurry to arouse her until she is receptive. Be calm, and as you enter the path of live and will, let her orgasm come first...” (*The Holy Letter*, attributed to Nachmanides) Ask:

- What are some responsibilities that lovers have?
- In an intimate relationship, what are the most important things for people to work on to avoid causing pain to each other?
- What are your personal obligations in bringing equality and mutuality to an intimate relationship?

Make a list on the board of “guidelines for partners.” Planned Parenthood offers a brochure with the following strategies:

- Have each other's consent
- Never use pressure to get consent
- Be honest with each other
- Treat each other as equals
- Be attentive to each other's pleasure
- Protect each other against physical and emotional harm
- Guard against unintended pregnancy and STDs
- Be clear with each other about what you want to do and don't want to do
- Respect each other's limits
- Accept responsibility for your actions

[Note: These guidelines fit in with *v'ahavta l'rei-echa* k'mocha (love your neighbor as yourself) by striving to be respectful and helpful in our relationships]

(30-45 minutes) Develop a Brochure. Using the list on the board, and the "Is This Love? How to Tell if Your Relationship is Good for You" materials from planned parenthood (included in the source pages of this lesson), have the students create a brochure that would be appropriate for Jewish middle and high school students. Ideally you will be able to produce a high quality version of the brochure, and make it available for students and families at the religious school.

(Adapted from Susan Freeman, Teaching Hot Topics)

(30-40 minutes) Sexuality-Related Dilemmas. In his book, Does God Belong in the Bedroom, Rabbi Michael Gold poses a number of sexuality-related dilemmas that teens may encounter. You can use them as conversation starters, or as role-play scenarios. Be sure to offer a Jewish response after the students give their perspectives. You may also consider inviting a rabbi or a sex therapist to be a guest during these dilemmas.

- Luann, a high school senior, has a boyfriend who says: "If you love me, you will sleep with me."
  - If you were Luann, how might you respond if your boyfriend/partner said this to you?
- Sally is sexually abused by her stepfather, who tells her not to tell anyone.
  - What would you do if you were Sally, or if you were a friend of Sally's?
- Rena discovers that her girlfriend, Sheila, cheated on her.
  - If you were Rena, what would you say to Sheila?
- Howard and Kate decide to have an open relationship, with permission to seek other sexual partners.
  - What are some of the risks that Howard and Kate are taking? What would your advice to them be?
- Barry decides to remain a virgin until marriage although other boys make fun of him.
  - Do you agree with Barry's decision? Why or why not? What advice would you give him based on your opinion?
    - Note – you can assign two people to this scenario – one who agrees with Barry's decision, one who disagrees.
- Janet, 15 years old, is pregnant after sleeping with her boyfriend.

- If you were Janet, what would you do? Who would you speak to?
  - A Jewish high school decides to hold a special sex education class taught by a nurse and a rabbi.
    - As a student in the high school, what would you want answered? How do you feel about this special class?
  - A new gay synagogue wants to advertise in the local Jewish paper.
    - As an editor of the paper, what would you do?
  - Jon likes to brag about his sexual conquests.
    - If you were Jon's friend, what would you say to him regarding his bragging?
  - A youth group is having an overnight trip and wants boys and girls to sleep in the same room.
    - As a member of the youth group, what is your reaction? Who would you speak to about your concerns or your approval?
      - Note: this is another case where you can assign two students, one who "agrees" and one who "disagrees" with the situation.
- (Adapted from Susan Freeman, Teaching Hot Topics)
- These role-plays may also be inserted in other lessons throughout this unit.

## ***Shmirat HaGuf***

Take good care of yourselves.  
(Deuteronomy 2:4)

Judaism does not despise the carnal. It does not urge us to desert the flesh but to control and to counsel it; to please the natural needs of the flesh so that the spirit should not be molested by unnatural frustrations...Judaism teaches us how even the gratification of animal needs can be an act of sanctification.

(Abraham Joshua Heschel, Man is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion)

**Sensual pleasure is unlike other pleasures in two main respects. First...for sensual pleasure to approach ultimate bliss, it takes the cooperation of the two involved...Second, the sensual experience, if properly approached, can be very painful, physically and emotionally, for either or both of the individuals. There is thus an implicit challenge in the sensual experience, to each of the partners, to approach the situation properly and to thus assure that it is a pleasurable rather than a painful event.**

**(Rabbi Reuven P. Bulka, *Judaism on Pleasure*, 132)**

*Questions:*

1. What might *Shmirat haguf* mean in regard to one's sexuality?
2. To what extent should pursuit of pleasure be a contributing factor to a healthy sexual relationship?

## ***Tzni-yut***

It has been told to you what is good, and what the Eternal requires of you; only to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk modestly (*hatzne'a*) with your God.  
(Micah 6:8)

Standing around naked inevitably decreases a person's dignity.  
(*Tosefta, Brachot 2:14*)

The privacy (*tzni-yut*, modesty) that Judaism requires of sex affects our clothing, our speech, and our public activities. We may dress in accord with the styles of the times, but never should our apparel accentuate the sexually arousing parts of our bodies. Thus sexually suggestive or revealing clothes for either men or women are not in keeping with Jewish law or responsibilities.

Similarly, our speech patterns should manifest respect for our bodies as creations of God, and this includes the generative parts of our bodies. Sexual language which is crass or violent bespeaks discomfort with one's body and disrespect for its divine value. It also cheapens the level of discourse, thereby diminishing the stature of everyone concerned, including especially the speaker.

Judaism's expectations of modesty also affect our behavior in public. Sexual activity should be reserved for private quarters. This is not to demean sex as something sordid which one must hide; quite the contrary, it is to sanctify it as the intense, intimate, mutual expression of love that it should be. Such love is understood within Jewish sources to be a great good, but a private one.

(Rabbi Elliot Dorff, [This Is My Beloved, This is My Friend: A Rabbinic Letter on Intimate Relations](#))

Dress, language, and behavior should reflect a sensitivity to the Jewish respect for modesty and privacy.

(Ad Hoc Committee on Human Sexuality, Report to the CCAR Convention, June 1998)

**To be modest means you are respectful and humble, that you don't show off. When you casually reveal your body and allow easy access to it by others, you are like an object, not a 'vehicle for holiness.'...Without modesty, people become 'used' rather than 'loved.' God created us for higher purposes.**

(Freeman, Susan. [Teaching Hot Topics](#))

### *Questions:*

1. What is the connection between "walking modestly with God" and being a modest person in dress and behavior?
2. What does a person gain by being modest?
3. Do you feel there should be a higher standard of modesty in our culture? Explain.
4. Should there be a higher standard of modesty in your own social group?

## ***Kedusha***

(Adapted from Susan Freeman, Teaching Hot Topics)

**A man and a woman should have the same intentions in sex, and when they are thus united, the two are one in body and soul.**

***(Reshit Chochmah, Sh'ar ha-Kedushah, chapter 16, #3)***

There is no sexual intercourse without embracing and kissing preceding it. And there are two kinds of kissing: the first is before sexual intercourse, where the purpose of kissing is that the man soothe the woman and arouse the love between them; the other kind is during intercourse itself, where the purpose is to accomplish the two kinds of union, the lower one and the supernal one together.

*(Siddur Yabetz)*

*Questions:*

- What makes a relationship holy?
- Why is holiness important in a sexual relationship?
- How will you or do you conduct yourself so that you pursue holiness in an intimate relationship?

## A Planned Parenthood Brochure

### Is This Love?

#### How to Tell if Your Relationship is Good for You

(<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/sexual-health/sexual-health-relationship/is-this-love.htm>)

#### Does Your Relationship Make You Happy?

We all deserve to be happy. Most of us want to be happy in healthy and loving relationships. What makes relationships healthy? They have six basic qualities.

- respect
- trust
- honesty
- fairness
- equality
- good communication

Healthy relationships help us feel better about ourselves and about our place in the world. They make us feel safe. Unhealthy relationships make us feel unsafe.

#### Respect

Do you and your partner respect each other?

- |  | Yes                      | No                       |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Do you listen to each other's ideas? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Do you treat each other as friends?  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Are you proud of one another?        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you answered yes to these questions, you may be feeling that your relationship is really good for you.

**Without respect, relationships can be hurtful.** Many of us think it takes a slap or a punch to hurt someone. But insults and unkind words hurt just as much. They can destroy our self-esteem — how we feel about ourselves.

Does your partner ...

- |  | Yes                      | No                       |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| • make you feel ugly, stupid, or unsure of yourself? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • say you could never make it without them?          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

- call you crazy or stupid?
- ignore or make fun of your feelings or ideas?
- put down your race, family, culture, religion, income, or neighborhood?

If you answered yes to some of these questions, you may be wondering if your relationship is good for you.

### Trust

Do you and your partner trust each other?

- |   | Yes                      | No                       |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Do you understand each other's need for friends and family? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Do you feel sure of each other's love?                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Do you have faith in each other's decisions?                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you answered yes to these questions, you may be feeling that your relationship is really good for you.

**Without trust, relationships can cause jealousy and unhappiness.** Jealous partners doubt the other's love or commitment. Building trust — by talking, listening, being honest, respecting each other's feelings, and having fun together — is the best cure for jealousy.

Does your partner say ...

- |   | Yes                      | No                       |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| • "You wouldn't need other friends if you really loved me." | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • "You're having an affair, aren't you?"                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • "You are the only person who can make me happy."          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • "I would die without you."                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • "You are lucky to have me."                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you answered yes to some of these questions, you may be wondering if your relationship is good for you.

### Honesty and Fairness

Are you and your partner fair and honest with each other?

- |  | Yes                      | No                       |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Do you both admit when you are wrong?    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Do you both tell the truth without fear? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Do you both forgive mistakes?            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you answered yes to these questions, you may be feeling that your relationship is really good for you.

**Without honesty and fairness, relationships can be hurt by lies and anger.** No one is always right — or wrong. In healthy relationships, partners admit their mistakes and can expect forgiveness.

Does your partner ...

- |   | Yes                      | No                       |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| • always blame you when something goes wrong? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • try to make you feel guilty about mistakes? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • sulk when you ask questions?                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • lie to you to avoid taking responsibility?  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • keep secrets?                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you answered yes to some of these questions, you may be wondering if your relationship is good for you.

### Equality

Do you and your partner treat each other as equals?

- |   | Yes                      | No                       |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Do you give and take equally?               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Do you make decisions about money together? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Do you both compromise?                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you answered yes to these questions, you may be feeling that your relationship is really good for you.

Without equality, unhappiness is likely as one partner takes control. In healthy relationships, neither partner is "in charge."

Does your partner ...

- |  | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| • keep track of your time?                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • make you ask permission to do what you want?     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • force you to do something you don't want to do?  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • check up on you at school, work, or home?        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • make most of the decisions in your relationship? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • want to control the money?                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you answered yes to some of these questions, you may be wondering if your relationship is good for you.

### **Good Communication**

Is your relationship based on good communication?

- |   | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Do you talk openly about your feelings with each other? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Are you able to work through disagreements?             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Do you listen to each other without judgment?           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you answered yes to these questions, you may be feeling that your relationship is really good for you.

**Without good communication, there are a lot of misunderstandings.**

In healthy relationships, partners are open and listen to each other.

Does your partner ...

- |  | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| • refuse to talk about your relationship?    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • keep you from saying what's on your mind?  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • yell at you?                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • refuse to talk about feelings and worries? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • refuse to find time for you?               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • give you the silent treatment?             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you answered yes to these questions, you may be feeling that your relationship is really good for you.

### **Love and Anger**

Love shouldn't hurt. In happy and healthy relationships, partners try not to hurt each other. It's true that we all get angry sometimes. But when we do get angry, we have a choice — we can express ourselves in a healthy way, or we do it in an unhealthy way and hurt someone else.

### **Some people use anger and violence to frighten and control a partner.**

Has your partner ever

- |   | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| • threatened to or almost hit you?                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • threatened you with a weapon?                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • hit, slapped, or punched you?                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • forced you off the road or kept you from driving? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • locked you out of the house or car?               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • abandoned you in a dangerous place?               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • threatened to leave you if you don't give in?     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • prevented you from seeing friends or family?      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

- damaged or hurt things you care about — pictures, books, clothing, pets?
- frightened your children?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may be wondering how safe you are in your relationship.

**Remember: You and your partner always have choices — even when angry.**

### Love and Sexual Abuse

#### Saying "No"

Many of us think that once we are in love, we can never say "no" to sex. We might even believe that we can never say "no" once we marry. No matter what kind of relationship you have, if you are forced to have sex, it is rape. If you are humiliated or forced to be sexual in any way, that is sexual abuse.

Does your partner

- |  | Yes                      | No                       |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| • want you to wear "sexy" clothes that you don't like? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • insult you in a sexual way?                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • show sexual interest in others to upset you?         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • touch you in ways that make you uncomfortable?       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • force you to engage in sexual activity?              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may be wondering how safe you are in your relationship.

#### If Your Relationship Makes You Feel Unsafe ...

##### Trust your instincts.

If you *feel* you are treated badly, you probably *are*. If you feel unsafe, you are probably in danger. If something inside you tells you to get away from your partner, do it.

**Talk to someone.** Talk to a friend or someone you trust, or call a confidential, toll-free hotline (**1-800-799-SAFE**) to speak with a counselor in private. If you feel you are in immediate danger, call the police.

**If someone you know is in an unsafe relationship**

- Don't try to "take control."
- Remember that it is very hard to end a relationship.
- Help them get professional advice for the person you think is in trouble.

**It starts with you.**

Having a healthy, loving relationship starts with you:

- Do you **respect** yourself?
- Do you **trust** yourself?
- Are you **honest** and **fair** with yourself?
- Do you expect people to treat you as an **equal** and as a **responsible person**?
- Do you **speak openly** about your feelings?

Once you can answer yes to these questions, then you might be ready for a happy and healthy relationship with someone as ready as you are. Good luck!

**If you are wondering if your relationship is good for you, you can**

- Talk with your family.
- Talk to someone in a relationship you admire.
- Talk to trusted friends or others in a "peer" group.
- Try couples counseling.

## Unit 5: How am I True to Me?

### Unit Goals:

The fifth and culminating unit is meant to be a chance for the girls to synthesize what they've already learned and discovered about themselves in the previous units. This unit will teach the value of *ometz lev* (courage) in order to help the girls make decisions about peer pressure, breaking up, and remaining true to themselves. This unit will also revisit the values of *tochechah* (rebuke) and *shmiat ha-ozen* (being a good listener) in terms of the self – how does one listen to one's own needs and desires? How does one give “self-rebuke” in a way that is productive and not harmful?

### Understandings:

1. Our national name “*Yisrael*” (the one who struggles with God) serves as a paradigm in which we can embrace the inherent struggle in our developing sense of self.
2. The Jewish value of *ometz lev* (courage) is a tool that can help girls build confidence in their perspectives about their own body image and decisions about relationships.

### Knowledge:

- Finding one's own sense of self is an important part of teen development.
- Values like *tochechah* (rebuke) and *shmiat ha-ozen* (being a good listener) relate not only to others, but also to oneself.
- *Ometz lev* (courage) is a Jewish value that literally means strength of the heart, and shows that validation of self comes from inside.
- Biblical heroines such as Vashti and the daughters of Zelophehad were early models of *ometz lev* (courage).

### Skills:

At the end of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Define *ometz lev* (courage).
2. Make a list of ways to be courageous with peers.
3. Relate *tochechah* (rebuke) and *shmiat ha-ozen* (being a good listener) to the self – not only a method of treating others.
4. Reflect on their own sense of self, ideas of beauty, relations to others, and finding their own voice.

### Authentic Assessment:

- Personal Boundaries list
- Artistic Interpretation of *Ometz Lev* (courage)
- Me Mosaic
- Personal Code of Ethics
- Journal:
  - Lessons 4 & 5:
    - How do you work to honor those in your life who have hurt you?

- Write of a situation in which you hurt someone, or they hurt you. What happened? How was the situation resolved? How did it make you feel? What lessons did you learn from it?
- Self-rebuke: How does self-rebuke factor into your daily life?
  1. Is there a pattern in my self-rebuke?
  2. Are my feelings of self-rebuke manifested physically (i.e. through posture, muscle tension, etc.), or is it a part of my inner-dialogue? If the latter, what percentage of it?
  3. What effect do others' words or actions have on my likelihood to engage in self-rebuke?
  4. How do my self-rebuking 'moods' affect my interactions with other people?
  5. How can/will your self-rebuking patterns change after journaling about this?

**Other Evidence:**

- Discussion of self esteem and standing up for oneself.
- Teacher observation of student body language and self-reflection in class participation

**Memorable Moments:**

- Me Mosaic
- Self Defense workshop

## Sequence of Core Activities

LESSONS 1 & 2

### Understandings

- Our national name “*Yisrael*” (the one who struggles with God) serves as a paradigm in which we can embrace the inherent struggle in our developing sense of self.
- The Jewish value of *ometz lev* (courage) is a tool that can help girls build confidence in their perspectives about their own body image and decisions about relationships.

