



**The Matanel
Fellowship for Global
Jewish Leadership**

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Introductions

The Matanel Foundation is proud to present the final projects of the first cohort of the Matanel Fellowship for Global Jewish Leadership.

This collection reflects a year of learning, dialogue, and creative exploration undertaken by exceptional young leaders from Israel, Poland, and the United States.

Across their projects and reflections, the fellows illuminate several powerful insights. They show that Jewish identity today is dynamic and resilient — a living tapestry shaped by memory, innovation, and personal voice. Their work demonstrates that Jewish peoplehood is not merely a concept, but a practice: the ongoing effort to listen to one another, to bridge differences, and to build a shared future grounded in mutual responsibility.

At a time when the Jewish world faces profound challenges — rising antisemitism, questions of belonging, and increasing polarization — these fellows offer a vision of hope. Through their thoughtful engagement, creativity, and moral courage, they embody the values that will guide the next generation of Jewish leadership.

We extend our warmest congratulations to the fellows and our gratitude to the educators and partners who accompanied them on this journey. May the ideas and initiatives collected here continue to inspire and strengthen Jewish communities around the world.

Mazal tov to all the participants, and may your leadership help illuminate the path forward for the Jewish People.

The Matanel Foundation

When I took on the role of Executive Director of Hillel Israel in 2019,

I set several aspirational goals for myself and for the organization: to create more leadership programs, deepen Jewish learning, strengthen global connections, and expand our impact.

I often recall the words of wisdom from Avraham Infeld — former CEO and President of Hillel International and current member of the Hillel Israel Board — who told me, *“Always add a third country.”* What he meant was simple yet profound: when bringing together students from two communities, always try to include a third. Go global. The strength and resilience of the Jewish People lie in our global connectedness.

The Matanel Fellowship, the results of which are presented in the following pages, is a realization of all those goals at once. Exceptional student leaders were selected; an outstanding curriculum was developed; and yes — we added a third country. Students from Israel, Poland, and the United States learned throughout the

year with top-tier educators on Zoom, culminating in an immersive Shabbat experience in Budapest.

Their final projects reflect their journey and embody our guiding principle: *“Learn with one another, about one another, and from one another.”* I couldn’t be prouder of this first cohort of Matanel Fellows. Their words leave me deeply optimistic — the Jewish People are in good hands, with good hearts, and good minds. *Kol hakavod!*

My heartfelt gratitude goes to Ami Bouganim and the Matanel Foundation for their generous support; to our partners at Hillel International — Esther Abramowitz, Esti Palmer, and Josh Hartman — for their excellent stewardship, facilitation, pedagogy, and management of the Fellowship; and to our colleagues at Hillel Columbia and Hillel Poland for joining us in going global. *Toda raba!*

With pride and gratitude,

Rabbi Noga Brenner Samia

CEO, Hillel Israel

November 2025

Following the success of our inaugural year of the Matanel Fellowship for Global Jewish Leadership,

we embarked on the journey to recruit for the second cohort. During the interviews, one applicant asked me, “What do you hope every fellow walks away learning?” The answer was immediate and clear: Jewish Peoplehood. The core goal of this fellowship is to ensure every student knows they are part of something bigger — a magnificently complex amalgamation of a nation — and that they can be its leaders. This requires the capacity to hold the unique story of the Jewish person in front of us, learning and growing from both profound similarities and beautiful differences.

This goal of Jewish Peoplehood is contained in the structure and curriculum of the fellowship. Fifteen students from Hillels in Israel, Poland, and the United States formed a truly global experience. Through monthly Zoom sessions, we tackled challenging topics like Jewish Peoplehood — Unified or Uniform? and Is Pluralism Possible?, opening hearts and minds to different stories and opinions. The highlight of our year of learning and leading was the immersive Shabbat experience in Budapest. Meeting face-to-face in this neutral city, where no one played the role of guest nor host, changed the trajectory of the cohort. The consideration and care invested by each fellow in facilitating an element of our shared Shabbat were spectacularly evident. In Budapest, we witnessed the swift transition from a group of individuals to a true cohort of Jewish leaders.

As a culminating experience, we tasked our fellows with creating a thoughtful final project reflecting their learning and contributing to the global Jewish discourse. They thought deeply about challenges like antisemitism, pluralism, and inclusion and envisioned their role in the resolution. The result is the journal before you: thoughtful research papers, creative program proposals, and deeply personal reflections. This volume proves our goal has been attained; the level of genuine care and love these fellows have extends into a compassion for the Jewish people of the past, present, and future.

On a personal note, witnessing the “aha!” moments — when an individual has a Jewish Peoplehood revelation — has rejuvenated my own passion for my work at Hillel. This fellowship reignited my motivation to create more opportunities for people to strengthen their connection to their own Jewish story and to the colorful tapestry of our global Jewish community. Thank you to our fellows for teaching me what it means to be authentically generous with your passion, your creativity, and your unique Jewish story.

Serdeczne gratulacje! Mazal tov! Congratulations!

Esti Palmer

Associate Director, Immersive Experiences
Hillel International

Becoming the Link: Living L'Dor va'Dor (From Generation to Generation) A Course Empowering Students to Reclaim Their Jewish Heritage

Anna Birman

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SUMMARY

Becoming the Link: Living L'Dor va'Dor is designed to empower middle school and early high school students to move through the Jewish world with confidence, bolstered by factual knowledge as well as a strong sense of self and the confidence that they have something to contribute to their local Jewish community and to the global Jewish community. At the end of the course, students will have formed friendships within the cohort and relationships with the broader Jewish community.

Students chosen to participate in this course will be students who do not have a formal Jewish education, as a result of their families/communities needing to hide their Judaism, either currently or in the recent past, due to historical or political

circumstances. Through sessions about Jewish history, activities that facilitate thinking about one's own Jewish identity and goals, the opportunity to lead the community in prayer, and Zoom sessions to build a global Jewish community across cohorts, students will become a new link in their generational chains and confident, effective leaders in the Jewish world.

The syllabus is a customizable outline for lesson plans, and each educator will have the opportunity to tailor the content to make it meaningful to their students and region.

DEFINITIONS

- 1. Orphans of Heritage:** A term which inspired this course, first heard from Matanel's tour guide in Budapest, Agi. In this project, this term is used to

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describe students who did not have access to Jewish education growing up as a result of Jewish history or family circumstances (including but not limited to, oppressive regimes, mass emigration, Communism, war, isolation from Jewish community, etc). When this term is used in the syllabus, it describes a student who would like to have a connection to their Jewish heritage and is looking for a place to begin. The tension found in this phrase—of being disconnected from something you should in theory have access to—has the potential to be channeled as an opportunity for personal agency to steer one's own journey, which is what this course hopes to achieve.

2. **Region (or Class Region):** The area in which the cohort is located and the home region of the students.
3. **Family Region:** The area from which student's family is from, if known. Family Region may be the same as Class Region.
4. **Cohort Community:** Cohort community is defined as the small community that will form in each class.
5. **Broader Community:** Broader community is defined as the inter-generational circle in the region the class is held.
6. **Global Community:** Students across all cohorts.
7. **Transmitter:** A transmitter is a person or people who pass(es)

on Jewish culture in a formal (school) or informal (home) setting. A transmitter is different from a teacher because the end goal of the knowledge is for it to be incorporated into a person's life and value system.

8. **Inheritance:** In my project, "inheritance" will be defined as receiving guidance on Jewish identity as part of your education, formal or informal. While the sum-total of Jewish heritage may be the same, individual inheritance varies by the guidance on Jewish culture/identity/tradition the student receives via the transmitter and by the time at which they receive this information.

LOGISTICS

- **Duration:** The program will run once a week, divided across 4 Themes. Teachers can choose how much time to allocate per theme.
- **Students:** The program will recruit 10-15 students per cohort, selecting students who show a motivation to delve into their Jewish identities and uplift the local Jewish community. Hebrew language or previous Jewish education are not prerequisites. See sample application in Appendix A Figure 1. Accepted students will complete an incoming survey, see Appendix A Figure 2.
- **Teachers:** The program will recruit 1 (or more) teachers per cohort who are passionate about making Judaism accessible and meaningful to any child. Teachers will be

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knowledgeable in Jewish Studies and have experience teaching introductory level Judaics. See sample teacher application in Appendix A Figure 3. All teachers will be trained by one Course Coordinator in the basics of this curriculum, but teachers will then have the opportunity to customize the lesson plan to the needs of the community they will be teaching in.

- **Region:** This program is designed to run in any region of the world whose students may benefit from this program. The program will have a global component, where students from different cohorts will meet each other virtually to discuss what they have learned and build community.

WHY THIS AGE?

The middle school and early high school age is a time when many teenagers are thinking about their identities and what their lives might look like in the future. For many students that meet the eligibility requirements of this course, this is the time when they may start thinking about their Jewish identities and have questions, which aligns both developmentally and with the

age of Jewish adulthood. This course will help them develop the skills of self-reflection and initiative, turning their questions into introspection and agency over their own lives. Many Orphans of Heritage are in a position to make decisions about their Jewish lives as young teens. While many Jewish identity programs are aimed at college-aged students, the goal of this program is to reach students before they enter college so that they can develop their connection to Jewish life before they move away from home and have to make Jewish life decisions on their own.'

WHY THIS PROJECT?

