



Sample Adult Education Session Offerings

You are Cordially Uninvited: The Case for Elimination of Bar/Bat Mitzvah Ceremonies

At first consideration, it seems nearly impossible and unimaginable to consider eliminating the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony as a significant milestone event in the Jewish lifecycle. However, with some exploration of the history of the ceremony, an examination of the current crisis in post-B'nei Mitzvah drop-out, and consideration of how Jewish education could be drastically better without it, you too will understand why eliminating or drastically altering this ritual as we know it might be good for the Jewish people.

Down with Dividers: Exploring Pluralism, Post- & Non-Denominationalism

Recent studies indicate that more and more Jews don't want to be identified with one specific movement and are attracted to programs that cross boundaries. These programs often advertise themselves as "Pluralistic," "Post-Denominational" or "Non-Denominational" which actually aren't the same. Come be a part of the struggle and join a conversation on how you build pluralism in a communal program. Explore what post- and non-denominationalism could mean to you.

Wrestling with G-d (lay leaders)

Can you be an active member of the Jewish community and not believe in G-d? What does it mean to participate in t'filah and other blessings if G-d isn't a part of your life? As a lay-leader, if you are asked to facilitate the creation of programs with Jewish content, can you still maintain integrity with your own G-d beliefs (or lack thereof)? Sometimes, it's a struggle to find a place for our own personal relationship with G-d and that which our community may expect us to have. Together, we will tackle the tension that exists when we are active communal Jews and wrestle with G-d.

Wrestling with G-d (general adult learners)

Can you be an active member of the Jewish community and not believe in G-d? What does it mean to participate in t'filah and other blessings if G-d isn't a part of your life? Sometimes, it's a struggle to find a place for our own personal relationship with G-d and that which our community may expect us to have. Together, we will tackle the tension that exists when we are active communal Jews and wrestle with G-d.



Choosing Judaism

In today's world, we might just all be "Jews by Choice" as we choose what and how to engage in Jewish life. But how do we move and inspire people (and ourselves) from being born into Judaism to actually choosing to have an active Jewish life? What do historical Jewish texts tell us about choosing Judaism and how can that inform our decision today? We will also consider the role that bar and bat mitzvah plays in our public declaration of choosing Judaism.

Sacred Scandals: Bad Behavior in Biblical Texts and Modern Examples

You think the bible and other historical stories are all about good people and good choices? Did you know that it's filled with scandal – perhaps even evil urges? Eve disobeys orders. Cain kills his brother. Jacob tricks his father and cheats his brother. And the scandal doesn't end there. The TaNaKh is filled with sexual misconduct, lies and other bad behavior. We will try and figure out what do these stories tell us and what are we supposed to learn from them. Then we will explore how modern scandals with high profile Jews impacts our community.

Encountering American Holidays as a Jew

All of us do it ... Jews living in America celebrating non-Jewish holidays. Is there anything wrong with that? The "Rabbis" have an opinion on the topic and we can learn some ways to evaluate specific holidays to see if they meet the Rabbis' litmus tests. Is there a difference between Jews celebrating Thanksgiving and Fourth of July vs celebrating Halloween and Valentines Day? We will learn a bit about the origin of a few American holidays and discuss if and how Jewish people should observe them.

God and Our Country

What are the actual laws about separation of "church/state"? As a religious minority living in North America, what can we expect of our government in terms of protecting our religious freedoms and how does a separation between "church and state" do that? Should God/prayer exist in our classrooms, in our senate sessions, at our graduations, on our money, in our pledge of allegiance? What limits should be set our legal system in terms of potential interference with religious practices: ritual slaughter of animals? Male circumcision? Polygamy? Participants will encounter a range of issues that arise when we consider the role of religion and government.