### Essential Question

What does it mean to have *ometz lev* (courage)?

### Goals

- Introduce value of *ometz lev* (courage)
- Discuss biblical examples of *ometz lev* – Daughters of Zelophehad and Vashti

### Activities

(This lesson is intended to take place over the course of two sessions)

(15-20 minutes) Set Induction: Show clips from movies/tv shows where women stand up for themselves. Ask the students: What similarities run through all these scenes? How does each woman behave the same? Differently?

(10-15 minutes) Introduction of the concept: *Ometz Lev* (courage).

- Note: In researching *ometz lev* (courage), most of the material found had to do with self-control and not being afraid. While these aspects of *ometz lev* are important, it is crucial to remember that there are forces out there that young girls should be aware of. Young women must learn how to protect themselves, and how to stand up for their own rights and safety in unhealthy relationships. Be sure to explain to the girls that while traditionally, *ometz lev* is about self control and “using our strength to pull others up, not push or keep them down,”<sup>41</sup> it is also important to learn how to be a champion for oneself.

Write the following quote on the board:

- “Should an army besiege me, my heart would have no fear; should war beset me, still would I be confident...Look to the Eternal; be strong and of good courage! Oh look to the Eternal! (Psalms 27:3, 14)

Ask:

- What does this quote explain about courage?
- What things make you afraid?
- This verse says that you should look to God for support. Along with God, there are other sources, within ourselves and others, that can provide support and give us *ometz lev* (courage). What/whom do you look to for such support?

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<sup>41</sup> Freeman, Susan. Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities. Denver: A.R.E. Publishing, 1999, p. 196.

(30 minutes) *Ometz Lev* – Further study. Split the class into *chevruta* and hand out the *Ometz Lev* study sheets. Have the students go through the texts and answer the questions. As each pair finishes their sheet, gather the class together, and discuss the last question together. Ask students if they would like to share a time they were courageous.

(15-20 minutes) Connection to Unit 4: How Do I Express Love? For the last few sessions, we talked about sexual relations, and the Jewish ethics surrounding them. We talked about the importance of treating our own bodies with *kavod* (honor). Although we sometimes don't like to think about it, abusive relationships are just as pervasive in the Jewish community as they are in the general population. Just as it is important for you to care for your own body, it is important that others do so as well. If you feel uncomfortable about the way someone is treating you or your body – tell someone!<sup>42</sup> Sexual coercion is a criminal act. Ask:

- What are some subtle behaviors that are reason to talk to an adult?

Write all of their answers on the board. Be sure that the following are on the list:

- touching inappropriately
- pinching
- cornering
- writing sexual graffiti
- making sexual jokes
- spreading sexual rumors
- pulling at someone's clothes or underwear
- flashing or mooning
- forcing a kiss on someone
- forcing someone to touch her or his private parts

(Adapted from The J Girl's Guide: The Young Jewish Women's Handbook for Coming of Age, p. 115)

Explain, "Pressure from a boyfriend [or girlfriend] should *never* make you feel guilty about refusing to do something you don't want to do. He may try to persuade you by saying, "If you love me, you'll do it." In the 1950s, mothers would tell their daughters, "If he loves you, he'll wait." This advice is still true."<sup>43</sup>

(20 minutes) Vashti – A Biblical Example of *Ometz Lev* (courage). We've already learned about Esther as a symbol of beauty in the bible. There was another woman in the Purim story, one who was villain-ized by the rabbis of the Talmud – Vashti. Hand out the "Vashti – A Courageous Woman" sheets. Read through the first chapter of Esther together. Ask:

- What can you tell about Vashti from this chapter?
- Explain in your own words what Vashti did. Why do you think she did this?
- Where did Vashti find her courage?
- How do you gather your own courage and strength in difficult or scary situations?

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<sup>42</sup> Adelman, Penina et al. *The J Girl's Guide: The Young Jewish Woman's Handbook for Coming of Age*. Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p. 116.

Explain that the rabbis claimed Vashti was related to the Babylonian king who conquered Israel, and sent the people into exile – because of this supposed connection they could not see her as a heroine, and wrote of her own greed and arrogance. They did not see her as standing up for her own rights in front of the king and other men. Yet recently, more modern, feminist interpretations have been developed. Split the class into X groups. Hand each group a quote about Vashti's strength and feminist connections. Ask each group to read through the quote and summarize the ideas in it. Each group will need to share their quote with the class, then ask:

- What do you think?
- What is your interpretation of Vashti's behavior?
- How did Vashti exhibit *ometz lev* (courage)?

(10-15 minutes) The idea of strength in numbers. It is important to have others that you can rely on to talk about sex, relationships, and other personal issues. Why? Read the following quote:

- “Separate reeds are weak and easily broken; but bound together they are strong and hard to tear apart.” (*Tanchuma, Nitzavim 1*)

Ask:

- What is this passage getting at, and what does it teach about strength?
- Can you think of how courage might grow when people “pull together?”
- Are there any personal examples you want to share?

(Adapted from Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities)

(20 minutes) Daughters of Zelophehad – A Biblical Example of Strength in Numbers. The daughters of Zelophehad were a biblical example of *ometz lev* (courage) and for strength in numbers. Hand out the “Daughters of Zelophehad” pages, and read through the story together. Ask:

- In your own words, summarize what is happening in this story.
- How did the daughters have *ometz lev* (courage)?

Read the rabbinic text together. Ask:

- Does this interpretation change your understanding of the story?
- What did the girls do in this text that is different from the biblical story? Do you think this displayed a different kind of *ometz lev*, why or why not?

(30-40 minutes) *Ometz Lev* (courage) – an Artistic Interpretation. Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav said,

כל העולם כולו גשר צר מאוד, והעיקר לא לפחד כלל  
*Kol ha-olam kulo geshet tzar me-od, v'ha-ikar lo l'fachayd klal.*

All the world is a very narrow bridge. The most important thing is not to be afraid.

Ask:

- Why is the world compared to a narrow bridge?
- For what reasons would being on a narrow bridge make us afraid?
- Why do you think we shouldn't be afraid?

Ask the students to interpret this quote through art – either with paint, paper-tear midrash, or crayon/pastels. Some questions to stimulate their imaginations:

- What does the bridge represent?
- Where does the bridge begin?
- Where does it go?
- How sturdy is the bridge?
- Who is on the bridge?
- Is there more than one bridge?

Once the girls have completed their interpretations, have them share them with the class. Hang the interpretations around the room.

(10-15 minutes) Closing: Setting Boundaries. One thing that all bridges have is boundaries – guard-rails, or cement blocks that indicate where the bridge ends: on one side, the bridge is safe to traverse, on the other, it is not. Each of us should have our own set of boundaries as well – we should know where our limits are with personal safety and comfort. As a class, compile a list of boundaries that the students might adopt. Be sure the class considers the following boundaries:

- Parents and other adults can help you strengthen your personal boundaries by respecting your privacy and taking seriously your feelings and perceptions.
- Parents and other adults can damage your personal boundaries by turning to you to fill their emotional needs or by violating you physically or sexually.
- Learn to say no. It's good to try to make other people happy, but when your desire to please or your fear of disapproval is excessive, you may meet other people's needs at the expense of your own well-being and become an easy target for those who would use you.
- Learn to set limits with other people. You can't be expected to serve another person always at the expense of your own needs. It's not healthy. You may have to enlist others to help you set limits for your own well-being.
- Practice saying no to others who might want to take advantage of you by doing role-plays with friends, teachers, parents.
- When your parents try to make sure you have adequate adult supervision in certain social situations with boys and girls together and try to enforce reasonable curfews, they are trying to lower the risk of dangerous sexual encounters.

(Adapted from The J Girl's Guide: The Young Jewish Woman's Handbook for Coming of Age)

Note: this activity can also be done individually in the journals.

**Ometz Lev – Courage**  
(Adapted from Teaching Jewish Virtues)

Fear no person, for judgment is God's.  
(Deuteronomy 1:17)

Those who trust in the Eternal will renew their strength.  
(Isaiah 40:31)

When I am afraid, I trust in You, in God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I am not afraid; what can mortals do to me?  
(Psalms 56:4-5)

*Questions:*

1. Why might a person need courage to cope with everyday life?
2. At times have you felt the greatest need for courage – when you were down in the dumps, when you faced an immediate threat, or just in day-to-day life?
3. Has the courage been there when you've looked for it?
4. For what kind of circumstances do you need to build more courage?

Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit....  
(Zechariah 4:6)

*Questions:*

1. In your own words, what point is the prophet, Zechariah, trying to make?
2. How does physical might differ from spiritual or intellectual might?
3. Are they of equal importance?

Ben Zoma taught: Who is mighty? Those who conquer their evil impulse. As it is written: *“Those who are slow to anger are better than the mighty, and those who rule over their spirit than those who conquer a city.”* (Proverbs 16:32)  
(Pirke Avot 4:1)

*Questions:*

1. According to Ben Zoma, who should be called mighty?
2. Who do you think should be called mighty?
3. We've read a lot about being mighty physically and spiritually. What other ways are there to show courage?
4. How do you show courage?

## Vashti – A Courageous Woman

Esther 1:1-22

It was in the days of Achashvairosh -- this was the Achashvairosh who reigned from Hodu to Cush, a total of one hundred and twenty seven provinces. At that time, King Achashvairosh established his royal throne in Shushan, the capital (of the Persian Empire). In the third year of his reign he made a party for all his ministers and servants. The army of Persia and Media, and the nobles and ministers of the provinces attended. His purpose was to display the wealth of his great empire and the riches he inherited through his prestigious stature for many days, one hundred and eighty days.

After that, the king made a seven-day party in the garden enclosure of the king's palace, for everyone in Shushan Capital; everyone was treated equally. There were exquisite white cotton and royal-blue wool hangings, embroidered with cords of fine linen and purple wool, suspended over silver rods and marble pillars; there were gold and silver couches, on platforms of green, white, shell, and onyx marble. The drinks were served in gold goblets -- no two goblets were alike; royal wine was in abundance, as befits the hand of the king. The drinks were served according to the law: no one was forced, because the king had instructed his officers to fulfill the wishes of each guest.

Queen Vashti also made a feast, for the women, in the royal house of King Achashvairosh. On the seventh day, when the king was under the influence of the wine he had been drinking, he ordered Mehuman, Bizisa, Charvonah, Bigsa, Avagsar, Zesar and Charcas, the seven attendants who served King Achashvairosh, to bring Queen Vashti, wearing only her royal crown, before the king, to show the nations and the ministers her beauty, for she was very beautiful.

The Queen refused to come at the word of the king as brought to her by the attendants, and the king grew angry, and his temper burst. The King spoke to his advisors, who were familiar with established precedents, because it was the king's custom to confer with those who knew law and custom. Those closest to him were Karshina, Shaisar, Admoso, Tarshish, Meres, Marsina, and Mimuchan, seven ministers of Persia and Media who were allowed in the presence of the king and were the highest ranking officials in the empire. The question was: what does the law say should be done to Queen Vashti for not obeying the command that King Achashvairosh conveyed to her through the attendants?

Memuchan said to the king and the ministers, "When Queen Vashti was disobedient, she hurt not only the king but also all the ministers of all the nations in all of the provinces of King Achashvairosh's empire. When word of the Queen's behavior gets out to all the women, they will treat their husbands with less respect, pointing out that even King Achashvairosh ordered Queen Vashti to come to him and she did not come. This very day, the wives of the ministers of Persia and Media who have heard what Queen Vashti did, will bring up this incident to the ministers of the king, and that will cause a great deal of scandal and quarreling. If it pleases the king, let him issue a royal edict that a new immutable law be written into the laws of Persia and Media to the effect that Queen Vashti may never again come to King Achashvairosh, and that her royal position will be

given to someone else more suitable. Let the King's decree be posted throughout the entire empire, even though it is very large, and then all the women will respect their husbands, regardless of their status."

The king and the ministers liked this idea, so the king did as Memuchan advised. He sent scrolls to all the king's provinces, each scroll written in the alphabet and language of the province to which it was sent, stating that the man is legally the master of his own home, and that everyone in the household must speak the man's native language.

## Vashti – A Feminist Perspective

Vashti has been reconceived by feminist Jews not so much as a victim of a despotic husband-king, but as a heroine for her refusal to bow to his demand that she dance naked at his party.

([http://www.ujc.org/content\\_display.html?ArticleID=30378](http://www.ujc.org/content_display.html?ArticleID=30378), 4/6/2007)

Vashti is not evil like Haman or a fool like Ahasuerus. She is a non-Jewish woman who because of her own suffering at the hands of the more powerful has much in common with both Mordecai and Esther and can therefore serve, on a narrative and symbolic level as a teacher, model and ally.

([http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Purim/TO\\_Purim\\_Community/Isaacs\\_Reading\\_687/TakeBackPurim.htm](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Purim/TO_Purim_Community/Isaacs_Reading_687/TakeBackPurim.htm), 4/6/2007)

Midrashim found in the Talmud about Queen Vashti set out to denigrate her and explain her behaviors as cruel, base and vain. Such descriptions of Vashti are not found in Megillat Esther itself. The Talmud's midrash about Vashti, like Courtier Memucan's attack on her in the text of the Megillah itself, arises from panic at the idea of an independent woman. The MEN of the Talmud (all men, except for three or four named women thru the entire 500 years of shaping what became the Talmud, and even they were never treated as rabbis) saw women as uncanny deviations from model (i.e. male) human beings (see Neusner on women as Other in the Talmud), and defined their place as subordinate and protected -- to be treated nicely by their masters. Vashti clearly challenged that role. So the men of the Talmud created a midrashic gestalt that further denigrated Vashti. And today, feminist women and men create midrash that celebrates her.

(<http://www.shalomctr.org/node/240>, 4/6/2007)

First, what to do with Vashti? She seems a heroine of defiance, but the text doesn't recognize her. It's the genius of the midrashic rabbis that adds the essential note missing from Vashti's part of the story. When the King sent for her to appear before his carousing guests, says a midrash in Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer, she was to come naked. Every Purim I have to check the text to remind myself that this searing detail is not in the Bible story. But the midrashic version, once imagined, will not go away. It has seized the text, and made itself a legitimate part of it. The rabbis did not say that Vashti was a hero, but they heightened our sense of what was at stake for her. She was not arrogant and willful, she was self-respecting and full of courage. She upholds the sacredness of human, therefore divine, aspect in a court so debauched that any woman who enters will certainly be dehumanized.

(Norma Rosen, "Midrash, Bible, and Women's Voices," Judaism, Fall 1996 (45:4), p. 440. Found on: <http://uriyo.blogspot.com/2005/03/was-vashti-hero.html>, 4/6/2007)

## Daughters of Zelophehad

Numbers 27:1-11

The daughters of Zelophehad, of Manassite family—son of Hephher son of Gilead son of Machir son of Manasseh son of Joseph—came forward. The names of the daughters were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. They stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the chieftains, and the whole assembly, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and they said, “Our father died in the wilderness. He was not one of the faction, Korah's faction, which banded together against the Lord, but died for his own sin; and he has left no sons. Let not our father's name be lost to his clan just because he had no son! Give us a holding among our father's kinsmen!”

Moses brought their case before Adonai.

And Adonai said to Moses, “The plea of Zelophehad's daughters is just: you should give them a hereditary holding among their father's kinsmen; transfer their father's share to them.

“Further, speak to the Israelite people as follows: ‘If a man dies without leaving a son, you shall transfer his property to his daughter. If he has no daughter, you shall assign his property to his brothers. If he has no brothers, you shall assign his property to his father's brothers. If his father had no brothers, you shall assign his property to his nearest relative in his own clan, and he shall inherit it.’ This shall be the law of procedure for the Israelites, in accordance with the Adonai's command to Moses.”

*The rabbis added:*

It was taught: the daughters of Zelophehad were wise women, they were exegetes, they were virtuous. They must have been wise, since they spoke at an opportune moment; for R. Samuel son of R. Isaac said: Torah teaches that Moses was sitting and holding forth and exposition the section of levirate marriages, as it is said, *If brethren dwell together* (Numbers 27:2). They said to him, “If we are as good as sons, give us an inheritance as to a son, if not, let our mother be subject to the laws of a levirate marriage!” *And Moses brought their cause before Adonai (Numbers 27:5).*

(Bava Batra 119b)

LESSON 3

**Understandings**

- Our national name “*Yisrael*” (the one who struggles with God) serves as a paradigm in which we can embrace the inherent struggle in our developing sense of self.
- The Jewish value of *ometz lev* (courage) is a tool that can help girls build confidence in their perspectives about their own body image and decisions about relationships.

**Essential Question**

How do I show *ometz lev* physically?

**Goal**

- Teach students methods of self defense.