Matanel had the privilege of visiting the Jewish community in Budapest. Our tour guide explained to the group that many rich practices of Judaism in Hungary faded after the destruction of the Holocaust and the decades of Communist rule in Hungary afterwards. We heard from staff at JCC Budapest — Bálint Ház about the incredibly successful work they are doing to help the Jews of Budapest at all stages of life connect with Jewish heritage, drawing

3500 visitors every month: "We are..the entry-point for Hungarian Jews who want to learn about their Jewish heritage after decades of fear and secrecy" ([JCC Budapest-Bálint Ház, 2025](#)). The JCC as a "transmitter" outside of the home, helping Jews, including later in life, connect with Jewish heritage. My parents immigrated from Belarus and Latvia in the former Soviet Union in the 1980s and 90s, and I was born in the United States. So, I, along with my family, had a similar opportunity to learn about and restart Jewish traditions with the help of passionate teachers and immersive Jewish experiences. In talking with our Hungarian tour guide and Hungarian and Polish students, I began to identify some very similar values in people who grew up in countries heavily influenced by Communism and their descendants, namely initiative and agency to

become involved in Jewish traditions. However, this process of learning can sometimes be lonely and confusing. This project aims to reach students who are motivated to become involved in Jewish culture and support their learning and ideas with teachers, information, and community.

PROGRAM EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

1. Survey

- a. Each student will fill out an intake (see Appendix A Figure 2) survey (See Appendix A Figure 6). If the numbers increase from the intake survey, then the program will have been successful.

2. Questionnaire (see Appendix A Figure 6).

- a. Students will answer the questions from the incoming survey (See Appendix A Figure 1) again. This response will be both for the student to track their thinking and for teachers to have a qualitative measure of how the students have changed.
- b. Students will be asked about their plans to participate in Jewish life in the coming year. Students have the opportunity to ask their teachers for help materializing this plan in this section.

3. Follow-up Questionnaire

- a. There will be a follow up questionnaire 3 months after the program asking if those plans from #2 materialized or changed.

4. Attendance

- a. High attendance at the meetings throughout the program will demonstrate interest.
- b. Success will be measured by the participation of students in the Broader Jewish Community, if it exists. Ideally, the teacher will be part of that community and will be able to follow engagement over several years.

THEME 1: PLACE, MEMORY, & HISTORY

Suggested time: 1 hour per part, 3 lessons.

Part B completed at home.

Materials: Books, laptops, poster boards or Powerpoint for presentations

Part A: COMMUNITY: Students learn about the history of the Class Region. What is the current Jewish scene? What is the history of Jews in this area? Teachers may break down the region by themes like food, art, major institutions, activism, etc. Teacher writes a lesson plan.

Part B: MEMORY: Each student goes home to find out about their family's Jewish history. If this history is not known, they may research a part of Jewish history that is interesting to them. Students may use the prompts in Appendix A Figure 4 to help them get started.

Part C: HISTORY: Using their family's personal story, each student is instructed to approach that story from a historical rather than anecdotal lens. See prompts to get started in Appendix A Figure 5. Students must find at least 1 primary source. The teacher may even assign each student articles to read based on what they report from Parts A or B. For example,

If a world event triggered the emigration of the family, the teacher may assign an informative article on that event;

If the family was involved in a Jewish movement (like the Neologue movement in Budapest), assign an article on the movement and its major institutions and philosophies.

Each student will present one narrowly focused detail of their research (teachers should make sure that the topic is not too broad).

Part D: CULTURE: The student will research and present one specific cultural detail or ritual from their Family Region or from their Class Region.

Upon completion of each part, students will present what they learned in a 2-3 minute presentation. Each presentation must have at least 1 picture and the History piece must have at least 1 primary source.

THEME 2: PRESENT DAY & IDENTITY

Suggested time: 1 hour

Materials: Pens/markers, Bubble map templates, short stories

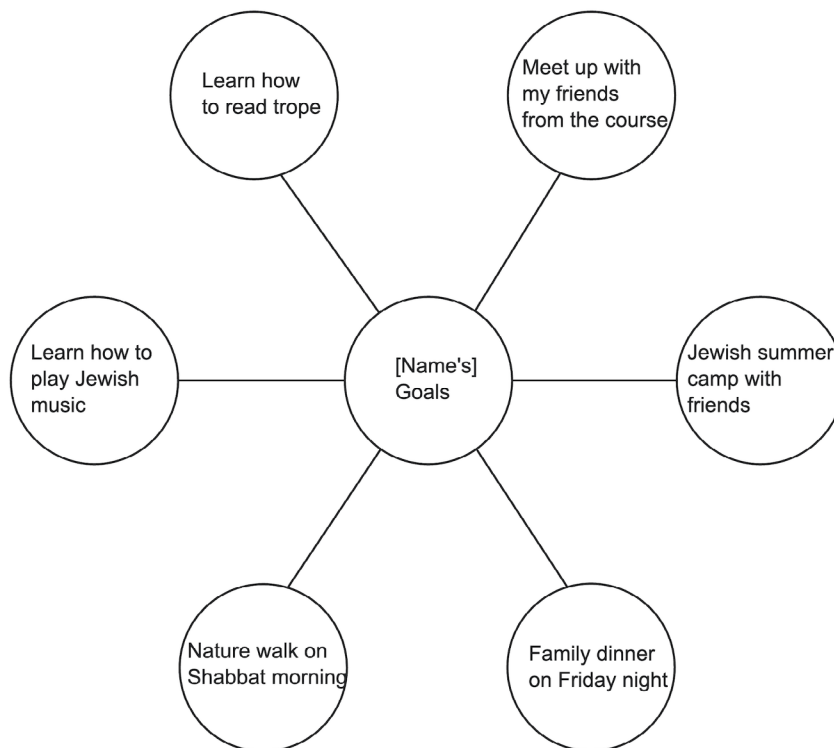
This section is discussion and reflection based. The purpose of this theme is to get to the “why” of the students’ Jewish education and connection. The end goal is for each student to begin to imagine what their Jewish life can look like. A blessing of being an “orphan of heritage” is getting to choose many details of how your Jewish life looks, learning or creating traditions and bringing them back to your family/community, and imagining a Jewish future for yourself that can take any shape. The exercises below aim to reframe the students’ Jewish backgrounds that may be marked by secrecy or hiding as an opportunity for creation and imagination.

Part 1: Read excerpts/short stories about Jewish community/identity (teacher’s pick).

Part 2: Break into pairs for 10 minutes. Each student gets 5 minutes of uninterrupted speaking time. Example prompts: What is important to me in my life? What communities am I a part of? How is the Jewish community different or the same as my other communities? How do I want Judaism to factor into my life for the next few years—is that different or the same from before? Why did I choose to join this class?

Part 3: Mapping your Jewish journey: Each student creates a bubble map (example below) of how they want Judaism to factor into their lives. Example bubble map below. Source: *Template.net*.

Mapping my Jewish Future



THEME 3: CREATION

Suggested time: *Teacher's discretion.*

Materials: *Siddurim (prayer books), text source sheets, prayer space to house congregants*

By this point, students have already produced 4 small presentations and one longer journal entry/essay that have explored past and present; theme 3 looks to the future. The students will work together, using an outline from the teacher, to plan a Kabbalat Shabbat (Friday evening service) or Shabbat morning service for the Broader Community. Special invitations made for elderly in the community to foster intergenerational friendships.

In order to prepare to do that, the teacher will spend several lessons, either as part of the previous lessons or as separate ones, modeling how to read text, prayer and Torah. Students will learn the basics of Hebrew alphabet, pronunciation and transliteration (depending on pre-existing Hebrew proficiency, as there is no requirement to be able to speak or read Hebrew to join the class).

Part 1: Teacher presents an outline for Kabbalat Shabbat, as that varies between denominations and communities. If there is no pre-existing standard for denomination, the teacher will explain practices from different denominations for Shabbat (including the music/no music distinction) and students will be able to choose. Teacher also explains some kabbalistic (mystical) and halakhic (legal) concepts of Shabbat.

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IMPORTANT NOTE ON LANGUAGE: Pluralistic spaces often say “define your terms.” Defining your terms is one of the most important things a teacher and classroom can do to reject the idea that anyone is “behind.” Language can be used to keep people out of their heritage, or to invite them in. It is recommended that the teacher creates a running list, or “Classroom Dictionary” that students can refer to. It will also serve as a visual representation of students’ learning.

Part 2: Teacher goes over the words and meaning of each prayer. This part can take several lessons. Teacher may introduce some choice passages from Talmud that align with the theme of identity and community that can help guide the service.

Part 3: Students volunteer to lead prayers in pairs. When writing a kavanah (explanation of the heart of the prayer/intention-setting), the students will use 1-2 pieces of information from their presentations and 1-2 lines from their journal entry.

Part 4: After the service, students will share with parents and guardians the traditions they wish to incorporate into their lives and homes, using their bubble maps as a guide. Mordecai Kaplan wrote in his 1934 book *Judaism as a Civilization* that “the scope of the Jewish teacher must be enlarged to include the home of the child he teaches. In fact, most of the influence he wishes to exert upon the child he must learn to exert through mediation of the parent” (Kaplan, 1934, p. 496). While Kaplan’s

argument that in order to impart values, teaching must move past the classroom and into the home rings true, in the context of students eligible for this program, personal experience shows that the most powerful tool a teacher can offer is the ability for the student to become a mediator themselves. Therefore, the teacher’s role in this course is to empower students to initiate and sustain Jewish practices themselves, while working in parallel with parents/guardians to ensure that the child’s initiatives are encouraged and supported in practical ways.