Judaism and Political Activism

What is it about being Jewish that compels us to be engaged in the American political arena? Participants will explore both modern and historical Jewish values and texts which shape the narrative for our commitment to politics, political debate and advocacy. As a class community we will choose a few of the following topics to explore in depth and through a Jewish lens: Gun Control, Gay Marriage, Animal Rights/Experimentation, Abortion, Legalization of Marijuana, Genetic Manipulation (manipulating for blue-eyed boy and/or to eliminate disease), Death Penalty, Immigration Reform and Refugee Crisis, Vaccinations, Assisted Suicide/Euthanasia, Ethics of War.

(NOTE: each of the Political Activism topics can also be presented as stand-alone classes, see below for samples)



Taking Aim at Gun Control: Framing the Issue in a Jewish Lens The gun control debate in the United States is filled with tension and personal conviction. On one hand, the NRA and other gun ownership advocacy groups cite the 2nd Amendment to the Constitution while gun opponents cite the horrific statistics for gun violence across our country. What does Judaism say about the 2nd Amendment and our right to protect ourselves? We will look at the actual 2nd Amendment text and overlay Jewish text and context so we can gain a better understand of Judaism's point of view on the topic.

Making the Case for Medical Marijuana: As the science of prescription drug development evolves, our law makers and citizens are taking a stand on the use of marijuana for medicinal and recreational purposes. Together we will explore Judaism's viewpoint on medical interventions and mind-altering substances – coming to understand the conflict between the two. We will also view segments from CNN's Dr. Sanjay Gupta's Weed documentary to gain knowledge on the medical pros and cons of utilizing medical marijuana.

Parenting:

Wired for Success: Understanding & Guiding Your Teen's Social Networking

What is it about the cell phone texting and on-line social networking that has your teen connected all the time? We will explore the draw of Facebook and other interactive platforms through the context of a teen's social and emotional framework. Participants will debate the question, "When does it become too much?" and will encounter some Jewish texts which help us to evaluate internet use and abuse through the lens of Jewish ethics.

Parenting Jewish Teens Jewishly

Parenting teens is not easy. Challenges of keeping them safe – emotionally and physically – are abound. We think their peers are their biggest influencers, but the data proves that parents are. What advice does Judaism have in helping parents guide their children to making healthy choices for their bodies and their minds? This session is one part text study, one part reflection and one part support group.



Sample Class Descriptions for Teen Education

American AND or VS. Jewish Values

Which came first? Your American Value System or your Jewish Value System? We will spend time individually considering which values are important to us and in what ways we use them in our lives. We will explore times when our Jewish values and our American values may come into conflict and when they may, in fact, be intertwined. As a group, we will develop a master list of values and evaluate the contexts in which we use them.

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Sex in the "Texts"

As a teenager, we encounter lots of relationships with peers: making new friends, evaluating old friendships, building romantic partnerships, managing groups of friends. In this elective, we will look at how classic Jewish philosopher Martin Buber might advise us on our friendships and potential physical/sexual relationships. We will also encounter multiple traditional Jewish texts that may inform our understanding of Jewish sex ethics.

Reality TV: Selling Your Soul?

It has become a complete obsession in American media ... we all do it ... some of us are even addicted. There is something so intriguing about watching what happens when "people stop being polite and start being real." It's easy to watch from the comfort of our couches and judge the behavior of our Reality TV stars, but what would YOU do differently? Join us for a discussion (and a little debate) about ethics, decision-making, Reality TV, and Jewish values.
(some program pieces adapted from BJENY)

Building Blocks to Genocide: What does it hurt to stereotype?

How do our words stereotype and diminish people? Become empowered to combat prejudice and bigotry. Understand how the first steps of standing up for others can be the start that puts an end to bias that could ultimately lead to genocide.

Jews and Judaism "Poppin'" Up All Over

When did Jews and Judaism become so mainstream and **popular** that every time you turn on the TV or radio, our people and our religion are front and center? Are these portrayals and representations good or bad for us? We will consider how our personal Judaism is impacted and shaped by Judaism in **pop** culture.