**Memorable Moment**

- Self Defense Workshop

**Activities**

Invite local expert (personal trainer, self-defense specialist, etc.) to class to teach the participants how to physically defend themselves.

LESSONS 4 & 5 & 6

**Understandings**

- Our national name “*Yisrael*” (the one who struggles with God) serves as a paradigm in which we can embrace the inherent struggle in our developing sense of self.
- The Jewish value of *ometz lev* (courage) is a tool that can help girls build confidence in their perspectives about their own body image and decisions about relationships.

**Essential Question**

How am I true to me?

**Goals**

- Teach that validation comes from within – we must look to ourselves in order to be strong.
- Revisit Jewish values of *shmiat ha-ozen* (being a good listener) and *tochechah* (rebuke) with a new lens: ourselves.

**Activities**

(This lesson is intended to take place over the course of two sessions)

(5-10 minutes) Set Induction: Show the scene in *The Wizard of Oz* where the Wizard explains to the Lion that he always had courage inside of him. Ask: How does the Wizard show the Lion that he has courage? Talk about moments where the students realize that they had something in them all along. Ask the students to reflect: How did it feel? How has moments like that changed your behavior or actions in the future?

- Be sure to explain that one aspect of the Wizard’s explanation is that the Lion needed to give himself more credit – to listen to himself more. There are moments in each of our lives where we need to stop berating ourselves and look at all of the wonderful things we can do and have done. This is what the Wizard gives to the Lion – the ability to listen to himself and not criticize himself too much.

(15-20 minutes) Looking to the Inside. Hand out copies of the Pirke Avot text. Ask the students to study the text on their own, and think back to the “Inside Outside” activity from unit 1. (On the outside, students drew or wrote what others see about them. On the inside, students drew or wrote what others may not see in or about them.) Ask:

- What are some ways that your outside does not reflect your inside?

Ask students to write a poem or draw an interpretation of their answers on the lower part of the Pirke Avot sheet.

(15 minutes) Discussion: Gaining strength from within. Ask the class:

- How are the Wizard’s (from *The Wizard of Oz*) and Rabbi Meir’s ideas similar?
- What is the ultimate message of each of these statements?
- How can these statements guide us in our lives? (Making personal choices, thinking about our own self-worth, etc.)

(10-15 minutes) Finding my own voice: How do I know when enough is enough? Explain to the students that in order to have *ometz lev* (courage), you need to be able to know when enough is enough. Ask:

- How do you practice *shmiat ha-ozen* (being a good listener) internally?
- What are some signs that you look for within yourself to know when something is wrong?

Make a list of everyone's answers on the board.

(15-20 minutes) Knowing the “warning signs” – knowing what to do. Now that we've talked about the different ways we can “listen” to ourselves, what do we do with those feelings? Many of us will berate ourselves for feeling or acting a certain way. While a certain amount of self-reflection can help us to grow, self-rebuke can also be a dangerous thing. Are we tearing ourselves apart, becoming paralyzed with fear, or feeling low self-esteem? Make a list with the students – healthy responses, and unhealthy responses.

- Some examples might be:
  - Healthy Responses:
    - Reflecting on what happened, why you feel the way you do, and what can be changed in the future?
    - Talk to someone about it – a friend, a parent, a sibling, etc.
    - Get active – this will help clear your head, and can allow you to “work out your stress” in a literal way.
  - Unhealthy Responses:
    - Cutting
    - Not eating
    - Verbally putting yourself down

(20 minutes) Journal: Self-rebuke: How does self-rebuke factor into your daily life?

- Is there a pattern in my self-rebuke?
- Are my feelings of self-rebuke manifested physically (i.e. through posture, muscle tension, etc.), or is it a part of my inner-dialogue? If the latter, what percentage of it?
- What effect do others' words or actions have on my likelihood to engage in self-rebuke?
- How do my self-rebuking ‘moods’ affect my interactions with other people?
- How can/will your self-rebuking patterns change after journaling about this?

Report back – what reactions/responses do you want to share?

(30 minutes) Buber: Beginning with Oneself. Hand out the “Buber: Beginning with Oneself” pages to the class. Split the class into *chevruta* and have them study text and answer the questions in pairs. Gather the class together and discuss the questions.

(30-40 minutes) Me Mosaic: Mosaics are a kind of art that use smaller images to create a larger one. Think back to all that you have learned during this class. Create a mosaic that incorporates some symbols/interests/characteristics that may represent you as part of a larger “you” shape. Share the “Me Mosaics” with the class.

- Note: this is *not* meant to be a collage activity, rather, it is a synthesis of the course. Be sure to have a number of art supplies on hand – paint, pastels, crayon, string, beads, foods, etc. Be creative. The more materials you provide for the students, the more innovative their mosaics will be.

(20-30 minutes) Personal Code of Ethics. Look back through your journal and reflect on the various values and issues we've talked about.

- What are some of your ideas and feelings about your body? Your beauty?
- How do you care for your body?
- How does what you say affect others?
- How do you express love?
- How do you stay true to yourself?

In your journal, craft a personal code of ethics that answers some, or all, of these questions. Be sure to back up your code with values, stories, and ideas from this course.

**Pirke Avot 4:27**

“Rabbi Meir said: Look not at the jar, but what is in it; there may be a new jar that is full of old wine, and an old one that has not even new wine in it.”

*Question:*

What are some ways that your outside does not reflect your inside?

In the space below, write a poem or draw an interpretation of your answers.

## **Buber: Beginning with Oneself**

The essential thing is to begin with oneself, and at this moment a person has nothing in the world to care about than this beginning. Any other attitude would distract him from what he is about to begin, weaken his initiative, and thus frustrate that entire bold undertaking.

Rabbi Bunam taught: “Our sages say: ‘Seek peace in your own place.’ You cannot find peace anywhere save in your own self. In the psalm we read: ‘There is no peace in any bones because of my sin.’ When a person has made peace within herself, she will be able to make peace in the whole world.”

(Adapted from Martin Buber, The Way of Man)

### *Questions:*

1. What does it mean to “begin with oneself?”
2. Why do you think Buber believes that if you don’t “begin with oneself,” whatever you are about to begin will not succeed?
3. Explain what Rabbi Bunam taught in your own words.
4. Give a few examples where Rabbi Bunam’s words have been true for you.

## **Parent Resources**

You may consider writing a letter to parents in the beginning of the year, letting them know what the class is about, and what their daughters will gain from the course. In addition to the letter, send or email parents the following pages of information to help them with this stage of their teenagers' life. Parent may also be interested in some of the articles provided in the "Source Material" section.

Source-sheets in this section:

1. Being a Good Role Model for Your Teenager
2. Four Cornerstones for Promoting Healthy Weight and Positive Body Image in Your Teen
3. Web Resources on Body Image and Sexuality
4. So You Want to Talk About Sex with Your Daughter?

**Being a Role Model for Your Teenager:**  
**Ideas for Changing Your Own Eating-, Activity-, and Weight-Related Behaviors**  
(From "I'm, Like, SO Fat!" by Dianne Neumark-Sztainer)

- Eat breakfast with your kids in the morning
- Eat a piece of fruit after dinner
- Tell your family that you've given up dieting and instead are focusing on lifestyle changes
- Give up dieting and being to focus on lifestyle changes
- Eat salad at dinner
- Offer other family members salad at dinner
- Go for a walk in the evening and invite your teen to go with you. Go again the next evening
- Take a look in the mirror and identify 5 things you like about yourself
- Give yourself compliments, in front of your children, on your appearance. Practice saying, "I think I look good in this new outfit."
- Give yourself compliments, in front of your children, not related to your appearance. Tell your children about a major accomplishment at work today
- Ask your teens how you can help them be more physically active – then follow through
- Prepare a shopping list before you go grocery shopping. Ask your kids about healthy foods they'd like for the week
- Don't make negative comments about your weight or appearance in front of your children. Resist the urge – it may be hard at first, but it is so important!
- Don't make negative comments about your weight or appearance in front of anyone
- When you see family members and friends you haven't seen for a while, avoid making comments on their weight
- If you're concerned about your teen's weight, don't encourage her to diet. Instead, start making some changes in the home food environment and be there when she's ready to talk
- Compliment your teens on their appearance – then say it again
- Praise your teens for their accomplishments – then say it again and again
- Plan family outings that involve physical activity
- Buy bottled water instead of soda pop
- Read magazines that make you feel good about yourself – avoid the others
- Get physical for fun – go for a walk or sign up for a dance class
- Reassure others who are concerned about their weight without putting yourself down

## **Four Cornerstones for Promoting Healthy Weight and Positive Body Image in Your Teen**

(From "I'm, Like, SO Fat!" by Dianne Neumark-Sztainer)

1. Model healthy behaviors for your children.
  - Avoid dieting, or at least unhealthy dieting behaviors
  - Avoid making weight-related comments as much as possible
  - Engage in regular physical activity that you enjoy
  - Model healthy (but not perfect) eating patterns and food choices
  
2. Provide an environment that makes it easy for your children to make healthy choices.
  - Make healthy food choices readily available
  - Establish family meal norms that work for your family
  - Make physical activity the norm in your family and limit TV watching
  - Support your teen's efforts to get involved in physical activity
  
3. Focus less on weight, instead focus on behaviors and overall health
  - Encourage your teen to adopt healthy behaviors without focusing on weight loss
  - Help your teen develop an identity that goes beyond physical appearance
  - Establish a no-tolerance policy for weight-teasing in your home
  
4. Provide a supportive environment with lots of talking and even more listening
  - Be there to listen and provide support when your teen discusses weight concerns
  - When your teen talks about fat, find out what's really going on
  - Keep the lines of communication open, no matter what
  - Provide unconditional love, not based on weight, and let your child know how you feel

## Resources on the Web

**There are many web sites out there that will offer advice on sexuality, sexual health, body image, and more. Here is a list of web sites to consult, and potentially share with your daughter regarding Teen Sexuality and Self-Esteem:**

- <http://www.gurl.com/>
- <http://jvibe.com/jvibrations/>
- <http://kff.org/>
- <http://www.campaignforrealbeauty.com/>
- <http://scarleteen.com/>
- <http://sexetc.org/>
- <http://siecus.org/>
- <http://www.teenwire.com/>
- <http://youthembassy.com/default.asp>
- <http://www.girlpower.gov/girlarea/bodywise/index.htm>
- <http://melpomene.org/girlwise/girlwise.htm>
- <http://www.4girls.gov/>
- [http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/take\\_charge.htm](http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/take_charge.htm)

(Adapted from “Teen Sex that’s ‘No Big Deal’” by Ilana Kramer and “I’m, Like, SO Fat!” by Dianne Neumark-Sztainer)

Your daughter might have a “MySpace” webpage. Check out what the North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY) has to say about the ethics of MySpace and other online social networks: <http://www.nfty.org/resources/ourspace/>

## **So You Want to Talk About Sex with Your Daughter?** **Questions to think about before Approaching Your Teen and** **Conversations to Have Once You Do**

As part of this class, your daughter will be discussing issues of sexuality and sexual practice. You may also want to talk about these subjects with your daughter, but are not sure where to start. Before you begin, consider these questions:

- Are the lines of communication sufficiently open in your family regarding issues of sexuality?
- What is easy to talk about? What is more difficult?
- How might family members improve communication on this topic?

(Adapted from Susan Freeman, Teaching Hot Topics)

What can you do to encourage your teenager to talk about these matters with you?

**For starters – “check your baggage.”** Being aware of your own experiences and opinions can help you approach this subject with your daughter.

- Think back to your first crush – Where were you when you first saw this person? How did you feel?
- What makes you most nervous about boys and your daughter?
- What do you want to teach your daughter about boys?
- Were you ever dumped by a girlfriend or boyfriend? Where and how did it happen?
- Who, if anyone, did you go to for support?
- What are your attitudes about homosexuality? How would you feel if a good friend told you that her daughter is gay?
- How would you feel if your own daughter were gay?

(Adapted from Queen Bees and Wannabes, by Rosalind Wiseman)

**Some conversation starters to consider:**

- Hey, I’m not sure if you want to talk about guys, but I’m guessing girls in your class are. I just want you to know that girls can feel different about it. Some girls are boy-crazy, some girls are sometimes interested, some girls aren’t sure, and some girls don’t care and may never care. Wherever you, or any girl, fit on that spectrum us all good and fine.
- It’s up to you to decide when you are ready for dating. When you think you are, let’s talk about what that means to you. What do you feel comfortable with? What do you feel uncomfortable with? You have no obligation to go out with anyone because your friends want you to. At the same time, friendships can really support you as you all figure this stuff out. It’s important to trust and rely on your friends so you can share your feelings with them and know those feelings will be respected.

(Adapted from Queen Bees and Wannabes, by Rosalind Wiseman)

**One thing we’ll be doing in class is talking about personal boundaries.** You can help by asking your daughter to consider these questions at home:

- How well do you have to know someone before you do something sexual with them?
  - How do I define knowing someone well?
  - What do I feel comfortable doing with someone sexually?
  - What do I not want to do?
  - How can I communicate that to the person I am with?
  - What would make it more difficult for me to say what I want and don't want?
- (Adapted from Queen Bees and Wannabes, by Rosalind Wiseman)

## Source Materials

<i>The JAP: Reclaim Her or Reject Her?</i> by Alana Newhouse (Lilith, Summer 2005)	158-161
<i>Jewish Women &amp; Food: Eat, Eat, Diet, Diet</i> by Susan Josephs (Lilith, Summer, 2005)	162-169
<i>How to Stop Punishing and Start Protecting Your Body</i> by Christopher Wright (Glamour, 2007)	170-175
<i>They Say 'It's Not Sex' and Teen Sex That's 'No Big Deal'</i> by Ilana Kramer (Lilith, Winter, 2003)	176-181

# The JAP

## Reclaim Her or Reject Her?

by Alana Newhouse

Last year, I inadvertently came out of the closet.

No, not that closet. Mine, I suppose, was a closet full of the best clothes and the most gorgeous shoes. I had outed myself as a Jewish American Princess.

It was in an interview given for a book on Jewish journalism. The discussion ranged from the relevance of the Jewish laws to news reporting, to the current state of Jewish fiction, to reconciling ideas of art and Jewish law in the Orthodox community. But, judging from the feedback I received, what sparked the most interest was a series of questions about my personal background. As I explained, I grew up in a modern Orthodox community, attended yeshiva through 12th grade, and at one time or another have exhibited many of the traditional accoutrements of the stereotypical girl from Long Island's "Five Towns": great clothes, even better shoes, nose job at 16, dark curls blown straight weekly.

"I grew up in Lawrence," I was quoted as saying. "To this day, I can do a better French manicure than any French manicurist you can get in Manhattan. I can put lipliner on in a dark cab. . . . I'm a well-honed JAP."

More than a year later, I'm still not sure why I made this comment on the record (and yes, I wince when I read it now). I certainly didn't mean it to present the full picture of me; in addition to my sartorial interests, I have avid intellectual, emotional and psychological ones. Perhaps, I wondered soon after the interview was published, I thought it might round me out, make me seem edgier or hipper than just some nerdy girl toiling away in the office of a Jewish newspaper.

Whatever I was angling for, I did not expect the rather fierce criticism I received in response, from both women and men whom I held in great regard. (There weren't many of them; as someone joked, this book about Jewish journalists would likely have the same number of readers as interviewees.) At 29, I have been for some time, and hope to remain, a proud feminist—not post-feminist or proto-feminist or paleo-feminist or what have you—as well as a very proud Jew, one so insatiably curious about her religion and culture that she devoted her professional life to it. Yet, according to

some, I had just identified myself with one of the most misogynist, anti-Semitic slurs in modern history.

So why did it feel so right?

Over the past year, I began hearing the term used more and more. I received galleys for a book titled *The JAP Chronicles*, a novel by Isabel Rose out in May from Doubleday; Rachel Factor, a Japanese-American actress who converted to Judaism, began touring the country with a one-women show titled "J.A.P."; I read that the Style Network was casting for a show called "JAP Squad," for which an executive sent out an e-mail looking for "girls who know where to go in NYC for the best deals, who know the nail salons, the bakeries, the spas, the nice places, too." Perhaps even more interestingly, a slew of new novels were guided by Jewish female protagonists evincing equally strong strains of intellectualism and material interests; one, in Julius Lester's excellent *The Autobiography of God*, is even described as "first-generation American, child of Holocaust survivors; fluency in Yiddish, Polish, Hebrew, Aramaic; ordained rabbi, therapist, and beneath it all, the soul of an editor at Vogue."

Clearly something was going on—after years of taboo, consumerism was once again being connected with Jewish identity—and, in this trend, I was no mere observer.