Parents/guardians and older community members attending the service bless the students with the *Birkat Yeladim* (Blessing for Children) and *Birkat Kohanim* (Priestly Blessing). The teacher works with interested parents in teaching them these prayers before the service. An explanation of these prayers can be found here: [Reena Bromberg-Gaber, “Birkat Yeladim: Blessing Children” \(Exploring Judaism, 2025\)](#). Recordings of these prayers can be found here: [Union for Reform Judaism, “Shabbat and Holiday Blessings Over Children” \(Union for Reform Judaism, 2025\)](#).

THEME 4: GLOBAL JEWISH COMMUNITY

The Head Coordinator will organize with teachers a time for all students to meet over Zoom. Teachers should aim for at least 3 zoom sessions over the time of the course.

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The goal is to connect students from all over the world to get to know each other, share their stories and experiences, ask questions of each other, and give each other advice in more socially-oriented Zoom sessions. The teacher is in a more facilitator role. Hopefully, students will see their experiences not as a one-time occurrence or limited to a specific region of the world—which can increase loneliness—but as a part of a larger, quintessential Jewish experience from generation to generation of asking questions about identity and belonging. The goal is for them to leave feeling like a part of a global Jewish community, like there is no “qualification for entry” into this community, and that they have much to contribute to the local and global Jewish community. The success of this more intangible component will be measured by an outgoing survey and questionnaire on this experience. See Appendix A Figure 5.

CONCLUSION

Becoming the Link: Living L'Dor va'Dor reframes a break in the generational chain of Jewish culture due to historical, personal, or political circumstances as an opportunity for students to reimagine Jewish practice for themselves in a meaningful way, involve their community and family in this practice, and become transmitters of the culture themselves going forward. This goal will benefit both

the student's wellbeing and the global Jewish community as a whole.

APPENDIX A

Figure 1: Student Application (100-250 words per question)

1. What are some things or actions in your life that make you feel Jewish?
2. Why do you want to participate in a program that centers around Jewish identity?
3. This year, how do you want to be involved in your local Jewish community?
4. What are some ideas you have to support your local Jewish community using your talents?
5. This course involves several Zoom calls with “Becoming the Link” around the world. If you could meet Jewish teenagers like you from another country, what would you ask them?

Figure 2: Student Incoming Survey

Scale of 1-10:

1. I feel connected to Judaism.
2. I feel that Judaism is a part of my life.
3. I have friends in my local Jewish community.
4. I have friends in the global Jewish community.

5. I feel like I have something to contribute to my local Jewish community.
6. I feel like I have something to contribute to the global Jewish community.
7. I can explain several Jewish traditions or prayers.
8. I can lead Jewish prayers.
9. I know websites or books to look through or who to contact if I have questions about Judaism.

Figure 3: Teacher Application

1. Please list your experiences working in Jewish education and a short description of your responsibilities there.
2. Why do you want to teach students who are exploring their Jewish identities for the first time?
3. The curriculum is customizable for teachers. Please read through the syllabus and suggest 3 additions or changes that you will make that will support students in a way that is specific and relevant to the area(s) in which you are applying to teach.

Figure 4: Prompts for Theme 1 Memory

Questions to ask family:

Where did your parents/guardians and grandparents grow up? Find a photo of this place.

What was their life like?

How did your family practice Judaism before the break in tradition?

How was your family Jewish after the break in practice?

Ask parents/guardians: What does being Jewish mean to you?

Figure 5: Prompts for Theme 1 History:

Where is this place on the map?

What is the history of Jews in this place? (start by thinking about important events, places, buildings, people, etc)

What is the Jewish community like there now?

What is one tradition of this place, 1 Jewish and 1 non-Jewish?

Figure 6: Student Outgoing Survey/Questionnaire

Scale of 1-10:

1. I feel connected to Judaism.
2. I feel that Judaism is a part of my life.
3. I have friends in my local Jewish community.
4. I have friends in the global Jewish community.
5. I feel like I have something to contribute to my local Jewish community.
6. I feel like I have something to contribute to the global Jewish community.
7. I can explain several Jewish traditions or prayers.
8. I can lead Jewish prayers.
9. I know websites or books to look through or who to contact if I have questions about Judaism.

Short Answers:

1. What is the most important thing you are taking away with you from this course?
2. What is one way you will get involved with the Jewish community this month?
3. How can your teacher help you achieve this goal?
4. What are 2-3 things you would change about this course?

Follow up in 3 months:

1. How have you been involved in the Jewish community these past 3 months?
2. What is something you learned from the course that has been useful to you lately?

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Shared Light: Jewish Identity in a Time of Disconnection and Disruption

Coral Mitelberg

Coral Mitelberg is studying political science and education at Ben Gurion University in Beer Sheva, Israel.

PROPOSED CHALLENGE

In the aftermath of the October 7 attacks and the rise of antisemitism worldwide, many young Jews are navigating a fragile and complex reality. At the same time, we are part of a generation shaped by digital life where identity is explored through memes, social media, and short-form content more than through traditional institutions. The challenge I aim to explore is: How can we build a relevant and emotionally resonant Jewish identity for young people today- one that acknowledges trauma, celebrates creativity, and uses the language of our times?

This challenge is supported by recent data from the Pew Research Center, which shows a significant drop in institutional Jewish affiliation among Gen Z Jews, alongside increased digital engagement. In parallel, studies have documented the psychological impact of collective trauma on identity development, especially in the wake of the October 7 attacks (e.g., Jewish Education Project, 2024)

INITIAL IDEAS & SOURCES

My final project proposes a three-part workshop series titled “Shared Light”, which blends storytelling, ritual, and pop-culture-inspired expression. The program is designed for young adult communities like Hillels, JCCs around the globe or global Zoom spaces and explores how Jewish identity and Peoplehood can be reclaimed in a post-trauma, digital-first world.

The sessions include:

1. **Personal Expression:** Participants reflect on their Jewish identity and post-October 7 experience through a mix of journaling and creative prompts. They’ll be invited to express themselves using contemporary formats: short video diaries, meme creation, or TikTok-style “duets” responding to classic Jewish quotes.
2. **Collective Ritual and Art:** The group will co-create a piece of community art (e.g., a digital collage of meme-ified Jewish moments, or a “Wall of Light” featuring

messages of hope). This stage incorporates platforms like Canva or collaborative Jamboards to engage digitally native participants.

3. Dialogue and Future Visioning: Through guided conversation, participants will explore questions like: What does it mean to be part of a global Jewish people in 2025? What kind of Jewish space would I want to belong to, and how can I help build it?

Modern Cultural Tools I envisioned included

- Jewish memes (e.g., from @hey.alma, @jewishgirlsoftiktok, or self-made memes)
- TikTok trends like “Things I didn’t know were Jewish” or “Day in My Life — Jewish Edition”
- Hashtag challenges (e.g., #MyJewishIdentity, #JewsOfTikTok)
- Online rituals shared through Instagram stories or other platforms
- Use of AI tools for identity prompts or reimagining Jewish texts in Gen Z language

Sources and Inspiration

- Pew Research Center reports on Gen Z and Jewish life
- The Jewish Education Project’s Jewish educator portal for a database of possible age-appropriate activities <https://educator.jewishedproject.org/content/what-we-do>

- Jewish Studio Project for art-based processing of trauma <https://www.jewishstudioproject.org/about-jsp>
- Writings by modern writers and thinkers such as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Shira Telushkin and more

WHY THIS FORMAT?

Young Jews today don’t always connect through lectures or formal text study, but they do connect through humor, creativity, vulnerability, and digital fluency. This workshop meets them where they are. It doesn’t dismiss tradition but translates it. It opens a safe and playful space for serious questions. And most importantly, it helps turn disconnection into meaning and scrolling into belonging.

LOGISTICS & IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

Marketing and Recruitment Strategy

The marketing and recruitment for the “Shared Light” workshop series will be implemented through local Hillels. Each Hillel center will have the autonomy to promote the series in a way that fits their student community — whether through social media, flyers, newsletters, WhatsApp groups, or Shabbat announcements. If this program is introduced at a Hillel leadership summit or shared via internal Hillel networks, local teams can opt in to implement it and take charge of outreach. This approach ensures cultural sensitivity and relevance to each specific context.

Structure and Participation Format

This is not intended to be a multinational or cross-continental cohort. The experience of trauma and Jewish identity differs significantly between Jewish communities in Israel, North America, and Europe. To foster a space of mutual trust, empathy, and resonance, each group will be local or national, allowing participants to share in a common social, political, and emotional landscape. The recommended group size is between 10–20 participants, allowing for both personal sharing and meaningful group interaction. This size supports intimacy, diversity of perspectives, and logistical feasibility. Participants will be asked to register for the entire three-part workshop series. This is essential to build emotional safety, continuity, and a sense of shared journey across sessions. Each session builds on the previous one and invites deeper levels of sharing and creativity. While each group will be run locally or nationally to preserve shared context and cultural relevance, a fourth optional session could bring together participants from different countries in a global Zoom reflection, to explore differences and shared themes in Jewish identity and post-trauma processing. As a possible pilot model, one Hillel in Europe, one or two in North America, and one in Israel can each run the program locally and later share reflections in a joint forum.