Sacred Scandals: Bad Behavior in Biblical Texts

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Judaism as a Brand Identity: If a big yellow M is McDonald's very recognizable logo and it represents fast food, French fries and family memories ... If a Nike swoosh represents "Just Do It" and the best of athleticism, what logo and tagline represent Judaism? In what ways does your behavior, clothing, jewelry, or language let others know you are Jewish? We will discuss whose responsibility it is to define the brand and who is responsible for upholding the quality of the brand. Collectively, we will develop an ad campaign for our brand of Judaism.



Sample Professional Development Session Descriptions

All sessions facilitated by JewishGPS are interactive. They model techniques, teaching methods and technologies that Jewish professionals can utilize in their own work.

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"Get Glue": How Good Experiential Jewish Educators Use Curriculum and Pedagogy to Hold it all Together

Sometimes experience-based education gets a bum rap for being fluff, education-light and informal. Participants in this session will examine components of traditional formal-setting curriculum and will come to understand how good experience-based education uses these curricular components. We will bust all of the assumptions education leaders have about a lack of quality education that experience-based learning provides. We will have the opportunity to look in-depth at some curriculum components and how they can play out in formal and informal settings embedded in an experience-based methodology.

High-Risk, Highly-Inspiring Jewish Education Innovation

After a brief introduction to the Systematic Inventive Thinking model of "subtraction," we will put the method to the test. You will be challenged to subtract some significant components of our supplemental Jewish education system in order to open our minds to some serious innovation. Come prepared to sacrifice some of the biggest "sacred cows" of supplemental Jewish education.

Categories, Schmatteories: What Makes it Experiential Jewish Education?

Anything that happens at camp is informal education, right? Everything that happens in a classroom is formal education? And any really cool education is experiential! Seems easy, but not so quick. Over the past few years, the buzzwords of informal and experiential education keep popping up, but unfortunately they are often misused. In a session half based in learning theory and half in experiencing the differences, we will come to understand exactly what comprises each education encounter.

How Many People Showed Up? Creating New Methods for Measuring Success

We all do it. A program ends, we see the staff person in the hallway the next day, and we ask them: "How did it go last night? How many people were there?" Many times our boards, our supervisors and our funders determine the entire success of a program based on the numbers that participate and the cost-per-person it took to run the program. In this session, we will explore several new ways to define success and discuss methods for influencing our stakeholders to consider these new models.



Down with Dividers: Exploring Pluralism, Post- & Non-Denominationalism

Recent studies indicate that more and more Jews don't want to be identified with one specific movement and are attracted to programs that cross boundaries. These programs often advertise themselves as "Pluralistic," "Post-Denominational" or "Non-Denominational" which actually aren't the same. Come be a part of the struggle and join a conversation on how you build pluralism in a communal program.

Four-Dimensional Text Study: Explore Text Like You Never Have Before

Text study can be quite the experience ... if you are prepared to leave the desk behind and fully immerse yourself in it. Texts you may (or may not) have encountered before come alive when you experience them in multiple dimensions. Participants in this session should be willing to be adventurous and go beyond typical text-study boundaries. We will take what has traditionally been confined to a formal education method and release the full potential of experiential education methods. Please note: you may get a little dirty but cleaning supplies are included.

Wresting with G-d (Jewish Leaders)

Can you be a Jewish leader and not believe in G-d? What does it mean to participate in t'filah and other blessings if G-d isn't a part of your life? How do you lead programs with Jewish content and still maintain integrity with your own G-d beliefs (or lack thereof)? As Jewish leaders, we struggle to find a place for our own personal relationship with G-d and that which our community may expect us to have. Together, we will tackle the tension that exists when we are Jewish leaders and wrestle with G-d.

It's Not Just an Icebreaker: Creating Community in Schools as an Explicit Element

Have you considered what kinds of relationships exist between the families in your organization/school/program? Do you know how well the learners in your program know each other? Utilizing some powerful quotes from Thomas Sergiovanni's 1994 book *Building Community in Schools*, we will contemplate alternate models for school systems that cultivate community development as well as family and multi-generation engagement. We will also experience some techniques that allow us to create community without compromising the content we need to transmit. Oh, and of course, classic Jewish texts have a thing or two to tell us.

