

The background is a rich, textured painting. It features two women in traditional Jewish clothing, including tall, pointed hats and patterned dresses, dancing or embracing. The scene is set against a deep purple and blue night sky filled with stars and a large, glowing spiral galaxy. The overall mood is spiritual and celebratory.

*Hearing Our Voices:  
Mothers and Daughters  
Exploring Jewish Womanhood*

*Rebekah Stern  
May 11, 2009*

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## **Rationale: Why Teach Jewish Womanhood?**

Something dramatic happens to girls in early adolescence. Just as planes and ships disappear mysteriously into the Bermuda Triangle, so do the selves of girls go down in droves. They crash and burn in a social and developmental Bermuda Triangle. In early adolescence, studies show that girls...lose their resiliency and optimism and become less curious and less inclined to take risks. They lose their assertive, energetic, and “tomboyish” personalities and become more deferential, self-critical and depressed. (Pipher, 1994, p. 4)

Mary Pipher, in her bestselling book Reviving Ophelia describes the sudden and painful loss of self that many of today’s American girls experience as they enter adolescence. It is as if the lenses through which they viewed the world during all of their childhood years are suddenly replaced with fun-house glasses. These new lenses distort not only their view of the world, which they experience as suddenly being hostile and unpredictable, but also their view of themselves. As they adopt what Dr. Pipher refers to as the “junk values of mass culture” (ibid, p. 9), adolescent girls often become abruptly and remarkably critical of themselves and of their mothers. Precisely at this time when they are most desperately searching for honest and unconditional guidance and support, they turn away from their primary adult female role models and caretakers and instead turn toward the fickle and self-interested consumerist culture of American society.

Not surprisingly, this can also be a deeply sorrowful time for the mothers of these stormy adolescent girls. Dr. Pipher writes, “Parents experience an enormous sense of loss when their girls enter this new land...In place of their lively, affectionate daughters they have changelings—new girls who are sadder, angrier and more complicated. Everyone is grieving” (ibid, p. 10). In addition to the sense of loss that Dr. Pipher describes, for many mothers, caring for an adolescent girl painfully probes the unhealed wounds from their own adolescent experiences. Adult women still struggle with many of the unanswered questions first raised in adolescence, “How important are looks and popularity? How do I care for myself and not be selfish? How can I be honest and still be loved? How can I achieve and not threaten others? How can I be sexual and not a sex object? How can I be responsive but not responsible for everyone?” (ibid, p. 12) As their adolescent daughters grapple with these questions for the first time, many mothers are forced to reexamine the ways that their life choices have answered these questions. And in this new light, some mothers find that they are dissatisfied with the answers they discover.

Judaism offers some answers to these questions, and even poses other questions that can lead to new insights into the challenges of womanhood in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. Since gender is such an important piece of a person’s identity, locating Jewish learning at the intersection of both gender and religious identities renders it highly significant for learners. Accordingly, this curriculum guide will situate itself precisely in that fertile and exciting meeting point. This course will help adolescent girls navigate the treacherous waters of early adolescence while simultaneously providing support to the mothers of

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these girls to not only stay connected to their children during this challenging time, but to further deepen their *own* understanding of what it means to be an American woman in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For both the adolescent girls and their mothers participating in this learning, this help will come equally from Jewish text and ritual and from the experience of participation in a safe and supportive community of Jewish women. One two-pronged goal of this course is that both adult and adolescent women will find themselves newly at home both in their gender and religious identities.

This women-centered perspective on Judaism has important implications for Judaism itself. As a system of values and beliefs, Judaism is strengthened when Jews engage in careful examination and even criticism of the system itself. Judaism is at risk of being discarded as irrelevant when it is regarded as a monolith, a solid wall with no doors to let new ideas in, and no windows to let Judaism's ancient wisdom pour forth into the modern world. But when new generations of Jews approach Judaism from a position of respectful curiosity, and when they are motivated by a thirst for understanding and knowledge which grows from their own life experience, then Judaism becomes a nourishing well of *mayyim chayyim*, of living water, that refreshes generation after generation. As much as this curriculum aims to engage participants in important learning about womanhood, it also aims to pique the curiosity of Jewish women and adolescent girls so that they will be motivated by that thirst for knowledge and understanding to engage deeply with Judaism. Through this process, Judaism itself will be given new life.

Further, in connecting the challenging experience of contemporary womanhood with Judaism, the Jewish identities of the women and adolescent girls who participate in this process will be expanded. Through the extraordinary work of the first generation of Jewish feminists in the last several decades, progressive Jewish women have achieved increasing success in finding new ways to relate to the traditionally androcentric world of Jewish text and ritual. But for many Jewish women it continues to be challenging to find personal meaning in the concept of covenant, a home in ritual, and a connection with God. This curriculum will offer Jewish women and adolescent girls new opportunities to discover the reflections of their own stories in the ancient text and traditions of Judaism. Upon completion of the course, participants will be equipped with a sense of ownership and belonging in their Judaism. This strengthened grounding in their Jewish identities will empower them to continue the lifelong process of engagement with Judaism.

The content of this course will be centered in Torah texts. Torah is the cornerstone of all Jewish text and tradition, and so is a natural Jewish starting point for women searching for answers to questions about their gender identities. While the course will primarily engage with Torah texts, this curriculum guide will also offer participants an opportunity to discover and rediscover some of the vast treasure of ancient and contemporary Jewish ritual, prayer, and theology. Participants will journey with Jewish women through Biblical, ancient, medieval, and more recent history as they piece together both old and new understandings of a Jewish understanding of womanhood. These adult and adolescent Jewish women will explore the intersection of their Jewish and female identities through thoughtful conversation, visual art, music, food, and literature. They will create new personal and communal rituals that synthesize their learning. They will find support for their core beliefs in the essential human truths of Judaism, and as a result of this discovery and in the company of other women and girls

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their age experiencing similar challenges, they will find renewed strength to resist America's "junk values of mass culture" (ibid, p. 9).

This content will flow out of and through the following 7 enduring understandings:

- As exemplified in Jewish text, the challenges of womanhood at every stage of life demand patience, compassion, and constant self-reflection.
- The Jewish feminist value of equal access to both God and to Jewish tradition rejects the androcentric signs and language of covenant in the Biblical text.
- The value of *kedushah* (holiness), as described in Jewish text, demands that women care for their bodies and their communities.
- Jewish feminism calls on today's Jewish women to question the limits to women's power and involvement in ancient and contemporary, Jewish and secular societies.
- The masculine language and imagery used to describe God in Jewish text can prevent Jewish women from having nuanced and healthy relationships with God.
- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.
- Judaism can guide Jewish women as they cope with the challenges of womanhood in contemporary western society.

It is a modern American dream to find a single simple solution to solve a deep and complex problem. This curriculum guide will certainly not magically transport adolescent girls into a confident and competent womanhood, nor will it finally heal the painful and still-open wounds that so many adult women still nurse from their own adolescence. It will not single-handedly create a relationship of love, trust, and mutual respect between fun-house glasses-wearing adolescent girls and their baffled mothers. But it will provide a solid mooring and a safe harbor in time-tested Jewish values for girls navigating the rough seas of contemporary American adolescence. And it will offer comfort and some Jewish suggestions for beginning to walk a path toward healing for the adult women whose proximity to and abiding love for these stormy girls causes such pain. And as adolescent girls begin to navigate the challenges of womanhood side-by-side with their mothers in the context of a safe and supportive Jewish community, the relationships between them will certainly be deepened.

## **Enduring Understandings: The Big Ideas in this Curriculum**

- At every stage of life, the challenges of womanhood, as exemplified in Jewish text, demand patience, compassion, and constant self-reflection.
- The Jewish feminist value of equal access to both God and to Jewish tradition rejects the androcentric signs and language of covenant in the Biblical text.
- The value of *kedushah* (holiness), as described in Jewish text, demands that women care for their bodies and their communities.
- Jewish feminism calls on today's Jewish women to question the limits to women's power and involvement in ancient and contemporary, Jewish and secular society.
- The masculine language and imagery used to describe God in Jewish text can prevent Jewish women from having nuanced and healthy relationships with God.
- Jewish feminism can support Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.
- Judaism can support Jewish women as they cope with the challenges of womanhood in contemporary western society.

## **Curriculum Goals: This course aims to...**

- Provide a safe environment for both adult and adolescent Jewish women to grapple with their gender and religious identities.
- Inspire women to discover existing and to regularly recreate new signs and understandings of covenant.
- Encourage women to embrace the Jewish value of *kedushah* (holiness), and in so doing, to face the tension between this Jewish value and their own negative self-talk.
- Help women create new opportunities for growth in their relationships with God.
- Persuade women to think Jewishly when faced with the pressures that the "junk values" of contemporary American consumerist culture place on women.
- Support women as they encounter Judaism through the lens of Jewish feminism.

## **Dear Educator: A Guide for the Guide**

Shalom! In the pages that follow you will find the road map that will guide you and your learners on a journey through the often-rocky territory of Jewish womanhood. But before you start using the map, I think you will find some guidance in this guide to the guide!

### ***Your Role***

As the leader on this journey, it is your job to help set the tone for a safe environment for your learners. In this safe environment your learners should feel comfortable asking difficult or challenging questions and encountering their own very real pain. You should be prepared that some of your participants may share—either with you individually or with the full group—their experiences with self-destructive behavior such as an eating disorder, or with being the victims of abuse. I recommend that you gather a list of references for specialized support services, for example therapists or groups, to have available in the event that any of these shared experiences are ongoing or took place recently.

There will also be sessions during this course when discussions and/or activities will take place in two groups, dividing the adult and adolescent women. For this reason, I recommend that this course be facilitated by two educators. If this is not possible, then it may be necessary either to bring in a second facilitator on certain days or to adapt the discussions/activities.

### ***A Note on Language***

Throughout this curriculum guide I use the words “mother” and “daughter” to refer to the adult and adolescent participants’ relationships. However, when you publicize this course, I recommend that you use language that is sensitive to non-standard family arrangements. Adolescent women are encouraged to participate with their “mother figures” if they come from a home with two mothers, a step-mother, a foster mother, or a home in which they are primarily cared for by another female relative (e.g. grandmother, aunt, etc.), etc. If you have participants in your group of learners whose relationship is not best described using the words “mother” and “daughter,” please adjust the language in this guide to be sensitive to these participants. This of course implies that you should know the relationships between your adolescent and adult participants before beginning the program.

### ***Learners***

This program should be open to all Jewish adolescent women and their Jewish adult primary female caretakers. This unfortunately will exclude adolescent women who are the daughters of gay couples (but, as noted above, does not exclude daughters of lesbian couples). I recommend that the adult participants be Jewish, but if the mother is not Jewish and is deeply rooted in her Jewish community, I leave this decision to your discretion as an educator. It should be noted, however, that the program assumes an

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identification with Jewish religious values and theology. This is an inappropriate forum for women to be wrestling with Jewish/non-Jewish issues.

In writing this curriculum guide I imagined a group of approximately 15 pairs of mothers and daughters. However, many if not all of the activities will run smoothly with significantly fewer or significantly more participants. If your group size is much bigger, you may want to further subdivide your group for some of the more intensive discussions. This will allow more participants an opportunity to contribute without feeling overwhelmed by the size of the group.

## *Settings*

In writing this curriculum guide I imagined that the program would take place in a synagogue community. However, there is no reason that it could not be easily adapted to an extra-curricular day school setting or a Jewish communal organization. Please feel free to adapt it to any setting you feel would be appropriate!

## *Navigating this Curriculum Guide*

As you make your way through each unit, you will notice references to the resources that you will need in order guide your participants through their learning. These resources are called *appendices*, and are indexed in alphabetical order at the end of each unit. If you are interested in doing further reading or research, you will find that many of the sources that I found to be the most useful in creating this guide are annotated in the bibliography at the very end of the guide.

## *Logistics*

- There are 18 sessions in this guide. 9 of them are 3 hours in duration and are called “full sessions.” 9 of them are 1 hour in duration and are called “half sessions.” Ideally each full session will be held on or near Rosh Chodesh each month, and each half session will be held 2 weeks after Rosh Chodesh. In this way the group should meet approximately every 2 weeks.
- During every full session I recommend that you allow for a 20-minute break. You may want to ask participants to take turns bringing a snack for the whole group to share during these breaks.
- If your group is small enough, and if it feels appropriate for your group dynamic, you may consider holding some, most, or all full sessions in the home of one of the participants (and in your home, if you feel comfortable). This may help with group bonding. Even though the activities are not specified, you may also wish to include some Rosh Chodesh ritual(s) in every full session.
- Every session should begin and end with the group’s opening and closing ritual. For a description of the full session opening ritual, see page 38. For a description of the half session opening ritual, see page 17. The group’s closing ritual will be decided on by the group during the first session see page 16.
- In each of the 4 units in this guide you will find 1 “scripted” lesson. These lessons specify timing for each activity as well as the materials needed for the lesson. The unscripted lessons do not have suggested timing to allow you more freedom in addressing the needs of the group in each lesson. During these lessons I recommend that you plan extra time for questions and discussion as participants



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engage with the material in each lesson. You may wish to have participants reflect in their journals during some of this extra processing time.

- In some lessons you may find that there are more suggested questions than your group has time to discuss. I recommend that you decide in advance which question(s) you will cut from your discussion if you run short on time.

## ***Planning Ahead for Special Events***

The following sessions require special resources, as indicated:

- Unit 1
  - Lesson 1: You will need to prepare a Rosh Chodesh ritual for your group before the lesson.
- Unit 2
  - Lesson 4: You will need to invite a panel to participate in this session
  - Lesson 5: I recommend that the clergy who will lead the services that participants will help to lead, come to this session
- Unit 3
  - Lesson 1: I recommend that you invite an “expert” on jewelry-making to come to this session to teach some basics of jewelry-making to participants.
  - Lesson 2: You will need to invite 2 community experts in women’s body image concerns (e.g. psychologists or social workers) to help facilitate this lesson.
  - Lesson 4: Participants should invite guests to participate in this session, and you may decide to make this session even more memorable by renting a performance space.
- Unit 4
  - Lesson 1: You will need to rent the short documentary film Women of the Wall.
  - Lesson 2: You will need to invite 3 senior Jewish women from the community to serve on a panel, or some combination of seniors and local female rabbis.
  - Lesson 5: You will need to order tallit-making supplies in advance and either learn how to make tallitot yourself, or invite an “expert” to help facilitate this session.

I hope that your journey through Jewish womanhood proves to be as fun and educational for you and your learners as it has been for me!

Happy exploring,

Rebekah Stern  
May 11, 2009

## In Other Words: Charge From An Inspiring Sermon

*Following is an excerpt from a sermon that was delivered by a 4<sup>th</sup>-year rabbinical student at the Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009. I include these inspiring words here as a charge to you and your learners.*

Sara Mason-Barkin  
4<sup>th</sup> Year Sermon  
Delivered at HUC-LA April 23, 2009  
*Parashat Tazria-Metzora*

### Today's Reform Jewish Feminist

...Generations of feminists have accomplished many of the goals that they set out to achieve. But the sexism still in our midst is sneakier. It appears in offhand comments and unchallenged societal trends. It is insinuated by the way we respond to one another's clothing and hard work. It creeps up in the way that people steal power from others with just a word, a glance, or a touch. Today's Reform Jewish Feminist takes on the work of addressing the inequalities that lie *beneath* the surface of equal rights.

Years ago, while studying at Hebrew Union College, Rabbi Laura Geller heard a professor explain that, "There is no important moment in the lifetime of a Jew for which there is no blessing." On reflection she wrote, "Suddenly I realized that this was not true. There had been important moments in my life for which there was no blessing. One such moment was when I ... first got my period."<sup>1</sup> While Jews praise God for nearly every other important life moment, menstruation is hardly seen as a blessing.

*Parashat Metzora*, the second of this week's *parshiot* teaches,

When a woman has a discharge,  
her discharge being blood from her body,  
she shall remain in *niddah*, her menstrual separation  
seven days; whoever touches her, *yit'mah ad ha-erev*,  
shall be impure until evening."

In the Torah, nearly everyone is subject to *tum'ah*, ritual impurity, at one time or another. However, beginning in the rabbinic period the *tu'mah* of the menstruating woman morphs from an ordinary condition, to an ugly, fearful thing: one used to degrade women and their bodily functions.

*Mishnah Shabbat* cites failure to observe *niddah* as a reason why women die in childbirth. In *Masechet Shabbat* 152a, women are called 'a pot of filth, whose mouth is full of blood.' The height of this paranoia is a medieval work called *Baraita d'Niddah*. In it, the author claims that just the breath of a menstruating woman can cause a sage to forget all of his learning.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Reprinted in *Engendering Judaism*, pg 61

<sup>2</sup> Jonah Steinberg, "From 'A Pot of Filth' to 'A Hedge of Roses' (and Back)"

Texts like these teach that women's bodies have the power to harm. That to be female is to suffer an affliction. Yet, in *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, Rabbi Elyse Goldstein reframes this power, suggesting that menstrual blood is "women's covenantal blood—just as the blood of *b'rit milah* is men's."<sup>3</sup> To Goldstein, to experience life as a female is not an affliction. To bleed and to birth and to have hips and breasts and full lips does not diminish connection to holiness, for women's bodies carry a sign of the covenant.

Today's Reform Jewish feminist follows Rabbi Geller's lead, articulating blessings where before none were spoken. Each month, Rabbi Elyse Goldstein praises God when she gets her period, saying "*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech HaOlam, Sheasani Ishah.*" *Blessed are you God, who has made me a woman.* Without fanfare, without a great production, Rabbi Goldstein uses these traditional words to acknowledge and bless.

The Reform Jewish Feminist today takes the *niddah* out of hiding, and shows the world that she has power, too.<sup>4</sup> Yet even the blessing structure that Rabbi Goldstein uses, *Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech HaOlam* originates in a patriarchal society. While most liberal circles acknowledge that God has no gender, when we *talk* about God, the words that roll off of our tongue invoke typically male imagery. We already referred to God as *melech ha-olam* 14 times today in *Nisim b'chol yom* alone. It is a problem that Jews acknowledge the Divine Power as male, over and over again.

As Dr. Adler teaches us, using metaphor to describe God helps us understand what is ultimately beyond our comprehension. However, when one metaphor drowns out the others, it is difficult to understand God in a multi-layered, complex way. It is a problem that the liturgical use of *shechinah* is met with eye rolls and *ein ha-hahayim* still feels strange on the tongue.

It is not enough to simply *understand* multiple metaphors, we need to *use* multiple metaphors as well. Using feminine God language gives us equal opportunity to imagine God in feminine terms. But metaphor isn't simply about imagining God to be male or female. Metaphor helps us expand our sense of God's character beyond human constructs of gender. Imagine God as a *tzur*, a rock. Strong and tough, like "the Rock," or even "Rocky." The word '*tzur*' conjures up typically male characteristics. Now, imagine God as mother, rocking her child to sleep at night. Tender and gentle, typically female. Now consider the metaphor presented in *Parashat Ha'azinu*, calling God *tzur y'ladetcha*. Everett Fox translates *tzur y'ladetcha* as "the rock that birthed you."

If God can be a steadfast rock and a mother giving birth, then we, too, can be both gentle and firm. Being who I am, looking how I look, and discovering my own strength has taught me that being a Reform Jewish Feminist today does not mean sitting back and enjoying a superficial equality: Because to be a feminist is to be in constant motion.

To be a Reform Jewish Feminist today means refusing to be satisfied. It means holding the world and those of us who live here to the highest possible standard.

Today's Reform Jewish feminist redefines what it means to be strong.

Today's Reform Jewish feminist challenges our current notion of power.

Today's Reform Jewish Feminist holds a vision for the future, for the time when:

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<sup>3</sup> TAWC 674-5

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

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One can be powerful, and still listen quietly.

For the time when one can be strong presence, and still be gentle.

When one can be professional, but not distant: competent, yet still be vulnerable.

This Reform Jewish Feminist feels as powerful in a skirt as she does in her power suit.

Today's Reform Jewish Feminist can choose a profession based on what he knows he does well, not the social expectation.

This Reform Jewish Feminist is made in God's image: The fullness of God's image, not only the image that was once typical for one gender or another.

The work is not impossible, but the work is not yet finished either. Of us, it requires the commitment to push ourselves past the point of discomfort. It requires the courage to tackle issues of sexism that are lurking beneath the surface in our schools, camps, agencies, and synagogues. It requires the forethought to say *brucha at ya ha-shechina* as proudly, and intentionally as we say an alternative *Aleinu*.

This work requires the mindfulness to not shudder or crack jokes or demean what it means to have a "time of the month." It requires the audacity to break the stereotypes that are typical for us, and our genders. As Reform Jewish Feminists today, we will not be defined by our suits, or our bodies. As today's Reform Jewish Feminists we cannot rest, cannot wait and cannot desist until we all see one another as *who we are*:

strong though we are sweet,

sweet though we are smart,

and smart no matter what we look like.

For we are all stakeholders in this covenant, bound and blessed by the *brit* we share, the *mitzvot* we keep, and the words of *Torah* that we will keep turning and turning together, until we can all see ourselves within them.

## Unit 1: Finding Women's Voices

### **Curriculum Understandings**

- As exemplified in Jewish text, the challenges of womanhood at every stage of life demand patience, compassion, and constant self-reflection.
- The Jewish feminist value of equal access to both God and to Jewish tradition rejects the androcentric signs and language of covenant in the Biblical text.
- The value of *kedushah* (holiness), as described in Jewish text, demands that women care for their bodies and their communities.
- Jewish feminism calls on today's Jewish women to question the limits to women's power and involvement in ancient and contemporary, Jewish and secular societies.
- The masculine language and imagery used to describe God in Jewish text can prevent Jewish women from having nuanced and healthy relationships with God.
- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.
- Judaism can guide Jewish women as they cope with the challenges of womanhood in contemporary western society.

### **Unit Understandings**

- As exemplified in Jewish text, the challenges of womanhood at every stage of life demand patience, compassion, and constant self-reflection.
- The value of *kedushah* (holiness), as described in Jewish text, demands that women care for their bodies and their communities.
- Jewish feminism calls on today's Jewish women to question the limits to women's power and involvement in ancient and contemporary, Jewish and secular societies.
- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.
- Judaism can guide Jewish women as they cope with the challenges of womanhood in contemporary western society.

### **Essential Questions for this Unit**

- What does it mean to be a woman?
- How does Judaism inform my understanding of what it means to be a woman?
- What is challenging about being a woman?
- What is rewarding about being a woman?
- How does my womanhood impact the way I relate to others?
- How are women powerful?