Facilitation and Leadership

The workshops will be facilitated by a local leader selected by the Hillel branch. This could be a professional staff member, a trained social worker, a student peer facilitator, or a fellow from one of Hillel's leadership programs. A facilitation guide will be included as part of the program materials, offering prompts, structure, and options for adaptation. This flexibility allows each site to tailor the experience based on local needs and available personnel. A one-time training session for facilitators will be offered ahead of the first cycle, providing guidance on holding space, addressing trauma sensitively, and navigating the creative tools of the program.

Facilitator Guide

Shared Light: Jewish Identity in a Time of Disconnection and Disruption

OVERVIEW

This three-part workshop series is designed to help young Jewish adults process personal and collective experiences in the wake of October 7 and the global rise in antisemitism, while reconnecting to Jewish identity in a creative, relevant way. The program blends storytelling, ritual, pop-culture, and digital tools to create a shared space of belonging.

Each session builds upon the last. Facilitators are encouraged to adapt the structure to the needs of their local Hillel or student group.

SESSION 1: PERSONAL EXPRESSION

Theme: *“Where Am I In This Story?”*

Goals:

- Reflect on personal Jewish identity before and after Oct 7
- Begin building group trust and emotional safety
- Use Gen Z-friendly mediums to express complex emotions

Suggested Activities:

- **Icebreaker:** Meme exchange- “show a meme that represents your mood this week”
- **Journaling prompt:** “My Jewishness felt most real when...”/ “After Oct 7, I started asking myself...”
- **Creative activity:**
 - Create a short video diary (TikTok style)
 - Make a meme with a Jewish quote that speaks to your current experience
 - Use AI prompt: “Reimagine a Jewish proverb in Gen Z slang”

Tools: Canva, Instagram stories, Jam board, ChatGPT (with prompts)

SESSION 2: COLLECTIVE RITUAL & ART

Theme: *“We Carry Light Together”*

Goals:

- Translate pain and identity into shared visual language
- Create an artifact of resilience and memory
- Deepen connection through joint expression

Suggested Activities:

- **Group discussion:** “What does Jewish light mean to you?”
- **Collaborative project:**
 - *“Wall of Light”*- Each participant contributes a piece (image, quote, drawing, TikTok clip, self-made meme)
 - *Digital collage:* “Moments that define us” (before/after, diaspora/Israel, joy/grief)
- **Optional:** End with candle-lighting or song

Tools: Canva whiteboard, Google Slides (shared collage), playlist

SESSION 3: FUTURE VISIONING & BELONGING

Theme: *“A People, A Purpose, A Plan”*

Goals:

- Explore the meaning of Peoplehood in 2025
- Invite commitment, curiosity, and hope
- Plant seeds for continued community-building

Suggested Activities:

- **Dialogue circle:**
 - “What kind of Jewish space do I want to be part of?”
 - “What responsibility do I feel to other Jews?”
- **Hashtag brainstorm:** #Jewish2025 #MyJewishFuture
- **Closing ritual:** Collective letter or mural to “Future Jewish Me”

Tools: Google Forms (to gather reflections), Padlet, AI-generated poetry tools

Optional Add-ons:

- Invite guest speaker (local educator, Holocaust survivor’s grandchild, artist etc.)
- Use Jewish texts as inspiration: Psalm 23, Rabbi Sacks, midrash on rebuilding after destruction and so on.

Oto Ha'am Me'ever La'yam: The Cultural Language of Jewish Peoplehood — A Workshop

Dor Ben Avi

Dor Ben Avi is studying philosophy, political science and economics at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Israel.

THE CHALLENGE

In the past couple of centuries, two main cultural languages were formed within the Jewish world — Jewish Peoplehood and Israeli — Judaism. I consider both approaches as an attempt of Renewal Judaism, an ongoing discussion between Jewish tradition and modern life and values.

Both languages portray Judaism as a living and changing idea that cannot be explained in only one form — neither religion nor nationhood are capable to provide the full picture regarding the worldwide Jewish experience. Jewish peoplehood was framed and structured by Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan, mainly in North America. whereas Israeli — Judaism is an Israeli based project well presented in the book “The Wondering Jew” by Dr. Micah Goodman. Even though both cultural languages share the same philosophical root and values, there is only limited co-operation, exposure and “cultural translation” between both sides.

My goal is to bridge the gap between Israelis and the rest of the Jewish world. I attempt to echo leading voices from both sides of the Jewish conversation.

THE RESOLUTION

The source sheet I gathered is based on Avraham Infeld's “Five-Legged Table” theory and wishes to continue the conversation around shared Jewish Heritage between different sections of the Jewish world.

Throughout the source sheet I gathered voices from all sides of the Jewish conversation — main leaders within American, English and Israeli Jewry.

In my vision, this source sheet is the academic part of an eight sessions long seminar followed by visual and methodic activities for young adults (18-35) regarding the pillars of Jewish peoplehood. It will preferably be an in-person seminar even though some of the activities can be transferred into zoom sessions. For a rich conversation I envision that the diverse group will be formed by Israeli and non-Israeli, religious and non-religious participants.

MY PERSONAL CONNECTION

Throughout my personal journey in Jerusalem, I had the privilege to learn from personal experience as a fellow in some of the leading organizations: Hillel Israel, Mabua — Beit Midrash, the Jewish Agency, Hartman Institution, Yahav — Zionist Education, JNF, etc.

The sources I gathered throughout my personal journey relates to an ongoing conversation I had with friends and fellows, in private conversation and in Batei-Midrash I had the privilege to lead. I believe this unique conversation can expand the understanding of the ideas behind the five-legged table theory and Jewish Peoplehood.

HISTORICAL MEMORY

Between Memory and History — Avraham Infeld

Sometimes there is a confusion between memory and history. In my opinion those are two different terms. History is the knowledge about events that occurred in the past; memory asks you how those events affect you today and tomorrow. If history is prose (the song's text) — memory is poetry. And like any good poetry — memory is not necessarily based on facts. History is based on the obligation to bring evidence and facts, whereas memory is not subject to these constraints. Sometimes we remember things that may not have happened, but this does not diminish the value or the truth of the memory. Did the Exodus from Egypt really happen? What are the facts about

the destruction of the Holy Temple? Archaeologists and historians can debate the evidence and come to different conclusions. However, for us as Jews, their conclusions are irrelevant. We know that the memory of the Exodus is real and continues to be meaningful.

A nation of storytellers — Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

The big questions — who are we? Why are we here? What is our mission? Are all responded to the best side in the way of a story, of a plot, of a narrative. As defined by literary researcher Barbara Hardy: “We dream in stories, daydream in stories, remember, expect, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, improve, criticize, build, gossip, learn, hate and love through stories.” This is fundamental to our understanding of what kind of book the Torah is: it is not a theological treatise or a metaphysical method. Rather, it is a series of stories woven together and spread over a long period of time, from the journey of Abraham and Sarah to the wanderings of Moses and the Israelites in the desert. Judaism sees the truth less as a system and more as a story and we are part of this story. Here we have what it is to be a Jew.

The Jews were the first people to write history — hundreds of years before Herodotus and Thucydides, who are often unfairly described as the first historians. And yet in biblical Hebrew there is no word that means “history” (“Chronicles — דברי הימים” is the closest expression in meaning to this). Instead of talking about history, it uses words describing Memory (Zachor). And there is a fundamental difference

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between history and memory. The English language gives it a nice sign: history begins with his, while memory begins with me. Third person — vs. first person. History has happened to others; The memory is my memory. Is my story. A memory is a past that I internalized and became a part of my identity. This is what the famous Sage article refers to, “In every generation a person must see himself as if he came out of Egypt”. The obligation is not only to remember, but also, to instill the memory in the children.

Questions:

What is the main difference between memory and history?
How is each formed?

Which is more dominant in your personal Jewish life?

Do you agree with the claim that facts are less important within the Jewish collective memory?

THE LAND OF ISRAEL (ZIONISM)

Who am I — A.B. Yehoshua

A Zionist is a person who wanted, or supported the establishment of, a Jewish state in the Land of Israel. But which state? Each Zionist had his own vision, and each had his own plan. Zionism is not an ideology, but only a very broad platform for different — and even contradictory — ideologies.

An Endless Ideal, 1899 — Benjamin Ze'ev Herzl

Honorable Congress! We have not gathered here to elect a head of state, for we are not a state. We are a community

— a community organized in a new way, indeed, but with an ancient destiny that appears as early as the First Book of Kings.

We believe that an ideal carries with it great and most beneficial advantages for the community of people, and it has even been openly stated that society cannot exist without it. It is the ideal that leads it. We have not discovered this truth either, it is as old as the days of the world. Just as bread and water are essential to the individual, so the ideal is essential to society. Our Zionism, which brought us here and will raise us to new and unknown cultural peaks, is an endless ideal.

Between Israel and the Diaspora, 1954 — David Ben-Gurion

And if the destiny of the Jewish people is to be a virtuous people, and it is doubtful whether the Jewish people would have existed or will exist in the future without this destiny — then the existence of this destiny is possible only in the Jewish state. For a virtuous people to be a virtuous people, not only the historical will and the spiritual virtues are needed — but also the state framework that will carry out the will of the nation and allow the virtues inherent in the people to be revealed and realized. Being one Virtuous people is possible only in the state. Both the fate of the Jewish people and the fate of the State of Israel depend on these two — which are one.

Questions:

What is the relation between the different texts? Do they agree, contradict or non-related?