As readers of this magazine well know, the term "Jewish American Princess" emerged in post-World War II America (though, as Riv-Ellen Prell argues persuasively in *Fighting to Become Americans: Assimilation and the Trouble Between Jewish Women and Jewish Men*, the basic stereotype has existed, under different names, for more than a century). Usually portrayed as the daughter of an upwardly mobile, doting immigrant father, the Jewish American Princess—embodied prominently by Herman Wouk's "Marjorie Morningstar" and Brenda Patimkin in Philip Roth's "Goodbye Columbus"—was on the receiving end of the best in life. And, like all stereotypes, she embodied a variety of contradictory traits, all negative—shallow yet supremely powerful, sexually



*I'd come to think of myself as admirably complicated,  
a woman who enjoyed intellectual pursuits  
as much as material ones.*

frigid yet knowledgeable enough to use sex as a tool of manipulation, stupid yet cunning enough to always get her way.

Feminists, including those associated with this magazine, waged battles against the JAP stereotype for years, but its Waterloo appears to have come in 1987, with the emergence of a fierce strain of JAP-baiting on college campuses. The examples ranged from offensive--graffiti, "Slap a Jap" T-shirts, anti-JAP rap song lyrics--to the downright frighten-

ing, including housing ads warning "No JAPS" and one particularly vicious newspaper cartoon that advised readers to exterminate the JAPS by "setting up trucks offering bargains, collecting the JAPS as they scurried in, and dropping them over a cliff."

"[Ten years ago,] we optimistically believed that the changing reality of Jewish women's lives would consign these negative images to the garbage can of history," read an editorial in

this magazine's famed fall 1987 issue on the topic. "Instead, what has happened is the opposite: they have gotten a new lease on life." Various theories were proposed for the term's resurgence; one of the most convincing was offered by Alan Dundes, the late Berkeley folklorist, who concluded that JAP jokes—which he claimed emerged in earnest in the late 1970s—were likely a reaction to the feminist movement.

The stereotype was connected to a panoply of Jewish communal frights, from undermining the solidarity of the Jewish family and causing a rise in intermarriage to connecting the Jews with the Japanese ("Japs"), America's enemy in World War II and, in the 1980s, a feared economic rival. After a vigorous campaign by activists and communal organizations—which included the formation of an organization to study the portrayal of Jewish women in the media, known as the Morning Star Commission—the term did eventually subside. For a decade or so.

**T**hat particular decade—the 1990s—was a formative one for me. It began with my 14th birthday, and took me through my first lipstick, my first boyfriend, one great camp romance, one gold lamé skirt, my first successful piece of writing, my nose job, getting my driver's license, one visit to Auschwitz, two crises of faith, my first days at Barnard, two years of regular visits to Henri Bendel, the beginning of my politics, my first paycheck, my first career and my first pair of Chanel shoes.

I had come to think of myself as admirably complicated, a woman who enjoyed intellectual pursuits as much as material ones, and who had earned the right—and the money—to embrace my materialism. Although I could acknowledge the very good arguments made by Second Wave feminists about the history of the stereotype, they seemed neglectful of a very real sociological phenomenon. *I did* blow my curls straight week after week, *I did* have a nose job, *I did* have a closet full of great shoes, *I was* from Long Island (and still have the accent to prove it).

"But why aren't you just a consumerist then?" Riv-Ellen Prell asked me, during a rather spirited discussion. "What does being Jewish have to do with it?"

*I had just identified myself  
with a terrible slur.  
So why did it feel so right?*

That's just it: My hair was blown straight not for weekdays, but on Fridays before Shabbat and the holidays; the most beautiful clothes were bought for shul, not for Saturday night. A very typical Friday afternoon with friends included lunch at Sabra Pizza and an afternoon of window (and actual) shopping, almost always in preparation for Shabbat. Nor was this ritual limited to girls; Wear Else?, a men's clothing store, was packed with guys trying on one awful-looking Coogi sweater after another, in what now appears to me to

have been one of the earliest hot spots of metrosexuality. (In fact, on the issue of clothing, my closest male friend always had me beat—and still does.)

"My identity as a 'Jewish daughter' was entangled with shopping," said artist and critic Rhonda Lieberman, "and infected with the JAP fantasy I'd internalized (and disavowed) about the importance, especially for a woman, of being the kosher-style incarnation of Thorsten Veblen's conspicuous consumer." In Lieberman, I found a kindred spirit, another woman struggling to make sense of a part of her own history that she found at once unattractive and unshakeable.

"I took it as an unwritten 'rule' that my subjectivity as a shopper had to be somehow quarantined from the 'serious' and valid, High-Culture, Art and Thought that would 'redeem' me," she once said in a speech on the topic. "Yet I soon discovered that questioning this taboo was the key to integrating parts of my experience and my self that threatened to cancel each other—and me—out. Not to reconcile them, but to let them coexist, honoring and appeasing each one."

When I asked Lieberman about the process, she referred to it as "a classic structure of integration. You reject certain early parts of your background and then when you're grounded, you can revisit those things and—through choice—decide whether or not you want to reclaim them," she explained.

**A**ccording to Lieberman, it is perfectly normal to examine a part of one's background and then—as an adult—decide whether to reclaim it or discard it. I agree. But this raises an obvious follow-up question: Why did I choose to reclaim it?

At one point in my discussion with Dundes, he mentioned that among children of immigrants in the postwar period it was popular to tell jokes that required the joke teller to acquire an overwrought Yiddish accent, usually at the punchline. According to some observers, beneath these seemingly harmless jokes ran an unseen rivulet of self-hatred; mimicking the Yiddish accent enabled the joke-teller—whose other sentences were presumably rendered in a normal "American" accent—to differentiate himself from his "foreign" parents. Perhaps this was true of me. Maybe calling myself a JAP, tongue-in-cheek, was a safe way for me to identify with my past while also remaining distant from it.

And maybe that's not a bad thing. For me, this process was never about embracing the stereotype, but about embracing a part of my past that, like it or not, fell under the rubric known as JAPpiness. It may seem reprehensible intellectually, and the words of a weary Francine Klagsbrun repeatedly run through my head: "You think the fights are won. But things get won and then they get lost again." That's just it.

Sometimes, the fights are personal and individual, and there's just no way for women to win those except one at a time.

**Alana Newhouse** is the arts & culture editor at the Forward newspaper.

# The Shame of the JAP

by Miriam Stone

**W**hen a Jewish woman comes to the table as a community activist in America—whether she wants to get involved with a campus environmental group or her local P.T.A.—certain assumptions precede her. She is white, so she can't possibly understand the struggle of non-white minorities. She is Jewish, so she is probably wealthy and therefore distant from the "people's" struggle. If she wants to be taken seriously, she has to prove that she belongs, or no one will believe her. Trouble is, she probably doesn't believe it herself.

For many twentysomething Jews, growing up like me in more comfortable circumstances than our parents or grandparents, fitting in as activists often translates into hiding our backgrounds. And since Judaism today is associated with wealth, this often means distancing ourselves from Judaism as well. I went to college with a pot-smoking environmental science major who tried to pretend that he grew up in the ghettos of Oakland (rather than the wealthy hills) and would not admit that he was Jewish unless pressed. For him, being Jewish meant being bourgeois, a status he tried to conceal with his dreadlocks and ripped khakis. It was once uncool to be Jewish in America because Jews were poor and struggling. Now it's uncool because they aren't. The relationship between Jews and money is always shifting, and always uncomfortable.

Nowhere is this tenuous relationship more clear than in the popularization of the term JAP, or Jewish American Princess. I myself am guilty of throwing this term around, of substituting it for "sorority chick" or "spoiled brat." However, when I heard myself recently, and stopped to break it down, I realized that the term signifies much more than its common use, it is in its very essence about being Jewish. Although calling someone a WASP—a White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant—has come to connote something similarly negative, the actual words are simply descriptive; they contain no inherent bias. Yet JAP is an entirely different beast, and it all hinges on that last word: Princess. Princess—a daddy's girl, a member of the nouveau riche, an extravagant spender who doesn't deserve it, a member of the upper class who doesn't belong. Thin and well-dressed with pin-straight hair, a JAP carries the look of assimilation. But she can't be completely assimilated—who's ever heard of a *Jewish* princess?

In every way, the word JAP is about Jews trying to fit into a world in which they have historically never belonged. Yet the term has become so internalized that Jews are just about the only ones who use it. At an Upper West Side dinner party I attended with members of my parents' generation, the entire table launched into a diatribe against *them*—JAPs who live

on the Upper East Side, those self-absorbed, shopaholic social climbers who are defined by their sense of entitlement. Beneath this sharp hatred lurks the real meaning: "those women" are undeserving. Of course rich and powerful men, self-made or not, don't face the same ridicule and derision when their backs are turned.

But a JAP is only a JAP if she behaves a certain way. A friend of mine who grew up in the suburbs and attended an elite private school in Washington looks the part of a JAP. She wears designer clothes and makeup, her hair perfectly highlighted and blow-dried. When people first meet her, they often write her off as typical sorority chick. But their attitudes change when they learn that she's a graduate student in social work and wants to work with HIV-infected children. Aside from the physical stereotype, the term JAP carries with it a value judgment, a criticism of those who prioritize (or even who *appear* to prioritize) money, self-presentation and social status over making a difference in the world.

*I spent my college years ashamed to admit I came from a wealthy suburb.*

But what about Jewish women who grew up poor and choose to become power players, lifting their families and themselves from the struggles they faced as children? Though they might be seen as more "deserving" of their wealth and status, they'll likely never be fully accepted or comfortable in the upper echelons of society, given their economic roots, their religion, and the fact that they are women. Jews, like women, aren't supposed to take up a lot of room. We shouldn't be loud or ostentatious, and we shouldn't be in power. As Jews in the U.S. have grown in economic status in this country, so have the evergreen conspiracy theories about Jews controlling the government or the media. And as Jewish women—mothers, daughters, and self-made businesswomen—have settled into wealth, the word JAP has come to life again in our everyday vocabulary, illuminating not only the discomfort of broader society with Jews' new-found status, but also our own.

I never thought it harmful to refer to someone as a JAP, yet I spent many of my college years ashamed to admit that I came from a wealthy suburb, or that I was related to a successful Cleveland family. It is this shame and division that keeps us from coming to the table as equals, as full members of society comfortable with our own positions and ready to take action to lift the bar for everyone. ●

**Miriam Stone** is the author of *At the End of Words: A Daughter's Memoir* (Candlewick 2003). She lives in Brooklyn.

Approach/Avoidance at the Jewish Trough

# Jewish Women & Food

## EAT, EAT, DIET, DIET

One Young Woman's Calendar

by Susan Josephs

illustrations by Beverly Naidus

**O**n the first night of Sharon's seventh Chanukah, her mother made her favorite food—potato latkes, and her father bought her the hottest doll on the market—Beach Babe Barbie. Now Sharon, a die-hard lover of both potato latkes and Barbie, wanted the food and the doll to love each other. So she threw a potato latkes party the next day, starring the leftovers in the refrigerator and Barbie as her special guest.

But only Sharon could actually eat the heavenly concoctions of potatoes, onions and grease. Barbie simply watched with serene blue eyes, and without so much as a rumble escaping from her ironing-board stomach, patiently waited for her human friend to finish stuffing her face.

Sharon tried to feed her doll friend, to mush the potatoes, and stuff them down her rosebud mouth. But Barbie refused ingestion, preferring undignified potato drool to drip down her voluptuous, silicone-inspired breasts. After several failed attempts at force-feeding, Sharon started to cry. Her dolls had never made her cry before. She always had food parties with her dolls and they ate the same way that Barbie did. After all, drooling was how dolls ate.

But Sharon expected more from Barbie, because she appeared more human. She had breasts, something that women had. If she could grow breasts then why couldn't

she eat? Breasts and food seemed related somehow, only Sharon didn't know exactly how.

All Sharon could do was cry that her friend Barbie didn't know how to eat. She wondered why she could no longer pretend that her dolls could eat. Maybe, Sharon thought in horror, this meant she was becoming a grown-up.



BEVERLY NAIDUS

**O**n the second day of her 11th Sukkot, Sharon sat in the sukkah, next to her well-meaning grandma, who had prepared tzimmes and honey cake, special for Sharon. "Eat *mammele*, eat. EAT!" said Grandma to Sharon.

Sharon needed no such encouragement. Happily she gulped mouthfuls of carrots and sweet potatoes and devoured slice after slice of the moist, fragrant, raisin-speckled cake. And just to be fair, Sharon ate her mother's beef stew and rice pilaf with much enthusiasm too.

In school, Sharon had learned that feasting on the festival of Sukkot was a *mitzvah*. Falling just after Yom Kippur, a day of fasting, Sukkot was a time for Jews to rejoice. And as Sharon understood it, Jews rejoiced not with kegs of beer but with mounds of tasty food. Christians drank; Jews ate. That was the way of the world.

Between mouthfuls, Sharon observed her family. Due to the incessant urgings of her mother and grandmother, her

father had a plateful of goodies rivaling Sharon's stockpile. But both her mother and grandma picked at their fly-sized portions of food. "You eat like a bird, dear," said Grandma to her daughter.

Sharon's mother smiled at the comment, which puzzled Sharon. Her mother's smile meant that Grandma's comment was a compliment. But Sharon, who wanted to be a zoologist when she grew up, knew that her mother did not eat like a bird. Birds ate twice their weight in food every day. If would be more correct to say that her mother looked like a bird—bony and delicate.

"I just take after you, Mom," said Sharon's mother to Grandma. "But our Sharon takes after her father. She's got a healthy appetite and meat on her bones."

Sharon's grandma, beaming, reached over and pinched Sharon's cheek in archetypal Jewish-grandma fashion. "Eat as much as you can now, *mammele*," she advised. "Because when you grow up you'll have to watch what you eat so you can keep your figure pretty for your husband.

"But Grandma, it's a *mitzvah* to eat on Sukkot," said Sharon. "Why don't you eat some of your honey cake? It's delicious."

"So you perform the *mitzvah* for me, *mammele*. God will understand," said her grandma.

Sharon reached for some more beef stew, put some on her plate, but before she lifted her fork to her mouth, she thought about how the meat on her plate would become the meat on her body, on her thighs, stomach and buttocks. But then Sharon thought about the *mitzvah*, and of her grandmother's and mother's refusal to perform the good deed. For God to look kindly upon her family. Sharon told herself she must perform the *mitzvah* for all their sakes.

As she began to clean her plate of beef stew, Sharon realized that the women in her family never did their own *mitzvot*. They never recited the Kiddush or led *benching*, and when in the synagogue, they could only watch the male members of their families receive the honor of an *aliyah*, of getting called up to the Torah. So it made sense that they would let others eat for them as well.

Until Sharon was about nine, she could go sit with her

father in the men's section of the synagogue. She loved that privilege, to sit near all the action. But the age of ten restricted her to the women's section. At what age would she have to let others eat for her, and be restricted to those fly-sized portions?

Although full, Sharon began shoveling pieces of cake into her mouth as if she had starved for weeks. She did not want to grow up and did not know how else to defy the inevitable.

**O**n her 13th Yom Kippur, Sharon fasted the whole day for the first time. This accomplishment pleased her, not because she felt holier but because she felt thinner. Feeling slightly ashamed, Sharon tried to feel spiritually purified, even though she did not know

BEVERLY NAIDUS

what that entailed. But after this day of fasting, kneeling and standing, she could only take pride in her thighs. They felt thinner, after a day without food.

Sharon had almost broken her fast on this day, but during the morning recitation of the *Amidah*, her eyes happened to fall upon the words, "For the sin we have committed of gluttony."

Good at English, Sharon knew what gluttony meant. What she didn't know until today was that God considered gluttons to be sinners.

Sins had never scared Sharon, because they had never had anything to do with her. She could pooh-pooh all the other sins mentioned in the Yom Kippur service, even the "thou shall nots" of the Ten Commandments. She had no desire to murder, rob, covet, and she certainly would never commit adultery, not at 13 years old, anyway.

But this gluttony sin made her see the divine lightening bolt threatening to strike. God knew of her guilt. He had seen her all those times, watched her take seconds and thirds, clamor for the largest slice of birthday cake and polish off entire pints of Double Chocolate Fudge Brownie Delight.

With fear in her heart, Sharon fasted. And when the fast ended and she felt pleasure at her hard-earned



thinness, the fear refused to go away. It stayed with Sharon, accompanying her into the synagogue's social hall, where the congregation would break their fast with a feast.

**O**n Sharon's 15th Purim, she dressed up as a gypsy. And accompanied by her friend Barbara, Sharon went to a party in her synagogue's social hall, sponsored by her youth group.

Barbara dressed up as a prostitute, but told her youth group adviser and other "righteous" types that she was a realistic depiction of Queen Esther. Queen Esther, after all, had to live in a harem, and harem girls wore practically nothing.

Barbara wore a silver-sequined halter top, an electric blue tube skirt that barely covered her upper thighs, black fishnet stockings with red spangles and bright purple five-inch spike heels. This splash of bright color and exposed body parts gave Barbara exclusive "center attraction" status the instant she sauntered into the party. (Sauntering is the preferred form of movement in five-inch spike heels.)