### **Unit Assessments**

- Anonymous expression of feelings about menstruation
- Performance of a Rosh Chodesh ritual
- Meeting a Matriarch interview
- Blessing for women for Erev Shabbat
- Written answers to *Eyshet Chayil* text study

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- Collage of the modern secular understanding of the good woman
- Participants' own images of the good woman

***Memorable Moments***

- Participation in Rosh Chodesh ritual
- Seeing the roles, attributes, and skills of good women in their mother/daughter

## Lesson One: Full Session

### ***Enduring Understandings: Focus for this Lesson***

- As exemplified in Jewish text, the challenges of womanhood at every stage of life demand patience, compassion, and constant self-reflection.
- The value of *kedushah* (holiness), as described in Jewish text, demands that women care for their bodies and their communities.
- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.
- Judaism can guide Jewish women as they cope with the challenges of womanhood in contemporary western society.

### ***Essential Questions: Focus for this Lesson***

- What does it mean to be a woman?
- How does Judaism inform my understanding of what it means to be a woman?
- What is challenging about being a woman?
- What is rewarding about being a woman?

### ***Objectives: By the end of this lesson, learners should be able to...***

- Compare and contrast Rosh Chodesh rituals as described in biblical, rabbinic, and modern texts.
- Compare modern stances toward menstruation with historical and modern understandings of Rosh Chodesh.
- Evaluate their own stances toward menstruation in the context of contemporary advertising and ancient ritual.
- Perform a group Rosh Chodesh ritual designed by the educator(s).
- Select a blessing to be used to close every session.

### ***Core Activities for this Lesson***

- Because this is the first session, it should begin with some kind of introductory activity to help participants get to know each other a little. The educator(s) may want to ask participants to share their reasons for choosing to participate in this group, as well as what they hope to gain from participation in the group.
- Following introductions, the educator(s) should introduce the words *Rosh* and *Chodesh* and ask participants what they know about Rosh Chodesh.
- Mothers and daughters should work together to explore a selection of information from different sources about Rosh Chodesh. **Appendix A: a selection of references and web links for this inquiry, including Biblical citations, rabbinic citations, and modern writings about Rosh Chodesh rituals.** As women explore the information, they should keep in mind the following questions:
  - According to this source, what rituals mark Rosh Chodesh?
  - How does this source characterize or represent women?
  - What does this source say about the connection between women and Rosh Chodesh?

## *Unit 1: Finding Women's Voices*

- Following the inquiry, the educator(s) should gather the full group together and briefly introduce the connection between women's monthly menstrual cycles and the moon and Rosh Chodesh. After this connection is introduced, the educator(s) should divide the participants into 2 groups—adolescent women and adult women. Each group should examine a number of TV and/or print ads (**Appendix B**) for “feminine hygiene” products. After exploring these advertisements, each group should discuss the way that the ads depict menstruation. The adult women's group should also discuss how they perceive the depiction of menstruation to have changed over the course of their lifetimes. Finally, each woman in each group should be given a note card on which to anonymously write a few sentences about how they feel about their own monthly cycle.
- The educator(s) should gather the full group together in a circle and begin by shuffling the note cards from the previous activity and handing one note card to each woman in the circle to read. The educator(s) will finish the reading with a couple of quotes from the book Cunt: A Declaration of Independence (**Appendix C**).
- Following snack and a break, the educator(s) will lead participants through a Rosh Chodesh ritual that they have planned prior to the session, making use of the resources that the participants will have explored in the earlier inquiry (**Appendix A**). When planning this ritual, the educator(s) should especially keep in mind the number of participants, the background of participants, and that this is the first session of a year-long curriculum and so will in some ways set the tone for the rest of the year. In planning this ritual, the educator(s) may find the service in Marcia Falk's book and on the Hillel website (“Opening and Closing Ceremonies for Rosh Chodesh”) to be particularly useful. (See the end of **Appendix A**).
- The educator(s) will finish the ritual and close the session by offering 3-4 closing blessings (**Appendix D: some suggested blessings**). As participants leave the room, they should pass printed copies of these blessings and indicate (by tally) which blessing they would like to use as a closing blessing for all future sessions.



## Lesson Two: Half Session (Scripted Lesson)

### ***Enduring Understandings: Focus for this Lesson***

- As exemplified in Jewish text, the challenges of womanhood at every stage of life demand patience, compassion, and constant self-reflection.
- Jewish feminism calls on today's Jewish women to question the limits to women's power and involvement in ancient and contemporary, Jewish and secular societies.
- The value of *kedushah* (holiness), as described in Jewish text, demands that women care for their bodies and their communities.
- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.
- Judaism can guide Jewish women as they cope with the challenges of womanhood in contemporary western society.

### ***Essential Questions: Focus for this Lesson***

- What does it mean to be a woman?
- How does Judaism inform my understanding of what it means to be a woman?
- What is challenging about being a woman?
- What is rewarding about being a woman?
- How does my womanhood impact the way I relate to others?
- How are women powerful?

### ***Objectives: By the end of this lesson, learners should be able to...***

- Recall the names and some identifying actions of the matriarchs Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah.
- Recognize the traditional blessing for daughters for Erev Shabbat.
- Evaluate the leadership/caretaking qualities of the matriarchs.
- Empathize with the challenges of motherhood/family caretaking.
- Create a blessing for women for Erev Shabbat.

### ***Time Table***

0-10 Minutes	Opening Ritual & Set Induction
10-15 Minutes	Introducing The Matriarchs
15-35 Minutes	Meeting A Matriarch
35-45 Minutes	Full-Group Debrief
45-50 Minutes	Individual Journaling
50-55 Minutes	Sharing Blessings
55-60 Minutes	Closing Blessing

### ***Detailed Procedure***

#### ***0-10 Minutes: Opening Ritual & Set Induction***

The full group will gather together in a circle for “check-in.” Each woman will share a brief headline about how they are feeling in this moment, especially focusing on what events or energy they are carrying with them from outside of this space.

Participants should be encouraged to share fun and joyful events or energy just as much

## *Unit 1: Finding Women's Voices*

as challenging events or energy. The sharing will proceed around the circle, and all women are encouraged—though not required—to share something with the group. The educator(s) is/are also encouraged to share.

Following the check-in, the educator(s) should ask participants to call out the qualities of a role model. The educator(s) should create a list of these qualities on a board or poster paper for everyone to see.

### *10-15 Minutes: Introducing The Matriarchs*

The educator(s) will ask if anyone in the group is familiar with the traditional blessing for daughters that is offered on Erev Shabbat. If not, the educator(s) will recite it (**Appendix E**). The educator(s) should explain that this blessing is one of the ways that Jews indicate that Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah are, in some ways, models for Jewish women to emulate.

### *15-35 Minutes: Meeting A Matriarch*

The educator(s) will give each pair of mothers and daughters some biblical quotes that describe one of the matriarchs or describe some actions of that matriarch (**Appendix F**). Each pair will work on a different matriarch, but all 4 matriarchs will be examined by some participants. It may be helpful for the later blessing activity for all of the participants to have a copy of all of the texts, although each pair should only focus on one of the matriarchs during this part of the lesson. After reading the texts, mothers should interview their daughters, and the adolescent women should answer the following questions in the first person singular, as if they were the matriarch they just read about:

- What led you to act the way you did? What other options did you have?
- Which relationship(s) did you consider to be the most important when you made your decision to act?
- Was it difficult to make the decision to act the way you did?
- Knowing how events unfolded following your decision to act, would you make the same choice(s) again? Why or why not?
- Why do you think that you are held up as a role model for Jewish women?

As the adolescent women answer their interviewer's questions, the interviewers should record their answers.

### *35-45 Minutes: Full-Group Debrief*

The educator(s) should call the full group back together and ask the following questions:

- What surprised you about what you read about the matriarchs?
- In what ways are Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah role models for Jewish women? What is inspiring about these women?
- Are there aspects of these women that we do not want to emulate?
- How do Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah measure up to the list of qualities of a role model that we created at the beginning of today's session? (The educator(s) should refer to the list on the board/poster paper.)
- For the adult women: what qualities of the matriarch that you focused on do you hope to see in your daughter?
- For the adolescent women: what qualities of the matriarch that you focused on do you hope to see in your mother?

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### *45-50 Minutes: Individual Journaling*

Each woman should write in her journal responding to the following prompt. “In her *Book of Blessings*, Marcia Falk wrote a new blessing for daughters to be offered on Erev Shabbat. It is, ‘Be who you are—and may you be blessed in all that you are.’”

- Do you prefer this blessing over the traditional blessing that invokes the names of the matriarchs? Why or why not?
- Write your own one-sentence blessing for women of any age for Erev Shabbat that in some way invokes one or more of the matriarchs.

### *50-55 Minutes: Sharing Blessings*

The educator(s) should ask for volunteers to share their blessings with the group. If there is time the educator(s) should ask what it was like for participants to write these blessings. What was challenging? What came easily?

### *55-60 Minutes: Closing Blessing*

The session will end with the singing or reciting of the group's chosen closing blessing.

### ***Materials***

Journals

Pens/pencils

Loose sheets of paper

Quotes from Appendix E

***Note to Educator: you should ask participants to bring to the next session an assortment of magazines and newspapers with images of women and articles about women and/or women's issues.***

## Lesson Three: Full Session

### ***Enduring Understandings: Focus for this Lesson***

- As exemplified in Jewish text, the challenges of womanhood at every stage of life demand patience, compassion, and constant self-reflection.
- Jewish feminism calls on today's Jewish women to question the limits to women's power and involvement in ancient and contemporary, Jewish and secular societies.
- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.
- Judaism can guide Jewish women as they cope with the challenges of womanhood in contemporary western society.

### ***Essential Questions: Focus for this Lesson***

- What does it mean to be a woman?
- How does Judaism inform my understanding of what it means to be a woman?
- What is challenging about being a woman?
- What is rewarding about being a woman?
- How does my womanhood impact the way I relate to others?
- How are women powerful?

### ***Objectives: By the end of this lesson, learners should be able to...***

- Describe the image of a good woman as depicted in Proverbs 31:10-31.
- Create a modern secular image of a good woman based on a selection of magazines and newspapers.
- Compare and contrast a modern secular image of a good woman with the image depicted in Proverbs 31:10-31.
- Identify the qualities of a good woman—as depicted in both Proverbs 31:10-31 and in modern secular culture—that they see in either their mother or daughter.
- Identify the qualities of a good woman—as depicted in both Proverbs 31:10-31 and in modern secular culture—that they see in themselves.
- Evaluate the experiences of identifying the qualities of a good woman that they see in another woman and identifying these qualities in themselves.

### ***Core Activities for this Lesson***

- Participants should do a careful examination of Proverbs 31:10-31 (**Appendix G**), using the questions below, and any others that the educator(s) add. The educator(s) should decide whether mothers and daughters should work together, or whether small groups of 2-3 adolescent women and 2-3 adult women should work together. Participants should record the answers to questions like:
  - As described in this text...
    - What are the primary roles for women?
    - How does a good woman spend her time?
    - What are the attributes of a good woman?
    - What skills does a good woman have?

## *Unit 1: Finding Women's Voices*

- Which of the roles, attributes, and skills of the good woman described in this text are still valued today?
- Participants should work on their own to look through the magazines and newspapers that were brought in. Participants should cut out words and images to create a collage that they feel reflects a modern secular understanding of the roles, attributes, and skills of a good woman.
- Participants should share their collages with the full group. The educator(s) should draw attention to any significant content differences in the collages of the adolescent vs. the adult women.
- The educator(s) should record 2 lists of the roles, attributes, and skills of a good woman somewhere that the full group can see (chalkboard, butcher paper, etc.). Participants should suggest roles, attributes, and skills for each list. One list should be based on the earlier text study of Proverbs 31:10-31, and the other list should be based on the participants' collages. The educator(s) should draw attention to the similarities and differences between the two lists and ask participants what they think might account for these similarities and differences.
- Using both lists, participants should write 2 different pages in their journals. On one page participants should list the qualities of a good woman—on either list—that they see in either their mother or daughter. On the next page participants should list the qualities of a good woman—on either list—that they see in themselves.
- Following the journaling exercise, mothers and daughter should pair up and alternate sharing the qualities that they recorded about the other. As the women hear qualities from the other, they should look at the list that they recorded about themselves and put a check by any quality that they had written about themselves. They should also draw a line under what they wrote about themselves and add, below the line, the qualities that their partner sees in them that they do not see in themselves.
- The educator(s) should lead a full-group closing discussion and ask questions like:
  - What was it like to share the qualities you see in each other?
  - Was it easier to say a quality or to hear a quality said about you? Why, do you think? Does this answer point to any of the qualities on our lists?
  - Was it easier to write a list of qualities you see in your mother/daughter, or to write a list of qualities you see in yourself? Why, do you think? Does this answer point to any of the qualities on our lists?
  - Look back at the qualities you see in each other. Are there more qualities from the Proverbs list or from the modern list?
  - Are you more inspired to try to be like the woman described in the Proverbs list or the modern list, or is it an even mix? Why?

*Unit 1: Finding Women's Voices*

***Note to Educator: If participants have particular skill with a specialized media (knitting, pastels, fabric art, etc.), you should invite them to bring some supplies for them to work in this media during the next session.***

## Lesson Four: Half Session

### ***Enduring Understandings: Focus for this Lesson***

- As exemplified in Jewish text, the challenges of womanhood at every stage of life demand patience, compassion, and constant self-reflection.
- Judaism can support Jewish women as they cope with the challenges of womanhood in contemporary western societies.

### ***Essential Questions: Focus for this Lesson***

- What does it mean to be a woman?
- How does Judaism inform my understanding of what it means to be a woman?
- What is challenging about being a woman?
- What is rewarding about being a woman?
- How does my womanhood impact the way I relate to others?
- How are women powerful?

### ***Objectives: By the end of this lesson, learners should be able to...***

- Create their own image of a good woman, either in words or images.
- Discuss how they view themselves today as compared with their own image of a good woman.

### ***Core Activities for this Lesson***

- Participants should spend the first half of this session creating their own image of a good woman, in whatever media they choose. The educator(s) should supply as many different kinds of art supplies as possible. The educator(s) may also choose to have some quiet music playing in the background to create an environment of calm, comfort, and focus.
- During the second half of this session, participants should present their image to the full group, and should explain how they view themselves today as compared with their own image of a good woman. The adult (and perhaps adolescent) women should be encouraged to think about and share how their image of a good woman may have changed over the course of their lives.

## Appendix A

- **Numbers 10:10<sup>1</sup>**

And on your joyous occasions—your fixed festivals and new moon days—you shall sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and your sacrifices of well-being. They shall be a reminder of you before your God: I, Adonai, am your God.

- **Numbers 28:11-15<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>11</sup>On your new moons you shall present a burnt offering to Adonai: two bulls of the herd, one ram, and seven yearling lambs, without blemish. <sup>12</sup>As meal offering for each bull: three-tenths of a measure of choice flour with oil mixed in. As meal offering for each ram: two-tenths of a measure of choice flour with oil mixed in. <sup>13</sup>As meal offering for each lamb: a tenth of a measure of fine flour with oil mixed in. Such shall be the burnt offering of pleasing odor, an offering by fire to Adonai. <sup>14</sup>Their libations shall be: half a *hin* of wine for a bull, a third of a *hin* for a ram, and a quarter of a *hin* for a lamb. That shall be the monthly burnt offering for each new moon of the year. <sup>15</sup>And there shall be one goat as a sin offering to Adonai, to be offered in addition to the regular burnt offering and its libation.

- **B. Talmud Megillah 22b<sup>3</sup>**

Come and hear: 'The general principle is that wherever the people would be hindered from their work, as on a public fast and on the month of Ab, three read, and where the people would not be hindered from their work, as on New Moons and the intermediate days of festivals,<sup>2</sup> four read'. This settles the question. Said R. Ashi: But we have learnt differently, viz., THIS IS THE GENERAL RULE: WHEREVER THERE IS A MUSAF BUT NOT A FESTIVAL FOUR READ: Now what is added [by the words 'THIS IS THE GENERAL RULE']? Is it not a public fast and the month of Ab? But according to R. Ashi,<sup>3</sup> whose view then is recorded in the Mishnah? It is neither that of the First Tanna nor of R. Jose, as it has been taught: 'If it [the month of Ab] falls on Monday or Thursday, three read and one [of them] says a haftarah. If on Tuesday or Wednesday, one reads and [the same] one says the haftarah. R. Jose, however, says that in all cases three read and one [of them] says the haftarah'. But still<sup>4</sup> the words 'THIS IS THE GENERAL RULE' are difficult! — No. They add New Moon and the intermediate days. But as these are stated explicitly: ON NEW MOONS AND THE INTERMEDIATE DAYS FOUR READ? — [The Mishnah]<sup>5</sup> is merely giving an indication that you should not say that the festivals and the intermediate days have the same rule, but you should take this as a general principle, that for every additional distinguishing mark an additional person reads. Hence on New Moon and the intermediate days, when there is an additional sacrifice, four read; on festivals, when [in addition] work is prohibited, five read; on the Day of Atonement when [in addition] there is a penalty of kareth, six read; on Sabbath when there is a penalty of stoning, seven read.

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<sup>1</sup> Translation adapted from JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society (2003).

<sup>2</sup> Translation adapted from JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society (2003).

<sup>3</sup> Translation from Judaic Classics online.



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*RaShI (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchak, who lived in the 12<sup>th</sup> century in France, and who wrote a complete commentary on the Talmud) comments on this passage from the Talmud:*

"New moons." There is no absolute prohibition against work, yet women do not perform work on those days I learned from my aged teacher, may his memory be for a blessing, that this commandment was given to them [women] because they did not submit their jewelry for the golden calf.<sup>4</sup>

- ***Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezar chapter 45***  
The women heard about the construction of the golden calf and refused to submit their jewelry to their husbands. Instead they said to them: "You want to construct an idol and mask which is an abomination, and has no power of redemption? We won't listen to you." And the Holy One, Blessed be He, rewarded them in this world in that they would observe the new moons more than men, and in the next world in that they are destined to be renewed like the new moons.<sup>5</sup>
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosh\\_Chodesh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosh_Chodesh)
- [http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/About\\_Jewish\\_Holidays/Rosh\\_Chodesh/Women\\_Rosh\\_Chodesh/Rosh\\_Chodesh\\_Gleanings.htm](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/About_Jewish_Holidays/Rosh_Chodesh/Women_Rosh_Chodesh/Rosh_Chodesh_Gleanings.htm)
- <http://www.jewfaq.org/chodesh.htm>
- [http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish\\_Holidays/Rosh\\_Chodesh/Women/Moon.shtml?HYJH](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Rosh_Chodesh/Women/Moon.shtml?HYJH)
- [http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish\\_Holidays/Rosh\\_Chodesh/Women.shtml](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Rosh_Chodesh/Women.shtml)

*Note to Educator: The following links and resources should be used in the inquiry activity, but may also be especially useful to you in planning the Rosh Chodesh ritual for the end of the first lesson.*

- <http://www.hillel.org/jewish/rituals/roshchodesh/default>
- [http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish\\_Holidays/Rosh\\_Chodesh/Blessing\\_the\\_New\\_Moon.shtml](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Rosh_Chodesh/Blessing_the_New_Moon.shtml)
- **Pages 327-413 of Marcia Falk's (1996) The Book of Blessings: New Jewish Prayers for Daily Life, The Sabbath, and the New Moon Festival. Boston: Beacon Press.**

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<sup>4</sup> Translation from

[http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/About\\_Jewish\\_Holidays/Rosh\\_Chodesh/Women\\_Rosh\\_Chodesh/Rosh\\_Chodesh\\_Gleanings.htm](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/About_Jewish_Holidays/Rosh_Chodesh/Women_Rosh_Chodesh/Rosh_Chodesh_Gleanings.htm)

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

## Appendix B

*Note to Educator: in addition to the following online resources—some of which you can download to play, and some of which you should print—you should also find some examples from magazines or newspapers.*

- <http://www.always.com/products/> (“print”)
- <http://www.tampax.com/products.php> (“print”)
- <http://www.kotex.com/na/default.aspx> (TV)
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-4APMv2QKo> (TV)
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vr3ZUmh-mc> (TV)

## Appendix C

*The following quotes are taken from Inga Muscio's 1998 book Cunt: A Declaration of Independence. New York: Seal Press.*

All women throughout time have had the *opportunity* to see the moon. From Africa and Asia to the Americas and Europe, plenty of these ladies started noticing that the moon grows, recedes and grows again, over and over every twenty-eight days. Those not detached from their menstrual cycle couldn't help but trip out on how their own blood rhythm also occurred over the span of approximately twenty-eight days.

This is how the moon links one up with a form of history none of the textbooks can possibly touch upon: a *psychic* history with all the women who've ever bled on this planet. (pg. 35)

It takes a lot of time, focus and energy to realize the enormity of being the ocean with your very own tide every month. However, by honoring the demands of bleeding, our blood gives something in return. The crazed bitch from irritation hell recedes. In her place arises a side of ourselves with whom we may not—at first—be comfortable. She is a vulnerable, highly perceptive genius who can ponder a given issue and take her world by storm. When we're quiet and bleeding, we stumble upon the solutions to dilemmas that've been bugging us all month. Inspiration hits and moments of epiphany rumba 'cross de tundra of our senses. In this mode of existence one does not feel antipathy towards a bodily ritual that so profoundly and routinely reinforces our...power. (pg. 52)

## Appendix D

***Note to Educator: In order for participants to familiarize themselves with all of the blessings, they should have the opportunity not only to see the words to the first blessing (below) but also to hear it sung. If this blessing is chosen, you should be prepared to lead participants in singing the blessing at the close of each session.***

*T'filat Haderech* words and music by Debbie Friedman

May we be blessed as we go on our way.

May we be guided in peace.

May we be blessed with health and joy.

May this be our blessing, Amen.

May we be sheltered by the wings of peace.

May we be kept in safety, and in love.

May grace and compassion find their way to every soul.

May this be our blessing, Amen.

*Unit 1: Finding Women's Voices*

*V'ahavta* by Marge Piercy<sup>6</sup>

So you shall love what is holy  
with all your courage, with all your passion  
with all your strength.  
Let the words that have come down  
shine in our words and our actions.  
We must teach our children to know and understand them.  
We must speak about what is good  
and holy within our homes  
when we are working, when we are at play,  
when we lie down and when we get up.  
Let the work of our hands speak of goodness.  
    Let it run in our blood  
and glow from our doors and windows.