What can be achieved within a Jewish country that could not have been achieved otherwise?

Do you agree with the claim that Israel is necessary for the Jewish people in achieving the goal of a virtuous people?

THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

Avraham Infeld — Summer Camp

Language is not just a means of communication; it is primarily a tool for translating basic concepts of culture from generation to generation. Without language, there is no continuity of culture. That is why Hebrew is such an important part of the issue of what it means to be Jewish.

We once held summer camps for Israeli and American teenagers. There were 300 kids in the dining room, and I couldn't tell the difference between the Israelis and the Americans. They looked alike to me in the jeans and shoes they wore, until the end of the meal, when the Reform rabbi stood up and announced the "Birkat," or the blessing of food as it was called in American summer camps. All the Americans began to sing in harmony in Hebrew. The other 150 kids in the room had no idea what was going on. They had never heard the blessing, and they didn't know the

melody, but they were the only ones who really understood the words. The young Americans asked the Israelis: What kind of Jews are you? Why don't you know the blessing of food? When was the last time you went to synagogue? And the young Israelis asked in response: What kind of Jews are you? Do you understand the language in which you were singing?

Hebrew and Translation — Avraham Shlonsky (1968)

Interviewer (17-year-old Avshalom Kor): How do you view recent attempts from abroad, where they tried to entrust the task of translation to an electronic computer that had been given knowledge of both languages?

Shlonsky: Look, the electronic computer thing, it's one of those naive beliefs that every time mankind makes a brilliant invention, it feels like it has God by the beard, and everything will work out. The electronic computer can in no way or in any way represent the non-electronic creator self.

I will give you an example, if it says, "בראשית ברא אלוהים את", "השמים ואת הארץ", no electronic brain will write that. It will write "בהתחלה עשה אדוני" etc. It will give the word from the dictionary. And in poetry, words are not entries taken from a dictionary. It will not examine the sound; it will not examine the association. When I say "בראשית" in my poem, I want you to remember "בראשית ברא", it is enough for it to write "בהתחלה".

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Questions:

According to both writers, is Hebrew crucial in a vital and prosperous Jewish life?

What are the main differences between a spoken language and a cultural language?

Can perfect translation be achieved? What are the consequences of a partial translation?

This source sheet is different, the aim of the activity is to debate the two views on the Jewish covenant — the two texts, by Heshel and Soloveitchik are divided into two different arguments — Destiny and Fate.

MOUNT SINAI (SHARED VALUES) — FATE OR DESTINY

Covenant of Fate — What is it?

“What is the nature of the existence of fate? It is an existence of compulsion, an existence of the type described by the Mishnah, “Against your will do you live out your life.” (Avot 4:29), a pure factual existence, one link in a mechanical chain, devoid of meaning, direction, purpose, but subject to the forces of the environment unto which the individual has been cast by providence, without prior consultation. The “I” of fate has the image of an object. As an object, he appears as made and not as maker”.

Rabbi Yosef-Dov Halevi Soloveitchik

“For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will speak a little about what we went through in the Diaspora, and especially about the Jews of the United States... In this difficult hour, the system of two authorities ceased: of the Diaspora separately and the State separately. No one said: What is this work for you? What is this concern for you? No one excluded himself from the rule. Suddenly it became clear to the Jews of the Diaspora that without the existence of the State they are like water flowing downstream, like a wave that has been uprooted from the water and splashed on the surface of the earth.”

Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heschel

Covenant of Destiny — What is it?

“What is the nature of the existence of destiny? It is an active mode of existence, one wherein man confronts the environment into which he was thrown, possessed of an understanding of his uniqueness, of his special worth of his freedom, and of his ability to struggle with his external circumstances without forfeiting either his independence or his selfhood. The motto of the “I” of destiny is, “Against your will you are born and against your will you die, but you live of your own free will”.

“The state (Israel) is not only a refuge for the remnants of the sword but also a holy abode for the revival of faith and justice. We must care wholeheartedly for the very existence of the state, and at the same time we must seek an answer

to the question of the quality of its existence, how and how to exist?

Rabbi Yosef-Dov Halevi Soloveitchi

What is the nature of the State of Israel? A vision that has become reality. The vision of the prophets, an aspiration to build a social life based on the purity of justice, was the source from which the pioneers and builders drew the creative forces in the Aliyah and the building of the country.

By the power of this vision, we did not give up the land of our ancestors for two thousand years, and by virtue of the vision we reside in it.”

Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heschel

Questions:

According to the authors — What are the main differences between a Fate or Destiny based covenant?

Is it a matter of choice to live according to one covenant or the other? By which one do you live?

This source sheet is formed by multiple short quotes that aims to help the participants relate to different views on Jewish belonging and tradition. My vision is to spread the different quotes across the room to be able to walk across them and choose and most relatable.

FAMILY (TRADITION)

“At the foundation level, I was born into my family, I am a son of my parents. This is a biological fact that even the court cannot take away from me. But being a member of my family has other meanings, ones that I must choose throughout my life. There is a role with which I can and perhaps should fill my life as a member of this family. I must choose to accept what my parents gave me. Choose to accept the traditions as they are or continue to develop them.

All of these are the second level of the meaning of being a member of my family. Perhaps we can distinguish between being Jewish and BEING Jewish (in the active sense of it).

Regev Ben David

“I have the right to choose what is essential and what is trivial, what is central and marginal and what is worthy of being shelved. Neither you nor Anyone else will tell me, each according to his own opinion, that this is a ‘package deal’ and you must accept everything or walk away from everything.”

Amos Oz

“Passing on tradition is not based on the reliability of the reported content but on loyalty to the one who transmits, that is, on an intimate connection and a unique listening. Loyalty to the world of one’s parents is the key to traditional Judaism. Transmission requires an intimate connection between the deliver and the one receiving. It occurs in a space of relationships: between parents and children, between grandparents and grandchildren, between previous generations and future generations.

In other words, loyalty is a relationship. The concept of Judaism that is based on loyalty to transmission blurs the sharp boundary between “religiousness” and “secularity.” For loyalty is a constant dance within a framework of relationships.”

Yaffa Bnaya

“Have holidays and Shabbats and cooking and education, and a pretty good relationship with God — but it’s not exactly like what’s written in the “Shulchan Aruch”, it is more what you feel in your heart. I don’t try to attribute ideology or rationality to it either, it’s simply what works for me and what I feel is right.

By the way, the first two rules of my traditionalism are: that there are no set rules, and what’s between me and the Creator of the universe stays between us and is nobody’s business.”

Roy Sharon

Race is something we view as inherited and unchanging, but there are many ways to become family. You can be family through birth, but also adoption. Or choice, like conversion. You can even become the closest of family through a covenant, as one does in marriage.

Our covenant with God is the foundation of Jewish Peoplehood. Instead of defining Jewishness by having the correct fraction of Jewish blood, let every Jew who feels bound by this covenant be seen, and counted, as part of the Jewish people.

Rabbi Angela Buchdal.

Questions:

To which of the following writers do you relate the most?

How does the different view effect the different Jewish way of life? Can all the different views live in one community?

Where is it easier to express those different voices? In Israel or outside of it?

Progressive and Proud: Reclaiming Jewish Identity in Social Justice Spaces

Gilad Schonberger

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INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

Across North American campuses, Jewish students committed to progressive values increasingly encounter a painful dilemma: their activism for justice, equity, and inclusion is often met with suspicion or exclusion when they also express attachment to Jewish identity or Zionism. This tension is not new, but recent events have intensified the challenge. Following the October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks in Israel, progressive spaces have witnessed an escalation of rhetoric that frames Zionism as incompatible with liberation movements, leaving Jewish students feeling alienated and silenced (Hartman Institute, 2023).

This exclusion is exacerbated by the rise of what Sharansky (2004) calls the “new antisemitism,” which disguises itself as anti-Zionism by denying Jews the right to self-determination, holding them collectively responsible for Israeli state actions, or demanding they renounce core aspects of their identity to participate in social justice work. Deborah Lipstadt (2019) emphasizes that antisemitism is unique in its ability to position Jews as both oppressors and outsiders simultaneously, a dynamic that resonates

strongly in progressive contexts where Jewish students may be accused of “white privilege” while also facing marginalization.

The challenge, then, is twofold: first, to equip Jewish students with tools to navigate and resist antisemitism in progressive spaces; and second, to empower them to embrace a vision of Jewish identity that is not only compatible with, but essential to, social justice movements. As Ameinu (2023) argues, progressive Zionism frames the pursuit of Jewish self-determination as part of a broader commitment to human rights, equality, and liberation for all peoples.

This proposal outlines a replicable program, Progressive and Proud: Reclaiming Jewish Identity in Social Justice Spaces, designed to help Jewish students strengthen their voices, build resilience, and foster dialogue across divides.

PROGRAM VISION & GOALS

Title: Progressive and Proud: Reclaiming Jewish Identity in Social Justice Spaces

Vision: To create a safe, empowering environment for

Progressive and Proud: Reclaiming Jewish Identity in Social Justice Spaces



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Jewish students in progressive activist circles, where they can articulate and embrace both their Jewish and progressive commitments.