The youth group adviser did not appreciate Barbara's concern for historical accuracy. He told her that nice Jewish girls should not be attired in such a fashion. Reluctantly, he let her stay for the party. It was Purim, after all.

Sharon, on the other hand, wore a long, flowing flower-dotted skirt, a long black t-shirt and lots of scarves. Like everyone else at the party, she could not take her eyes off Barbara. On the one hand, she condemned her friend for wanton exhibitionism and kowtowing to male fantasies that objectify females. (At 15, Sharon had discovered feminism.) Yet, grudgingly, she also admired her friend's body and wished she had the guts to parade around nearly naked, to feel sexy.

After several minutes of watching Barbara flit around the room, flirting with every boy who would pay homage,

Sharon began to feel both miserably invisible and shamefully naked. So she glanced toward the table laden with food—fruit-filled hamentashen, platters of pita and humus, the classic chips and onion dip. Purim, like all the other joyous days on the Jewish calendar, meant a ton of food, to be eaten at various Purim parties and at the festive Purim meal.

Sharon approached the table, panther-like. She slowly circled its circumference, zoning in on her prey. Lightning-quick, her hand captured a hamentasch, strawberry-filled, and pitched it into the bottomless pit she called her body. Sharon devoured the hamentasch in one

BEVERLY NARXUS

gulp, leaving the pastry no time to reflect upon its death. Sharon, however, failed to be appeased. It wasn't enough to crave a mere second hamentasch, Sharon yearned for an entire plateful, maybe two platefuls. And she had been so good today, eating only an apple and one square of a Hershey chocolate bar.

The Purim feast had begun. But by her ninth hamentasch, the familiar, debilitating fear descended upon Sharon. Fat, fat, fat. Fatter, fatter, fatter . . . Sharon felt the hamentashen commiserating within her digestive system, loaded with fat and calories, plotting to blow up her body. Only she would remain blown up, like a massive balloon, forbidden to mercifully explode, to disintegrate into unrecognizable bits.

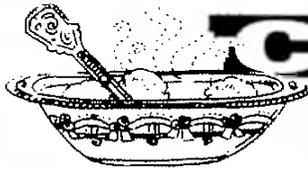
Trying not to run, Sharon made her way to the bathroom. She carefully locked herself in an end stall, held her hair away from her face with one hand and leaned over the toilet bowl. With a first-timer's timidity, Sharon

stuck a finger down her throat. But she could accomplish nothing past gagging.

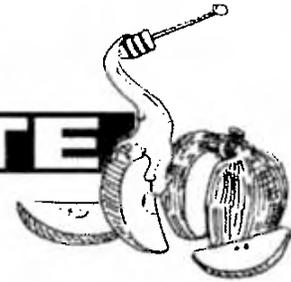
Defeated, but no less desperate, Sharon opened her stall and climbed on the bathroom counter in order to see her whole body in the mirror. The terror of her reflection overwhelmed her to the point where she didn't care that she stood on top of a fixture in a public restroom. Like any good masochist, she took off her t-shirt and stared at her naked midriff, horrified. The truth was, despite her binges, her rib cage protruded like that of any average girl—although

*Continued on page 12*





# T H E CLEAN PLATE C L U B



by Harriet Lerner

**At a National Women's Studies Association meeting,** a woman told the following story. When she was a teenager, her mother, a Holocaust survivor, constantly pressured her to eat more and put on weight. Why? Because "in the camps," her mother explained, "those people who had a few extra pounds could survive a few extra days."

My mother was not a Holocaust survivor, but her "stuff" around food was intense. The fact that my sister and I had enormous appetites and ate everything put before us was a source of great pride to her. When my own boys ate less, or didn't like vegetables, she worried that they were "poor eaters."

Wasting food was the only thing close to "sin" in my childhood family. Not one item of food, not a single pea, was ever tossed. I do not exaggerate. If anything was left over

from a meal (which was rarely), or from some one's plate (which was almost never), it would go into my father's lunch bag the next day. He was also a "good eater." He didn't complain if my mother packed him a string bean sandwich along with a jar of pickle juice (literally) to quench his thirst.

My sister Susan and I were proud members of "The Clean Plate Club," and we were told to consider "the starving children" if we so much as hesitated over a last bite of mashed potatoes. Imagine my shock when a friend reported that in her Protestant family, she had to leave something on her plate after each meal for "Mr. Manners," to demonstrate restraint and lack of gluttony. "My mother would die," I told her.

My biggest challenge with food now is to stop eating when I'm no longer hungry. I reflexively finish everything on my plate—

and on everyone else's plate—at home and in restaurants. Jane Hirschmann [see sidebar p.15] started me thinking about the fact that this behavior doesn't really help starving children and certainly doesn't help me. But throwing out food from a plate (as opposed to letting it rot in the refrigerator, which it does regularly behind my back) still feels sinful.

I have not passed this legacy to my children. My sons, Matt and Ben, have never heard of "The Clean Plate Club" (or "Mr. Manners," for that matter). But for me, even at 50, it's hard to let my membership lapse.

Harriet Lerner, Ph.D., is a senior staff psychologist at the Menninger Clinic, Topeka, Kansas, and the author, most recently, of *The Dance of Deception: Pretending and Truth-Telling in Women's Lives* (HarperCollins, 1993).

## BEV NAIDUS: BODY-SIZE ARTIST

Beverly Naidus, 41, tenured professor of "activist and new genre art" at California State University at Long Beach, first published her book, *One Size Does Not Fit All*, at her local Kinko's. "I thought female body hate was my personal, clandestine obsession, my own self-esteem problem. At the time I was doing 'serious' art about nuclear holocaust and environmental disasters. But people started buying my women's body-hate book before I even left Kinko's. So it started to dawn on me: this is important political work—symbolic of a lot that's screwed up."

Naidus prefers to show her art at beauty salons and shopping malls rather than traditional galleries. "I like to access a non-art audience, to disguise my work." She explains: "My body-hate work was first shown as a rack of clothing at a real clothing store. I showed stiff, distorted clothes that looked like skin, each with a laminated price tag with a political saying from my book (like saying on illustration on right). Then women would find this classical pedestal-altar on which I'd placed a clipboard inviting them to write down their

Having done every diet available, she considered the possibility of a lobotomy.



own 'body hate' stories. Meanwhile I'm in the store eavesdropping and watching. Then I recycle people's participation into the next incarnation of my show."

Naidus' next book, *But You Don't Look American*, tackles "consumerism, unemployment, immigration, assimilation, and the whole notion of who's considered an outsider and why." Naidus includes her own "personal history of being Jewish, looking dark and different, going to a Yiddish culture camp called Boiberik, and belonging to neither synagogue nor church when I grew up in Glen Rock, New Jersey."

The Jewish Museum in New York City has invited Naidus to participate in their 1996 show, "Too Jewish," along with 11 other prominent assimilated Jewish artists. "We've all done work on Jewish identity that's been dismissed or excluded from shows as 'Too Jewish,'" explains Naidus.

—Susan Schnur

Illustrations from *One Size Does Not Fit All*, published by Aegis Publications, Littleton, CO, \$15.

*continued from page 10*

Sharon could not see that. Fat globules, big and lumpy, a mushy, round mass of breast and stomach—that's what Sharon saw. Fat, fat, fat. Fatter, fatter, fatter...

Sharon punched herself in the stomach, hoping she would pop, or at least reduce to the dimensions of a completely flat surface. But her three-dimensionality held firm. "It's not fair," thought Sharon. "I want to disappear."

Sharon felt guilty for having so much unhappiness on such a happy occasion. Had God now put her in the "bad Jew" category, for defiling the joyous spirit of Purim, for not loving the beautiful Queen Esther who saved the Jewish people from Haman's most murderous plan?

Yes, she did not love Queen Esther. Because Sharon knew that Queen Esther never had a weight problem in her entire life. No way would a king like Ahasuerus fall head over heels for a chubby, cellulite-plagued queen. Queen Esther was every man's ideal—obedient and thin.

But then there was Vashti, the queen before Esther, who met her demise after refusing to display her beauty before the king and all his party guests. In the story, Vashti became the symbol throughout the Persian Empire of what happens when wives don't listen to their husbands. But maybe there was more to the story, thought Sharon. Maybe Vashti had once been beautiful, but after days of presiding at the banquet for the women,

overeating to oblivion, she porked out. Maybe that's why Vashti did not want to appear in front of the men. Maybe King Ahasuerus had her killed for getting fat.

Sharon went back into the toilet stall, just to sit for a while. She did not want to return to the festivities. Like Vashti, she did not want to be in full view of others.

**O**n the second night of Sharon's 17th Passover, her cousin Jolene sat across from her at the seder table. Sharon did not care much for Jolene as a human being, but she greatly admired her bones. She liked Jolene's jutting collarbone, liked the fact that her



BEVERLY NARDUS

ribs stuck out from the thin fabric of her tight-fitting dress.

Sharon knew she could never compete with Jolene. Sharon got better grades in school, had feature roles in school plays and received myriad acceptances to universities. Jolene, however, had the supreme gift—visible bones.

Sharon stared at the coloring book-like pictures in her new and improved *Maxwell House Haggadah*. In one picture, a group of slaves toiled near some pyramids. Sharon thought the female slave in the drawing, with a languid, emaciated body, resembled Jolene. It delighted her that Jolene looked like a slave. But upon second glance, Sharon thought the female slave seemed sexy—something

Jolene was not. Or was she?

Sharon wondered what had happened to this slave in the picture, once she crossed the Red Sea into freedom. Had liberation destroyed her sexiness? Sharon had no idea; she simply felt ashamed of her longing to look like the slave.

**O**n the first night of Sharon's 18th Shavuot, she sat at the dinner table, next to her mother who had made chocolate chip cheesecake, special for Sharon. "Have a piece, dear," said her mother. "You've gotten so thin since you went to college."

Sharon loved cheesecake the way good parents love their children—unconditionally, fiercely, eternally. She had always liked

Shavuot, the holiday commemorating God's giving the Torah to the Jewish people, because of the custom to eat dairy products. For Sharon, Shavuot had less to do with going to synagogue and learning Torah all night and much more to do with blintzes loaded with sour cream, noodle kugels filled with fruit and cheese, and cheesecake of all delectable flavors. When Sharon ate cheesecake, she not only tasted crust and filling; she tasted *olam habah*, the Jewish notion of the paradisaical world to come.

Eyes huge, mouth dripping with saliva. Sharon focused on that chocolate chip cheesecake. She licked her lips slowly and said, "No thanks, Mom, I'm not hungry."

"Honey, you eat like a bird," said Sharon's mother, concerned. "Ever since you started college, you seem to

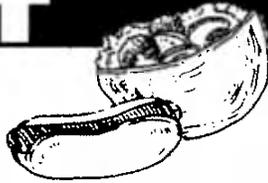
*Continued on page 14*

# AREN'T YOU GONNA

# EAT

# THAT?

by Rabbi Susan Schnur



**My childhood household included my Latvian grandmother** whose evening routine—after she finished washing all the supper dishes—involved circulating to each of her grandchildren's bedrooms to show off what she'd found in the kitchen garbage: a heel of hot-dog, a carrot that could have been gnawed off a centimeter closer to the top. "An *avairah*," she'd say, clucking ["a sin"], and she'd pop the offending sliver into her mouth.

I don't remember, as Harriet Lerner does, having a "Clean Plate Club" in our household, but, challenged to look back, it does occur to me that my grandmother, Nana, was the family's Clean Plate Club. My siblings and I were never badgered to finish food on our plates, but we were definitely expected to, as we called it, "pass the plate down." As I recall, well after my father, three brothers and myself had left the dinner table to carry on with homework, T.V., or the Trenton Times, my mother and Nana continued a kind of *ner tamid* [eternal light] vigil at the table's foot—their version of a sort of Jewish Mad Hatter's tea party. Propped side by side in front of a bloodline of plates, mother and daughter handled one lagan of leftovers after another. Yes, it's true—they were both somewhat overweight (contemporary versions of the martyring Jewess), though their sacrifices (including, in Nana's case, eating garbage) spared those they loved.

In college I did experience a few years' worth of occasional uncontrolled food binges (passing the plate down to myself, I suppose), and after that I took up smoking until age 30—re-channeling my oral Jewess mandate. For the last decade, though, I have replaced bottom-feeding Jewish mothers with several dozen chickens, goats and ducks, and an occasional sheep. When I ponder my current family's barnyard—in the context of Clean Plate Club disorders—I think: elegant solution.

When my husband or I cook, we always cook too much and we encourage leftovers: the more to take out to Zlatah, Ubi, Little

Isadore, Buntley or Mehlaffafon. I've been known, in fact, to guilt-trip my children into not taking pasta seconds—Waycool and Bebbi, begging at the kitchen door, are just dying for Annie's Macaroni handouts. Now that I think about it, I am not unlike my Jewish foremothers (surprise): though not invoking starving African children or Holocaust experiences to complicate my kids' relationship to food, I do quote Talmud: "It is forbidden to eat unless you have also fed your beasts" [Gittin 62].

Our double kitchen sink always contains two bins: one for the barnyard, the second for composting. My husband (probably because he, and not I, built our composters) actually has been known to wheedle "perfectly good" vegetables out of our very mouths in order to "feed" his composters. (Now that's crazy.) But to explain this: his legacy includes two Eastern-European parents, both of whom experienced starvation as children, who have never once set an American *Shabbos* table without both chicken and brisket.

Will my adaptation—running a selfless gourmet carry-out for barn animals—turn out to be yet another example of Jews poorly managing change from one generation to the next? . . . of each Jewish generation's ingenious solution becoming the next one's problem? Or maybe this adaptation simply bears out what our Mayflower-descended friends (those in Harriet Lerner's "Mr. Manners" category) have known all along: That one "high" (eating, say; or, as AA notes, drinking) can rarely be extirpated, but can only be replaced by another "high" (like moral etiquette, or altruism).

Change, in pleasure-freighted (or addiction-freighted) domains like eating, needs to take seriously the reward-circuitry of the human brain. Our neurons demand that we don't just "give something up"; we must create compensations. If not *ruggelach*, Talmudic *mitzvot*; if not drugs, spirituality or charity; if not smoking, *Shabbos*. This is simply how the brain works—Jewish or other.

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Continued from page 12

have lost your appetite. Is anything wrong?"

No. Mom, I just take after you, Sharon wanted to say. "I have a heavy class schedule, so I'm a bit stressed, but there's nothing wrong," she lied instead.

"But I've never seen you look so thin," persisted her mother.

Oh, don't worry. Mom, I'll never be as thin as you. I take after Dad, right? I've got this damn meat all over my bones, Sharon wanted to say. "I eat plenty, Mom," she lied instead.

Painfully, Sharon watched her mother and father enjoy their cheesecake, watched them sample the delights of the world to come. Such delights had become off limits for her. Because while a slice meant tasting heaven, consuming a whole cake meant immersion into hell. And Sharon had lost the ability to eat only a slice.

**On the first day of her 20th Rosh Hashanah, Sharon**

performed the ceremony of *tashlich*—the casting away of one's sins over a body of water. Leaning over the gleaming toilet bowl in her just-cleaned-for-the-occasion bathroom, Sharon purged herself of the year's sins.

Sharon knew her interpretation of *tashlich* did not exactly conform to custom. Traditionally, *tashlich*-observers used pieces of bread that symbolized their sins, and threw them over an outside, moving body of water.

But she had used bread, justified Sharon, as she expelled more sin from her body. A whole loaf, in fact. And now, she was throwing the bread over a body of water. Sharon's unconventionality came from thinking that the bread only represented sin when eaten, when lodged in her stomach.

Finished with purging, Sharon stared at the contents in

the toilet. Her throat burned, as if she had swallowed fire. She felt the sadistic pounding of numerous hammers within her head, threatening to split open her skull. With tears in her eyes, Sharon forced herself to admit that the toilet's contents represented not sin but something more terrifying—sickness.

Although tempted to faint, Sharon flushed the toilet several times, to remove all traces of vomit. She then walked into her kitchen, retrieved an apple from the refrigerator and a pot of honey from the cupboard. "It is not a sin to be sick. It is not a sin to be sick," she softly muttered.

Sharon cut a slice from the apple and dipped it into the pot of honey. She said the blessing for eating fruit, and with a deep breath, took a small bite. Sharon tasted the tartness of the apple, but more intensely, she tasted the sweetness of the honey; she felt its smooth thickness covering her wounded throat, stroking it the way a mother cuddles her child to sleep.

BEVERLY NADUS

Over this apple and honey, Sharon toasted herself—to a happy and sweet new year. For that's how Jews toasted themselves on their New Year, with food. "It seems we Jews love food more than any other people in the world," thought Sharon. "How did I, a Jew, come to do battle with the thing I love most?"