We should love ourselves, for we are of G-d.  
We should love our neighbors as ourselves.  
We should love the stranger, for we  
were once strangers in the land of Egypt  
and have been strangers in all the lands of the world since.  
Let love fill our hearts with its clear precious water.  
Heaven and earth observe how we cherish or spoil our  
    world.

Heaven and earth watch whether we choose life or choose  
    death.  
We must choose life so our children's children may live.  
Be quiet and listen to the still small  
voice within that speaks in love.  
Open to that voice, hear it, heed it and work for life.  
Let us remember and strive to be good.  
Let us remember to find what is holy  
within and without.

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<sup>6</sup> Piercy, Marge (2002). The Art of Blessing the Day: Poems with a Jewish Theme. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. Pgs. 132-133

*Unit 1: Finding Women's Voices*

Sisterhood: A Covenant of the Spirit by Rabbi Rachel Hertzman<sup>7</sup>

Sacred memories flood our dreams.  
We awake, awestruck.  
We are explorers with an exquisite vision:  
To become God's soulmirrors;  
reflecting dignity, justice, beauty.  
Divine sparks spill forth from our hands,  
We create with compassion and trust.  
We breathe life into moments of peace,  
Our hearts respond with whispers of hope.  
Our children learn to weave tapestries of dream memory.  
And God weeps tears of relief and joy  
as we affirm our shared, unbroken promise—  
our covenant of the spirit.

Dear God by Naomi Levy<sup>8</sup>

Dear God, as I pray, day after unpredictable day,  
May the voice of my soul spring forth from my lips.  
May I turn to You, God, in tears, in laughter, and in song.  
And may my prayers be answered. Amen.

When I panic, God, teach me patience.  
When I fear, teach me faith.  
When I doubt myself, teach me confidence.  
When I despair, teach me hope.  
When I lose perspective, show me the way—  
back to love, back to life, back to You. Amen.

You have blessed me with many gifts, God, but I know it is my task to realize them.  
May I never underestimate my potential; may I never lose hope.  
May I find the strength to strive for better, the courage to be different, the energy to give  
all that I have to offer.  
Help me, God, to live up to all the goodness that resides within me. Fill me with the  
humility to learn from others and with the confidence to trust in my instincts.  
Thank You, God, for the power to grow. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> Hertzman, Rachel (2005). Covenant of the Spirit: New Prayers, Poems and Meditations from Women of Reform Judaism. New York: Women of Reform Judaism. Pg. vi.

<sup>8</sup> Levy, Naomi (2002). Talking to God: Personal Prayers for Times of Joy, Sadness, Struggle, and Celebration. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

## **Appendix E**

יְשִׁמְעַךְ אֱלֹהִים Ye'simech Elohim

כְּשָׂרָה רִבְקָה רָחֵל וְלֵאָה: ke-Sarah, Rivka, Rachel ve-Leah

May God make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.

## Appendix F

### Sarah

Genesis 21:1-21<sup>a</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Adonai took note of Sarah as promised, and Adonai did for Sara as spoken.  
<sup>2</sup>Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken. <sup>3</sup>Abraham gave his newborn son, whom Sarah had borne him, the name of Isaac. <sup>4</sup>And when his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God had commanded him. <sup>5</sup>Now Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. <sup>6</sup>Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter; everyone who hears will laugh with me." <sup>7</sup>And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would suckle children! Yet I have borne a son in his old age." <sup>8</sup>The child grew up and was weaned, and Abraham held a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

<sup>9</sup>Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing.<sup>b</sup>  
<sup>10</sup>She spoke to Abraham, "Cast out that slave-woman and her son, for the son of that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac. <sup>11</sup>The matter distressed Abraham greatly, for it concerned a son of his. <sup>12</sup>But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed over the boy or your slave; whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you. <sup>13</sup>As for the son of the slave-woman, I will make a nation of him, too, for he is your seed." <sup>14</sup>Early next morning Abraham took some bread and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar. He placed them over her shoulder, together with the child, and sent her away. And she wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. <sup>15</sup>When the water was gone from the skin, she left the child under one of the bushes, <sup>16</sup>and went and sat down at a distance, a bowshot away; for she thought, "Let me not look on as the child dies." And sitting thus afar, she burst into tears.

<sup>17</sup>God heard the cry of the boy, and an angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heeded the cry of the boy where he is. <sup>18</sup>Come, lift up the boy and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him." <sup>19</sup>Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water, and let the boy drink. <sup>20</sup>God was with the boy and he grew up; he dwelt in the wilderness and became a bowman. <sup>21</sup>He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

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<sup>a</sup> Translation adapted from JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society (2003).

<sup>b</sup> In Genesis 16, Sarah (then called Sarai) recognized that she was unable to have children, and suggested that Abraham (then called Abram) attempt to have a child with Sarai's slave Hagar. Because Hagar was Sarai's property, any children that Hagar had with Abram would technically be counted as belonging to Sarai. When Hagar became pregnant, Sarai felt threatened and jealous, and treated Hagar terribly, even though the whole thing was Sarai's idea to begin with! God stopped Hagar from running away when she was pregnant, promising her great reward if she continued to put up with Sarai's harsh treatment and give birth to Abram's son in Abram and Sarai's household, which she did.



## Unit 1: Finding Women's Voices

### Rebekah

Genesis 27:1-17<sup>a</sup>

<sup>1</sup>When Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see, he called his older son Esau and said to him, "My son." He answered, "Here I am." <sup>2</sup>And he said, "I am old now, and I do not know how soon I may die. <sup>3</sup>Take your gear, your quiver and bow, and go out into the open and hunt me some game. <sup>4</sup>Then prepare a dish for me such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my innermost blessing before I die."

<sup>5</sup>Rebekah had been listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau had gone out into the open to hunt game to bring home, <sup>6</sup>Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "I overheard your father speaking to your brother Esau, saying, <sup>7</sup>'Bring me some game and prepare a dish for me to eat, that I may bless you, with Adonai's approval, before I die.'<sup>8</sup>Now, my son, listen carefully as I instruct you. <sup>9</sup>Go to the flock and fetch me two choice kids, and I will make of them a dish for your father, such as he likes. <sup>10</sup>Then take it to your father to eat, in order that he may bless you before he dies." <sup>11</sup>Jacob answered his mother Rebekah, "But my brother Esau is a hairy man and I am smooth-skinned. <sup>12</sup>If my father touches me, I shall appear to him as a trickster and bring upon myself a curse, not a blessing." <sup>13</sup>But his mother said to him, "Your curse, my son, be upon me! Just do as I say and go fetch them for me."

<sup>14</sup>He got them and brought them to his mother, and his mother prepared a dish such as his father liked. <sup>15</sup>Rebekah then took the best clothes of her older son Esau, which were there in the house, and had her younger son Jacob put them on; <sup>16</sup>and she covered his hands and the hairless part of his neck with the skins of the kids. <sup>17</sup>Then she put in the hands of her son Jacob the dish and the bread that she had prepared.

Genesis 27:26-29

<sup>26</sup>Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come close and kiss me, my son"; <sup>27</sup>and he went up and kissed him. And he smelled his clothes and blessed him, saying, "Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of the fields that Adonai has blessed. <sup>28</sup>May God give you of the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth, abundance of new grain and wine. <sup>29</sup>Let peoples serve you, and nations bow to you; be master over your brothers, and let your mother's sons bow to you. Cursed be they who curse you, blessed they who bless you."

Genesis 27:41-45

<sup>41</sup>Now Esau harbored a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing which his father had given him, and Esau said to himself, "Let but the mourning period of my father come, and I will kill my brother Jacob." <sup>42</sup>When the words of her older son Esau were reported to Rebekah, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, "Your brother Esau is consoling himself by planning to kill you. <sup>43</sup>Now, my son, listen to me. Flee at once to Haran, to my brother Laban. <sup>44</sup>Stay with him a while, until your brother's fury subsides—<sup>45</sup>until your brother's anger against you subsides—and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will fetch you from there. Let me not lose you both<sup>b</sup> in one day!"

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<sup>a</sup> Translation adapted from JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society (2003).

<sup>b</sup> Rebekah is afraid that both her husband Isaac and her favorite son Jacob will die in a single day.

## Unit 1: Finding Women's Voices

### Rachel

Genesis 29:13-35<sup>a</sup>

<sup>13</sup>On hearing the news of his sister's son Jacob, Laban ran to greet him; he embraced him and kissed him, and took him into his house. He told Laban all that had happened, <sup>14</sup>and Laban said to him, "You are truly my bone and flesh."

When he had stayed with him a month's time, <sup>15</sup>Laban said to Jacob, "Just because you are a kinsman, should you serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" <sup>16</sup>Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older one was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. <sup>17</sup>Leah had weak eyes; Rachel was shapely and beautiful. <sup>18</sup>Jacob loved Rachel; so he answered, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." <sup>19</sup>Laban said, "Better that I give her to you than that I should give her to an outsider. Stay with me." <sup>20</sup>So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her.

<sup>21</sup>Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my time is fulfilled, that I may cohabit with her." <sup>22</sup>And Laban gathered all the people of the place and made a feast. <sup>23</sup>When evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to him; and he cohabited with her.—<sup>24</sup>Laban had given his maidservant Zilpah to his daughter Leah as her maid.—<sup>25</sup>When morning came, there was Leah! So he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I was in your service for Rachel! Why did you deceive me?" <sup>26</sup>Laban said, "It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the older. <sup>27</sup>Wait until the bridal week of this one is over and we will give you that one too, provided you serve me another seven years." <sup>28</sup>Jacob did so; he waited out the bridal week of the one, and then he gave him his daughter Rachel as wife.—<sup>29</sup>Laban had given his maidservant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maid.—<sup>30</sup>And Jacob cohabited with Rachel also; indeed, he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he served him another seven years.

<sup>31</sup>Adonai saw that Leah was unloved and he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. <sup>32</sup>Leah conceived and bore a son, and named him Reuben; for she declared, "It means: 'Adonai has seen my affliction'; it also means: 'Now my husband will love me.'" <sup>33</sup>She conceived again and bore a son, and declared, "This is because Adonai heard that I was unloved and has given me this one also"; so she named him Simeon. <sup>34</sup>Again she conceived and bore a son and declared, "This time my husband will become attached to me, for I have borne him three sons." Therefore he was named Levi. <sup>35</sup>She conceived again and bore a son, and declared, "This time I will praise Adonai." Therefore she named him Judah. Then she stopped bearing.

Genesis 30:1-6

<sup>1</sup>When Rachel saw that she had borne Jacob no children, she became envious of her sister; and Rachel said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die." <sup>2</sup>Jacob was incensed at Rachel and said, "Can I take the place of God, who has denied you fruit of the womb?" <sup>3</sup>She said, "Here is my maid Bilhah. Consort with her, that she may bear on my knees and that through her I too may have children." <sup>4</sup>So she gave him her maid Bilhah as concubine, and Jacob cohabited with her. <sup>5</sup>Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. <sup>6</sup>And Rachel said, "God has vindicated me; indeed, God has heeded my plea and given me a son." Therefore she named him Dan.

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<sup>a</sup> Translation adapted from JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society (2003).

## Unit 1: Finding Women's Voices

### Leah

Genesis 29:13-35<sup>a</sup>

<sup>13</sup>On hearing the news of his sister's son Jacob, Laban ran to greet him; he embraced him and kissed him, and took him into his house. He told Laban all that had happened, <sup>14</sup>and Laban said to him, "You are truly my bone and flesh."

When he had stayed with him a month's time, <sup>15</sup>Laban said to Jacob, "Just because you are a kinsman, should you serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" <sup>16</sup>Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older one was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. <sup>17</sup>Leah had weak eyes; Rachel was shapely and beautiful. <sup>18</sup>Jacob loved Rachel; so he answered, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." <sup>19</sup>Laban said, "Better that I give her to you than that I should give her to an outsider. Stay with me." <sup>20</sup>So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her.

<sup>21</sup>Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my time is fulfilled, that I may cohabit with her." <sup>22</sup>And Laban gathered all the people of the place and made a feast.

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<sup>26</sup>Laban said, "It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the older.

<sup>27</sup>Wait until the bridal week of this one is over and we will give you that one too, provided you serve me another seven years." <sup>28</sup>Jacob did so; he waited out the bridal week of the one, and then he gave him his daughter Rachel as wife.—<sup>29</sup>Laban had given his maidservant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maid.—<sup>30</sup>And Jacob cohabited with Rachel also; indeed, he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he served him another seven years.

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conceived and bore a son and declared, "This time my husband will become attached to me, for I have borne him three sons." Therefore he was named Levi. <sup>35</sup>She conceived again and bore a son, and declared, "This time I will praise Adonai." Therefore she named him Judah. Then she stopped bearing.

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<sup>a</sup> Translation adapted from JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society (2003).

## Appendix G

### *Proverbs 31:10-31<sup>a</sup>*

- <sup>10</sup>What a rare find is a capable wife! Her worth is far beyond that of rubies.  
<sup>11</sup>Her husband puts his confidence in her, and lacks no good thing.  
<sup>12</sup>She is good to him, never bad, all the days of her life.  
<sup>13</sup>She looks for wool and flax, and sets her hand to them with a will.  
<sup>14</sup>She is like a merchant fleet, bringing her food from afar.  
<sup>15</sup>She rises while it is still night, and supplies provisions for her household, the daily fare of her maids.  
<sup>16</sup>She sets her mind on an estate and acquires it; she plants a vineyard by her own labors.  
<sup>17</sup>She girds herself with strength, and performs her tasks with vigor.  
<sup>18</sup>She sees that her business thrives; her lamp never goes out at night.  
<sup>19</sup>She sets her hand to the distaff; her fingers work the spindle.  
<sup>20</sup>She gives generously to the poor; her hands are stretched out to the needy.  
<sup>21</sup>She is not worried for her household because of snow, for her whole household is dressed in crimson.  
<sup>22</sup>She makes covers for herself; her clothing is linen and purple.  
<sup>23</sup>Her husband is prominent in the gates, as he sits among the elders of the land.  
<sup>24</sup>She makes cloth and sells it, and offers a girdle to the merchant.  
<sup>25</sup>She is clothed with strength and splendor; she looks to the future cheerfully.  
<sup>26</sup>Her mouth is full of wisdom, her tongue with kindly teaching.  
<sup>27</sup>She oversees the activities of her household and never eats the bread of idleness.  
<sup>28</sup>Her children declare her happy; her husband praises her,  
<sup>29</sup>“Many women have done well, but you surpass them all.”  
<sup>30</sup>Grace is deceptive, beauty is illusory; it is for her fear of Adonai that a woman is to be praised.  
<sup>31</sup>Extol her for the fruit of her hand, and let her works praise her in the gates.

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<sup>a</sup> Translation adapted from JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society (2003).

## Unit 2: Relating to the Voices of the Divine

### **Curriculum Understandings**

- As exemplified in Jewish text, the challenges of womanhood at every stage of life demand patience, compassion, and constant self-reflection.
- The Jewish feminist value of equal access to both God and to Jewish tradition rejects the androcentric signs and language of covenant in the Biblical text.
- The value of *kedushah* (holiness), as described in Jewish text, demands that women care for their bodies and their communities.
- Jewish feminism calls on today's Jewish women to question the limits to women's power and involvement in ancient and contemporary, Jewish and secular societies.
- The masculine language and imagery used to describe God in Jewish text can prevent Jewish women from having nuanced and healthy relationships with God.
- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.
- Judaism can guide Jewish women as they cope with the challenges of womanhood in contemporary western society.

### **Unit Understandings**

- As exemplified in Jewish text, the challenges of womanhood at every stage of life demand patience, compassion, and constant self-reflection.
- The Jewish feminist value of equal access to both God and to Jewish tradition rejects the androcentric signs and language of covenant in the Biblical text.
- The masculine language and imagery used to describe God in Jewish text can prevent Jewish women from having nuanced and healthy relationships with God.
- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.

### **Essential Questions for this Unit**

- What is challenging and what is rewarding about being in relationship with God?
- Where, within Judaism, is my belief in God grounded?
- How does (or could) my belief in God guide my choices as a Jewish woman?

### **Unit Assessments**

- God Timeline or Snapshot
- Blessing for either their mother or daughter that refers to God in feminine language
- Individual Covenant with God
- Creative Introduction to a prayer in the Shabbat liturgy

### **Memorable Moments**

- Personal theology snapshot or timeline
- Blessing ceremony
- Women and covenant debate
- Introducing a prayer during a regular congregational *t'filah*

## **Lesson One: Full Session (Scripted Lesson)**

### ***Enduring Understandings: Focus for this Lesson***

- As exemplified in Jewish text, the challenges of womanhood at every stage of life demand patience, compassion, and constant self-reflection.
- Jewish feminism can support Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.

### ***Essential Questions: Focus for this Lesson***

- What is challenging and what is rewarding about being in relationship with God?
- Where, within Judaism, is (or could) my belief in God grounded?

### ***Objectives: By the end of this lesson, learners should be able to...***

- Identify a number of different ways to understand God.
- Articulate their current understanding(s) of God.
- Compare and contrast various Jewish understandings of God.
- Decide which Jewish understanding(s) of God coincide with their own understanding(s) of God.

### ***Time Table***

0-15 Minutes	Opening Ritual & Set Induction
15-25 Minutes	Constructing Understandings of God
25-35 Minutes	Combining the Lists
35-50 Minutes	Who/What is God?
50-60 Minutes	God Gallery
60-90 Minutes	Personal Theology Snapshot or Timeline
90-110 Minutes	Blessings, Snack, and Break
110-130 Minutes	Comparing Titles
130-145 Minutes	Sharing Timelines or Snapshots
145-165 Minutes	Full-group discussion
165-170 Minutes	Individual Journaling
170-175 Minutes	Wrap-Up and Questions
175-180 Minutes	Closing Blessing

### ***Detailed Procedure***

#### ***0-15 Minutes: Opening Ritual & Set Induction***

The full group will gather together in a circle. Each woman will share one memory from the last month, and one expectation or hope for the coming month. These memories and expectations/hopes can be joyful or challenging. The sharing will proceed around the circle, and all women are encouraged—though not forced—to share something with the group. The educator(s) is/are also encouraged to share.

When everyone has had an opportunity to participate, the educator(s) should ask participants to turn to the woman sitting next to them and share a single sentence about their relationship to God.

## *Unit 2: Relating to the Voices of the Divine*

### *15-25 Minutes: Constructing Understandings of God*

The adult women and adolescent women will separate. Each group will be asked to create a list of as many different descriptive words and images associated with God as they can. One member of each group will record the results of the group brainstorm.

### *25-35 Minutes: Combining the Lists*

The 2 lists will be combined and written in large print so that everyone can see the compiled list. The educator should ask:

- Which words and images did both groups come up with independently?
- Why do you think that both groups came up with these words?
- Which words and images seem to go together? What makes you think these words/images are related?

### *35-50 Minutes: Who/What is God?*

Mothers and daughters will work together. The pairs will group the words and images from the combined list created in the last activity. When the pair has put each of the words and images in a group, they will generate a title for the group that represents each of the words and images in the group. For example, the words “protector,” “father,” and “hears my prayers” might be grouped under the title of “Parent” or “Care-Taker.” Each titled group must have at least one word/image in it. There is no limit to the number of words/images per group, so long as they can all be represented by a single title. Each pair should write their titles and groups of words/images on separate sheets of paper and post them around the room for the full group to see.

### *50-60 Minutes: God Gallery*

The educator(s) should instruct the participants to walk around the room and look at the ways that each pair grouped the words/images as well as the titles that were given to each group of words/images. As they read the titles and groupings, participants should keep in mind the following 3 questions:

- Which of these titles and groupings most resonate(s) with you? Why?
- Are there contradictions between the titles and groupings that most resonate with you? If so, which are in contradiction, and how so?
- Where in your life did these descriptions of God come from?

### *60-90 Minutes: Personal Theology Snapshot or Timeline<sup>1</sup>*

There are 2 possible activities that participants may choose to engage in during this time. It is recommended that the adolescent women choose the snapshot activity and the adult women choose the timeline activity, but the educator(s) should allow participants to make the choice that best suits their ability.

**Snapshot Instructions:** Using the titles and groupings that were created in the first part of the lesson for inspiration, participants should create a visual representation of their understanding of God. Suggested materials: colored paper, magazines, markers, clay, pipe cleaners, tissue paper, glue, scissors, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Activity adapted from From Our Roots to Ourselves: Learning from Biblical Women, a curriculum guide by Arianna Gordon, 2007.

## *Unit 2: Relating to the Voices of the Divine*

Timeline Instructions: Using the titles and groupings that were created in the first part of the lesson for inspiration, participants should create a timeline that matches periods of time and/or specific events in their lives with particular understandings of God. The timeline should end with their current understanding of God. Participants should be encouraged to represent their timeline in a visually creative way, and should not be limited to a single piece of paper. The suggested materials are the same as for the snapshot activity.

### *90-110 Minutes: Blessings, Snack, and Break*

The words for the blessings over food and drink should be distributed, and after the blessings are recited together, participants should enjoy a snack and a break.

### *110-130 Minutes: Comparing Titles*

The adult women and adolescent women will separate. Each group will further divide itself into groups of 2-3 women. (The educator(s) may decide that it is more effective for the adolescent women to engage in this activity as a full group rather than in smaller groups.) In these small groups participants will be asked to compare the titles and groupings hanging around the room with the 8 titles and descriptions of God taken from different areas of Jewish thought (**see appendix A**). In their comparison, participants will consider the following questions for discussion:

- Which of the titles that we created are also presented here?
- Where within your Jewish experience have you come across some of these images of God?
- Which of these Jewish images of God best coincide(s) with your own current understanding of God, as you expressed it in your snapshot or timeline?
- What is challenging about Judaism's many different images of God?
- What are the benefits of Judaism's many different images of God?

### *130-145 Minutes: Sharing Timelines or Snapshots*

Mothers and daughters should again work together. Each woman should share her timeline or snapshot with the other. The women should be encouraged to ask questions about each other's timelines or snapshots. Questions for discussion as part of the sharing:

- What was challenging about creating your timeline or snapshot?
- Having now examined some of Judaism's images of God, are there things about your timeline or snapshot that you would change? What would you add?
- Which of the 8 of Judaism's images of God that you examined do you see in your timeline or snapshot?

### *145-165 Minutes: Full-group discussion*

The educator(s) will gather the full group in a circle and moderate a discussion based on the following questions:

- What is difficult and what is easy about talking about God?
- How does your belief in God impact the way you feel about being Jewish?
- How does your belief in God impact the way you feel about being a woman?
- When in your life are you most aware of God? When are you least aware?
- What kind of a relationship would you like to have with God?