Learning Goals:

- **Identity Integration:** Empower students to affirm their Jewish and progressive values without compromise.
- **Dialogue Skills:** Equip participants with tools for engaging in challenging conversations about Zionism, antisemitism, and social justice.
- **Knowledge & Confidence:** Provide historical, textual, and contemporary frameworks to ground Jewish perspectives in social justice discourse.
- **Community Building:** Foster supportive networks of Jewish students navigating similar challenges.
- **Replicability:** Offer a model that can be adapted to campuses across North America.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The program will consist of a hybrid four-session workshop series, supplemented by optional projects for wider engagement:

Session 1: Naming the Tension

- Introductions, storytelling, and exploration of lived experiences.

- Jewish texts on identity and responsibility (Pirkei Avot 1:14).
- Group norms for dialogue and safety.

Session 2: Understanding Antisemitism in Progressive Spaces

- Historical overview of antisemitism and “the new antisemitism” (Sharansky, 2004; Lipstadt, 2019).
- Differentiating criticism of Israel from antisemitism (IHRA, 2016).
- Case studies from campus contexts.

Session 3: Strategies for Dialogue & Advocacy

- **Conversation tools:** curiosity, storytelling, disengagement when necessary.
- Responding to common claims (e.g., “Zionism = colonialism”).
- Role-play and peer practice.

Session 4: Reclaiming Jewish Voice in Progressive Movements

- **Guest speaker:** progressive Jewish activist.
- **Action-planning:** how to bring insights back to student groups.
- Closing reflections and commitments.

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Format & Facilitation

- **Group size:** 20-25 students for intimate dialogue.
- **Each session:** 90 minutes, blending text study, discussion, and interactive activities.
- **Facilitators:** progressive Jewish activists, Hillel staff, or Hartman educators.
- **Closing panel:** invite broader campus community for dialogue.
- Each Hillel runs its own version of the program, contextualized to local politics and student needs
- Once or twice a year, participating groups can join a global summit on Zoom, where Jewish students from different regions share insights, stories and outcomes

Optional Podcast Project: Participants record reflections or interviews to amplify their voices, creating a resource for other campuses.

RESOURCE GUIDE

Key Definitions

- **Antisemitism:** Prejudice or hostility toward Jews individually or collectively (Lipstadt, 2019).
- **Anti-Zionism:** Denial of Israel's right to exist; distinct from policy critique (Cotler, 2014).
- **Progressivism:** Advocacy for justice, equality, and inclusion (Wisse, 1992).

Intersectionality: Framework for overlapping systems of oppression; Jewish identity often excluded (Hartman Institute, 2023).

Jewish Texts

- **Pirkei Avot 1:14:** “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?”
- **Psalms 137:** “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill.”

These texts highlight the balance between Jewish self-preservation and universal responsibility, a tension central to the program.

Conversation Tools & Myths

Common Claim	Nuanced Response
“Zionism = colonialism”	Zionism is a national liberation movement rooted in Jewish indigenous connection to the land (Ameinu, 2023).
“Criticizing Israel = antisemitism”	Policy critique is legitimate; denying Israel’s right to exist is antisemitic (IHRA, 2016).
“Jews are privileged oppressors”	Jewish communities are diverse; many continue to face persecution (Lipstadt, 2019).

Practical Strategies

- Lead with curiosity; ask questions before debating.
- Share personal narratives to humanize discussions.
- Use campus resources: Hillel, Jewish advocates, Title VI protections.
- Know when to disengage if dialogue becomes unproductive or unsafe.

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

Each session follows a consistent 90-minute structure:

- **Opening (10 min):** Welcome, grounding ritual, framing question.
- **Learning (25 min):** Presentation of texts, case studies, or history.
- **Dialogue (35 min):** Small-group discussions, role-plays, or journaling.
- **Reflection (15 min):** Sharing insights, naming challenges, affirmations.
- **Closing (5 min):** Takeaways and next steps.

Facilitator Role:

- Hold space for vulnerability while ensuring safety.
- Offer historical and textual context.
- Encourage respectful disagreement and model productive dialogue.

Sample Activity:

- **Journaling prompt:** “Recall a time you felt silenced or excluded in a progressive space because of your Jewish identity. How did you respond? What might you do differently now?”
- Pair-share followed by group debrief.

IMPLEMENTATION & REPLICATION

The program is designed to be scalable and adaptable for diverse campus contexts:

- **Recruitment:** Partner with Hillel, progressive student organizations, and identity-based clubs.
- **Partnerships:** Collaborate with Hartman Institute educators, Ameinu activists, “For The Sake of Argument” organization or other progressive Jewish networks.
- **Customization:** Campuses may adapt session content to reflect local challenges (e.g., specific protests, debates, or controversies).
- **Sustainability:** Train peer facilitators from each cohort to lead future iterations, creating self-sustaining dialogue communities.
- **Broader Engagement:** Podcasts, op-eds, or panel events extend the program’s reach beyond the participant cohort.

CONCLUSION

Progressive and Proud responds to a critical need in today's campus climate: empowering Jewish students to reconcile and reclaim their progressive and Jewish commitments in the face of rising exclusion. By combining Jewish text study, dialogue training, and activist praxis, the program strengthens resilience, builds community, and fosters inclusive social justice movements.

Its replicable structure offers a model that can be adapted across campuses, ensuring Jewish voices remain integral to progressive activism. As Hillel the Elder reminds us, the balance between self-preservation and universal responsibility is not optional — it is the essence of Jewish moral life. By helping students embody this balance, the program equips the next generation of leaders to stand proudly as both progressive and Jewish.

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From Challenge to Connection: Addressing Rising Antisemitism Through Structured Dialogue for Jewish and Non-Jewish Community Building

Hagar Avidor

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INTRODUCTION

Growing up in Israel, I always assumed that Jewish communities around the world lived in relative safety and acceptance. However, my participation in the Matanel Fellowship has opened my eyes to a troubling reality: Jewish diaspora communities are facing an unprecedented wave of antisemitism that is fundamentally changing their relationships with their non-Jewish neighbors. This challenge demands our attention not just as Jews, but as future leaders who care about building bridges rather than walls.

The challenge I want to address in this project is the deterioration of Jewish and non-Jewish relationships in diaspora communities due to rising antisemitism. My proposed resolution for this challenge centers on creating structured dialogue programs that bring Jewish and non-Jewish community members together to combat prejudice, build empathy, and restore the trust that has previously enabled Jewish diaspora life to flourish.

A CHALLENGE OF CONNECTION: UNDERSTANDING THE SCOPE

The statistics are alarming. Germany documented a 108% increase in politically motivated antisemitic incidents in early 2024, while Columbia University was named the most antisemitic campus in that year, with 127 reported incidents. But beyond the numbers lies a deeper problem: deteriorating everyday relationships between Jews and their neighbors. Jewish students in the United States face exclusion from campus organizations, Jewish professionals encounter workplace hostility, and families question their safety in once-welcoming spaces. I believe this breakdown isn't just antisemitism's consequence; it's the key to fighting it. When people know each other as individuals rather than stereotypes, when they share experiences and build trust over time, prejudice becomes much harder to maintain. Research shows that spending time with cross-group friends and building deep communication are the strongest predictors of reduced prejudice. This is why I

see strengthening interpersonal connections as our most powerful tool against antisemitism.

THE CAMPUS CRISIS

Jewish students now face hostility on campuses from peers, with antisemitic incidents often linked to political movements that blur the lines between legitimate political discourse and prejudice. This affects an entire generation forming their worldviews in environments where antisemitism is becoming normalized, potentially carrying these attitudes into their future professional and social lives.

IMPACT ON COMMUNITY LIFE

Jewish communities increasingly divert resources from community building to security: hiring guards, installing metal detectors, and restricting access to once-open spaces.

This defensive posture is not only a financial burden; it reinforces the separation from non-Jews. When Jewish communities turn inward for protection, they lose opportunities to build the relationships and understanding that could prevent antisemitism in the first place. It forces communities to prioritize safety over the open, welcoming environments that define Jewish communal life.

MY PROPOSED SOLUTION: DIALOGUE CIRCLES FOR COMMUNITY BUILDING

I propose facilitating dialogue circles for Jewish-non-Jewish community building to address antisemitism at its roots while rebuilding damaged relationships. My core belief is that personal connections are our strongest weapon against prejudice; when people see each other as individuals with shared hopes and concerns rather than as representatives of threatening groups, antisemitic stereotypes lose their power.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Intergroup Contact Theory: Gordon Allport's research from 1954 shows that under the right conditions, contact between different groups reduces prejudice. His four necessary conditions are equal status between groups; common goals; cooperation; and institutional support. The evidence supporting contact theory is extensive. A massive meta-analysis study found that intergroup contact was consistently associated with reduced prejudice. That research showed that the most carefully designed studies produced the strongest positive results, suggesting that well-structured contact programs are even more effective than casual interactions.

Intergroup Dialogue Research: Universities have developed structured dialogue programs that go beyond casual contact. One study defined intergroup dialogue as "face-to-face, facilitated, and sustained conversations

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between members of two or more social identity groups”. Their research shows these dialogues build empathy and reduce stereotypes, especially when they use co-facilitation and multiple sessions rather than one-time encounters. A review on contact theory research affirms that repeated, structured contact is among the most reliable methods of reduction of prejudice, though they emphasize that effects depend heavily on program design and institutional support. When designing dialogue groups, it is essential to have a skilled facilitator who sets clear norms of respect and equal participation. The facilitator should actively guide the discussion so that stereotypes are questioned and not reinforced. Without such professional guidance, groups may polarize or allow prejudiced voices to dominate.