Sharon licked her fingers clean of honey, then forced herself to put the honey back into the cupboard. She prayed that one day, she would be able to look at a pot of honey and not feel compelled to con-

sume the entire quantity in one ferocious gulp.

It was on this day, on her 20th Rosh Hashanah, that Sharon decided to stop the burning in her throat, to do something about the fire raging in her soul. She wanted peace, not war, and knew she must learn anew how to eat if she wanted to live out the new year. □

Susan Josephs is a staff writer at *The Jewish Week* in New York, and is currently working on her first novel.



# "EATING DISORDERS HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH FOOD"



**Psychologist Jane Hirschmann**, co-author of the new book *When Women Stop Hating Their Bodies: Freeing Yourself From Food and Weight Obsession* [Ballantine Books], believes that women, like the bulimic protagonist of Susan Josephs' story, "Eat, Eat, Diet, Diet," (p.8), "talk in a code called Fat Talk. It's a mother tongue," she says, "an international female code."

When Josephs' protagonist, for example, blames herself for the sin of gluttony, she's really not referring to food at all, explains Hirschmann. "Her gluttony, God forbid, is that she has desires, wishes, difficulties, feelings. But she doesn't know how to name these directly, so she heads for the language of FAT: 'Oh my God, I'm so out of control.' On Purim, a time when a young Orthodox girl can dress in costume and 'play' with sexuality, Sharon's 'gluttony' is erotic appetite—fraught with ambivalence. This 'gluttony' must be absolutely controlled. Sharon's feelings makes a detour to her body—women make these detours all the time."

"Growing up female," adds Hirschmann, "all women learn that flesh is bad, is female. Our flesh provokes our confusion about how much space we're really allowed to take up in this world, how much power is seemingly to have. Women would not get into manias about food if we didn't believe that something was deeply wrong with us."

And do Jewish women in particular have psychological issues with food? "Eating disorders pertain to one subculture: women, period," answers Hirschmann. "Of course, we Jewish women have our particular inheritance—Eastern European pogroms, hunger, survival. Food means: 'We're never going back there again!' But it's also a form of self-help, of being able to soothe ourselves. Food represents good early caretaking. But then we're also told, 'You *prepare* the food, but stay away from its self-soothing effects."

"We say horrible things to ourselves about our bodies," continues Hirschmann, "things we

would never say even to our worst enemies. In this atmosphere of self-contempt, of course, we can change nothing. Our task is to stop clobbering ourselves with masochistic thoughts and the internalized tyranny of the culture: that we can all stay young, that thin is better, that all stomachs must be flat. What we need to do instead (what Sharon in this story needs to do) is to get attuned to our own real selves. Like babies know when they require nurturance, women need to begin to acknowledge what our wishes, fears and drives really are. We must learn again how to listen to ourselves, as we once did so naturally in infancy. Only then will we feel more centered, more psychologically prepared to speak the truth about our real conflicts and desires."

In her 25 years of being a therapist to women with eating disorders, Hirschmann claims that she has seen confirmed, over and over, that body hatred is but a metaphor for larger, unacknowledged concerns. An example? Says Hirschmann, "I saw a woman just an hour ago who tells me: 'I can't stand my arms. They jiggle.' I asked her why this thought was coming to her just at this moment—why not earlier in the afternoon? why not last night? As we explored her thoughts, the woman began to talk about a business meeting she had just left. She was unhappy with how *wishy-washy* she had been at that meeting, how ambivalent she was about being assertive. 'I guess you could say I was 'jiggly' at that meeting, and that I have a hard time tolerating that,' the woman told me. She was amazed to see this unconscious detour—from her life to her body."

And as for Sharon, our protagonist's, future? "Well, so far her 'bad body' thoughts, which have nothing to do with her body, have robbed her of her life," says Hirschmann. "But now I see a woman beginning to get her life back. Revolutionary things happen to us once we stop obsessing about our bodies."

—Susan Schnur

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# HOW TO STOP PUNISHING AND START RESPECTING

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**S** TARTING A NEW JOB IN NEW YORK CITY A FEW YEARS AGO, I WAS SURPRISED when a colleague asked me, “Have you studied ballet? You’re so elegant and graceful.” Ha, I thought. “Ha,” I said. Me, a ballerina? I still see myself as the farm girl from rural Connecticut with a physique better suited to behind-the-scenes set building than to dancing a pas de deux. Bless this woman for mistaking me for the Sugar Plum Fairy, but I had to wonder: How could her impression of my appearance be so completely different from my own?

Even though we’ve all seen ourselves in photographs and home videos, and we check ourselves out at least twice a day in the mirror, somehow most of us have no idea what we look like to other people. Here’s the happy truth: Generally, research shows, you’re much harder on yourself than anyone *looking* at you is. Louise Nape of Brooklyn swore she was having a “fat day,” as she puts it, on her thirty-fifth birthday. “My jeans were tight from taking extra helpings of cake and champagne,” she says. “Then a friend said, ‘You’re in such great shape.’ My first reaction was ‘Are you kidding?’ But for the rest of the night, I thought, hey, I must look better than I realized!”

What woman doesn’t feel some insecurity about her looks? A rare one, according to psychological studies. “Women underestimate their beauty,” agrees Nancy Etcoff, Ph.D., author

STYLIST: MOLLY GALLAGHER; HAIR: FRED VAN DE BUNT FOR ART DEPARTMENT; MAKEUP: LESLIE MARKETT FOR ARTIST LOFT; PROP STYLING: SAM LOOK; LAUREN WARE DRESS; ILLUSTRATION: LAURIE ROSENWALD



When asked to draw themselves life-size, women usually outline a figure much bigger than their own. Would you draw an accurate portrait?

of *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty*. In fact, research shows that while people tend to rate themselves *higher* than others rate them in most areas—like driving ability and sense of humor—the opposite is true when women rate their own appearance. In a 2004 study, only 2 percent of women claimed to be “beautiful,” and less than one percent thought they were “gorgeous.” “Very few even called themselves cute,” says Etcoff.

The same image anxiety seems *not* to hit men as hard. “They’re better than women at putting personal appearance into perspective,” says Kay Peters, citing what she’s observed as an executive coach and media trainer in New York City. “Women feel that one of their greatest assets is their appearance, whereas men say it’s their brain.” That might explain why 90 percent of the 1.8 million cosmetic surgeries performed in the United States are on women. And then there’s a recent study that reports most women who are trying to lose weight want to shed 32 percent of their body mass—an amount probably appropriate only for the minority of us who are severely overweight or obese.

Sounds extreme, but then again, our body-image issues can start long before we learn how to say the word *liposuction*. Mothers and girlfriends rank as the earliest and strongest influences on girls’ body image, according to research. Interestingly, girls who are most influenced by their mothers tend to feel *good* about what they look like, whereas those most affected by girlfriends are tougher on themselves (see *Mean Girls*). As early as kindergarten, girls become aware of their appearance—how much they’re eating, how they look in

## WE DON'T MEASURE OUR INTELLIGENCE AGAINST ALBERT EINSTEIN'S, SO WHY DO WE TRY TO STACK UP PHYSICALLY AGAINST GISELE BÜNDCHEN?

clothes—and of the social disadvantages of being overweight. “Girls get messages early on that who they are is a function of what they look like,” says Doug Bunnell, Ph.D., vice president of outpatient clinical services for the The Renfrew Center, an eating disorders clinic.

Add to that the fact that we live in an age when female beauty is highly prized (and, some would argue, completely overvalued). The impossibly perfect female figure—air-brushed, highly toned, well lit and expertly groomed—is so ubiquitous these days that it’s easy to forget just how unrealistic it is. “It’s hard to grow up in this culture and not be affected,” says photojournalist Lauren Greenfield, whose documentary *Thin*, about young women at The Renfrew Center, aired recently on HBO. “I remember thinking I was really fat as a teenager,” she says. “Now I can see that I wasn’t. I still have that critical voice, but it doesn’t rule my daily life.”

**It takes considerable psychological strength not to feel “less than” in a size-2 world.** “Some women can handle the pressure to look a certain way, and come to terms with being less than ‘perfect,’” says Michael Cunningham, Ph.D., a psychologist and professor of communication at the University of Louisville in Kentucky. “Others give in to self-loathing and may seek to change themselves in radical ways.”

Ironically, many of the celebrities women constantly compare themselves with have their own distorted body-image issues. It seems safe to say that celebs who have undergone extreme body transformations—among them Nicole Richie, who at 5'1" weighed 85 pounds when arrested on her DUI charge last

# Alert: Bad body image can kill you

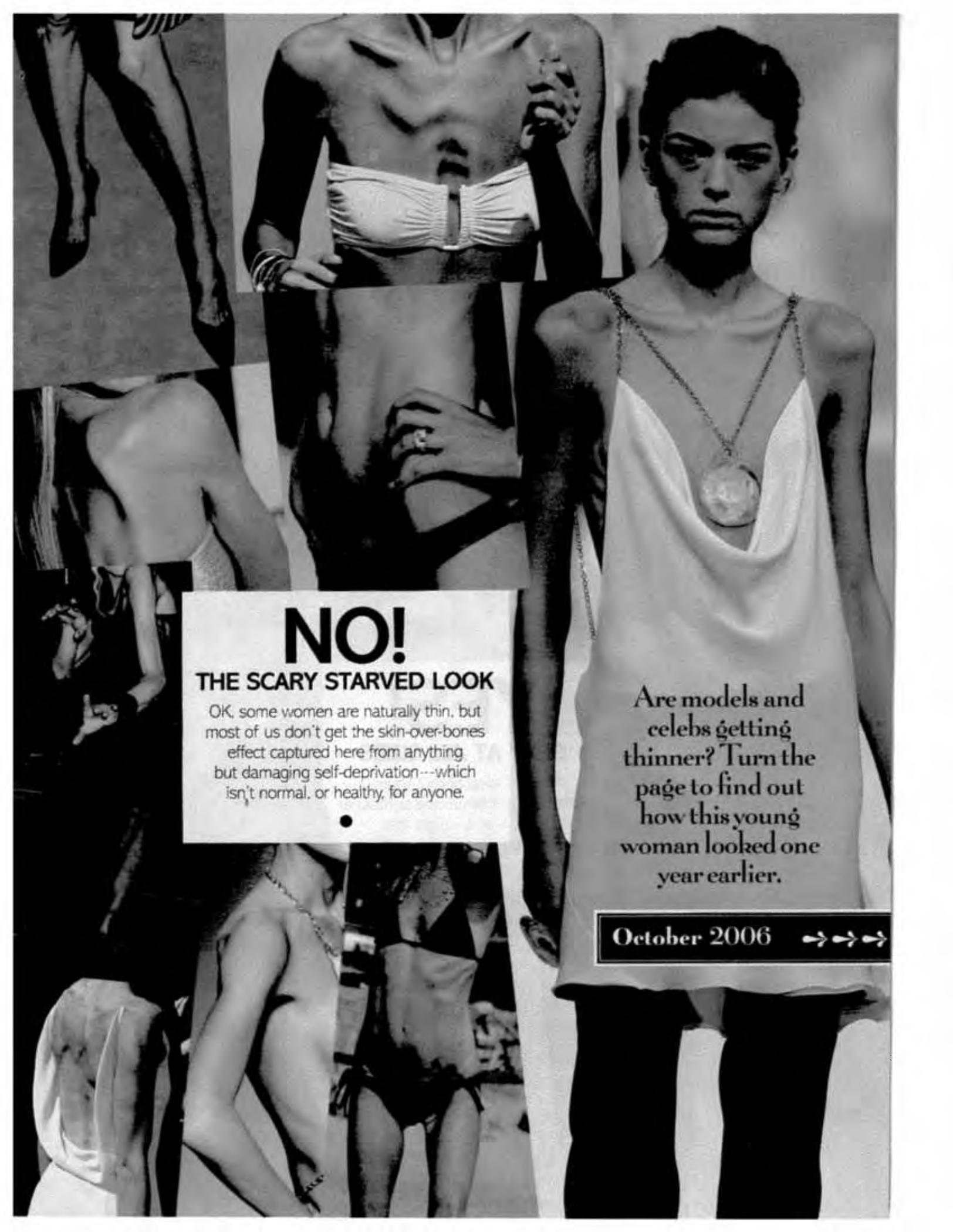


WHEN BRAZILIAN MODEL ANA CAROLINA RESTON, SHOWN HERE IN HEALTHIER DAYS, DIED LAST NOVEMBER, SHE WEIGHED JUST 88 POUNDS AT 5'8". HER FAMILY HAD BEGGED HER TO GAIN WEIGHT.

Models have traditionally been slimmer than the rest of us, but as recent news reports have detailed, the average size on the catwalk may actually be *shrinking*. “Twenty years ago, models were 5'9" or taller, and a size 6 or 8,” one modeling insider tells *Glamour*. “Now they’re that height but more like a size 2.” Pressure to be unnaturally skinny has led some to develop eating disorders, and three models—two Brazilian, one Uruguayan—have reportedly died from self-starvation. The Council of Fashion Designers of America recently issued guidelines to raise awareness and help troubled models. Intervention is crucial, doctors say, because victims rarely see how emaciated they’ve become.

Go to [glamour.com/health](http://glamour.com/health) to see how real women of different weights feel about their bodies.

RESTON: EUGENIO SAVOIA/UP IMAGES; SCARY STARTED LOOK: GLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ALAN DAVIDSON/WIREIMAGE.COM; NIEL BEMPS/GAZ SHIRLEY/ONCEUPONSTARS.COM; NUBIA VALENTINO/OLY PHOTO FUTURE.COM; PIERRE PHILIPPE MARCOU/GETTY IMAGES; JIM SRECH/WIREIMAGE.COM; LESTER COHEN/WIREIMAGE.COM; CENTER: ARJUN NEHAR/WIREIMAGE.COM



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**THE SCARY STARVED LOOK**

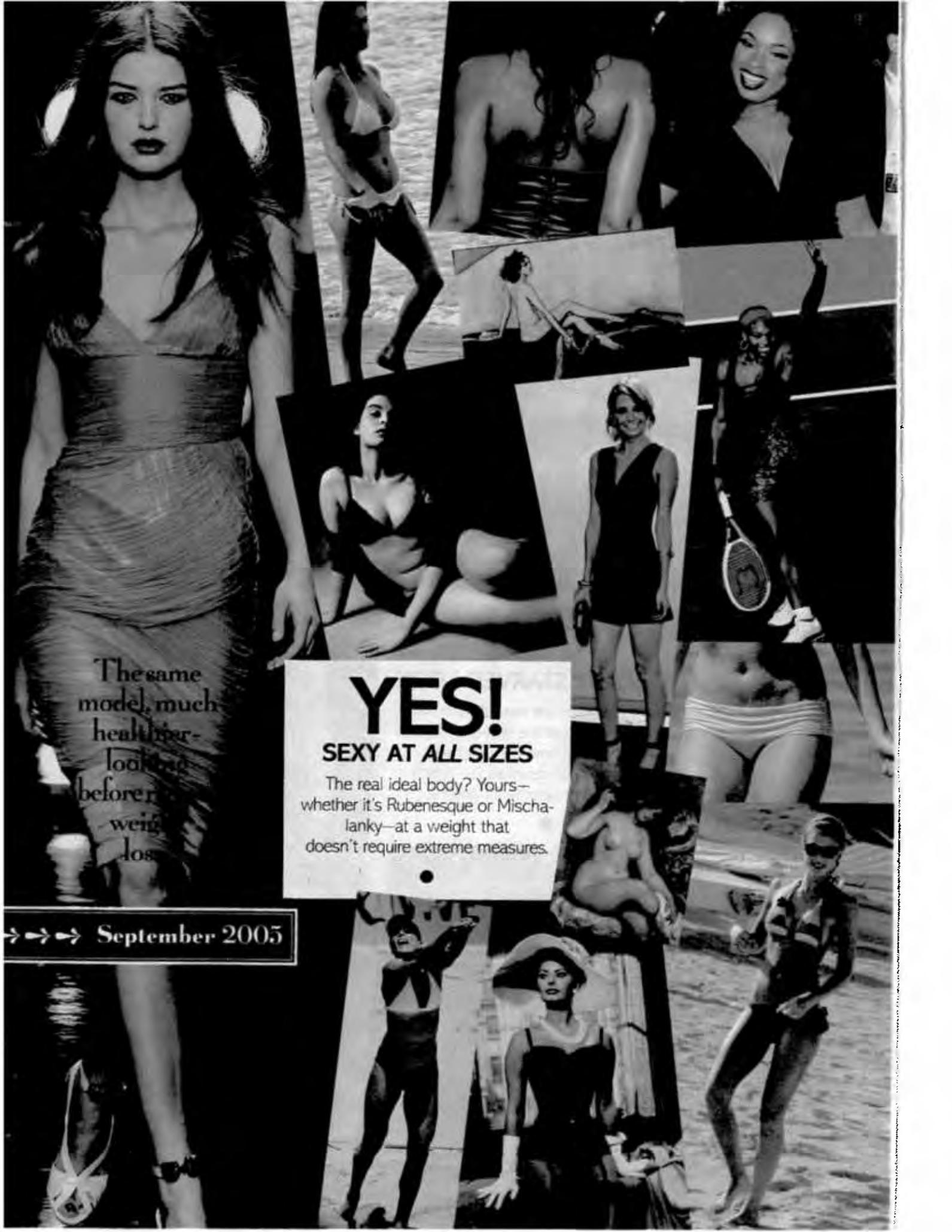
OK, some women are naturally thin, but most of us don't get the skin-over-bones effect captured here from anything but damaging self-deprivation—which isn't normal, or healthy, for anyone.