## *Unit 2: Relating to the Voices of the Divine*

### *165-170 Minutes: Individual Journaling*

Each woman should write in her journal responding to the following prompt. “The Jewish People is often referred to as *Am Yisrael*. The word *Am* means ‘people’ and the word *Yisrael* is for our ancestor Jacob. Jacob, after wrestling one night with a divine representative of God, was renamed *Yisrael*. The name *Yisrael* is made up of 2 words: the future tense of the verb ‘to wrestle,’ *yisra*, and the word God. And so we are the ‘people who will struggle with God.’

- What does it mean to you that the name of the Jewish people involves a never-ending struggle with God? Is this comforting or frustrating? How so?

### *170-175 Minutes: Wrap-Up and Questions*

The educator(s) will underline the importance of being members of the people who will struggle with God. This means that our own beliefs in God will change over the course of our lives as we change. The timelines that some of you created today are evidence of that change. Not only is this struggling and changing part of who we are as Jews, this is who we are as human beings. In recognition of this struggle, note cards will be passed around the circle. Each woman will take a card and will be instructed to write one question about God that was raised for them in today’s lesson. The educator(s) will collect the questions for later use.

### *175-180 Minutes: Closing Blessing*

The session will end with the singing or reciting of the group’s chosen closing blessing.

### ***Materials***

Paper for Who/What is God group lists

Supplies for timelines/snapshots: colored paper, magazines, markers, clay, pipe cleaners, tissue paper, glue, scissors, etc.

Words for blessings before snack

Appendix A with discussion questions (above)

Questions for discussion for sharing timelines/snapshots

Journals

Pens/pencils

Note cards for questions

Words for closing blessing

## **Lesson Two: Half Session**

### ***Enduring Understandings: Focus for this Lesson***

- The masculine language and imagery used to describe God in Jewish text can prevent Jewish women from having nuanced and healthy relationships with God.
- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.

### ***Essential Questions: Focus for this Lesson***

- What is challenging and what is rewarding about being in relationship with God?
- Where, within Judaism, is my belief in God grounded?
- How does (or could) my belief in God guide my choices as a Jewish woman?

### ***Objectives: By the end of this lesson, learners should be able to...***

- Identify the feminine imagery that is used to describe God in various Jewish texts.
- Compare the way it feels to use feminine language instead of masculine language in some familiar prayers or blessings.
- Compose a blessing for either their mother or their daughter using feminine language to refer to God.

### ***Core Activities for this Lesson***

- First participants will explore some of the feminine imagery that has been used to describe God in Judaism (**Appendix B: list of feminine descriptions of God with citations in Jewish text**).
- Participants will then experience the use of feminine language to address God in traditional Jewish prayer. For the first round, the adolescent women will read together (aloud) the traditional masculine form of a well-known blessing (**Appendix C: traditional masculine forms of 2 blessings and equivalent feminine forms of the same 2 blessings**). Then the adult women will read together (aloud) the same blessing using feminine language to refer to God. For the second round the adolescent and adult women will switch roles, reading 2 versions of the same blessing aloud to one another. This way each woman will have the experience of both hearing and speaking both the traditional and feminine forms of well-known blessings. It is recommended that the educator(s) debrief the experience of hearing and using this different language with the participants.
- Following these explorations, adolescent women and adult women should separate into 2 groups. The daughters will brainstorm ideas for blessings to write for their mothers and the mothers will brainstorm ideas for blessings to write for their daughters.
- Once each group has generated a list of possible ideas for blessings, each woman should compose a blessing on her own, using feminine language to refer to God.
- When each woman has composed her blessing, the full group will reconvene in a circle for a blessing ceremony. Pairs of mothers and daughters will take turns going to the center of the circle and offering their blessings to each other. The full group will respond “amen” to each blessing.

*Unit 2: Relating to the Voices of the Divine*

- Following the blessing ceremony, the educator(s) will ask the following questions of the full group:
  - How did it feel to address God using feminine language?
  - How did it feel to write your own blessing or prayer?
  - How did it feel to offer your mother/daughter a blessing or prayer?
  - What other opportunities in your life do you have to offer a prayer or blessing? Would you consider using feminine language to address God? Why or why not?

## **Lesson Three: Full Session**

### ***Enduring Understandings: Focus for this Lesson***

- As exemplified in Jewish text, the challenges of womanhood at every stage of life demand patience, compassion, and constant self-reflection.
- The Jewish feminist value of equal access to both God and to Jewish tradition rejects the androcentric signs and language of covenant in the Biblical text.
- The masculine language and imagery used to describe God in Jewish text can prevent Jewish women from having nuanced and healthy relationships with God.
- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.

### ***Essential Questions: Focus for this Lesson***

- What is challenging and what is rewarding about being in relationship with God?
- Where, within Judaism, is my belief in God grounded?
- How does (or could) my belief in God guide my choices as a Jewish woman?

### ***Objectives: By the end of this lesson, learners should be able to...***

- Define the word *covenant*.
- Identify the traditional Jewish understandings of the signs of the covenant between God and the Jewish people.
- Create their own covenant with God based on their own understandings of God.
- Create at least 3 signs of their covenant with God based on their own understanding of God and of the traditional Jewish signs of the covenant.

### ***Core Activities for this Lesson***

- Generate a list of as many different kinds of contracts as they can think of. Then, without reading any “expert” definitions of the word “covenant,” generate a list of as many different kinds of covenants as they can think of. What are the differences between the two?
- Create definitions that reflect the distinctions between contracts and covenants, then compare these definitions with **Appendix D: a few “expert” definitions of the words “contract” and “covenant.”**
- Explore the contexts in the Bible in which the word *brit* (covenant) is used. **Appendix E: a list of some of the Biblical citations in which the word *brit* is used.**
- Stage a debate. The educator(s) should decide whether the adolescent women represent one side and the adult women represent the other, or whether pairs of mothers and daughters should work cooperatively on the same side. Each side should be given a significant period of time during which participants will explore some authors’ perspectives on whether or not women need their own signs of the covenant between God and the Jewish people and whether, without circumcision, women are fully included in that covenant. **Appendix F: excerpts from a few authors expressing different opinions.** Once both sides have had adequate time to prepare their arguments, the educator(s) should moderate the debate.

## *Unit 2: Relating to the Voices of the Divine*

Participants are encouraged to cite excerpts from the Biblical texts about *brit* that they explored earlier in the lesson.

- Regardless of whether or not there is a clear winning side to the debate, as an exercise, participants will create their own covenant with God. Their covenant should be based not only on the Jewish—especially Biblical—understandings of what a covenant is, but also on their understanding of who or what God is. Educator(s) should instruct participants to think back to their timelines or snapshots that they created in the first lesson of this unit. Ideally these timelines and snapshots will still be available in the room for participants to reacquaint themselves with as they create their covenants.
- The final step to creating the covenant is the creation of at least 3 signs of their covenant. Participants should draw on their knowledge of the signs of the covenant that are described in the Bible. Signs may be regular, occasional, or only one-time actions.

## **Lesson Four: Half Session**

### ***Enduring Understandings: Focus for this Lesson***

- As exemplified in Jewish text, the challenges of womanhood at every stage of life demand patience, compassion, and constant self-reflection.
- The Jewish feminist value of equal access to both God and to Jewish tradition rejects the androcentric signs and language of covenant in the Biblical text.
- The masculine language and imagery used to describe God in Jewish text can prevent Jewish women from having nuanced and healthy relationships with God.
- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.

### ***Essential Questions: Focus for this Lesson***

- What is challenging and what is rewarding about being in relationship with God?

### ***Objectives: By the end of this lesson, learners should be able to...***

- Summarize the beliefs about God that are held by leaders in their community.
- Describe the personal meaning they find in a particular prayer in the *siddur*, based on their understanding of God.

### ***Core Activities for this Lesson***

- The educator(s) should invite all of the synagogue's senior staff (clergy, educators, etc.) to participate as members of a God panel. (If there are not enough senior staff in the synagogue—or they are not available that day—the educator(s) should invite the synagogue's lay leaders to fill out the panel.) If the educator(s) feel it is appropriate, they should both participate in and moderate the panel discussion.
- Each member of the panel should begin by briefly describing his or her understanding of God. If possible, this should be done by sharing their own God timelines of the kind that participants created in the first lesson in this unit.
- Next each member of the panel should share a favorite prayer from the *siddur*. The panelists should explain the themes of the prayer as well as the reason(s) that this particular prayer is so striking to them, and finally the way that this prayer fits with their own understanding of God.
- To finish the panel discussion, the educator(s) should pose to the panel some of the questions that participants wrote down in the conclusion of the first lesson in this unit.
- Finally each participant should, with a partner, select her favorite prayer in the *siddur*. The educator(s) should decide whether it is more appropriate for mothers and daughters to be partnered or whether an adolescent woman should work with another adolescent woman and an adult woman should work with another adult woman. Each member of the pair should follow the same procedure that the panel followed when describing their favorite prayers:
  - explain the themes of the prayer
  - explain the reason(s) that this particular prayer is so striking to them
  - explain how this prayer fits with their own understanding of God

## **Lesson Five: Half Session**

### ***Enduring Understandings: Focus for this Lesson***

- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.

### ***Essential Questions: Focus for this Lesson***

- What is challenging and what is rewarding about being in relationship with God?
- Where, within Judaism, is my belief in God grounded?
- How does (or could) my belief in God guide my choices as a Jewish woman?

### ***Objectives: By the end of this lesson, learners should be able to...***

- Align their understanding of God with the language of prayer found in the *siddur*.
- Evaluate *t'filah* as one of the most common means that Jews use to maintain a relationship with God.
- Describe what prayer means to them.

### ***Core Activities for this Lesson***

- Mothers and daughters should work together. Each pair should be assigned a prayer in the Shabbat liturgy that was not the prayer that either of the women identified as her favorite prayer in the last lesson.
- Working together, each pair should explain the themes of the prayer and describe at least one way that the prayer reflects each woman's understanding of God.
- The pair should create (or plan and then later create) an introduction to the prayer that explains the themes of the prayer and the ways that the prayer reflects each woman's understanding of God. The introduction can be in any medium: visual art of any kind, music, poetry, prose, food, drama, dance, etc.
- Follow-up for this lesson: the participants should present their introductions during a regular congregational *t'filah* service. Accordingly, each introduction should take no longer than 2-3 minutes to present, at the most. It is recommended that the clergy who will lead the service be present during this lesson to offer feedback and answer questions as the partners create their introductions. Further, if there are so many participants in the program that having them all present their introductions in a single service would dramatically impede the flow of the service, the introductions should be spread out over 2 or 3 different services. Participants are strongly encouraged to support each other in attending all of these services.
- To conclude the lesson and the unit, the educator(s) should facilitate a full-group discussion about the importance of *t'filah* in maintaining a relationship with God, regardless of each individual's understanding of who or what God is. The educator(s) should also ask each participant to reflect on the role of prayer in terms of maintaining a covenantal relationship with God.

## Appendix A<sup>1</sup>

<p><b>מַחֲיֵה הַכֶּלֶל</b> Author of Life &amp; Death (from <i>Gevurot</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>— God is responsible for all that happens in the world.</li><li>— Reward and punishment are given out in the afterlife.</li><li>— God has reasons for doing things that we will never understand.</li><li>— I cannot argue with God.</li></ul> <p><b>מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם</b> Ruler of the Universe (from our <i>tefillot</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>— God plays an active role in our lives.</li><li>— God protects and cares.</li><li>— God rewards good people and punishes bad people.</li><li>— God hears my prayers.</li><li>— God works miracles.</li><li>— God gives order.</li><li>— God is just.</li><li>— God holds us up in times of trouble.</li></ul> <p><b>קוֹל דְּמַמָּה דְּקָה</b> A Still, Small Voice (from I Kings 19:12) “Jiminy Cricket”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>— God is my conscience.</li><li>— God is inside of everyone.</li><li>— God talks to me.</li><li>— God lets me know what is right and wrong.</li><li>— God helps me to be just.</li></ul> <p><b>אֵין סוּף</b> Infinite One (from the <i>Zohar</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>— God is the only reason I exist.</li><li>— God is the ocean; I am a wave.</li><li>— God is everything.</li><li>— God is the cause of causes.</li><li>— God is the constant breath of the universe.</li></ul>	<p><b>יוֹצֵר אֹרֶךְ וְ מַעְרִיב עֶרְבִים</b> Creator of Light / One Who Makes Evening Fall (from our <i>tefillot</i>) “The Force”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>— God is everywhere.</li><li>— The beauty of nature represents God.</li><li>— The patterns in the world are evidence of God.</li><li>— God does not deal with me personally.</li><li>— God is in all scientific truths.</li><li>— God is order.</li></ul> <p><b>שׁוֹתֵף בְּמַעֲשֵׂה בְרֵאשִׁית</b> Partner in Creation (from Talmud <i>Shabbat</i> 10a)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>— God gave human beings free will.</li><li>— We are made in the image of God.</li><li>— God re-creates the world continually.</li><li>— I am God's partner; we are fulfilling an agreement.</li><li>— I can argue with God.</li><li>— God helps us to hold ourselves up in times of trouble.</li></ul> <p><b>נִעְטָף וְלֹא אֶרְאֶה</b> The Hidden God I Cannot See (from Job 23:9) “The Watchmaker”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>— God created the world.</li><li>— God is not involved in our lives today.</li><li>— God allows bad things to happen to good people.</li><li>— God is there, but God is silent.</li></ul> <p><b>הַטּוֹב וְהַמְּרַחֵם</b> Goodness &amp; Compassion (from <i>Modim</i>) “Goodness, Love, Dreams and Ideals”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>— God represents potential.</li><li>— God is a role model for perfection.</li><li>— God acts through me.</li><li>— God is the best I can possibly be.</li><li>— God is our dream for a united humanity.</li></ul>
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GODshopping created by Cantor Ellen Dreskin, Rabbi Billy Dreskin and Rabbi Mark Dov Shapiro

<sup>1</sup> From the GODshopping lesson created by Cantor Ellen Dreskin, Rabbi Billy Dreskin, and Rabbi Mark Dov Shapiro. [http://www.dreskin.us/html/jewish\\_resources.html](http://www.dreskin.us/html/jewish_resources.html).



## Appendix B<sup>2</sup>

- Numbers 11:12-14, Moses complains to God, “<sup>12</sup>Did I conceive all this people, did I bear them, that You should say to me, ‘Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries an infant,’ to the land that You have promised on oath to their fathers? <sup>13</sup>Where am I to get meat to give to all this people, when they whine before me and say, ‘Give us meat to eat!’ <sup>14</sup>I cannot carry all this people by myself, for it is too much for me.”
- Deuteronomy 32:18-19, Moses says of God, “<sup>18</sup>You neglected the Rock that begot you, forgot the God who brought you forth. <sup>19</sup>Adonai saw and was vexed and spurned God’s sons and God’s daughters.”
- Isaiah 42:14, God says, “I have kept silent far too long, kept still and restrained Myself; now I will scream like a woman in labor, I will pant and I will gasp.”
- Job 38:29, God asks Job, “From whose belly came forth the ice? Who gave birth to the frost of heaven?”
- Job 38:8-11, God asks Job, “<sup>8</sup>Who closed the sea behind doors when it gushed forth out of the womb, <sup>9</sup>when I clothed it in clouds, swaddled it in dense clouds, <sup>10</sup>when I made breakers My limit for it, and set up its bar and doors, <sup>11</sup>and said, ‘You may come so far and no farther; here your surging waves will stop’?”

In response to this passage, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott writes (p. 27), “Anybody who has ever dressed an energetic youngster, put diapers on a kicking, squirming child, erected barriers to keep an inquisitive toddler out of harm’s way, or struggled with a playpen, should understand this amazing image. God the Mother not only gives birth to the sea, but also dresses it in mist, diapers it in black clouds, erects barriers it cannot cross, and puts it into an enormous playpen with a bolted gate!”<sup>3</sup>

- Throughout both the Bible and liturgy (prayer), God is often described as having *rachamim*, or is even called, as on Yom Kippur, *Adonai El Rachum*. Phyllis Tribble, in her book God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality, explains (p. 33) the surprising female connotations of the words *rachamim* and *rachum*: “Difficult to translate in the fullness of its imagery, the Hebrew noun *rachamim* [compassion] connotes simultaneously both a mode of being and the locus of that mode. In its singular form, the noun *rechem* means ‘womb’ or ‘uterus.’ In the plural, *rachamim*, this concrete meaning expands to the abstractions of compassion, mercy, and love. Further, these abstractions occur in a verb, *rachm*, ‘to show mercy,’ and in adjective, *rachum*, ‘merciful.’<sup>4</sup>
- In a comment on the name of God “*El Shaddai*,” The Torah: A Women’s Commentary notes the following (p. 74), “‘*El Shaddai*.’ An ancient name of the Deity, apparently meaning ‘God of the mountains’ or ‘God of my breasts.’ Ancient Near Eastern and other deities are frequently associated with the mountains. The alternate meaning of *shaddai* as

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<sup>2</sup> Biblical translations adapted from JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society (2003).

<sup>3</sup> Mollenkott, Virginia Ramey (1985). The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company.

<sup>4</sup> Tribble, Phyllis (1978). God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

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‘breasts’ perhaps hints at aspects of the feminine contained in the Deity. This name of God often appears in the Bible in a context where fertility is an issue. For example, Naomi uses this name in Ruth 1:20.”<sup>5</sup>

- “The word *Shekinah* derives from the Hebrew root *shkn*, meaning ‘to dwell.’ The term *Shekinah* was used by Jewish rabbis in the first or second century B.C.E to indicate God’s presence among the children of Israel—and the term was feminine in gender...*Shekinah* depicts the visible expression or residence of God’s glory within the creation.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Eskenazi, Dr. Tamara Cohn & Rabbi Andrea L. Weiss, Ph.D., Ed. (2008). The Torah: A Women’s Commentary. New York: URJ Press.

<sup>6</sup> Mollenkott, Virginia Ramey (1985). The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company. Pg. 36

## Appendix C

### *Masculine (Traditional) Language: Candle Blessing for Holidays (Yom Tov)*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הוֹה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
ha-'o-lam me-lekh e-lo-hei-nu Adonai at-tah ba-ruk  
the universe king (of) our God Lord are you Blessed

אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק  
le-hadlik v'tsivanu be-mits-vo-tav kid-de-sha-nu a-she  
to kindle and with his sanctified us who  
commanded us commandments

נֵר שֶׁל ( שַׁבָּת וְשֶׁל ) יוֹם טוֹב.  
tov yom v'shel shabbat shel ner  
the holiday (and of of sabbath) the candles of

*Blessed art thou, Lord our God, Master of the universe,  
who sanctifies us with Your commandments, and commanded us  
to kindle the light (of shabbat and of ) the holiday.*

*barukh attah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam,  
asher kideshanu be-mitzvotav ve-tsivanu lehadlik  
ner shel (shabbat v'shel) yom tov.*

### *Feminine Language: Candle Blessing for Holidays (Yom Tov)*<sup>7</sup>

ברוכה את אֱלֹהֵינוּ מַלְכַת הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁתָנוּ  
בְּמִצְוֹתֶיהָ וְצִוָּתָנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל יוֹם טוֹב

*Brucha at elilah, elohaynu malkat ha' olem, asher kidishatnu  
b' mitzvotaha v'tzevatnu l' hadlik nare shel yom tov.*

Blessed are you goddess, our goddess, queen of the universe, who has made us holy by giving us the power of goodness and allowing us to use this power to celebrate this holiday.

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<sup>7</sup> Feminine language blessings taken from Like an Orange on a Seder Plate: Our Lesbian Haggadah.

**Masculine (Traditional) Language: Blessing for Bread (Ha'Motzi)**

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי Baruch ata Adonoy,  
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם Eloheinu melech ha-olam,  
הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ. ha-motzi lechem min ha-aretz.

Blessed are you God, King of the Universe,  
Who brings forth bread from the earth.

**Feminine Language: Blessing for Bread (Ha'Motzi)<sup>8</sup>**

בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ אֱלִילָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מַלְכַת הָעוֹלָם.  
הַמוֹצִיָּא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ

*Brucha at elilah, elohaynu malkat ha' olem, hamotziah  
lechem min ha' aretz.*

Blessed are you goddess, our goddess, queen of the  
universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid

## Appendix D

- A **contract** is an exchange of promises between two or more parties to do, or refrain from doing, anything that is enforceable in a court of law. It is a binding legal agreement. That is to say, a contract is an exchange of promises for the breach of which the law will provide a remedy.<sup>9</sup>
- A **contract** is a limited time agreement.<sup>10</sup>
- **Contract (n)**: a binding agreement between two or more persons that is enforceable by law<sup>11</sup>
- **Covenant (n)**: 1. compact, concordat, a signed written agreement between two or more parties (nations) to perform some action  
2. (Bible) an agreement between God and his people in which God makes certain promises and requires certain behavior from them in return<sup>12</sup>
- A **covenant**, in its most general sense, is a solemn promise to engage in or refrain from a specified action.  
More specifically, a covenant, in contrast to a contract, is a one-way agreement whereby the covenanter is the only party bound by the promise. A covenant may have conditions and prerequisites that qualify the undertaking, including the actions of second or third parties, but there is no inherent agreement by such other parties to fulfill those requirements. Consequentially, the only party that can break a covenant is the covenanter.<sup>13</sup>
- A **covenant** is an agreement for life.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contract>

<sup>10</sup> Statement of Rabbi Mark Borovitz.

<sup>11</sup> <http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=contract>

<sup>12</sup> <http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=covenant>

<sup>13</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Covenant>

<sup>14</sup> Statement of Rabbi Mark Borovitz.

## Appendix E

*Note to Educator: Following is a selection of citations that participants should use to see some different contexts in which the word “covenant” is used in Genesis and Exodus to describe relationships between people and God. You may choose to assign a couple of citations to different groups of participants to look up for themselves, or to pre-select a couple of the texts for everyone to look at that seem most relevant to you.*

**Genesis 6:9-22** Noah before the flood

**Genesis 9:8-17** Noah after the flood

**Genesis 15:7-21** Covenant with Abram

**Genesis 17** Covenant with Abraham with circumcision

**Exodus 2** God remembers the covenant with the Israelites

**Exodus 6:1-9** God explains the plan to Moses

**Exodus 19:1-13** Pre-Sinai revelation

**Exodus 31:12-18** Shabbat and Covenant

## Appendix F

- Genesis 17:1-17<sup>15</sup>

<sup>1</sup>When Abram was ninety-nine years old, Adonai appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am El Shaddai. Walk in My ways and be blameless. <sup>2</sup>I will establish my covenant between Me and you and I will make you exceedingly numerous.”