Jewish Wisdom: This approach connects to our Jewish tradition. Pirkei Avot 5:17 teaches about machloket l’shem shamayim — disputes for the sake of Heaven. This concept suggests that respectful disagreement, conducted with genuine commitment to truth and understanding, is sacred. The entire Talmudic tradition is built on dialogue between different voices across generations.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Participants: 10-15 people per group, equally divided between Jewish and non-Jewish community members. Recruitment will be carried out by JCCs, Hillels, or other community organizations.

Leadership: Two co-facilitators — one Jewish and one non-Jewish — trained and skilled in dialogue methodology. The

facilitators will be professionals with backgrounds in group-leading, and will go through a short preparation seminar, focused on the program’s curriculum.

Format: Six 90-minute sessions over 8-10 weeks, allowing relationships to develop gradually.

Implementation: Ideally, the project will start with a pilot program, including thorough documentation and evaluation. Successful models could be adapted for different contexts: university campuses, workplaces and professional settings, neighborhoods and perhaps even online formats via video meetings.

Program structure:

Each session follows a consistent structure:

- Opening with ground rules (respect, confidentiality, equality of voice).
- Brief connection exercises to reduce anxiety and build mutual trust.
- Guided dialogue on the week’s theme.
- Closing reflection where each person shares one takeaway.

OPTIONAL SESSION THEMES

Identity and Belonging: How do we experience inclusion and exclusion in our communities? This creates space for both Jews and non-Jews to share their experiences of feeling like outsiders.

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Memory and Tradition: What stories and rituals define our communities? Participants share family histories, holiday traditions, and cultural practices that shape their identities.

Stereotypes and Misunderstandings: What misconceptions exist about our communities, and where do they come from?

Principled Disagreement: Using machloket l'shem shamayim as a model, how can we disagree respectfully about difficult topics?

Shared Civic Concerns: What issues do we care about in our local community? This can open participants' eyes to surprising common ground around education, environment, or social justice.

Envisioning Coexistence: What would ideal shared public spaces look like for both our communities? How do we want to live together in neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces where everyone feels they belong? Participants can co-create a vision of inclusive community life that honors several identities while fostering genuine connection.

Future Collaboration: Groups design a small joint initiative, perhaps a community service project, cultural event, or educational program, that they can implement together.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

After the program ends, I expect participants to show reduced intergroup anxiety, increased empathy, a greater sense of closeness and more positive attitudes toward

the other group. These aspects will be measured through surveys, filled out twice by participants, once before the start of the program and once after it ends.

Beyond these measures, I expect participants to become ambassadors for better relationships in their own networks, creating ripple effects throughout the community. Most importantly, by building genuine personal connections, participants develop a form of immunity against future antisemitic messages; when someone tries to spread negative stereotypes about Jews, these participants will think of their Jewish friends and neighbors, not abstract prejudices.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

Safety Concerns: Some Jewish community members may worry that dialogue programs make them vulnerable to antisemitic attacks. The program will address this by careful screening and preparation of all participants, trained facilitators skilled in managing difficult conversations and clear ground rules and consequences for inappropriate behavior.

Participation Barriers: Non-Jewish participants might worry about saying the wrong thing. The program will address this by equal representation and co-facilitation, emphasis on learning rather than perfect knowledge, structured activities that reduce anxiety and focus on similarities rather than differences.

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Political Tensions: Current events, particularly concerning Israel-Palestine, may take over discussions and intensify them. The program will manage this by establishing clear boundaries about the dialogue's focus on local community relationships, teaching skills for respectful disagreement before tackling contentious topics and having protocols for when discussions become too heated.

MY ROLE AS A JEWISH LEADER

As a young Israeli student planning to pursue graduate studies abroad and who has friends in different communities around the world, I see myself as a bridge between Israeli and diaspora Jewish experiences. My role in this solution includes program development and adaptation, as well as becoming certified in dialogue facilitation to train other leaders and personally facilitate pilot programs. I can see myself advocating and speaking at conferences.

I envision a network of Jewish leaders trained in dialogue facilitation, working in partnership with allies from other communities to rebuild relationships alongside existing conflicts. I regard it as a vital task to learn how to live together in the shadow of conflicts, without allowing them to tear us apart from within. I may not personally experience the global rise of antisemitism, yet the deep polarization within Israeli society is very familiar to me. It serves as a daily reminder of the tragedies that can unfold when division intensifies and hatred prevails.

The skills developed through this work — empathetic listening, respectful disagreement, bridge-building across difference — are exactly what our polarized world needs. Jewish leaders who can model these skills will be valuable not just to Jewish communities but to democratic societies everywhere.

CONCLUSION

Rising antisemitism in diaspora communities represents both a crisis and an opportunity. We can choose to retreat into defensive isolation, or we can step forward with confidence, inviting our neighbors into conversations that rebuild trust and understanding.

The Dialogue Circles model offers a practical approach to addressing antisemitism while strengthening Jewish leadership. By combining social science insights with Jewish wisdom, I intend to create a program that has the potential to reduce prejudice and build empathy. The key insight driving this approach is that personal connections are the most effective antidote to antisemitism; when people know us as individuals, prejudice becomes much harder to maintain.

As Jewish leaders of the next generation, we have a choice. We can accept deteriorating relationships as inevitable, or we can take responsibility for rebuilding them. I offer to choose the path of engagement and dialogue. Jewish communities will not be strengthened by retreat but by stepping forward, welcoming neighbors into spaces of honest dialogue and mutual engagement.

Belonging Fellowship: How to Reduce Barriers and Promote Inclusion in the Jewish Community

Lily Lebwohl

Lily Lebwohl is studying psychology at Barnard College in NYC, USA.

One of the most pressing challenges facing the global Jewish community today is the feeling of exclusion that many Jews experience, even in Jewish spaces. Very frequently, individuals report that they feel they are “not Jewish enough” to participate fully in Jewish life. This sentiment may arise from lack of formal education, unfamiliarity with traditions, or from diverse cultural backgrounds that do not align with most of the community norms. A community built on the value of *klal Yisrael*, the unity of the Jewish people, should not leave so many people feeling alienated. As Avraham Infeld argues in *A Passion for a People*, the Jewish community does not thrive on uniformity, but rather on shared connections. He writes that Jew alone is a contradiction in terms and that the survival of our collective future depends on our ability to ensure that every Jew regardless of their knowledge, practice, or origin feels that they belong. Through my final project, I propose a new fellowship designed to address this challenge of exclusivity and belonging in the Jewish community. The fellowship creates a structured, welcoming environment for Jewish students who feel disconnected

from Jewish life at their Hillel or broader university Jewish community. The goal of the fellowship is not only to reduce barriers, but to actively promote intentional inclusion and that prepares students to engage with Jewish community both on campus and beyond.

Research shows that many Jews, particularly young adults, wrestle with belonging. According to the Pew Research Center’s 2020 study on Jewish Americans, while 72% of American Jews say “being Jewish” is very important to them, a large portion connect to Judaism culturally rather than ritually. This proves the tension that Jews strongly identify with Jewishness, yet often feel uncertain about their place in Jewish religious or communal settings. In a college context, this manifests as students who walk into Hillel feeling unprepared, intimidated, or unwelcome. Additionally, this problem is even greater when the barrier feels so great that students do not even want to walk into the building, or know that it exists. I have heard peers express that they feel they “don’t know enough” Hebrew, Jewish tradition, or religious practice to feel comfortable taking part in many of the opportunities Hillel has to

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offer. Instead of lowering barriers, many communities unintentionally reinforce them, creating a cycle where the uninvolved remain uninvolved. Rabbi Ben Berger and Jon Levisohn describe this process in terms of becoming, belonging, and building. Students rarely jump directly into leadership roles, however instead, they move through thresholds of initial involvement, gaining confidence, and ultimately shaping the community themselves. For students stuck at the first threshold, intentional inclusion is essential.

My vision is a Jewish community where no student feels excluded because of what they don't know or how they grew up. My role within this vision is to create a fellowship at Columbia

Barnard Hillel specifically designed for students who feel disconnected or hesitant to get involved. By meeting them at their starting point, I hope to equip them with knowledge and confidence that will allow them to thrive. While this will be initially designed to start at Columbia Barnard Hillel, I hope to continue to develop programs that emphasize inclusion, both in American Hillels and in global Jewish communities.

The Belonging Fellowship is an eight-week program with two central goals:

1. To create a welcoming, judgment-free environment where students can explore Jewish identity without fear of not knowing enough.

2. To provide accessible Jewish learning and opportunities for participation, leading to greater confidence in Jewish engagement.

SESSIONS OUTLINE (8 WEEKS)

1. Creating Belonging — Opening & Community Building

- a. Icebreakers designed for inclusivity (sharing one personal Jewish memory or question).
- b. Study and discussion of Avraham Infeld's Five-Legged Table of Jewish Identity (memory, family, Mount Sinai, Israel, Hebrew).
- c. Explore the idea of belonging vs. fitting in.

2. Jewish Diversity

- a. Reflect on the question: "Where do you feel that you belong?"
- b. Explore global Jewish communities.
- c. Review Pew data on Jewish identity.
- d. Reflect on the question: "What makes someone Jewish enough?"

3. Jewish Learning Without Prerequisites

- a. Judaism 101: Shabbat, holidays, Torah, Talmud, mitzvot, minhag.
- b. Break into small groups, each group teaches one concept to others after discussion.