●

Are models and celebs getting thinner? Turn the page to find out how this young woman looked one year earlier.

October 2006





The same model, much healthier-looking before weight loss.

# YES!

**SEXY AT ALL SIZES**

The real ideal body? Yours—whether it's Rubenesque or Mischak-lanky—at a weight that doesn't require extreme measures.

→ → → September 2005

# 4 WAYS TO SEE YOUR BODY CLEARLY

Warning: These exercises may cause rapidly rising self-esteem.

If you've spent the better part of your life angsting over your body, the notion that you could learn to love it is probably pretty unbelievable (though very nice). But experts say you *can* change your mind-set. Here, exercises that body-image experts use with their patients; they can work just as well for those who have a mild case of what-I-look-like dislike.

## ■ BODY TRACING

**What you need:** Paper, a marker, a friend.

**How you do it:** Tack six feet of paper on a wall and draw a life-size silhouette of how you think your body is shaped. Then have a friend trace the actual outline of your body. How do the shapes compare?

### **What you'll learn:**

"Women usually draw themselves much larger than they really are," says Susan Kleinman, a dance therapist at The Renfrew Center, an eating disorders facility. "It allows you to see your body as it truly is."

## ■ MIRROR EXPOSURE

**What you need:** A full-length mirror.

**How you do it:** "Look in the mirror and describe your body, from head to toe, in nonjudgmental terms," explains body-image researcher Sherrie Delinsky, Ph.D. "Rather than saying, 'I have a huge belly,' say, 'My stomach is round and firm.'" Devote equal time and attention to *all* areas.

**What you'll learn:** "It helps you see every aspect of your body—not just what you don't like and tend to zero in on—and to be much kinder to it," Delinsky says.

## ■ THOUGHT STOPPING

**What you need:** Just your own voice.

**How you do it:** Whenever you start to think unkind things about yourself ("I'm so fat"; "I hate my butt"), shout "Stop!" (When you're in public, you can mentally scream it.)

**What you'll learn:** It instantly gets your mind off those bad body thoughts and helps you retrain yourself to be more positive. Also try repeating a mantra like "I trust and love my body" instead. Sound silly? Sure—but it may *stick*.

## ■ DANCE

**What you need:** Music—that's it!

**How you do it:** Put on an inspiring song you can't stand still to. Go crazy.

### **What you'll learn:**

"Dancing gets your body in touch with its natural rhythm—and that's empowering," says therapist Kleinman.

**IF YOU NEED MORE HELP** with your body issues, or think you may have an eating disorder, call your doctor or go to the American Psychiatric Association website ([healthy.minds.org](http://healthy.minds.org)) to assess your symptoms.

December—simply can't see their own jutting collarbones and rib cages. Ditto the increasing number of size-0 runway models. How can some of the most photographed women on earth, whose livelihoods depend on their appearance, be blind to the fact that there's slim and then there's...a potential medical emergency?

### **But maybe the larger issue here is this:**

Few of us measure our intelligence against the bar set by Albert Einstein, or our tennis ability by Venus Williams' trophy case. We're inspired, not discouraged, by their achievements: We still go to college, and we still pick up our rackets and play. So why do we get so down on ourselves when we don't stack up physically to the genetic anomaly that is Gisele Bündchen?

Because the hard-on-yourself habit is tough to shake. And yet it is possible for all women to conquer even the most deep-rooted body insecurities (consider the exercises above a start). When Elizabeth Jackson, 30, was growing up in a small town in Massachusetts, she was, she says, "definitely fat." The kids in school were cruel to her, calling her names like Jabba the Hutt. Jackson has an M.B.A. and a great

marketing job in New Jersey, and she's slimmed down by exercising religiously. "Sometimes I think people still see me as that fat kid," she says—especially when she's doing something looks-centered, like, say, walking into a scene-y singles bar—but generally, Jackson says, her self-image is in tune with reality. "It's when I'm doing something I know I'm good at that has nothing to do with my looks—work, running, yoga—that I don't feel self-conscious or worry about what I look like."

## SIMPLE BUT TRUE: WOMEN WHO PLACE THE MOST IMPORTANCE ON LOOKS ARE ALSO THE MOST UNHAPPY.

**Jackson's experience holds an obvious—**but easy to forget—lesson for all of us: We'll feel better about our appearance if we spend less time obsessing about it. In her work, Eteoff has observed that "those who place the most importance on looks are the most unhappy." If we instead derive self-confidence from what we *do* and find comfort

in the knowledge that most people think we look pretty damn good anyway, we'll face the world more easily, a million and one *other* qualities—wit, intellect, strength—shining through. "If we could get *that* confidence," says Eteoff, "we'd look better." Especially to ourselves. ©

# They Say "It's Not Sex"

But experts call it  
"an oral sex epidemic."  
What do Jewish teen girls  
think is really going on?

When "Sex in the City" features a bat mitzvah party where the precocious 13-year-old girls talk about performing oral sex on the guys "to be popular," we're tempted to blow it off, as it were. After all, this is television, not real life.

While this is certainly not a behavior exclusive to Jewish teens, the episode in question does spotlight a practice LILITH has been hearing about for several years from parents, educators, counselors and adolescent girls themselves. Unbidden, they have spoken to Lilit about the prevalence of oral sex among young teens—at parties, on school grounds, at camp, and at the back of the bus.

Reports on National Public Radio, in The New York Times, USA Today, The Washington Post and the Detroit Free Press all quote specialists in adolescent medicine, psychiatrists and educators who agree that oral sex is a widely popular practice among young teens. USA Today reports an online sex survey in which more than half the 10,000 respondents were under age 14; 25% had participated in oral sex; a psychiatrist speculates that one-third of middle-school girls have performed oral sex on boys. SIECUS, the renowned Sexuality Information and Education Council of the US, has published dramatic findings about what teens are doing, and discusses one study in which 24% of teens surveyed said oral sex was likely to be an activity in their "casual" relationships. At least one Jewish teen website has run a jokey sex "test" on oral sex and other practices. And this doesn't take into account the fact that most surveys on teen sexual activity don't even ask about oral sex "and most do not question the youngest teens," according to Sara Seims, a past president of the Alan Guttmacher Institute.

No one is suggesting, even for a moment, that Jewish teens are leading the oral sex revolution. But they may have earlier and more frequent opportunities for sexual contact in a supercharged social milieu than their non-Jewish peers. The rush of elaborate parties at age 13 and younger—parties which may include unsupervised bus rides to and from the party venue—means that there is a context, repeated almost every week in season, for getting it together.



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A random selection of adult women I spoke to as this report was being edited—writers, artists, foundation executives—agreed that many young teens know this activity is going on, and say that oral sex is “no big deal.” Almost every one of these Jewish women with children between the ages of 10 and 20 had the same response when I told them what we were writing about: No surprise. Many of them reacted immediately to tell me their kids assert, “Don’t worry. It’s not sex.”

Despite the frequency and consistency of these anecdotal reports from adults and on some Jewish teen websites, and despite the widely publicized reports from sexuality researchers on oral sex and young teen girls, Jewish schools, camps and youth groups don’t seem to be taking note of this sexual behavior. There is plenty of attention paid to crisis issues relating to girls’ bodies (eating disorders, cutting, low self esteem around body image), but not to this.

To get a better sense of what’s really going on, Lilith asked Ilana Kramer (Cornell ’03), an experienced crisis-line counselor who is now a graduate student in gender studies, to speak to teen girls, sex educators, professionals in Jewish schools, therapists, parents, rabbis and clinic workers. From all corners, she heard them talk about the prevalence of oral sex. But she also heard teens say, again and again, that, just as I’d heard their mothers report, “It’s not sex.”

The reasons for this denial or demurral are more complex than mere concealment of what might be seen—especially at 13 or 14—as transgressive behavior. In a way, it’s political. With so much focus on “abstinence only” education in schools, and so little frank talk about sexual feelings, anything that is not strictly defined as vaginal intercourse seems to teens to be—de facto—NOT actual sex.

As a consequence, teens see oral sex as perfectly safe, since it’s “not sex” and since it is rarely discussed in health class, which focuses on protection and prevention (of AIDS and pregnancy). Unprotected oral sex does, though, carry physical risks, and the teens Kramer spoke to are dismally (and dangerously) unaware of this. And perhaps there’s emotional risk as well.

There is an intimacy to this act, even if it is almost always unilateral (girls on boys). If these teen girls claim it’s not intimate, we have to assume that on some level they’re stifling their own responses, positive or negative.

As you read the report which follows, keep in mind the asymmetrical aspect. Girls are not getting sexual pleasure from oral sex. So what do they get? The reward of being popular with the guys? The gratification of bonding with other girls?

**A**fter more than three decades of feminist revolution—in a year when more women than men are applying to medical school, and women are entering the rabbinate in unprecedented numbers—we learn that many Jewish girls and young women still think their worth is defined by how they please men (or, in this case, 13-year-old boys).

Well, we ask here some feminist questions and some Jewish ones.

The feminist ones are about power and control. Who’s in charge here? Is it the girls, since they still have all their clothes

on and they are not the vulnerable ones this time? Or is it the guys, who—as our informants put it—get to choose which girls they’ll allow to gratify them? Therapists and sex educators wrestle with this conundrum too, as you’ll see.

At the other end of the spectrum, there seems to be an increased interest in being *shomer negia*—a term young people are using to describe themselves when they refrain from all touching with the opposite sex. The term has even entered the vocabulary of non-Orthodox teens as a way to calibrate sexual behavior. At the same time, we’re hearing some young teens at Orthodox schools and camps interpreting oral and anal sex to violate no precept against premarital sex, still remaining, “technically,” virgins. Brittany Spears meets halakha? Time to rethink a more realistic Jewish sex ethic?

A more widely applicable Jewish question is about the party celebrations that sometimes accompany bar and bat mitzvahs. Not to get into the tired discussion about over-the-top parties,

## Are the girls in control because they have their clothes on?

but...we need to start treating these young teens (13, 14) like the children they still are in many ways, though on the cusp of adulthood. Although this milestone signals the beginning of Jewish adulthood—with increased ritual responsibility, for example—it doesn’t mean adulthood in all ways. What kind of values are transmitted to the young celebrants? Adults aware of oral sex practices have a valuable opportunity to explore sexual values with teens in some very practical ways.

At those bat and bar mitzvah parties, with grownup women often dressed seductively and everyone in a party mood, young teens sense the sexual energy in the air. Some parties feature hired dancers in tight outfits cavorting seductively with each other and with both the kids and the adults. This combined with little oversight (grownups often in separate rooms) can be a setting for some sexual behaviors in the kids inspired by the adults.

Partly this behavior is just teens being teens. But it’s also a matter of Jewish parents and the Jewish community giving them opportunity and perhaps even some subtle encouragement to experiment sexually, aided and abetted by peer pressure. National Federation of Temple Youth director Andrew Davids told our reporter, about the *bnai mitzvah* experience: “We’re sending a message, ‘You’re gonna have a big party and then be an adult,’ and then we’re surprised when they do nothing but party and do what they perceive to be adult behavior.”

An indication of how casually teens view oral sex is that all the girls aged 13 to 17 Ilana Kramer interviewed for this article were willing to have their real names used. However, LILITH has decided to protect their privacy by using pseudonyms. The people you’ll meet in this report who are identified only by first name are Jewish teens whose names and home towns have been changed. But their ages and their words are exactly as reported.

—SUSAN WEIDMAN SCHNEIDER

# Teen Sex That's "No Big Deal"

BY ILANA KRAMER

The scene is a lavish bat mitzvah affair, replete with giant martini glasses and girls in slinky hipster dresses. The dolled-up bat mitzvah girl is discussing sex with her two pals. An older woman overhears and comes over to scold her. "Please," the girl retorts. "I've been giving blowjobs since I'm 12". Her best bud chimes in, "It's the only way to get guys to like you."

Ok, so this wasn't your daughter's bat mitzvah (sigh of relief). Or your niece's, or your own. It's an episode of HBO's *Sex and the City*. But instead of shrugging off this episode, titled "Hot Child in the City," as a tawdry exaggeration, maybe we need to ask why, on one of America's most widely watched TV shows, there is a depiction of a Jewish 13-year-old girl bragging about her adeptness at performing oral sex.

Barbara Victor, an educator with the Jewish Family Services in Montreal, says it in a nutshell: "Whether your kids are engaged in oral sex or not, it's something kids are talking about." And so were the more than two dozen teen girls and their teachers and counselors LILITH interviewed this fall. They made it clear that girls are performing oral sex on boys in significant numbers and that young teens have ample opportunity to do so at elaborate and largely unsupervised bar and bat mitzvah parties. Worse yet, blow jobs are now seen as "no big deal," simply part of the range of activities that many 12- and 13-year-old girls engage in casually as part of their social lives. Seventeen-year-old Sari, from Long Island, sums up my research well: "You come into middle school and you have no idea what it is and you leave middle school knowing."

## Just a 'Suburban Myth'?

In the recently released feature film "Thirteen," 13-year-old Tracy and her best friend Evie take out their chewing gum to perform oral sex on the two boys they are dating that night. And this past October, on an "Oprah!" episode entitled "The Double Lives of Teens," Michelle Burford, a writer for *O Magazine* who interviewed 50 teen girls and their mothers about the secret sex lives of teens, explained an American teen phenomenon dubbed rainbow parties: "All of the girls put on lipstick and each one puts her mouth around



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the penis of the gentleman or gentlemen who are there to receive favors and makes a mark in a different place on the penis, hence, the term rainbow."

Elissa, a 13-year-old from southern California, is in the eighth grade at a private school. Oral sex, she says, is "so common now, people don't even think of it as bad anymore. It's cool if you do it." She says girls she knows "give blow jobs" at house parties and dances and sometimes on school grounds as well. She reports that "some people have done it in the batting cage at their school, because no one goes near this area.")

Among Jewish teens, the opportunity presents itself repeatedly in non-school settings as well, and relatively early: at bar and bat mitzvah parties. It happens, we were told, outside the party, in a bathroom, or maybe even an open room with a pool table in it. There is a lot of making out and "freaking," today's word for bumping and grinding. The truly troubling element here is not what might in an earlier age have been termed necking or petting, but rather unilateral, ubiquitous girl-on-boy oral sex. Jen, 17, an eleventh-grader at a public school in Manhattan, says that "Oral sex happens at bar/bat mitzvahs all the time. It starts in seventh and eighth grade." This assertion is repeated by teens in private schools, public schools, Jewish day schools.

Baltimore-based sex educators Amy and Charles Miron, say that oral sex is known among some teens as "the bar mitzvah present." Robin Stein is the director of The Response Center, an agency that staffs medical clinics and other services for Chicago-area teens, about one-third of them Jewish. "I have been hearing for three years about sex on school buses and on the buses on the way to bar/bat mitzvah parties around Chicago — oral sex primarily," she says. "A reporter asked me do I have

a source for the bat mitzvah bus story and asked, "Is this just a suburban myth?" I said, "No, I cannot imagine it is all just a myth—we hear these stories so often."

Myra Greenberg Glassman of San Diego tells of chaperoning a trip for American Jewish high school students traveling through Eastern Europe. Greenberg, realizing that girls at the back of the bus had been involved in oral sex, asked them why they did it. The reply, "We were bored on the bus." The girls told Glassman oral sex was "no big deal."