<sup>3</sup>Abram threw himself on his face; and God spoke to him further, <sup>4</sup>“As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You shall be the father of a multitude of nations. <sup>5</sup>And you shall no longer be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I make you the father of a multitude of nations. <sup>6</sup>I will make you exceedingly fertile, and make nations of you; and kings shall come forth from you. <sup>7</sup>I will maintain My covenant between Me and you, and your offspring to come, as an everlasting covenant throughout the ages, to be God to you and to your offspring to come. <sup>8</sup>I assign the land you sojourn in to you and your offspring to come, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting holding. I will be their God.”

<sup>9</sup>God further said to Abraham, “As for you, you and your offspring to come throughout the ages shall keep My covenant. <sup>10</sup>Such shall be the covenant between Me and you and your offspring to follow which you shall keep: every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup>You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. <sup>12</sup>And throughout the generations, every male among you shall be circumcised at the age of eight days. As for the homeborn slave and the one bought from an outsider who is not of your offspring, <sup>13</sup>they must be circumcised, homeborn, and purchased alike. Thus shall My covenant be marked in your flesh as an everlasting pact. <sup>14</sup>And if any male who is uncircumcised fails to circumcise the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his kin; he has broken My covenant.”

<sup>15</sup>And God said to Abraham, “As for your wife, Sarai, you shall not call her Sarai, but her name shall be Sarah. <sup>16</sup>I will bless her; indeed, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she shall give rise to nations; rulers of peoples shall issue from her.” <sup>17</sup>Abraham threw himself on his face and laughed, as he said to himself, “Can a child be born to a man a hundred years old, or can Sarah bear a child at ninety?”

- “**7-10.** Five times in this passage, God refers to the covenant’s other party as ‘you and your descendants’ (literally: ‘seed’); this indicates that membership in the covenant is not limited to males, although every male is to bear circumcision as a mark of the covenant. This covenant is with Abraham and Sarah’s offspring regardless of gender. Likewise the entire Israelite people is a party to the Covenant at Sinai, where Shabbat—not circumcision—is the covenantal *ot* (sign

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<sup>15</sup> Translation adapted from JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society (2003).

or mark), a sign that explicitly applies to all members of the community (Exodus 31:12-17).”<sup>16</sup>

- “In a sense, the greatest ‘sign’ of this covenant is the fulfillment of God’s promise that Sarah will bear a child. Sarah’s pregnancy and Isaac’s birth are tangible proof that God fulfills promises—and will similarly fulfill the other promises. Perhaps women after Sarah, as the ones bearing life, carry on the covenant between God and Abraham and Sarah’s descendants in the most basic, physical way. Maybe circumcision is a male rituals to include men in a physical way in the covenant that women make real in their flesh when they bear the next generation.

This view has its own problems. Women of every nation bear children; how can childbearing be an essential characteristic or sign of a particular covenant? And what about women who will not bear children? Are they excluded from the covenant?”<sup>17</sup>

- “Circumcision has thus remained the sine qua non of Jewish identity throughout time. Among other things, Jews came to believe that it warded off danger and even saved Jews from damnation, that the sign of circumcision was tantamount to carrying God’s ineffable name carved into the flesh, that it was a means of attaining mystical unity with the Creator, and that it brought about visionary experience.”<sup>18</sup>
- “There has been an explosion of creative thinking around rituals for entering girls into the covenant, as well as rituals for a number of heretofore unmarked moments in women’s lives. The Reconstructionist Rabbis’ Manual includes a *Brit Rehitzah* (a covenant of washing) to welcome girls into the community of the Jewish people. There are numerous other examples of such ceremonies in the files of Jewish women’s organizations, rabbis’ offices, and seminaries. It should come as no surprise that feminists, in thinking about creating ceremonies for girls, also have begun to rethink the nature of the covenantal ceremony for boys. Many additions and embellishments have been added to the traditional *brit milah* [circumcision] ceremony, and many people have begun to separate the naming ceremony from the circumcision itself.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Eskenazi, Dr. Tamara Cohn & Rabbi Andrea L. Weiss, Ph.D., Ed. (2008). The Torah: A Women’s Commentary. New York: URJ Press. Pg. 75.

<sup>17</sup> Sohn, Ruth H. *Contemporary Reflection*. Ibid. Pg. 80.

<sup>18</sup> Hoffman, Lawrence A. (1996). Covenant of Blood: Circumcision and Gender in Rabbinic Judaism. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Pg. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Wechterman, Rabbi Elyse (2003). *A Plea for Inclusion*. The Covenant of Circumcision: New Perspectives on an Ancient Jewish Rite. Elizabeth Wyner Mark, Ed. Lebanon (NH): Brandeis University Press. Pg. 192.



## Unit 2: Relating to the Voices of the Divine

- “Is it really conceivable that, since the sign of the covenant was the circumcision, the covenant was not concluded with all Israel, but only with its male members!”<sup>20</sup>
- “In the previous chapter I discussed answers that Maimonides might have given to our question. Men need circumcision, Maimonides says, because circumcision reduces lust and sexual passion, thereby allowing Jewish men to devote themselves more fully to God and Torah than they otherwise would be able. And why do women not need circumcision? Apparently because they, unlike men, do not suffer from a surfeit of lust. Maimonides does not actually say this, of course, but it is a conclusion that logically follows from his position...For Maimonides, circumcision is not covenantal; the relationship between the people of Israel and God, and between the individual Jew and God, is not a function or consequence of circumcision. Therefore the exclusion of women from the commandment of circumcision does not (necessarily) betoken their inferiority or their exclusion from the covenant. By believing in God and by observing the commandments of the Torah that are incumbent upon them, women can find favor in God’s eyes just as men do.”<sup>21</sup>
- In the Maimonidean view, “Circumcision is a commandment like any other commandment; it is not covenantal and does not affect an individual’s relationship with God any more than any other commandment. In this chapter I elaborate a non-Maimonidean perspective. Circumcision is indeed covenantal, and indeed establishes a bodily connection between a male Jew and God. Women do not need to be circumcised because the female experience includes an analogue to circumcision. Men have circumcision; women have menstruation. The central author to be considered here is R. Josheph Bekhor Shor...who lived in Orleans in the middle of the twelfth century, is best known for his commentary on the Torah, which shows him to have been both an independent thinker and an ardent polemicist...Both his intellectual independence and his anti-Christian perspective are evident in his commentary on Genesis 17:11, which runs as follows:

*And that shall be sign of the covenant between me and you:*

*A mark and a sign that I am the master and you are my slaves. The seal of the sign of the covenant is in a hidden place that is not seen, so that the nations of the world should not say concerning Israel: they are maimed. Since God commanded the males, and not the females, we may deduce that God commanded to seal the covenant on the place of maleness. And the blood of menstruation that women*

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<sup>20</sup> Eliezer Berkovits quoted in Shaye J.D. Cohen (2005). Why Aren’t Jewish Women Circumcised?: Gender and Covenant in Judaism. London: University of California Press. Pg. 174.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Shaye J.D. Cohen, pg. 174.

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*observe by telling their husbands of the onset of their periods—this for them is covenantal blood.”<sup>22</sup>*

- Exodus 31:12-18

<sup>12</sup>And Adonai said to Moses: <sup>13</sup>Speak to the Israelite people and say: Nevertheless, you must keep My sabbaths, for this is a sign between Me and you throughout the ages, that you may know that I Adonai have consecrated you.

<sup>14</sup>You shall keep the sabbath, for it is holy for you. One who profanes it shall be put to death: whoever does work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his kin. <sup>15</sup>Six days may work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to Adonai; whoever does work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. <sup>16</sup>The Israelite people shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout the ages as a covenant for all time: <sup>17</sup>it shall be a sign for all time between Me and the people of Israel. For in six days Adonai made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day God ceased from work and was refreshed.

<sup>18</sup>When God finished speaking with him [Moses] on Mount Sinai, God gave Moses the two tablets of the Pact, stone tablets inscribed with the finger of God.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Shaye J.D. Cohen, Pgs. 191-2.

<sup>23</sup> Translation adapted from JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society (2003).

## Unit 3: Finding Jewish Voices

### *Curriculum Understandings*

- As exemplified in Jewish text, the challenges of womanhood at every stage of life demand patience, compassion, and constant self-reflection.
- The Jewish feminist value of equal access to both God and to Jewish tradition rejects the androcentric signs and language of covenant in the Biblical text.
- The value of *kedushah* (holiness), as described in Jewish text, demands that women care for their bodies and their communities.
- Jewish feminism calls on today's Jewish women to question the limits to women's power and involvement in ancient and contemporary, Jewish and secular societies.
- The masculine language and imagery used to describe God in Jewish text can prevent Jewish women from having nuanced and healthy relationships with God.
- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.
- Judaism can guide Jewish women as they cope with the challenges of womanhood in contemporary western society.

### *Unit Understandings*

- The value of *kedushah* (holiness), as described in Jewish text, demands that women care for their bodies and their communities.
- Jewish feminism calls on today's Jewish women to question the limits to women's power and involvement in ancient and contemporary, Jewish and secular society.
- Jewish feminism can support Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.
- Judaism can support Jewish women as they cope with the challenges of womanhood in contemporary western society.

### *Essential Questions for this Unit*

- What does Judaism have to offer me, especially as a woman?
- How does my womanhood inform my understanding of what it means to be Jewish?
- How are Jewish women powerful?
- In what ways is my understanding of covenant and the *kedushah* (holiness) of my life connected?

### *Unit Assessments*

- Jewelry Making
- Mirror Exercise
- Image Creation
- Slam Poem

### *Unit 3: Finding Jewish Voices*

#### ***Memorable Moments***

- *Kedushah/B'tzelem Elohim* and eating disorder discussion
- Mirror-making and burning of un-God-like statements ritual
- Poetry slam

## Lesson One: Full Session (Scripted Lesson)

### ***Enduring Understandings: Focus for this Lesson***

- The value of *kedushah* (holiness), as described in Jewish text, demands that women care for their bodies and their communities.
- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.
- Judaism can guide Jewish women as they cope with the challenges of womanhood in contemporary western society.

### ***Essential Questions: Focus for this Lesson***

- In what ways is my understanding of covenant and the *kedushah* (holiness) of my life connected?
- What does Judaism have to offer me, especially as a woman?
- How does my womanhood inform my understanding of what it means to be Jewish?

### ***Objectives: By the end of this lesson, learners should be able to...***

- Define *kedushah*.
- Explain what *kedushah* means to them.
- Connect their personal theology and covenant (from unit 2) to the value of *kedushah* as described in Leviticus 19:1-2.
- Compare and contrast Judaism's value of the *kedushah* of human beings to both their modern secular and personal understanding of the roles, attributes, and skills of a good woman (from unit 1).
- Explain how Judaism's value of *kedushah* can guide their relationships with others.

### ***Time Table***

0-15 Minutes	Opening Ritual
15-30	<i>Kedushah</i> Concept Attainment
30-45	Full-group discussion of <i>kedushah</i>
45-65	<i>Chevruta</i> discussion of <i>Kedoshim Tih'yu</i>
65-90	Individual reflection
90-110	Blessings, Snack, and Break
110-140	Four Corners
140-170	<i>Kedushah</i> jewelry making
170-175	Jewelry-sharing
175-180	Closing Blessing

### ***Detailed Procedure***

#### ***0-15 Minutes: Opening Ritual***

The full group will gather together in a circle. Each woman will share one memory from the last month, and one expectation or hope for the coming month. The sharing will proceed around the circle, and all women are encouraged—though not required—to share something with the group. The educator(s) is/are also encouraged to share.

### Unit 3: Finding Jewish Voices

#### 15-30 Minutes: *Kedushah Concept Attainment*

Mothers and daughters will work together. Each pair will receive a page with 2, untitled columns. In one column will be a list of words that define the concept *kadosh*, and in the second column will be the opposites of these words. (See **appendix A: Concept attainment worksheet**.) Each pair will be asked to title each column, and then to add 3 or 4 more pairs of words to the columns.

#### 30-45 Minutes: *Full-group discussion of kedushah*

The educator(s) will gather the full group back together and pose the following questions for discussion:

- What titles did you put on each of the columns? (After hearing some answers, the educator(s) should share that one column might be titled “holy” and the other “unholy.” The educator(s) should also introduce the Hebrew word for “holy” here: *kadosh*.)
- Do you notice any words within each column that seem to conflict?
- Which of the words in each column do you think are especially a Jewish definition of *kodesh*? Which words seem to be more secular, or even non-Jewish?
- Why do you think that *kedushah*—holiness—is so difficult to define?

#### 45-65 Minutes: *Chevruta discussion of Kedoshim Tih'yu*

The educator(s) will conclude the above discussion and ask the women to find a partner—adult women should work together and adolescent women should work together. The educator(s) will give each pair a single sheet on which participants will see the first 2 verses of Leviticus 19, followed by an excerpt from Rabbi Elyse Goldstein’s Contemporary Reflection on the *Kedoshim* Torah portion, as well as questions for the pair to discuss following the reading (see **Appendix B**).

#### 65-90 Minutes: *Individual reflection*

Each woman should find (or be given) the following 4 things:

- 1) Her personal covenant (unit 2, lesson 3)
- 2) Her collage representing the modern secular understanding of the roles, attributes, and skills of a good woman (unit 1, lesson 3)
- 3) The image she created of a good woman (unit 1, lesson 4)
- 4) Her journal

Each woman should find her own space in the room and reflect on the following questions, using her journal to record her answers:

- How does the quote from Leviticus work (or not work) with your personal theology?
- The quote from Leviticus seems to imply a relationship that every Jew has with God. How does this implication work (or not work) with your personal covenant?
- How does your collage compare with what you understand about Judaism’s value that we are all *kedoshim* (holy)?
- How does your image of a good woman compare with what you understand about Judaism’s value that we are all *kedoshim* (holy)?

### *Unit 3: Finding Jewish Voices*

- Finally, using everything you have come to understand about Judaism's value of *kedushah* (holiness), compose your own definition of *kedushah*.

#### *90-110 Minutes: Blessings, Snack, and Break*

The words for the blessings over food and drink should be distributed, and after the blessings are recited together, participants should enjoy a snack and a break.

#### *110-140 Minutes: Four Corners*

The educator(s) should hang 4 signs around the room. On each sign should be one of the definitions of *kadosh* from the concept attainment list. The educator(s) should ask participants to consult their journals to see the definition of *kedushah* that they wrote before the break. Based on that definition, they should stand by 1 of the 4 signs that is closest to their own definition. Once all of the women have chosen a place in the room, the educator(s) should give the participants 10-15 minutes to discuss their choice with the other women who are standing with them by one of the signs. During this discussion, participants should be encouraged to share the definitions of *kedushah* that they created, and to explain how the sign they chose relates to their own definition. Next, participants in each of the 4 groups should explain why they feel this definition (on the sign) truly captures the meaning of the word *kadosh*. Participants should be encouraged to draw on all of the resources they have consulted during the session in order to create their argument.

For the remaining time of this activity, the educator(s) should moderate a full-group discussion, as each group presents its explanation as to why their definition of *kadosh* is the most important. The educator(s) should conclude the discussion by underlining both the importance and the complexity of the idea of *kedushah* in Judaism—God commands us to be *kedoshim*, but there are many, and sometimes opposing, ways of understanding what being *kedoshim* really means.

#### *140-170 Minutes: Kedushah jewelry-making*

If possible, the educator(s) should bring in an “expert” from the community to quickly teach the participants about some basic jewelry-making skills. The educator(s) should provide high-quality supplies so that participants are excited to regularly wear the jewelry that they create during this activity.

Ideally participants would be able to choose what kind of jewelry to create (bracelet, necklace, ring, etc.), insuring that it is a kind of jewelry that the women are likely to wear. Further, participants should be encouraged to create a piece of jewelry that both they and others will be able to see (without looking in a mirror). This probably implies that the bracelet is ideal, but the final decision belongs to the educator(s).

Participants should create a piece of jewelry that reminds them of their understanding of the Jewish value of being *kadosh*. It is recommended that participants try to make use of the Hebrew word *kadosh* (or *kedushah*) in their jewelry.

#### *170-175 Minutes: Jewelry-sharing*

Mothers and daughters should show each other the jewelry that they created. They should share their answers to the following question with each other:

### *Unit 3: Finding Jewish Voices*

- How will/do you remind yourself to act with *kedushah* in your relationships with yourself and with others?

#### *175-180 Minutes: Closing Blessing*

The session will end with the singing or reciting of the group's chosen closing blessing.

#### ***Materials***

Concept attainment worksheets (Appendix A)

Pens

Leviticus 19:1-2 and commentary (Appendix B)

Journals

Personal covenants

Modern, secular good woman collages

Personal good woman projects

Questions for journaling

4 signs for 4 Corners exercise

Jewelry-making supplies



## Lesson Two: Half Session

### ***Enduring Understanding: Focus for this Lesson***

- The value of *kedushah* (holiness), as described in Jewish text, demands that women care for their bodies and their communities.
- Jewish feminism calls on today's Jewish women to question the limits to women's power and involvement in ancient and contemporary, Jewish and secular societies.
- Judaism can guide Jewish women as they cope with the challenges of womanhood in contemporary western society.

### ***Essential Questions: Focus for this Lesson***

- What does Judaism have to offer me, especially as a woman?
- In what ways is my understanding of covenant and the *kedushah* (holiness) of my life connected?
- How are Jewish women powerful?

### ***Objectives: By the end of this lesson, learners should be able to...***

- Paraphrase Genesis 1:26-27.
- Connect the idea of being created in God's image from Genesis 1:26-27 with the value of being *kadosh* from Leviticus 19:1-2.
- List several ways that they feel they are both created in the image of God and *kadosh*.
- Talk openly about body image issues with other women.

### ***Core Activities for this Lesson***

- For this lesson participants should be divided into 2 groups: adolescent women and adult women. Ideally the second part of the discussion in each group of women would be facilitated by a community expert in women's body image concerns (e.g. a psychologist or social worker).
- Before the groups begin their discussions, each woman should receive her journal, and reflect on the following prompt:
  - During our last session we examined Judaism's value that we are all *kadosh* (holy). In what moments in your life have you felt most and least *kadosh*? How so?
- The educator(s) should then introduce Genesis 1:26-27 (**see Appendix C**), making a connection to Leviticus 19:1-2 (**see Appendix B**). The educator(s) should lead the groups in discussing the following questions:
  - What do you think it means that human beings are created in the image of God?
  - If God is perfect, does this mean that we are perfect? Can human beings ever be perfect?
  - Does looking at your personal challenges through the lens of this verse make you feel differently about those challenges? If so, how so? If not, why not?

### Unit 3: Finding Jewish Voices

- If all human beings are created in the image of God, how can we explain mental and/or physical disabilities and diseases?
- Women should work in pairs and read together the text on eating disorders in the Jewish community (see **Appendix D: excerpts from Eating Disorders in the Jewish Community, by Esther Altmann, Ph.D.**). They should discuss the following questions:
  - What experience do you have with eating disorders?
  - Why do you think women—and Jewish women in particular—suffer from disordered eating habits?
  - How do you usually feel about your own body?
- The community expert (or the educator(s), if no expert is available) should facilitate a discussion about the widespread problem of women’s low self-esteem, especially in the area of body image. Some sample questions:
  - What do you think about Rabbi Diane Cohler-Esses’ theory that, “...we are hungry because we feel we are not permitted to legitimately fill our needs for power, for comfort, for love; we often feel like we can't speak out, express anger, disappointment, or frustration.”<sup>1</sup>
  - In what ways do you feel limited in your life?
  - How can you act on behalf of yourself and others to make a positive difference in your community on the issue of negative body image and disordered eating?
  - Are there times that you have particularly felt created in the image of God?
  - When is it/has it been most difficult to feel that you were created in the image of God?
  - How is it for you to accept the idea that you were created in the image of God? How can/do you live this Jewish value each day?
- The discussion should finish with another opportunity for journaling. Women should respond to the following prompt:
  - List as many things about yourself as you can that remind you that you are created in the image of God.

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<sup>1</sup> From Eating Disorders in the Jewish Community by Esther Altmann, Ph.D.  
[http://www.myjewishlearning.com/practices/Ethics/Our\\_Bodies/Health\\_and\\_Healing/Carving\\_for\\_Ones\\_Health/Eating\\_Disorders.shtml](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/practices/Ethics/Our_Bodies/Health_and_Healing/Carving_for_Ones_Health/Eating_Disorders.shtml)

***Note to Educator: Before the next session, each woman should take 3 minutes to do the following exercise. “Set a timer for 3 minutes and stand in front of a full-length mirror. Study every part of your body—head to toe. When the timer goes off, draw a line down the middle of a piece of paper, and list on one side of the paper each of the areas of your body that you feel good about. On the other side, list each of the areas of your body that you do not feel good about. Bring this piece of paper to our next session. You will not be asked to share it with anyone, so please be as honest with yourself as possible.”***

## Lesson Three: Full Session

### ***Enduring Understanding: Focus for this Lesson***

- The value of *kedushah* (holiness), as described in Jewish text, demands that women care for their bodies and their communities.
- Jewish feminism calls on today's Jewish women to question the limits to women's power and involvement in ancient and contemporary, Jewish and secular societies.
- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.
- Judaism can guide Jewish women as they cope with the challenges of womanhood in contemporary western society.

### ***Essential Questions: Focus for this Lesson***

- What does Judaism have to offer me, especially as a woman?
- How does my womanhood inform my understanding of what it means to be Jewish?
- How are Jewish women powerful?
- In what ways is my understanding of covenant and the *kedushah* (holiness) of my life connected?

### ***Objectives: By the end of this lesson, learners should be able to...***

- Compare and contrast their internal voices that both affirm and criticize.
- Create a physical representation of the different messages they hear about their self-worth.
- Describe some ways in which Judaism empowers them in different areas of their lives.
- Explain the genre of slam poetry.
- Write a slam poem to express the place of Judaism in their lives.