Moving the Teen/Parent Relationship from Hassled to Holy

Navigating the teen/parent relationship can be incredibly challenging: for the teen, the parents, and particularly as a Jewish educator. Parents are still the number one indicator for teen choices on everything from smoking to Jewish identity. Robyn will share proven methodologies that help teens and parents tackle difficult adolescent topics which might include sex ethics, tattoos, body piercing, drugs, alcohol, and body image, modesty in clothing choices. The role of Jewish family education in the lives of teens and their parents can be life altering.

Stopping Post-B'nei Mitzvah Drop-Out with Pre-B'nei Mitzvah Families

Nationally, over 80% of non-Orthodox teens drop out of engaged Jewish life. When leadership teams gather to discuss how to stop this trend, they typically turn towards developing new programming for 8th-12th graders. In this session, we will explore how engaging the 3rd-6th grade families is really the core antidote for this issue. We will challenge the status quo of current programming for these grade cohorts and will generate different strategies for engaging these families.



Engaging Synagogue School Families Year-Round

When I ask educators about their family education programming, I am often told about “4th Grade Family Tu B’Shevat Seders” and “2nd Grade Family Havdallah Programs.” While these one-shot programs offer feel-good moments for our families and our schools, they are not actually engaging parents in their child’s Jewish education. In this session, we will learn how to utilize web-based eNews systems to engage and empower parents. We will also talk about strategies for creating community amongst families and will also share programmatic models for family education integration. This session requires computer and internet access.

Focus on the Family: Multiple Methods of Educating the Jewish Family

What exactly is Jewish Family Education? How and why did it emerge as a field and who are today’s leading experts? In this session, we will create a common language to speak about JFE, reflect on the offerings your institution currently offers, and encounter some new emerging JFE models from across the Jewish education landscape.

More and More means Less: Managing Huge Programs and Dozens of Volunteers with Small Tasks

Volunteer burnout is a real thing and often occurs when we place a very ambitious program on the shoulders of a few very dedicated volunteers. And do it again and again. During this session we will uncover a model for engaging many more volunteers, managing large-program logistics results in less burnout and creating a structure for communication that will result in less burnout, less turnover and more smiles!

It’s Over My Head: Education Technology Integration

For many seasoned educators, the apps, tweets, blogs, clouds and web platforms of today are just intimidating. This session is a hands-on workshop to help introduce some great Web 2.0 and 3.0 tools that can be used in classrooms, youth programs, board rooms, staff meetings, schools and more. Bring your laptop, iPhone or iPad – or all three – so you can join in the fun and exploration of these tools.

Inspiring Meaningful Jewish Moments

Jewish educators don’t get into this field for the money. We do it for the goal of setting a strong foundation for meaningful Jewish moments that our learners – adults or children – will have in their lives. How do we recognize when our work has led to these great moments? Are we ever finished planting the seeds for the Jewish futures of our learners? This feel-good session recharges educators and inspires them to think about what they bring to their learners and how the encounters they have now shapes the future of the Jewish people.

The “Surprise and Delight” of High-Impact Learning Methods

What are the moments our learners remember 5 years from now? How about 25 years from now? There are certain methods educators can embrace which will create memorable and high-energy learning in any environment. Summer camps are experts at creating those moments, but can they be replicated in classrooms? Together we will learn a few techniques for integrating new methods into our religious school classrooms so we can offer some “Surprise and Delight” through the year!



Building Partnership & Team in Community

Many congregations offer madrichim programs as way of involving their teens and keeping them engaged. Often, however, madrichim are not utilized to their full capacity. What can a congregational education team of teachers and madrichim accomplish when working in partnership? We will spend time building a community atmosphere and developing team strategies in order to strengthen the education experience the learners in your setting encounter.

NOTE: This session is done in cooperation with a Madrichim Coordinator and the madrichim themselves.

Sample Lay Leadership Development Session Descriptions

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