Although parents say they feel confident about supervision at Jewish activities, we've had reports of oral sex on trips and at Jewish summer camps, as well as at those bar/bat mitzvah party buses. Daniel Kopf, 20, an NYU undergraduate who was a camper and then a counselor at Camp Ramah in Massachusetts, says "I learned about sex at Jewish camp." Kopf recalls that after Havdallah services, campers would go into the woods in pairs "to do sexual things." Although no interviewees would go on the record about this, we have heard similar reports from Orthodox camps. Jen, who has been a counselor at Camp Eisner in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, says, "I promise there's oral sex happening at the camps.... Every night after 10:30, kids go hook up with each other behind the cabins." Sari, 17, from Long Island, New York, reports that when she was a counselor, she heard that some of her campers, going into eighth grade, were regularly engaging in oral sex. "It's a new experience, but the kids haven't learned about what a big deal it is or about the STIs [sexually transmitted infections]," she adds. "They say that because they 'haven't gotten around a lot,' they don't have to worry about contracting STIs"

## Why Is It Happening?

**A**mong educators and counselors, explanations vary for why girls so willingly, and apparently casually, give boys blow jobs. Nora Gelperin, a Rutgers University sex educator created a workshop for teachers two years ago on "Oral Sex and Young Teens: The New Third Base?" because when she went into schools to talk about about pregnancy and contraception she kept hearing about oral sex. "At the back of the bus, in classrooms, in gyms when no one's around, all over school it's happening." Gelperin reports hearing stories "all the time" about seventh-grade girls giving "blow jobs" to tenth-grade boys in order to elevate their social status. Abigail Natenshon, a psychotherapist in Chicago's North Shore suburbs who treats children and young adults, concurs. Natenshon adds: "Though most girls would not admit they are desperate, many youngsters will do anything to assure peer acceptance. Girls do what boys expect." In this way, notes Gelperin, oral sex may be right in line with how we socialize girls. "We teach them to please others. It's about pleasing and caring for someone else's needs, though it is not necessarily in her best interest."

Laura Kaufman, executive director of the Jewish Women's Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago, also wonders about the ways in which adult women can offer more support. "I'm baffled that girls are so desperate to be accepted by peers, and by boys. They don't feel empowered to say, why am I doing

this? Do I really want this?"

Others, however, believe that there's a payoff here for girls, too. It's power. Montreal Gazette reporter Donna Nebenzahl, who interviewed teens in June for an article on oral sex, told LILITH, "Some girls say it's a power thing that they have. ... In order to give a blow job, you're in control of it, even though it's really about servicing the boy. For girls, there's a certain status, because your friends do it, you're gonna be cool too, you'll be part of the group, this is the line." Jen, the Manhattan eleventh-grader, agrees. "What girls get from it is reputation, popularity, and guys will stick around more. If you give head to Billy, he'll make you popular and then he'll tell more guys and if you give head to them, you'll get even more popular."

The fact that girls believe giving a blow job isn't sex also explains, in part, their willingness. Says Jen, "In seventh- and eighth-graders, they don't see oral sex as any different than groping or kissing." Part of this attitude, ironically enough, may come from the cultural importance of virginity. Pop star icons like virginity-booster Britney Spears send a disturbing

## Why aren't girls asking "Do I really want this?"

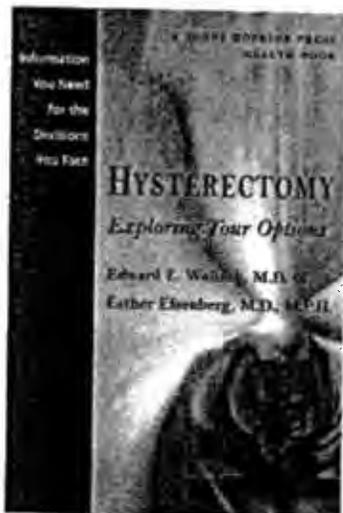
mixed message to teen girls. Britney says she's a virgin, explains Adrienne Verrilli, director of communications at SIECUS, "but also is very sexy, which sends the mixed message that you should be both, and creates a pedestal of what you should be to boys. It's complex." NYU Gender Studies professor Julian Carter calls oral sex in young teens "a creative response." She says, "Oral sex allows young teens to reach a compromise of peer approval and maintaining virgin status."

Carter also views the oral sex phenomenon as part of an adolescent power dynamic. "At 12 and 13 you have no control over money, freedom, anyway, so this may be a means of attaining power. It's precisely at this age of early adolescence that there's a drop-off in power; girls' sense of self-worth changes dramatically at this age, this is when they are finding out they have the less power within a patriarchal system and begin doing less well in school."

One thing is for certain, no matter why girls are giving boys blow jobs, they're not getting much in return. "Although girls say they do it, they don't say they actually like it," says Barbara Victor. And boys are reportedly not so obliging. Daniel Kopf confesses that "When I was 14 and first heard one of my friends went down on a girl, we were all like 'Ewwwww!' I think there's more stigma for guys going down on girls." Jen says, "The girl always does it because guys say it's gross but for a girl to do it it's cool. Also, it's not considered macho for a guy to do it. Girls also don't like to get it because they're insecure about their bodies, it's always girls doing it to guys."

But, some observers speculate that this very lack of mutuality may be what's appealing to girls. "There is a sense that women are denigrating themselves if they want to receive pleasure," says Julian Carter. Nora Gelperin points out that this fear of addressing pleasure affects the words used in teaching girls about sex. "In sex education, we don't talk about the

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## Some Thoughts for Adults Who Care About Teens

LILITH suggests that, for all the complex issues driving young teen girls to engage in oral sex with boys, there are steps adults can take to intervene, or at least to inform themselves.

■ Suggest that youth groups and schools bring in health practitioners to talk to middle schoolers about the fact that even these non-intercourse practices are both sexual and risky. In Jewish schools and youth programs, the focus can be on how strongly the tradition emphasizes that one must take good care of one's body; there is no mind-body split in Judaism. It's OK, and very "Jewish" to talk about health (But remember that scare tactics alone have little credibility.)

■ Be clear about mutual pleasure in sex. Jewish sources have lots to say here, including the Talmudic injunction that a man must pleasure his wife first. Teens need to hear that sex is neither about controlling nor servicing the "other."

■ In practical terms, parents can use young adult chaperones to be the heavies at bar and bat mitzvah parties. "I was just at a bar mitzvah last month," said Rabbi Joui Hessel of the Washington Hebrew Congregation. "The family hired two college-age kids to watch the kids, who walked around the party, in the bathrooms. I don't even think the kids noticed the chaperones were there because they were young adults."

■ Parents and camp counselors can meet before the summer season for discussions on sexual behavior and how to educate their campers. "We've entrusted an enormous amount of responsibility to young adult counselors without much training," Barbara Victor worries. "Parents are giving kids over to

16-year-old counselors for two months and those 16-year olds must be equipped to know what age-appropriate behavior is."

■ Put forward the idea to youth group leaders that sexual behaviors are appropriate topics for discussion in girls' groups.

■ The school nurse at Manhattan's Hunter High School told the New York Times this spring that she keeps boxes of mint-flavored condoms in her office for the students, and marks the box "for oral sex only." Is it farfetched to imagine that nurses at Jewish day schools and camps can be trained to talk to girls? Then the young teens considering this behavior have a chance not only to protect themselves but—importantly—to be reminded that, yes, oral sex is sex.

■ Check out some websites that address teen sexuality, often with frankness and tenderness too:

[gurl.com](http://gurl.com)

[iwannaknow.org](http://iwannaknow.org)

[jvibe.com/jvibrations](http://jvibe.com/jvibrations)

[kff.org](http://kff.org)

[MzVibe.com](http://MzVibe.com)

[noah-health.org/english/sexuality/sexuality.html](http://noah-health.org/english/sexuality/sexuality.html)

[scarleteen.com](http://scarleteen.com)

[sexetc.org](http://sexetc.org)

[SIECUS.org](http://SIECUS.org)

[teenwire.com](http://teenwire.com)

[themirous.com](http://themirous.com)

[youthembassy.com](http://youthembassy.com)

In these pages, LILITH opens a discussion on a disturbing phenomenon. We welcome your responses. LILITH, 250 W. 57th Street, Suite 2432, New York, NY 10107 or e-mail [Lilithmag@aol.com](mailto:Lilithmag@aol.com).

orgasm or clitoris. Some textbooks don't even have the clitoris shown in it. Instead, there's a focus on the fallopian tubes. Enough of the fallopian tubes. Girls have a right to be educated about the clitoris."

It may also be that oral sex is considered "safe." Ellen Kanter, a nurse-educator for the Family Life Education program at the Lake County Health Department in Illinois, works with low-income Latinas and African-Americans and educates them about sex and preventing pregnancy. Kanter calls what's going on among Jewish teens an "oral sex epidemic."

## What Girls Need Now

"I went to a PTA meeting three years ago at the high school here and somebody brought up oral sex and that it's going on at the bar mitzvah buses, and since that time, I've been keeping my ears open," said Gail Squires, a Jewish mother in Great Neck, New York.

But experts in this area say that most parents do not know what their children are doing when no one is supervising them.

Lilith's exploration of this admittedly upsetting subject has convinced us that kids today are not getting adequate guidance on sex. It's treated, as sex educator Gelperin put it, like a plumbing lesson. "But teens are telling us they want to talk about love, the feelings, the difficult issues, and how to ask someone out." When Myra Greenberg Glassman, who chaperoned the Jewish teen trip to Europe, tried to discuss the back-of-the-bus situation with parents, many insisted that their kids were not involved. Yet she was surprised to hear from her own teenage daughter how frequently oral sex was a subject of conversation among the bat mitzvah crowd. Parents need to get beyond their own denial and talk to their kids, says Barbara Victor, not only about sex, but about its implications. "We have to begin to talk about what it means to be sexual. This is the piece that sex ed programs are lacking," she says.

Planned Parenthood educator Heather Samel, of Nassau County, Long Island, explains precisely where schools many be going wrong. Many schools, Samel says, still use fear-based tactics which promote abstinence-only education. "Abstinence-

only programs exaggerate consequences, saying you will die because of HIV. While it may delay the onset of sex, these programs are not talking oral and anal sex, so kids think, ok, I'm not gonna get pregnant or HIV from oral or anal sex. They don't think of oral and anal sex as sex even though that is what it is. And since the subject of oral sex is not discussed in schools, many early teens are unaware of STIs such as herpes, chlamydia, and gonorrhea, of which Samel reports they get many cases.

Some Jewish educators are now thinking about sex ed in a new light. Rabbi Andrew Davids, director of the Reform Movement's National Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY), and his staff have created two single-sex groups, Nashim (females) and G'varim (males), focusing on gender identity. Ultimately, Davids says, "The Jewish response to teen sexuality is not just to say no, but we want them to be responsible for it, we want them to own the choices they make, that what they do is appropriate for them."

Long-time sex educators Amy and Charles Miron are the authors of the book *How to Talk with Teens About Love, Relationships, and S-E-X*. They also run a sexuality retreat for the ninth-graders at Washington Hebrew Congregation, in Washington, D.C., in which they teach everything from Jewish values and the holiness of the body to the proper use of dental dams and what to expect at your first gynecological appointment ["Jewish Sex-Ed," Winter 2002-03]. The Mirones say that "The Jewish community as a whole is not responsive to this [oral sex among teens]. They tend to focus on reproduction, but they don't get into the exchange of values, such as when is the right time for sex and with the right person." In fact, claims Amy Miron, "The more sexual information you give a kid, the later their sexual debut and the more conservative they are."

It's time to shift some of the focus away from grades and to realize that middle school is a crucial time when girls are forging attitudes—and having experiences—of which their parents are often totally unaware. And it's time that teen girls had an opportunity to discuss and maybe even refuse these intimate behaviors. ■

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## Annotated Bibliography

Adelman, Penina et al. The J Girl's Guide: The Young Jewish Woman's Handbook for Coming of Age. Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005.

*This is a book designed for Jewish teenagers as they go through various physical and emotional changes and developments in their lives. Adelman et al connect psychological issues with Jewish values and activities.*

Adler, Rachel. Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1998.

*Adler explains the importance of men and women working together to recreate Judaism as equals. She discusses the difference between language of sexuality and language about sexuality, and the danger in using only language about sexuality in schools.*

Covey, Stephen. The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. New York: Free Press, 2004.

*Covey presents seven habits for people to live moral, ethical lives. The habits help people to focus on their own values and motivations, and to communicate and learn from others.*

Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty (<http://www.campaignforrealbeauty.com>)

*An excellent online resource promoting self esteem in girls that includes interactive results on Dove's International Beauty surveys, short activities, quizzes, journals, and ideas for activities that moms and daughters can do together.*

Freeman, Lauren. Teaching Hot Topics. New Jersey: ARE Publications, 2003.

*Freeman's resource book on abortion, politics, sex, drugs, etc. The book boasts a wealth of text resources (from biblical to modern) and activity ideas. Each "hot topic" is explored through debate, so questions are answered from both sides ("on the one hand....and on the other hand"), allowing students to make their own choices.*

Freeman, Susan. Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Arts Activities. New Jersey: ARE Publications, 1999.

*Although geared toward a younger audience than high school, this book offers a wide variety of sources and activities surrounding various Jewish values, including reflection questions on texts.*

Grishaver, Joel Lurie. The Content of their Character: Shmirat ha-Lashon The Ethics of Language. Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 2000.

*Torah Aura produces a number of "instant lessons" that provide a diverse array of Jewish sources and short activities surrounding the texts. While The Content of their Character is geared toward a younger age, texts and activities may be adapted for an older audience.*

Josephs, Susan. "Jewish Women & Food: Eat, Eat, Diet, Diet" *Lilith*, Summer, 2005, pp. 8-15.

*Lilith, a feminist Jewish magazine, explores issues that are important to Jewish women. In this article, Josephs writes a mock journal of a teenage girl as she begins to be aware of her eating habits and the expectations placed on her as a Jewish woman.*

Khazzoom, Loolwa. The Flying Camel: Essays on Identity by Women of North African and Middle Eastern Jewish Heritage. Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2003.

*Khazzoom and others write of their experiences as Sephardi and Mizrahi women in a society that all-too-often denigrates them and their culture. Issues include identity (feeling stuck between Arabs, Jews, Israelis, and Americans and not knowing where one “belongs”), beauty, intellectualism, war, and ritual.*

Kramer, Ilana. “They Say ‘It’s Not Sex’” and “Teen Sex That’s ‘No Big Deal.’” *Lilith*, Winter 2003, pp. 14-19.

*This is one of the first articles that “blew the cover” on the abundance of oral sex among teenagers. Kramer interviews teenagers, their parents, psychologists and youth workers in this in-depth look at why more and more girls are performing oral sex at such young ages.*

Neumark-Sztainer, Dianna. “I’m, Like, SO Fat!” New York: The Guilford Press, 2005.

*Neumark-Sztainer offers a variety of suggestion on how to help teens make healthy choices in a world that is obsessed with weight. Neumark-Sztainer writes in an accessible style, and provides a number of lists and charts about helping teenagers make good choices regarding food, exercise, and body image.*

Newhouse, Alana. “The JAP: Reclaim Her or Reject Her?” *Lilith*, Summer 2005, 28-31.

*This Lilith article explores the stereotype of the JAP, and the sordid history of the term. Newhouse discusses the idea of embracing some JAP qualities, as she struggles to define herself as a modern Jewish woman.*

Olitzky, Kerry M. Body Ethics: Hooking Up. Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 2006.

Olitzky, Kerry M. and Grishaver, Joel Lurie. Body Ethics: Drugs and Alcohol. Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 2002.

Olitzky, Kerry M. and Grishaver, Joel Lurie. Body Ethics: Modesty. Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 2001.

*These Torah Aura instant lessons are geared toward high school students, and give the teacher an assortment of Jewish texts relevant to the topic of each lesson. Lessons come with short activities, questions for discussion, and some case studies.*

URJ Department of Family Concerns. Kedushat HaGuf: The Sanctity of the Body. New York: Union for Reform Judaism Press, 2006.

*This curriculum guide from the Union for Reform Judaism explores issues of eating disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, and body-harming habits (cutting, etc.) and offers model lessons for high school students and informational pages for adults.*

Wiseman, Rosalind. Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends & Other Realities of Adolescence. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2002.

*Wiseman presents her research and subsequent work with teenagers in this accessible book about cliques, gossip, high school, relationships, and more. Wiseman offers advice based around what teenagers have reported to her in workshops she has administered around the country. Readers are provided with tips on how to start a conversation with your teenager about a difficult subject, and warnings about “traps” that parents often fall into when discussing these issues.*

Yedwab, Paul. Sex in the Texts (Curriculum and Teacher’s Guide). New York: UAHC Press, 2001.

*Yedwab presents a collection of texts from the Torah and the rabbis about sex and love. Texts are accompanied by knowledge-level questions and some secondary sources.*

<http://wilderdom.com/games/descriptions/HumanKnot.html>, 1/31/2007

*This site offers a wide variety of classroom games and team-building exercises. Many can be used as ways to build a community among the students.*

<http://www.campaignforrealbeauty.com/DoveBeyondStereotypesWhitePaper.pdf>,  
12.2.2006.

*This is the central research paper of the Dove Campaign for Beauty. It includes a brief summary and implication of findings, along with quick facts of how women around the world feel about beauty and its affect on their personal identity.*

<http://urj.org/yoffie/biennialsermon05/>, 10.28.2006

*In his 2005 Biennial speech, URJ President Rabbi Eric Yoffie made the call for more awareness around teen sexuality. This sermon is worth reading to know and understand that Reform movement’s stand on the issue of teen development and sex.*