### ***Core Activities for this Lesson***

- Each woman should be given a few minutes to reflect in her journal on the process of doing the mirror exercise at home. Following this personal reflection, the educator(s) should ask, if participants feel comfortable, if anyone is willing to share how they felt about doing the mirror exercise.
- Each woman should be given strips of paper in 2 different colors. On 1 color paper strips participants should write statements that make them feel (or help them remember) that they are created in the image of God. On the other color paper strip participants should write statements that make them feel that they are not created in the image of God. Women should make use of the mirror exercise as well as any of the memorable things that others have said to them about themselves over time—physical or otherwise—and any thoughts they have about themselves beyond what they recorded in the mirror exercise.
- Each woman should be given a mirror with a frame. Ideally each woman should receive a full-length mirror, but if this is cost-prohibitive then a smaller mirror with a frame will work. Participants should glue the colored strips that make

### Unit 3: Finding Jewish Voices

- them feel/help them remember that they are created in the image of God to the frame of the mirror. Prior to gluing, participants may wish to decorate the strips with images, colors, glitter, etc.
- Each participant should then take the strips of paper on which she wrote the statements that make her feel that she is not created in the image of God. If possible, the full group should go outside and everyone should place their un-God-like strips of paper in a fire-resistant container. The group should remain silent as the educator(s) light the pile of strips on fire. Everyone should wait until all of the paper has been consumed by the fire. Then the group should return inside.
  - The completed mirrors should be displayed around the room. Participants should walk around to view each of the mirrors. It should be left up to the group to decide whether the mirrors have participants' names on them or not. After everyone has toured the gallery of mirrors, the educator(s) should lead a full-group discussion to debrief the process of creating these mirrors and of viewing each other's mirrors. The discussion should especially focus on shared experiences/statements and on empowerment of participants in this shared experience.
  - After snack/break, the full group should reconvene to watch Vanessa Hidary perform her slam poem Hebrew Mamita (see CD or <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubdGjzzJiVs>). The educator(s) should be sure to preview the poem before using it—it does contain some strong adult language and imagery. After watching the performance, each woman should receive a copy of the words to the poem (see **Appendix E: Hebrew Mamita by Vanessa Hidary**).
  - The educator(s) should lead a full-group discussion to unpack the poem. Some sample questions:
    - What does “Jewish” look like to you? What does that mean?
    - Have there been times when you have tried to hide your Judaism, or just tried to be less obviously Jewish?
    - Why is it sometimes uncomfortable to be Jewish?
    - When is it most comfortable to be Jewish?
  - Following the full group discussion adolescent women should pair up with other adolescent women, and adult women should do the same. They should discuss answers to the following questions, and record them in their journals:
    - What do you love about being Jewish?
    - What is most difficult about being Jewish?
    - How does/could Judaism empower you in different areas of your life?
    - How does being Jewish make you feel about being a woman?
  - Each participant should begin working on her own slam poem that addresses her answers to the above questions. Participants should be encouraged to continue working on their poems between this session and the next session, and to bring their completed poem to the next session.
  - If the educator(s) know any slam poets in the community, it would be ideal to invite the slam poet to the final part of this lesson to offer some insight into writing and performing slam poetry. If no slam poet is available, the educator(s)

### *Unit 3: Finding Jewish Voices*

should explain slam poetry: Slam poetry "... can feature a broad range of voices, styles, cultural traditions, and approaches to writing and performance. Some poets are closely associated with the vocal delivery style found in hip-hop music and draw heavily on the tradition of dub poetry, a rhythmic and politicized genre belonging to black and particularly West Indian culture. Others employ an unrhyming narrative formula. Some use traditional theatric devices including shifting voices and tones, while others may recite an entire poem in ironic monotone. Some poets use nothing but their words to deliver a poem, while others stretch the boundaries of the format, tap-dancing or beatboxing or using highly-choreographed movements."<sup>2</sup>

***Note to Educator: The next session will be a poetry slam. Participants should not only be prepared to share their slam poetry with the group, but to perform it in the style of slam poetry. Participants should be encouraged to watch some other examples of slam poetry online at home in order to better acquaint themselves with the genre.***

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<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slam\\_poetry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slam_poetry)

## Lesson Four: Half Session

### ***Enduring Understanding: Focus for this Lesson***

- The value of *kedushah* (holiness), as described in Jewish text, demands that women care for their bodies and their communities.
- Jewish feminism calls on today's Jewish women to question the limits to women's power and involvement in ancient and contemporary, Jewish and secular societies.
- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.
- Judaism can guide Jewish women as they cope with the challenges of womanhood in contemporary western society.

### ***Essential Questions: Focus for this Lesson***

- What does Judaism have to offer me, especially as a woman?
- How does my womanhood inform my understanding of what it means to be Jewish?
- How are Jewish women powerful?
- In what ways is my understanding of covenant and the *kedushah* (holiness) of my life connected?

### ***Objectives: By the end of this lesson, learners should be able to...***

- Perform a slam poem that they wrote.
- Identify some deep connections between Judaism and other areas/aspects of their lives.
- Challenge themselves to stretch beyond their comfort zones

### ***Core Activities for this Lesson***

- The room should be set up like a performance space. Alternatively, the educator(s) could rent a performance space for this session. If the participants feel comfortable, family and friends could be invited to the session. The community slam poetry expert should be invited. The room should feel cozy and intimate, and ideally some comforting food and beverages would be available (e.g. tea, coffee, cookies, sparkling cider, hors d'oeuvres, etc.)
- Each woman should perform her slam poem for the rest of the group.
- If there is time following the performances, the guests should be invited to share their experience as audience members, and participants should be invited to share their experience both writing and performing their slam poem.

## Appendix A

<b>Your Title:</b>	<b>Your Title:</b>
Sacred	Regular
Important	Normal
Heavenly	Earthly
Set apart	Inter-mingled
Associated with God	Associated with people
Perfect and flawless	Imperfect and flawed
Having to do with religion	Having to do with daily life
Connectedness	Isolation



## Appendix B

Leviticus 19:1-2

<sup>1</sup>Adonai spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup>Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them: You shall be holy, for I, Adonai your God, am holy.<sup>1</sup>

“*Parashat K’doshim* places before us one of the most difficult commandments in the whole Torah—not kashrut or Shabbat, nor even the rules of sexual conduct, but rather the admonition to ‘be holy.’ Throughout the Torah we are given rules and statutes that tell us what to do. Here we are told what to be. We find a similar statement in Exodus 19:6, commanding us to be a ‘kingdom of priests and a holy people.’ But what does it mean to be holy? *K’doshim* does not tell us...

But note that even though the parashah enumerates the specifics of holy behavior, it never defines what it means by the word *kadosh* (‘holy’). Many commentators have tried to understand the term *kadosh* as indicating a state of being. Rashi (11<sup>th</sup> century) and Rambam (13<sup>th</sup> century) both interpret ‘you shall be holy’ as meaning ‘you shall be separate.’ For them, holiness requires standing apart as Jews, with a firm set of boundaries. The end of *K’doshim* underscores this point: ‘You shall be holy to M, for I Adonai am holy, and I have set you apart from other peoples to be Mine’ ([Leviticus] 20:26).

This concept of separation is critical to understanding Jewish spirituality. For example, in the classic Jewish marriage formula, the phrase *harei at m’kudeshet li* means ‘you are set apart for me from others’... In the Talmud, *hekdesh* is money or goods set aside or separated for tithing or donation. Holiness seems intrinsically linked in Judaism to separation (*havdalah*), making distinctions: milk or meat, Shabbat or weekday, Jew or gentile, female or male.

But does this concept of spirituality ring true for women? Would there be a different kind of *imitatio dei* [imitation of the Divine] for women? Do women experience holiness differently? For those women who carry life inside, attached to another being who is—at the same time—part of them, separateness does not equal spirituality. For those women who breastfeed—who nurture and sustain from their very own bodies—connection is more at the root of holiness. For those women who form bonded friendships from earliest memory, or who bring the family together, who are the cohesive force in a group, a definition of holiness is needed that does not imply building fences. Thus, though *parashat K’doshim* demands holiness, it is up to us to define holiness in a way that is truthful for both women and men.”<sup>2</sup>

- How does it feel to be commanded to *be holy*?
- When in your life do you especially feel holy? Have you felt connected to God in these moments?
- What do you think of Elyse Goldstein’s argument that *kedushah* may be different for women than for men?

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<sup>1</sup> Translation adapted from *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society (2003).

<sup>2</sup> Goldstein, Elyse. *Contemporary Reflection. The Torah: A Women’s Commentary*. Eskenazi, Dr. Tamara Cohn & Rabbi Andrea L. Weiss, Ph.D., Ed. (2008). New York: URJ Press. Pgs. 718-719.

## **Appendix C**

Genesis 1:26-27<sup>3</sup>

<sup>26</sup>God now said, “Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness; and let them hold sway over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky, over the beasts, over all the earth, over all that creeps upon the earth.” <sup>27</sup>So God created the human beings in [the divine] image, creating [them] in the image of God, creating them male and female.

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<sup>3</sup> Translation from The Torah: A Women’s Commentary. Eskenazi, Dr. Tamara Cohn & Rabbi Andrea L. Weiss, Ph.D., Ed. (2008). New York: URJ Press. Pg. 7-8.

## Appendix D<sup>4</sup>

**Eating Disorders in the Jewish Community: Anorexia and bulimia are amongst the most emotionally and physically devastating disorders affecting young Jewish women.**

"I feel fat today" is an all too familiar morning refrain in many households. In Western societies thinness has become synonymous with both beauty and success. The imperative to perfect the female body through dieting, exercise, and plastic surgery has become an obsessive preoccupation for adolescent girls and women in our culture. Eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia are a dangerous consequence of this culture of thinness.

### *In the Jewish Community*

Anorexia and bulimia are most prevalent within upwardly mobile demographic groups, and are amongst the most emotionally and physically devastating disorders affecting young Jewish women. The Jewish community has become increasingly aware that eating disorders are a serious health concern and, in some cases, a life threatening condition.

In a recent review of studies by Dr. Caroline Peyser, the data regarding eating disorder rates amongst American Jews was inconclusive as to whether eating disorders are a more prevalent problem within the Jewish community, in comparison to the general population. However, anecdotal observations reveal that most Jewish women have had a friend or family member who has struggled with some sort of eating disorder. Data from Israel indicates that body preoccupations are also a pervasive worry among Israeli adolescent girls. For example, in one study of weight concerns among high school girls in Israel, 74 percent of 10th grade girls reported having dieted at some point and 47 percent of the girls reported being on a diet at the time of the study. Yet only 12 percent of the girls were actually overweight...

Rabbi Diane Cohler-Esses cites the verse from Amos--"Behold, days are coming, declares the Lord God, When I will send a famine in the land, Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, But rather for hearing the words of the Lord."

From her perspective, there is a famine in the land, and it is women's hunger to be themselves. Rabbi Cohler-Esses explains, "we are hungry because we feel we are not permitted to legitimately fill our needs for power, for comfort, for love; we often feel like we can't speak out, express anger, disappointment, or frustration." In other words, the societal imperative to curtail the appetite for food may be a symbol of a culture that demands that women limit their desires, and not take up too much space in the world.

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<sup>4</sup>[http://www.myjewishlearning.com/practices/Ethics/Our\\_Bodies/Health\\_and\\_Healing/Caring\\_for\\_Ones\\_Health/Eating\\_Disorders.shtml](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/practices/Ethics/Our_Bodies/Health_and_Healing/Caring_for_Ones_Health/Eating_Disorders.shtml)

## Appendix E

Hebrew Mamita by Vanessa Hidary<sup>5</sup>

I meet a guy in a bar that's cute.  
He wears LL Bean duck boots and guards my bar stool when I have to go pee.  
He asks me out to dinner for the following Tuesday.  
I decline. Tuesday is Yom Kippur, I will be fasting.

“You're Jewish?  
“Wow! You don't look Jewish  
You don't act Jewish.”

And he says it in this tone, that sounds like he's complimenting me.  
And I say....And I say....

Nothing.

I say nothing, which when combined with a flirty smile translates to thank you.  
I say nothing cause I got a contact high off someone's anti-Semitic crack pipe,  
I say nothing because somewhere along my life's graph I'd been swayed to believe that  
being Jewish is not too cool, not too sexy.  
I say nothing cause I'm in a deep sleep,  
A Snow White coma,  
Destined to meet my prince five years later  
in the form of stone, in Jerusalem, named The Wailing Wall.

I place folded paper with written prayers for the dead, in a nook,  
in a nook in the wall, next to a woman with concentration camp numbers tattooed on her  
forearm.  
Surrounded by fervent praying, and bodies swaying,  
I am far more awake than I ever thought possible.  
I suddenly remember The Exodus of the Israelites,  
and I walk barefoot from the wall in the desert to the bar,  
and look for the guy with the duck boots.

He's not there, but I have something to say to him.  
He's not there, so I make a soap box, and reenact the scene.

Bartender, tell me I don't look Jewish.  
Tell me I don't act Jewish.  
Cause I'm thinking, I'm saying,  
What does Jewish Look like to You?

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<sup>5</sup> [www.hebrewmamita.com](http://www.hebrewmamita.com)

*Unit 3: Finding Jewish Voices*

Should I fiddle on a fucking roof for you?  
Should I humor you with oy-veys, and refuse to pay,  
because you know how we like to Jew you down.  
Jew you down? I'd like to throw you down.

'Cause I walked here, long miles on hot sand,  
to publicly repent my sins,  
'cause I...  
Almost forgot 6 million died without having the option of giggling on bar stools,  
almost forgot that concentration camp survivors are now a dying generation. That my  
children may never have the sensation,  
of seeing in person.  
And if you must see me as that blood sucking Jew,  
see me as that pesky mosquito, that bites and sucks- the prejudice right out of you!

Just feel the need to say I can't be the only exception to the rule,  
just the one right now using my poetry as a tool,  
to follow KRS One,  
I will use my gift to only uplift,  
and maybe change just one heart tonight.

I'm the Hebrew Mamita, long lost daughter of Abraham and Sarah.  
The sexy, Oy Veying. Chutzpa-having, non-cheaping, non-conspiracizing, always-  
questioning, hip-hop-listening, Torah scroll-reading, All people-loving, pride filled  
Jewish Girl.  
Bigging up all people who are a little miffed,  
'cause someone tells you don't look like, or act like your people.

Impossible. 'Cause you are your people.  
You just tell them they don't look.  
Period.

## Unit 4: Sharing Jewish Women's Voices

### *Curriculum Understandings*

- As exemplified in Jewish text, the challenges of womanhood at every stage of life demand patience, compassion, and constant self-reflection.
- The Jewish feminist value of equal access to both God and to Jewish tradition rejects the androcentric signs and language of covenant in the Biblical text.
- The value of *kedushah* (holiness), as described in Jewish text, demands that women care for their bodies and their communities.
- Jewish feminism calls on today's Jewish women to question the limits to women's power and involvement in ancient and contemporary, Jewish and secular societies.
- The masculine language and imagery used to describe God in Jewish text can prevent Jewish women from having nuanced and healthy relationships with God.
- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.
- Judaism can guide Jewish women as they cope with the challenges of womanhood in contemporary western society.

### *Unit Understandings*

- As exemplified in Jewish text, the challenges of womanhood at every stage of life demand patience, compassion, and constant self-reflection.
- Jewish feminism calls on today's Jewish women to question the limits to women's power and involvement in ancient and contemporary, Jewish and secular societies.
- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.
- Judaism can guide Jewish women as they cope with the challenges of womanhood in contemporary western society.

### *Essential Questions for this Unit*

- In what ways can we best express both Jewish and female aspects of our identities?
- How can Jewish values guide us as women in the contemporary western world?
- What is the place of women in contemporary, progressive, Jewish life?

### *Unit Assessments*

- List of different kinds of *mitzvot*
- Vision statement for gender in Jewish life
- Teaching fellow participants about *mikvah* in "expert" groups
- Vision statement for participants' best Jewish female life

## *Unit 4: Sharing Jewish Women's Voices*

### ***Memorable Moments***

- Senior Jewish women's panel
- Mikvah Monologues reading
- Mother/daughter reflections
- Tallit-making
- Final blessing ceremony

## Lesson One: Full Session

### ***Enduring Understandings: Focus for this Lesson***

- Jewish feminism calls on today's Jewish women to question the limits to women's power and involvement in ancient and contemporary, Jewish and secular societies.
- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.

### ***Essential Questions: Focus for this Lesson***

- In what ways can we best express both Jewish and female aspects of our identities?
- What is the place of women in contemporary, progressive, Jewish life?

### ***Objectives: By the end of this lesson, learners should be able to...***

- Explain what a *mitzvah* (commandment) is.
- Compare and contrast different categories of *mitzvot* (e.g. positive, negative, time-bound, etc.)
- Evaluate traditional Jewish expectations about women performing *mitzvot*.
- Express their own motivations for performing *mitzvot*.
- Compare and contrast their religious experience as progressive Jewish women living in the United States with the experience of some Jewish women living in Jerusalem.

### ***Core Activities for this Lesson***

- The educator(s) should ask participants to define the word *mitzvah*. After the group has created a list of possible definitions, e.g. law, commandment, good deed, action, etc., the educator(s) should either distribute or write up an encyclopedia definition of the word *mitzvah* (**Appendix A**).
- Mothers and daughters should work together in pairs to examine the Mishnah and Gemara for b. Kiddushin 29A and 33b-34b (**See Appendix B**). They should focus on the following questions:
  - What kinds of *mitzvot* are women obligated to perform?
  - What kinds of *mitzvot* are women exempt from?
  - What clues does the text offer, if any, as to why the expectations to perform *mitzvot* are different for men than they are for women?
- After the paired discussion the educator(s) should gather the full group to clarify the technical terms positive/negative and time-bound *mitzvot*. As a group participants should generate a list of *mitzvot* that they perform in each category. (E.g. prayer, lighting Shabbat candles, fasting on Yom Kippur, not eating leavened foods (*chametz*) during Passover, not stealing, not committing adultery, etc.) The educator(s) should conclude the discussion by asking participants how the exemptions from women performing *mitzvot* make them feel.
- Following snack and the break, the full group should gather together to watch Faye Lederman's documentary Women of the Wall. (The educator(s) should be



*Unit 4: Sharing Jewish Women's Voices*

- able to rent the film from a rental store or online service.) The film's running time is 31 minutes.
- When the film ends the educator(s) should invite participants to respond to the film in their journals. One possible prompt could be, "How does this film make you feel about being a Jewish woman?"
  - The group should reconvene to discuss the connection between the text from Kiddushin and Women of the Wall. The discussion should especially focus on why participants feel it is important to perform the *mitzvot* on the list that was generated in the earlier discussion, as well as focusing on the differences between their Jewish religious experience as Jewish women in the United States and the religious experience of the women in Women of the Wall.

## Lesson Two: Half Session

### ***Enduring Understandings: Focus for this Lesson***

- As exemplified in Jewish text, the challenges of womanhood at every stage of life demand patience, compassion, and constant self-reflection.
- Jewish feminism calls on today's Jewish women to question the limits to women's power and involvement in ancient and contemporary, Jewish and secular societies.
- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.

### ***Essential Questions: Focus for this Lesson***

- In what ways can we best express both Jewish and female aspects of our identities?
- How can Jewish values guide us as women in the contemporary western world?
- What is the place of women in contemporary, progressive, Jewish life?

### ***Objectives: By the end of this lesson, learners should be able to...***

- Compare and contrast their Jewish experience of contemporary progressive Judaism with the Jewish experiences of senior women in the community.
- Describe some of the ways that progressive Judaism has evolved in the last several decades to be more inclusive of women.
- Create a vision statement for Jewish life that addresses the role of gender in Jewish life.

### ***Core Activities for this Lesson***

- The educator(s) should invite 3 senior Jewish women from the community to serve on a panel. The women should be given the following prompt (ahead of time) to reflect on:
  - What was it like to be a young woman in the Jewish community in which you grew up?
  - What were your favorite aspects of Jewish life?
  - Were there parts of Jewish life were you excluded from because you were a girl/woman? If so, which ones? Were you aware of being excluded at the time? Looking back, how do you feel today about those experiences?
  - Finally, as Judaism has evolved over the years to be more inclusive of women, what aspects of Jewish life have you participated in or experimented with that you would have been excluded from many years ago?

***Note to Educator: If there are female rabbis in the local community, you should also consider inviting them to participate in the panel and to discuss their experience as women in a profession that was, only a few decades ago, entirely closed to women.***

*Unit 4: Sharing Jewish Women's Voices*

- Once each woman on the panel has offered her reflections, program participants should be invited to ask questions.
- As a full group, participants should summarize some of the changes in women's involvement in Jewish life by creating a list of some of the areas of Jewish life that have, in the last few decades, been opened to women.
- Finally, participants should write in their journals a 2-5-sentence vision statement for Jewish life that especially addresses the role of gender in Jewish life. A vision statement for Jewish life is a statement about how Jewish life would look in each participant's ideal world. If time allows, and if participants are willing, the educator(s) should ask for a few volunteers to read their vision statements aloud.

***Note to Educator: You may invite participants to do the following optional homework. "Interview any Jewish senior women in your own family to hear their answers to the questions that the panelists responded to today."***

## Lesson Three: Full Session

### ***Enduring Understandings: Focus for this Lesson***

- As exemplified in Jewish text, the challenges of womanhood at every stage of life demand patience, compassion, and constant self-reflection.
- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.
- Judaism can guide Jewish women as they cope with the challenges of womanhood in contemporary western society.

### ***Essential Questions: Focus for this Lesson***

- In what ways can we best express both Jewish and female aspects of our identities?
- How can Jewish values guide us as women in the contemporary western world?
- What is the place of women in contemporary, progressive, Jewish life?

### ***Objectives: By the end of this lesson, learners should be able to...***

- Explain what a *mikvah* (ritual bath) is.
- Compare and contrast the ways that *mikvah* (ritual immersion) was used in ancient Jewish life with how it is used in contemporary traditional and progressive Jewish life.
- Identify some barriers that progressive Jewish women might feel to using a *mikvah*.
- Create a list of non-traditional opportunities for women to use the *mikvah*.

### ***Core Activities for this Lesson***

- The educator(s) should divide participants into 3 groups. One group should receive the texts that explain what a *mikvah* is and what specifications make for a kosher *mikvah* (**Appendix C**). One group should receive the texts that explain the ancient and traditional uses for *mikvah* (**Appendix D**). The third group should receive the texts that describe contemporary rituals that have been developed for the *mikvah* (**Appendix E**). Each group should read through its texts and be prepared to summarize the texts for someone who has not read them. The guiding question for discussion is, “What does your text say about the ritual of *mikvah*?”
- The educator(s) should ask participants to regroup into groups of 3 participants. Each group of 3 should have 1 woman who has studied each of the texts in appendices C-E. In this way, the groups are composed of 3 “experts.” In these groups of 3, each “expert” should describe the texts she read and explain the most important points from her texts.
- Following the small group discussions, the educator(s) should gather the full group back together to share images of different *mikvaot*, especially those from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple in Jerusalem and those from Mayyim Hayyim Community Mikvah in Newton Massachusetts (**Appendix F: some examples of mikvaot both ancient and modern**). As the group looks at the images, the educator(s) should ask participants for their reactions to the ritual of *mikvah*.
  - What questions do you have about the ritual of *mikvah*?

#### Unit 4: Sharing Jewish Women's Voices

- Has anyone here ever immersed in a *mikvah*? What was the experience like?
- If you have never immersed in a *mikvah*, does it sound like a ritual you would like to try? Why or why not?
- What important occasions in your life can you imagine marking by using the *mikvah*?
- After snack and break, the educator(s) should pass out copies of The Mikvah Monologues (Appendix G) and divide the group into 2, separating adult and adolescent women. In each group the educator(s) should ask for volunteers to read each of the following monologues: *The Bat Mitzvah Girl*, *The Bride*, *Farewell*, *Products*, and *Niddah*. The women who are not reading should follow along in the script. Following the reading, the educator(s) should lead a discussion in each of the groups:
  - What kinds of emotions did these people experience when they immersed in the *mikvah*?
  - Can you imagine using the *mikvah* for any of the rituals described in these monologues? Why or why not?
  - What would be difficult or weird about using a *mikvah*, especially if there isn't a *mikvah* like Mayyim Hayyim in our community?
- Each discussion should conclude with the participants reflecting in their journals on the following prompts:
  - What important events in your life can you imagine using the *mikvah* to help you mark?
  - If immersion in a *mikvah* is a ritual that appeals to you, what do you like about it?
  - If immersion in a *mikvah* is a ritual that doesn't appeal to you, what do you dislike about it? What other ritual(s) could you imagine that could help you to Jewishly mark an important event in your life?

## Lesson Four: Half Session (Scripted Lesson)

### ***Enduring Understandings: Focus for this Lesson***

- As exemplified in Jewish text, the challenges of womanhood at every stage of life demand patience, compassion, and constant self-reflection.
- Jewish feminism calls on today's Jewish women to question the limits to women's power and involvement in ancient and contemporary, Jewish and secular societies.
- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.
- Judaism can guide Jewish women as they cope with the challenges of womanhood in contemporary western society.

### ***Essential Questions: Focus for this Lesson***

- In what ways can we best express both Jewish and female aspects of our identities?
- How can Jewish values guide us as women in the contemporary western world?
- What is the place of women in contemporary, progressive, Jewish life?

### ***Objectives: By the end of this lesson, learners should be able to...***

- Describe some ways in which they find strength as contemporary women in their Jewish identities.
- Describe some ways in which the year's feminist approach to Judaism has helped them understand and relate to Judaism.
- Analyze some of the ways their relationship with their mother/daughter has grown over the course of the year.
- Create a personal statement that explains the intersection of their Jewish and female identities and their vision for their best Jewish female life.

### ***Time Table***

0-10 Minutes	Opening Ritual
10-25 Minutes	Personal Reflection on the Year
25-40 Minutes	Paired Reflection on the Year
40-50 Minutes	Vision of My Best Jewish Female Life
50-55 Minutes	Transferring and Sharing Vision Statements
55-60 Minutes	Closing Blessing

### ***Detailed Procedure***

#### ***0-10 Minutes: Opening Ritual***

The full group will gather together in a circle for "check-in." Each woman will share a brief headline about how they are feeling in this moment, especially focusing on what events or energy they are carrying with them from outside of this space. The sharing will proceed around the circle, and all women are encouraged—though not forced—to share something with the group. The educator(s) is/are also encouraged to share.

## *Unit 4: Sharing Jewish Women's Voices*

### *10-25 Minutes: Personal Reflection on the Year*

Participants should reflect in their journals on the following 2 prompts:

- How can Judaism help you to be the best woman you can be?
- How has this year's learning about Judaism through the lens of womanhood helped you to better understand your own Jewish identity?

The educator(s) should encourage participants to respond to the prompts in whatever way they see fit, e.g. complete sentences, lists, sketches, etc.

### *25-40 Minutes: Paired Reflection on the Year*

Mothers and daughters should work together. Each woman should share as much of her personal reflection as she is comfortable sharing with her mother/daughter. (The educator(s) should encourage participants to share the full reflection. Having now completed a year of learning together, the hope is that these pairs of women will have built a more trusting relationship and that they will feel more comfortable sharing their reflections with each other than they might have at the beginning of the year.) The women can ask clarifying questions about one another's personal reflections, but otherwise the woman presenting should simply share her reflection uninterrupted. If time allows, each pair should reflect on the following questions:

- What was it like to share your reflections with your partner?
- In what ways do you think this sharing is different now than it was at the beginning of our year together?
- What changes have you seen in your partner's understanding of her Jewish and female identities?

### *40-50 Minutes: Vision of My Best Jewish Female Life*

Participants should return to their journals and create a vision statement of their best Jewish female life. Participants should think about the vision statement as an ideal picture of themselves both as Jews and as women. They should respond to the following prompt:

- In an ideal world, how would you live as a Jew?
- In an ideal world, how would you live as a woman?
- In an ideal world, how would you live as a Jewish woman?

The educator(s) should explain that participants will have 10 minutes to brainstorm, prepare, and create their vision statements. Participants should be encouraged to respond to the prompts either in words or in images. Before beginning the exercise, participants should be given an 8 ½ x 11" piece of unlined, white paper and told that they will be presenting their vision statements on these pieces of paper. If participants would prefer to work directly on the white paper and not in their journals (especially for those who prefer to draw than to write), then they should do so.

### *50-55 Minutes: Transferring and Sharing Vision Statements*

Participants should take a few minutes to transfer their vision statements from their journals to their larger papers (if they have not already done so). Finally, mothers and daughters should share their vision statements. The educator(s) should keep the final vision statements to be used in the final session.

*Unit 4: Sharing Jewish Women's Voices*

*55-60 Minutes: Closing Blessing*

The session will end with the singing or reciting of the group's chosen closing blessing.

***Materials***

Journals

Pens/pencils

Journaling, paired reflection, and vision statement prompts

Paper for final vision statements



## Lesson Five: Full Session

### ***Enduring Understandings: Focus for this Lesson***

- As exemplified in Jewish text, the challenges of womanhood at every stage of life demand patience, compassion, and constant self-reflection.
- Jewish feminism calls on today's Jewish women to question the limits to women's power and involvement in ancient and contemporary, Jewish and secular societies.
- Jewish feminism can guide Jewish women as they strive to understand and relate to Judaism.
- Judaism can guide Jewish women as they cope with the challenges of womanhood in contemporary western society.

### ***Essential Questions: Focus for this Lesson***

- In what ways can we best express both Jewish and female aspects of our identities?
- How can Jewish values guide us as women in the contemporary western world?
- What is the place of women in contemporary, progressive, Jewish life?

### ***Objectives: By the end of this lesson, learners should be able to...***

- Identify the Biblical origins of the *tallit* (prayer shawl)
- Recite the blessing for wearing a *tallit*
- Recite the blessing for ritual hand washing
- Create a blessing for their own *tallit*
- Create their own *tallit*

### ***Core Activities for this Lesson***

- Participants should study the first and second paragraphs of the *v'ahavta* prayer (Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Numbers 15:37-41 **see Appendix H**) in pairs, mothers and daughters working together. They should address the following questions:
  - What do you think are the connections between these 2 texts? Why do we say them together every time Jews pray?
  - How do these texts fit with your own understanding of God and your own covenant with God?
  - What are the fringes for, as described in the text from Numbers? What contemporary Jewish ritual object do you think has its origins in this Biblical text?
- The educator(s) should convene the full group and explain that each woman is going to make her own *tallit*. But before beginning the process each participant should perform a ceremonial hand washing. The educator(s) should explain that, just as a full immersion in the *mikvah* is used to help Jews enter into a state of ritual purity—*sofrim* (those who write Torah scrolls) immerse frequently in their work of creating new Torah scrolls—ritual hand washing can serve a similar purpose. The educator(s) should either pass around or write on the board the blessing for hand washing (**Appendix I**) and lead the full group in the blessing

- before modeling ritual hand washing. Each participant should then perform the ritual for herself, either with bowls of water and cups, or at the sink.
- Each participant should be given the materials to create her own *tallit* (see **Appendix J for information on tallit-making**). The educator(s) should supply a variety of fabrics for participants to choose from, and should have sample *tallitot* available for participants to look at, as well as the blessing for wearing a *tallit* (**Appendix K**). The educator(s) should explain to participants that they may put whatever they want on the *atarah* of their *tallit*—it is common to have the blessing for wearing a *tallit* on the *atarah*—participants should be encouraged to write or paint something that is meaningful to them, representing their Jewish and female identities.
  - When participants have finished decorating their *tallitot*, the educator(s) should show participants how to add the fringes and tie the knots. Before tying each knot, the educator(s) should model saying the blessing for knot-tying (see **Appendix J for information on tallit-making**). Next each participant should add the fringes and tie the knots (while saying the blessing) on her own *tallit*. Mothers and daughters should be encouraged to work together.
  - Following snack and the break, the full group should reconvene in a circle. The educator(s) should once again distribute the blessing for wearing a *tallit* (**Appendix K**) as well as the poem Whoever Wrapped in a Tallit by Yehuda Amichai (**Appendix L**). Everyone should read together aloud the Amichai poem, followed immediately by the blessing for wearing a *tallit*. Each woman should then wrap herself in her own *tallit* and take a couple of minutes for silent reflection. Participants should be encouraged to pull their *tallitot* over their heads in order to better focus on their own reflections.
  - Before the next activity, the educator(s) should ensure that each woman has the blessing that she wrote for her mother/daughter in the second lesson of the second unit (Relating to the Voices of the Divine). Next the adolescent women should enter the center of the circle and group themselves together in a clump. The adult women should encircle them and hold their (i.e. the adult women's) *tallitot* over the heads of the adolescent women and go around the circle reading the blessings they wrote earlier in the year. When each adult woman has shared her blessing, the groups should switch: the adult women should enter the center of the circle and group themselves in a clump while the adolescent women encircle them and hold their *tallitot* over the heads of the adult women. The adolescent women should then go around the circle and read their blessings for the adult women.
  - The session should conclude with everyone in the circle together, with mothers standing next to their daughters. Each woman should wear her *tallit*. Participants should be invited to share their reflections at the end of this year of learning together. The educator(s) should also share some final words. The session should end, in addition to the group's usual closing blessing, with the full group singing the *Shehecheyanu* blessing (**Appendix M**).

## Appendix A<sup>1</sup>

**MITZVAH** (Heb. מצוה), a commandment, precept, or religious duty. The term is derived from the Hebrew root מצו which means "to command" or "to ordain." In common usage, *mitzvah* has taken on the meaning of a good deed. Already in the Talmud, this word was used for a meritorious act as distinct from a positive commandment. The rabbis for instance declared it "a *mitzvah* to hearken to the words of the sages" (Hul. 106a; cf. Git. 15a). Although many different terms such as *hukkah* ("statute," Ex. 27:21), *mishpat* ("ordinance," Deut. 4:5), *edut* ("testimony," Deut. 4:45), *mishmeret* ("observance," Lev. 8:35), and *torah* ("teaching," Ex. 16:28) are mentioned in the Pentateuch to indicate laws only the word *mitzvah* is generally used to include all its commandments. There are traditionally 613 biblical Commandments which are divided into 248 positive mandates and 365 prohibitions. With the increased ritual obligations imposed by the rabbis, the *mitzvot* were also separated into two main categories: *mitzvot de-oraita*, the biblical commandments, and *mitzvot de-rabbanan*, the rabbinic commandments (Pes. 10a; Suk. 44a). There are also instances when the *mitzvot* were classified as *mitzvot kallot*, less important *mitzvot*, and *mitzvot hamurot*, more important *mitzvot* (e.g., Hul. 12:5; Yev. 47b; Av. Zar. 3a). Nevertheless, the rabbis exhorted the people to be mindful of all the *mitzvot*, both light and grave, since the reward for the fulfillment of each precept is not known to man (Avot 2:1). The *mitzvot* were further divided into *sikhliyot* (rational) and *shimiyot* (revealed) by medieval Jewish philosophers (see Commandments, Reasons for). Other distinctions have also been made, such as: commandments performed with the external limbs of the body and those by the heart; commandments regulating conduct between man and his Maker and between man and his fellows; and commandments applicable only to Erez Israel and those not dependent upon Erez Israel. Responsibility for the *mitzvot* is formally assumed by boys at the age of 13 plus one day, and by girls at 12 plus one day (see Bar Mitzvah, Bat Mitzvah, and Puberty). Women are exempt from all affirmative precepts contingent upon a particular time or season although the Talmud also makes those of the Sabbath, Hanukkah, Purim, and Passover obligatory on them. All negative precepts, whether limited to a certain time or not, are binding upon both men and women (Kid. 1:7). The performance of most *mitzvot* is preceded by a benediction which is usually worded: "Who has sanctified us by His commandments and commanded us to..." The omission of the benediction, however, does not invalidate the performance of the *mitzvah*. The opposite of *mitzvah* is *averah*, a transgression. A "precept fulfilled through a transgression" is considered as an *averah*, e.g., one does not discharge his obligation through a stolen lulav (Suk. 30a; see Four Species). Although *mitzvot* were not meant to provide material enjoyment (RH 28a), and the final reward for their performance is in the hereafter (Kid. 39b), true joy and sanctity can be attained only through their observance (Shab. 30b; Sifra 9:2). Man should not anticipate any material recompense for performing the *mitzvot*, but one *mitzvah* brings another in its train (Avot 1:3; 4:2). "God desired to make Israel worthy, therefore He enlarged the Law and multiplied its *mitzvot*" (Mak. 3:16).

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<sup>1</sup> [Encyclopedia Judaica](#) online.

## Appendix B<sup>2</sup>

MISHNAH. ALL OBLIGATIONS OF THE SON UPON THE FATHER,<sup>9</sup> MEN ARE BOUND, BUT WOMEN ARE EXEMPT. BUT ALL OBLIGATIONS OF THE FATHER UPON THE SON, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN ARE BOUND. ALL AFFIRMATIVE PRECEPTS LIMITED TO TIME,<sup>10</sup> MEN ARE LIABLE AND WOMEN ARE EXEMPT. BUT ALL AFFIRMATIVE PRECEPTS NOT LIMITED TO TIME ARE BINDING UPON BOTH MEN AND WOMEN. AND ALL NEGATIVE PRECEPTS, WHETHER LIMITED TO TIME OR NOT LIMITED TO TIME, ARE BINDING UPON BOTH MEN AND WOMEN; EXCEPTING, YE SHALL NOT ROUND [THE CORNERS OF YOUR HEADS],<sup>11</sup> NEITHER SHALT THOU MAR [THE CORNER OF THY BEARD],<sup>12</sup> AND, HE SHALL NOT DEFILE HIMSELF<sup>13</sup> TO THE DEAD.<sup>14</sup>

ALL AFFIRMATIVE PRECEPTS LIMITED TO TIME etc. Our Rabbis taught: Which are affirmative precepts limited to time? Sukkah,<sup>27</sup> lulab,<sup>28</sup> shofar,<sup>29</sup> fringes,<sup>30</sup>

and phylacteries.<sup>1</sup> And what are affirmative precepts not limited to time? Mezuzah,<sup>2</sup> 'battlement',<sup>3</sup> [returning] lost property,<sup>4</sup> and the 'dismissal of the nest.'<sup>5</sup>

Now, is this a general principle? But unleavened bread,<sup>6</sup> rejoicing [on Festivals],<sup>7</sup> and 'assembling',<sup>8</sup> are affirmative precepts limited to time, and yet incumbent upon women.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, study of the Torah, procreation, and the redemption of the son, are not affirmative precepts limited to time, and yet women are exempt [therefrom]?<sup>10</sup> — R. Johanan answered: We cannot learn from general principles, even where exceptions are stated. For we learnt: An 'erub<sup>11</sup> and a partnership,<sup>12</sup> may be made with all comestibles, excepting water and salt. Are there no more [exceptions]: lo, there are mushrooms and truffles! But [we must answer that] we cannot learn from general principles, even where exceptions are stated.

AND AFFIRMATIVE PRECEPTS LIMITED TO TIME, WOMEN ARE EXEMPT. Whence do we know it? — It is learned from phylacteries: just as women are exempt from phylacteries, so are they exempt from all affirmative precepts limited to time. Phylacteries [themselves] are derived from the study of the Torah: just as women are exempt from the study of the Torah, so are they exempt from phylacteries. But let us [rather] compare phylacteries to mezuzah?<sup>13</sup> — phylacteries are assimilated to the study of the Torah in both the first section and the second;<sup>14</sup> whereas they are not assimilated to mezuzah in the second section.<sup>15</sup> Then let mezuzah be assimilated to the study of the Torah?<sup>16</sup> — You cannot think so, because it is written, [And thou shalt write them upon the mezuzah of thine house . . .] That your days may be multiplied:<sup>17</sup> do then men only need life, and not women! But what of sukkah, which is an affirmative precept limited to time, as it is written, ye shall dwell in booths seven days,<sup>18</sup> yet the reason [of woman's exemption] is that Scripture wrote ha-ezrah,<sup>19</sup> to exclude women,<sup>20</sup> but otherwise women would be liable? — Said Abaye, It is necessary: I would have thought, since it is written: 'ye shall dwell in booths seven days', 'ye shall dwell' [meaning] even as ye [normally] dwell [in a house]: just as [normal] dwelling [implies] a husband and wife [together], so must the sukkah be [inhabited by] husband and wife!<sup>21</sup> — But Raba said,

It<sup>1</sup> is necessary [for another reason]: I might have thought, we derive [identity of law from the employment of] 'fifteen' here and in connection with the Feast of unleavened bread:<sup>2</sup> just as there, women are liable, so here too. Hence it is necessary.

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<sup>2</sup> Translation from Judaic Classics online.

## Appendix C<sup>3</sup>

**Mikvah** (or **mikveh**) is a ritual bath designed for the purpose of ritual immersion in Judaism. The word "mikvah", as used in the Hebrew Bible, literally means a "collection" - generally, a collection of water.

Several biblical regulations specify that full immersion in water is required to regain ritual purity after ritually impure incidents have occurred. Most forms of impurity can be nullified through immersion in any natural collection of water. Some, such as a *Zav*, however require "living water," such as springs or groundwater wells. Living water has the further advantage of being able to purify even while flowing as opposed to rainwater which must be stationary in order to purify. The *mikvah* is designed to simplify this requirement, by providing a bathing facility that remains in ritual contact with a natural source of water.

The traditional rules regarding the construction of a mikvah are based on those specified in classical rabbinical literature. According to these rules, a mikvah must be connected to a natural spring or well of naturally occurring water, and thus can be supplied by rivers and lakes which have natural springs as their source. A cistern filled by the rain is also permitted to act as a mikvah's water supply. Similarly snow, ice and hail are allowed to act as the supply of water to a mikvah, as long as it melts in a certain manner. A river that dries up on a regular basis cannot be used because it is presumably rainwater which cannot purify while flowing. Oceans for the most part have the status of natural springs.

A mikvah must, according to the classical regulations, contain enough water to cover the entire body of an average-sized man; based on a mikvah with the dimensions of 3 cubits long, 1 cubit wide, and 1 cubit deep, the necessary volume of water was *estimated* as being 40 *seah* of water. The exact volume referred to by a *seah* is debated, and classical rabbinical literature only specifies that it is enough to fit 144 eggs; most Orthodox Jews use the stringent ruling of the Avrohom Yeshaya Karelitz, according to which one *seah* is 14.3 litres, and therefore a mikvah must contain approximately 575 litres. This volume of water could be topped up with water from any source.

There are also classical requirements for the manner in which the water can be stored and transported to the pool; the water must flow naturally to the mikvah from the source, which essentially means that it must be supplied by gravity or a natural pressure gradient, and the water cannot be pumped there by hand or carried. It was also forbidden for the water to pass through any vessel which could hold water within it, (however pipes open to the air at both ends are fine) as a result, tap water could not be used as the primary water source for a mikvah, although it can be used to top the water up to a suitable level. To avoid issues with these rules in large cities, various methods are employed to establish a valid mikvah, and tap water is made to flow over the top of this, and through a conduit into a larger pool.

Most contemporary mikvahs are indoor constructions, involving rain water collected from a cistern, and passed through a duct by gravity into an ordinary bathing pool; the mikvah can be heated, taking into account certain rules, often resulting in an environment not unlike a spa.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikvah>

## Appendix D<sup>4</sup>

Traditionally, the **mikvah** was used by both men and women to regain ritual purity after various events, according to regulations laid down in the Torah and in classical rabbinical literature. The Torah requires full immersion...

- after Zav/Zavah- abnormal discharges of bodily fluids
- after Tzaraath- certain skin condition(s). These are termed *lepra* in the Septuagint, and therefore traditionally translated into English as *leprosy*; this is probably a translation error, as the Greek term *lepra* mostly refers to psoriasis, and the Greek term for *leprosy* was *elephas/elephantiasis*.
- by Jewish priests when they are being consecrated
- by the Jewish high priest on Yom Kippur, after sending away the goat to Azazel, and by the man who leads away the goat
- after contact with a corpse or grave, in addition to having the ashes of the Red Heifer ritual sprinkled upon them

It also became customary for priests to fully immerse themselves before Jewish holidays, and the laity of many communities subsequently adopted this practice. Additionally converts to Judaism are required to undergo full immersion.

R' Aryeh Kaplan in *Waters of Life* connects the laws of impurity to the narrative in the beginning of Genesis. According to Genesis, by eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve brought death into the world. Kaplan points out that most of the laws of impurity relate to some form of death (or in the case of Niddah the loss of a potential life). One who comes into contact with one of the forms of death must then immerse in water that is described in Genesis as flowing out of the Garden of Eden (the source of life) in order to cleanse oneself of this contact with death. Accordingly, the water that is required for a mikvah is often called *mayim chayim*, living water.

Common uses for mikvah today:

- Before some Jewish holidays (especially Yom Kippur, and, in some places, Shabbat)
- By a bride and groom
- By a father, prior to the circumcision of his son
- Following the *niddah* period [7 days] after menstruation, prior to resuming marital relations
- Following the *niddah* period after childbirth, prior to resuming marital relations
- As part of a conversion to Judaism
- Immersion of utensils or dishes in order to render them kosher

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikvah>

## Appendix E<sup>5</sup>

### **Rethinking the Meaning of Mikveh by Jennifer Siegel**

For the traditional Orthodox woman, visiting a mikveh generally serves as both a method for regulating sexual relations with a husband and a way of preparing for the possibility of pregnancy after another month in which a menstrual period came and went.

But for Conservative Jew Susan Heffron, it was both an opportunity to find closure after her so-called "eight-year pregnancy" — a time in which she endured four rounds of invitro fertilization, several miscarriages and the removal of a fallopian tube in an attempt to overcome infertility — and a chance to fully embrace her new life as an adoptive mother in the week before her infant daughter's own immersion for conversion.

"Even though I was totally happy and totally thrilled, I felt there was still that whole chapter with infertility that I wanted to close," said Heffron, 40, in a telephone interview from her home in Brookline, Mass. "It's like you've been carrying this weight around with you for such a long time, and you just let it go."

Heffron is one of a growing number of Jewish women who are reinterpreting what it means to visit the mikveh. Until fairly recently, most women from the non-Orthodox streams of Judaism either explicitly rejected, quietly ignored or were simply unaware of the rules in the Torah requiring women to undergo ritual immersion before resuming sexual relations following their menstrual periods. In recent years, however, as one more reverberation of the spirituality movement that was jumpstarted by the entrance of women into the rabbinate during the last two decades, Jewish feminists have begun to reconceptualize the ritual...

Heffron's immersion took place at the two-year-old Mayyim Hayyim Living Waters Community Mikveh and Education Center, a gleaming, spa-like retreat in Newton, Mass., with abundant windows and radiantly heated stone floors.

At many Orthodox mikvehs, the immersion ritual is a strictly personal and private experience. But Mayyim Hayyim — meaning "living waters," a reference to the fact that to be kosher, some of the water in a mikveh must come from or make contact with a natural source such as an underground spring or cistern of rainwater — seeks to be a kind of community center, with rooms for classes, meetings and celebrations as well as an art gallery. Both men and women may use the two mikvehs, which are surrounded by pocket doors that can be opened up to accommodate friends and family members — in the case of a baby's immersion for conversion, for example — or kept closed for privacy.

According to Aliza Kline, executive director of the independent non-denominational center, there are currently about 100 to 150 immersions per month, including about 500 thus far for conversions. The most common visitors are women coming for monthly immersions, but the mikveh has been used for more than 1,000 nontraditional reasons, including immersions to mark the onset or remission of cancer, the celebration of a milestone during the recovery from an addiction and a variety of events having to do with women's reproductive health.

The Mayyim Hayyim ritual committee has created optional prayers to address women's fertility that are both traditional and subversive. One prayer for women's standard monthly immersion removes the traditional references to child bearing, while others are specifically tailored to women trying to conceive naturally or through fertility treatment.

There are prayers to mark abortion, miscarriage or stillbirth, and ritual committee members also will work individually with women who want to adapt the existing prayers or to address other situations.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.mayyimhayyim.org/pdfs/FORWARDMAY%2006.pdf>

## Appendix F

*Note to Educator: Following are some sample images of different mikvaot. It is recommended that you supplement these images with any others you can find that you think would be educational for your participants.*



The archeological remains of a mikvah that was used during the time of the 2nd Temple (5<sup>th</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> centuries CE)



*Unit 4: Sharing Jewish Women's Voices*



Pool of a medieval mikvah in Speyer, dating back to 1128



A modern mikvah



One of the two mikvaot at Mayyim Hayyim Living Waters Community Mikveh and Education Center in Newton Massachusetts

## Appendix G

*Note to Educator: In this appendix you will find excerpts from the script of The Mikveh Monologues. These excerpts appear here with the permission of Mayyim Hayyim Living Waters Community Mikveh and Education Center, with the understanding that they will be used for educational purposes only, and that you will not be performing these monologues and will not use these excerpts for any profit. If you are interested in using the full script, or if your group is interested in performing any part of the monologues, please contact Mayyim Hayyim directly ([www.mayyimhayyim.org](http://www.mayyimhayyim.org)).*



***The Mikveh Monologues***  
*Stories and Songs from*  
*Mayyim Hayyim Living Waters*  
*Community Mikveh and Education Center*

By  
Anita Diamant & Janet Buchwald

Musical Director: Josh Nelson

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“Farewell,” the music can continue softly as the Rabbi’s speech begins, fading out quickly and quietly. After “Hair,” you might consider an up-tempo lick of *Chad Gadya*. An immediate swell of music, usually a reprise of “These Waters,” is very effective as after the end of “Breast Cancer.”

## CHARACTER NOTES

“Bat Mitzvah Girl” – 13 year old girl

Mature and articulate, should have a strong presence but still be child-like.

“Father and Son Shabbat” – Man, 30-mid-40s

An energetic and educated Jew, he has a 6-year-old son.

“The Bride” – Young woman, 20-30

A Gen-Xer, self-aware, smart, and fun.

“Farewell” – Rabbi, 40-60 and Cantor, 30-60

Rabbi can be male or female, experienced and compassionate. Cantor can be male or female, with a powerful voice, able to modulate from intense and quiet to strong and impassioned. (This works best if one is male, one female.)

“Adoptions” – Young mother, 35-45

Loving, warm, well-grounded mother of three children.

“The Mikveh Guide” – Woman, 60, Husband, 60s.

The guide is a down-to-earth, warm woman who is turning 60. Husband is loving and witty. (May be performed by one of the other male cast members.)

“Hair” – Woman, 30-50, with abundant hair

Funky, funny.

“Products” – Man, 30-50

A gay Jew-by-Choice who owns a hair salon. He is well put together but not a slave to fashion; sensitive with great sense of humor.

“Niddah” – Woman, 25-40

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She's thoughtful, not shy, and needs to navigate through a broad range of emotions.

“Breast Cancer” – Woman, 35-50

Must be believable as mother of 13 year old daughter, down-to-earth, vulnerable and strong.

### ***The Mikveh Monologues***

#### ***SONG: THESE WATERS***

#### ***The Bat Mitzvah Girl***

Thanks so much for coming on this tour of Mayyim Hayyim. So, since you're all in my Hebrew school class, you know that I chose to learn about mikveh for my Bat Mitzvah project. Okay, settle down, now. Could you tell your Moms to stop talking? Thanks. I studied with one of the interns here for three months, and then a week before my Bat Mitzvah I came and did an immersion myself. And now, as part of my project, I'm giving you this tour.

I know you probably have a lot of questions, and most of you probably never heard of a mikveh. I didn't know anything about it till my Mom came for a visit. I didn't know what it was or who was supposed to use it. Now, I know that traditionally, women came to a mikveh after their menstrual cycle, or before their wedding. That goes on here, but all kinds of people are finding new ways to use the mikveh, too, like after they've been really sick or after a divorce. Not just women come here. Men come, too.

Since it opened in 2004, there have been over 6000\* immersions. Including me.

\*This number should be updated by Mayyim Hayyim prior to any performance.

#### *Unit 4: Sharing Jewish Women's Voices*

So, now we're standing in what's called the atrium, and on the sides you can see the four changing rooms and the two mikveh pools. Did you notice when you first came into the building how it felt so welcoming? They make it that way for everyone. If you look in that dressing room over there, you'll see that there's even a changing table for babies, and there's a special lift to help disabled people in and out of the water.

Isn't it so pretty and peaceful? And look at the water in this pool. What color is it? Blue right? Now, if I flip this switch, it changes to purple. Isn't that cool? And you see over there, that black cap under the water? That's called the bor cap.

Before you immerse, you open it and it lets in a little rain water from outside, to "kiss" the water in here and make it a kosher mikveh..

You probably want to know why I decided to do this. There's no tradition for a Bar or Bat Mitzvah to go to the mikveh. Not yet. But when I thought about it, I realized that I was going through something pretty big and even kind of scary. Like my life was changing. So I thought that coming to the mikveh could kind of help me handle it better.

As part of this project, I created a ceremony for my immersion, so when I came out of the water, I said this little prayer that I wrote:

**I immerse today in celebration of becoming Bat Mitzvah. As water cleanses the spirit, let it fill me with renewal, energy, and direction to continue on my Jewish path. May God grant me strength, courage, and peace.**

When I came out of the mikveh, I felt really clean and like I was ready for my Bat Mitzvah. Not that I wasn't still nervous - I was. But I felt different. In a good way.

I'm pretty sure my little sister will do it, when it's her turn. I'm really glad I did.

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## ***The Bride***

I'm pretty much your classic disaffected Gen X kind of gal. I have too many shoes, I work too hard, I'm cynical, I'm broke. So when it came time for me to immerse before my wedding, I figured I'd bring some friends, we'd hang out, I'd get wet, we'd go eat, and that would be the end of it.

I should have known better.

Like the princess I am, I'm a pretty private person, so I didn't want anyone in the mikveh with me except a guide. I asked my mom and my friends to wait outside. I did the whole bit: shower, scrub, floss, file, blah, blah, blah. I suppose it was meaningful in some way, but mostly I felt like I was just getting really clean in a friend's tub.

And then I picked up the phone to call the mikveh guide. Except, instead of, "I'm ready!" I found myself saying, "Can you send my mom in here?"

So in comes my mom, looking concerned because if I'm asking for my mom there's got to be something wrong, right? And I just looked at her and lost it. Big, heaving, turn-on-the-faucet kind of sobbing. Soaking my mom's shirt with tears. Like 28 years of anxiety and pain and stubbornness - just falling away in layer after layer of deep, heavy, down-in-the-core gratitude. Like finally feeling something in the chaos of preparing to get married.

We talked. I don't know what we said. I think I said, "Thank you." I hope I said "Thank you." I think she told me that I turned out OK. Or that she was proud of me. Or something. It doesn't matter, actually.

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Then I went, and I dunked. I remember wanting to jump up and down in the water because the whole experience was just so cool. It was fun. I felt really light – like I had to force myself under because I was so buoyant.

And happy. And clear.

***Farewell (Rabbi and Cantor)***

I became Ellen's rabbi about a year ago. She had recently moved to our town and came to see me, wanting to explore the possibility of continuing her son's Jewish education. She was also interested in deepening her own understanding of and commitment to Judaism. This was just after she had been informed that her cancer had returned. Although her positive spirit hid her concern, she didn't hesitate to share her medical situation with me. As I came to learn, Ellen was a seeker.

She told me that, although her deceased father was Jewish, he had turned away from Judaism. But something in Ellen's soul urged her to return to the heritage that had been denied to her as a child, and by the time she came to see me, she had reclaimed her Jewish inheritance. She was living a Jewish life – lighting Shabbat candles, observing the holidays, worshipping at synagogue, and passing the tradition on to her child. Still, she felt the need to learn more. She wanted to strengthen and authenticate her Jewish identity.

During the summer, Ellen had hoped to attend a class I was teaching for people preparing for conversion to Judaism, but because of her illness, she was only able to come to a few sessions.

In August, she informed me that she was very sick and didn't have much more time to live. I went to her home, and she shared some of the ups and downs of her amazing life. That was when she told me that she wanted to go to the mikveh.

The cantor and I met Ellen at Mayyim Hayyim; she was accompanied by her husband and a close friend, but she confessed that she was feeling very sick. She wasn't sure if she would be able to go through with the ceremony. But with tremendous patience and tenderness from two wonderful mikveh guides, she was able to disrobe, shower, and enter the waters of the mikveh.

I stood outside the door and listened as she entered the water and recited the ancient blessings of immersion. Afterwards, we all gathered around her as she sat in a chair in the sun-lit atrium. She was absolutely glowing, and it suddenly became clear to me that Ellen's determination to go to the mikveh was not only about completing her Jewish journey, but also about preparing herself to complete the journey of her life. Just as she had entered life from a

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womb of living water, so too she would return to God and immortal life by passing through another womb of living waters.

For her Hebrew name, Ellen chose Ruth, which comes from the root meaning "friend." It was the perfect name for Ellen because everyone who met her soon became her friend. We sang to Ellen, now Ruth.

*Eli, Eli*

O God my God, We pray that these things never end,

The sand and the sea

The rush of the waters

The crash of the heavens

The prayer of the heart.

*(Pause)*

Ellen's visit to the mikveh was her last venture out of her home. She died a week later. She was 39 years old.

*U'tzror Bitzror HaChaayim et Nishmatah*

May her soul be bound up with God in the bonds of eternal life.

May her repose be one of peace.

And let us say, Amen.

**SONG: Eli, Eli**

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## ***Products***

I don't know why she was so amazed. It was really no big deal. I was ordering products for my salon, so I ordered a few extra things for the mikveh. I just couldn't stand the idea that they had such crummy shampoos and soaps at Mayyim Hayyim. I mean, everything else there is so beautifully done, so classy. But those conditioners and lotions? Ugh.

So I bought some extras and brought them over as a way to say "thank you." The woman there made such a fuss, you'd have thought I was giving her a big bag of money. Well, I guess it was a unique way to say thanks.

My immersion marked an important point in a journey that I've been on for a long, long time. I decided to become Jewish because Judaism fits the way I think, the way I live. And once I started studying and really got into it, I realized that I'd always been Jewish, just not officially. Going to the mikveh made it official.

I'd be lying if I said I was never anxious about the process. My hair salon is in Newton, and most of my clients are Jewish, so all through the year of my conversion classes I talked to them about it. They answered any questions I asked and when I told them about my doubts, they'd say, "Look, Paul, if it's right for you, you'll do it, and if it's not, you won't. Don't put all this pressure on yourself." It helped a lot to hear that.

But in the end, it was right for me, and there I was, on a freezing January day with my partner and our rabbi and cantor at the mikveh. I had been really anxious.. I thought it was going to be cold and intimidating, but it wasn't like that at all. It was gorgeous.

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Once I actually got in the water, all my fears and worries just melted away. After the blessings and the formal part of the ritual, the rabbi said I should stay in the mikveh until I was ready to leave.

I've got to tell you, I'm not the kind of person who can meditate. You know, you try to empty your mind and your whole life comes crashing into your head. But in the mikveh I totally relaxed. I just floated there. I don't know how long I was in the water. It was, hmmm, delicious.

When I went back to get dressed and I saw all those second-rate products in the bathroom, I made a mental note to replace them as soon as I got the chance. I wanted every part of the experience to be beautiful for everyone who goes there.

It was the least I could do. So I did it.

## ***Niddah***

I have a secret. I go to the mikveh every month for niddah, to immerse after my period. It's not something I've been very forthcoming about. Not even my best friends know this about me. I worry that they would think it's a weird thing to do. After all, I'm a Reform Jew, hardly the hat-and-long-skirt-type of woman that most people think of when they picture regular mikveh-goers. And yet, there's something about the idea of a monthly separation that seems right to me, and when I asked my husband if he'd be willing to give it a try, he said okay.

Judaism was a very big part of what had brought us together, and from the very beginning of our marriage, we've tried to bring it into our everyday lives in ways that work for us. So we always make a blessing before we eat anything. We sing the Sh'ma to our children every night as they snuggle in their beds. If we try to add Judaism to eating and loving our children, why would we exclude sex from this holiness-making?

Refraining from lovemaking for a certain length of time began for us as a trial, and then became completely integrated into the rhythm of our marriage.

Here's another secret. My observance of niddah never ended with an immersion in a mikveh. I took a bath or shower at home to mark the end of separation, because that was the only thing I could do that felt honest.

But when Mayyim Hayyim opened, I was there. The experience itself was – where to begin. A whole hour to spend on myself? When you have young kids? It's unheard of! I soaked in the tub uninterrupted, pumiced my feet, filed my nails. Heaven.

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When I got into the water, I thanked God for the wonderful husband who shares my life, our children who bring me so much joy and love. I thanked God that I was healthy, and have meaningful work.

Ever since, I have looked forward to my monthly immersion. Secretly. Let me be honest. Sometimes the experience is less than perfect. I forget to bring something to read for inspiration, or I have a stupid little argument with my husband on the way out the door.

But other times, it's extraordinary. Like when my immersion happened a few days before I became an adult bat mitzvah and I overcame my terror of chanting Hebrew in public by singing the Shehecheyanu out loud, in the water. Or the month when my father was so sick and I sobbed and sobbed into the mikveh, where I found comfort and hope.

But mostly, this month to month practice is about me and my husband. It's a secret we share with each other.

After all this time, you'd think he would remember and count the days, but he doesn't. Now he asks, "Are you going tomorrow?" We have little smiles on our faces when we talk about the logistics. He always does the dishes before I get home. And for one night, every month, from the time I walk into Mayyim Hayyim until I fall asleep, I focus exclusively on my love for my husband, my gratitude for our life together, and for the gift of some really great, holy lovemaking.

It truly does work that way. This is bigger than just the two of us making a personal choice. This comes from ancient wisdom.

This is, above all, a mitzvah.



## Appendix H<sup>6</sup>

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

<sup>4</sup>Hear, O Israel! Adonai is our God, Adonai alone. <sup>5</sup>You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. <sup>6</sup>Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. <sup>7</sup>Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. <sup>8</sup>Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead; <sup>9</sup>inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Numbers 15:37-41

<sup>37</sup>Adonai said to Moses as follows: <sup>38</sup>Speak to the Israelite people and instruct them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout the ages; let them attach a cord of blue to the fringe at each corner. <sup>39</sup>That shall be your fringe; look at it and recall all the commandments of Adonai and observe them, so that you do not follow your heart and eyes in your lustful urge. <sup>40</sup>Thus you shall be reminded to observe all My commandments and to be holy to your God. <sup>41</sup>I Adonai am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I, Adonai your God.

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<sup>6</sup> Translations adapted from JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society (2003).

## Appendix I



בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ עַל נְטִילַת יָדַיִם.

*Blessed art thou, Lord our God, Master of the universe,  
who hast sanctified us with thy commandments, and commanded us  
about washing the hands.*

*Barukh attah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam,  
asher kiddeshanu bemitzvotav vetzivanu al netilat yadayim.*

## **Appendix J**

- <http://museforjews.files.wordpress.com/2007/07/tallitot.pdf> (one educator's advice and experience with planning a group tallit-making experience)
- [http://www.judaicartkits.com/catalog/adult\\_tallit\\_bk.htm](http://www.judaicartkits.com/catalog/adult_tallit_bk.htm) (a source for all necessary tallit-making materials)
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FehK2VPVIWE> (step-by-step instructions for tying tzitzit)
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tzitzit> (more information on tying tzitzit, including the blessing/statement of intent for tying tzitzit)

## Appendix K

בְּרֹךְ	אַתָּה	יְי	אֱלֹהֵינוּ	מֶלֶךְ	הָעוֹלָם,	אֲשֶׁר	קִדְּשָׁנוּ
ba-rukḥ	at-tah	Adonai	e-lo-hei-nu	me-lekh	ha-'o-lam	'a-sher	kid-de-sha-nu
Blessed	You	LORD	our God	King of the universe	King of the universe	who	sanctifies us
בְּמִצְוֹתָיו,	וְצִוָּנוּ	לְהִתְעַטֵּף	בְּצִיצִית.				
be-mits-vo-tav	ve-tsi-va-nu	le-hit-at-tef	bats-tsi-tsit				
with his mitzvot	and	to wrap ourselves	in tzitzit				
commanded	us						

*Blessed art Thou, LORD our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with his commandments and commanded us to wrap ourselves in the tzitzit.*

*Barukh attah Adonai, eloheinu melekh ha-olam, asher kiddeshanu bemitzvotav, vetzivanu lehitatef batzitzit.*

## Appendix L

### **Whoever Wrapped in a Tallit by Yehuda Amichai<sup>7</sup>**

Whoever wrapped in a tallit in one's youth will never forget:  
taking it out of the soft bag, opening the folded tallit,  
spreading it, kissing the border along its length (sometimes embroidered and sometimes embossed). Afterwards, a great sweep over the head like the heavens, like a huppah, like a parachute. Afterwards, folding it around one's head as if playing hide-and-seek, and then wrapping the body in it, tight tight, letting it fold you like a cocoon, and then opening it like wings for flying.

And why are there stripes and not black-white squares like a chessboard? Because squares are finite without hope and stripes come from infinity and go on to infinity like the runways at the airport so that angels may land and take off.

When you wrap yourself in a tallit you cannot forget  
Coming out of a swimming pool or the sea  
and being wrapped in a great towel and casting it  
over one's head and wrapping in it, tight tight  
and shivering a little and laughing and—blessing.

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<sup>7</sup> Translation from Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur. New York: CCAR Press (2007). Pg. 27.

## Appendix M

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה	Blessed are You,
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם	our God, Creator of time and space,
שֶׁחַיָּנוּ וְקִיְמָנוּ	who has supported us, protected us,
וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה.	and brought us to this moment.

*Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam shecheyanu v'kiy'manu v'higyanu lazman hazeh.*

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- This Torah commentary combines Biblical scholarship with poetry, archeology with *drash*. The Biblical translation is accurate and gender-sensitive. It is a superb resource for anyone looking to engage in a rich study of Torah through a nuanced Jewish feminist lens.

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- In the first few pages of the book the author explains her choice for the provocative title. The ideas are strong and progressive, and may even be called revolutionary (or disgusting!) by some. This is a secular American woman's outraged commentary on life as a woman in 21<sup>st</sup> century America.

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- Mary Pipher's work provides the psychological rationale for this curriculum guide. She tells the stories of several of her adolescent female clients and their families. In so doing, she welcomes her readers into the tumultuous and often-painful world of adolescent women, extending to us a charge to make a change.

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- This book was published as the first wave of Jewish feminism crashed onto the scene of contemporary progressive Judaism. This is a scholarly and in-depth look at many important Biblical texts through many lenses of modern Biblical scholarship, but especially through a feminist lens.

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[http://www.dreskin.us/html/jewish\\_resources.html](http://www.dreskin.us/html/jewish_resources.html).

[www.hebrewmamita.com](http://www.hebrewmamita.com)

[www.mayyimhayyim.org](http://www.mayyimhayyim.org)

- The online home of the ground-breaking community *mikvah* located in Newton Massachusetts. Here you will find information on both their *mikvaot* and their education center, as well as photos, contact information, and links to other sites where you can learn more about *mikvah*.

[www.myjewishlearning.com](http://www.myjewishlearning.com)

- This Jewish information clearinghouse contains articles and blogs on a full range of topics. The site is not associated with any denomination or movement, and is a particularly good source for both traditional and progressive takes on Jewish text and Jewish living.

[www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)



Alternate method for viewing the video that accompanies Rebekah Stern's Curriculum Guide.

This CG includes a movie clip which I can't send because the file is too big. But it's on YouTube here:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VoENRgzP\\_VI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VoENRgzP_VI)

(same artist/same piece/different performance)