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- c.** Fellowship builds a shared dictionary of key terms.

4. Becoming, Belonging, Building

- a.** Discuss Berger & Levisohn's framework.
- b.** Map personal Jewish journeys.

5. Jewish Values & Ethics

- a.** Study texts on ethics (Pirkei Avot).
- b.** How can Jewish values guide personal and communal life?
- c.** Global connection: compare how Jewish values are lived out in Israel, America, and other Diaspora communities.

6. Shabbat through the lens of Inclusion

- a.** Fellowship participants design and lead a low barrier Shabbat dinner.
- b.** Participants invite 1–2 friends outside the fellowship to the dinner and use their evaluations of the Shabbat after the dinner.

7. Barriers & Bridges

- a.** Identify exclusionary barriers in Jewish spaces.
- b.** Create initiatives to lower them.
- c.** Start moving from reflection to action.

8. Looking Forward — Leadership & Belonging

- a.** Participants share personal Jewish visions.
- b.** Revisit Infeld's "Five-Legged Table" and discuss which leg do you want to strengthen in your own Jewish identity?
- c.** Closing ritual of blessings.

EVALUATION PLAN

The fellowship's success will be evaluated through quantitative and qualitative measures:

- Pre and post fellowship surveys on confidence, sense of belonging, and likelihood of engaging in Jewish life.
- Reflection exercises (Jewish journey maps, final letters to self).
- Engagement outcomes (participation in the Shabbat dinner, continued involvement at Hillel).

Although this fellowship is designed for Columbia Barnard Hillel, its principles can be applied universally. Every Jewish community around the world grapples with inclusion and exclusion. The fellowship could be adapted to Hillels worldwide, or to synagogues and community centers, by making the curriculum relevant to local communities. The program not only strengthens the Columbia and Barnard community but also contributes to the global discourse

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on Jewish Peoplehood, emphasizing that belonging must be at the heart of our shared Jewish future. The future of the global Jewish community depends on the ability to welcome those who feel left out and by addressing the barriers of exclusivity and creating intentional ways into Jewish life, we can build a community that is stronger, more diverse, and more unified.

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Ahavat Chinam: A Learning and Reflection Workshop

Maya Jamil

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This guide is designed for group reflection programs exploring Jewish unity, Jewish community, or global Jewish peoplehood. It can be used in contexts such as fellowships, Hillel gatherings, leadership seminars, or trips like the Matanel Fellowship for Global Jewish Leadership. Through Torah sources, discussion questions, and personal reflection, participants will explore the challenge of division among Jews and the Torah's call to rebuild connection through *ahavat chinam*, unconditional love.

PART I: A CHALLENGE FACING GLOBAL JEWRY

Discussion Questions

What is one challenge that you see within the global Jewish community and what is your vision for resolving this challenge?

What role do you foresee for yourself within that resolution?

Facilitator Notes

Many Jews today feel far away from one another and from the broader sense of global Jewish peoplehood. We often notice external differences such as appearance, background, and practice instead of the shared inner neshama (soul) that binds us as one people. Too often, we dismiss or distance ourselves from Jews with different customs or perspectives simply because it feels easier or more convenient. At the heart of this disconnection lies a deeper challenge: we no longer instinctively see all Jews as family, as one people with one heart. This sense of division is not new; it echoes throughout Jewish history. The Torah and our sages teach that the disunity among Jews has long been one of our greatest spiritual challenges and that restoring that unity may be among our greatest callings.

PART II: AHAVAT CHINAM

Before we can rebuild connection, we must understand what tore us apart. The Talmud doesn't describe the destruction of the Second Temple as a result of immorality or idolatry. It states that the destruction was a result of

sinat chinam, baseless hatred. The following sources thus explore the Torah's vision of *ahavat chinam*, baseless love, as the cure.

Source 1: Yoma 9b:8-12

However, considering that the people during the Second Temple period were engaged in Torah study, observance of mitzvot, and acts of kindness, and that they did not perform the sinful acts that were performed in the First Temple, why was the Second Temple destroyed? It was destroyed due to the fact that there was wanton hatred during that period. This comes to teach you that the sin of wanton hatred is equivalent to the three severe transgressions: Idol worship, forbidden sexual relations and bloodshed.

Discussion Question

How does this change our understanding of what truly sustains the Jewish people?

יומא ט' ב:ח'-י"ב אָבֵל
מִקְדָּשׁ שְׁנֵי שָׁהִיו עוֹסְקִין
בְּתוֹרָה וּבְמִצְוֹת וּגְמִילוּת
חֲסָדִים, מִפְּנֵי מָה חָרַב?
מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהָיְתָה בּוֹ שְׂנְאָת חֲנָם.
לִלְמַדְךָ שֶׁשְׂקוּלָה שְׂנְאָת חֲנָם
כְּנֶגֶד שְׁלֹשׁ עֲבִירוֹת: עֲבוּדָה
זָרָה, גְּלוּי עֲרִיּוֹת, וּשְׁפִיכוֹת
דָּמִים.

Source 2: Rav Kook, Orot HaKodesh

If we were destroyed, and the world with us, due to baseless hatred, then we shall rebuild ourselves, and the world with us, with baseless love — *ahavat chinam*.

Discussion Question

How could *ahavat chinam* serve as a form of rebuilding both personally and collectively?

Source 3: Leviticus 19:18

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against someone from your nation. Love your fellow as yourself: I am Hashem.

וּיִקְרָא י"ט:י"ח לֹא-תִקַּח
וְלֹא-תִטֹּר אֶת-בְּנֵי יַעַמְךָ
וְאֶהְבֶּתָ לְרֵעֲךָ כָּמוֹךָ אֲנִי יְיָ

Discussion Questions

What does "Love your fellow as yourself" practically mean in our daily relationships?

How might this verse serve as the foundation for repairing divisions among Jews today?

Source 4: Rashi on Leviticus 19:18:2

"You shall love your fellow man as yourself" —Rabbi Akiva said: "This is a fundamental principle of the Torah" (Sifra, Kedoshim, Chapter 4 12; Talmud Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:3).

רש"י על ויקרא י"ט:י"ח ב:
ואהבת לרעך כמוך. אָמַר רַבִּי
עֲקִיבָא זֶה כָּלֵל גָּדוֹל בְּתוֹרָה
(ספרא):

Discussion Questions

Why do you think Rabbi Akiva chose ahavat chinam as the fundamental principle of Torah as opposed to other principles?

What would change in the Jewish world if we truly lived by this principle?

PART III: THE MAGEN DAVID

Moving from ideas to symbols, the Magen David — literally “Shield of David” — is one of the most recognizable emblems of Jewish identity. Beyond its design, it symbolizes protection, harmony, and the unity of opposites. Understanding its origins reveals how a single symbol can unite diverse elements, much like *Am Yisrael* itself.

Source: National Library of Israel, “The Story of the Star of David” (Sharon Cohen, 2021, <https://blog.nli.org.il/en/star-of-david/>)

“In the Hebrew context, the Star of David is actually referred to as the “Shield of David” (*Magen David*), a phrase first mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud, not as a symbol, but as an epithet for God [Pesachim 117b]. Another link to the shield concept is a Jewish legend according to which the emblem decorated the shields of King David’s army; what’s more, even Rabbi Akiva chose the Star of David as the symbol of Bar-Kochba’s revolt against the Roman emperor Hadrian (Bar-Kochba’s name means ‘son of the star’).”

Discussion Question

How might seeing it as a shield change the way we view its meaning today?

Facilitator Notes

The star as a magen, a shield, represents divine protection, safety, and endurance. It reminds us that G-d’s presence is a constant guard over the Jewish people and that unity itself serves as a shield against division.

The Star of David displayed in Prague’s Old New Synagogue, photo: Øyvind Holmstad

Source: National Library of Israel, “The Story of the Star of David” (Sharon Cohen, 2021, <https://blog.nli.org.il/en/star-of-david/>)

“The Star of David only became a distinctly Jewish symbol in the mid-14th century, when the Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV granted the Jews of Prague the right to carry a flag, and they chose the six-pointed star. From Prague, the use of the Star of David as an official Jewish symbol spread, and so began the movement to find Jewish sources that traced the symbol to the House of David.”

Discussion Questions

How does a shared symbol unite people across countries and backgrounds?

What does it mean for something to become a “universal representation” of Jewish identity?

Source: National Library of Israel, “The Story of the Star of David” (Sharon Cohen, 2021, <https://blog.nli.org.il/en/star-of-david/>)

“Hexagrams abound in alchemy, the theory and study of materials from which the modern science of chemistry evolved. Magical symbols were commonplace in this ancient theory, and alchemists recruited the six-pointed star to their graphic language of signs and symbols: an upright triangle symbolized water, an inverted triangle symbolized fire, and together they described the harmony between the opposing elements. In alchemical literature, the hexagram also represents the ‘four elements’ — the theory that all matter in the world is made up of the four elements: air, water, earth and fire — effectively, everything that exists. One could say that the star is the ultimate alchemical symbol.”

Discussion Questions

How might the idea of harmony between opposites relate to Jewish unity?

What would it mean to see ourselves as the ‘elements’ that make up this shared star?

Facilitator Notes

The Magen David represents balance and interdependence between opposing elements. Perhaps each triangle can reflect distinct yet complementary forces like the diverse communities within Am Yisrael. Just as the elements of the Magen David form one complete symbol, a symbol of coming together, our people are strongest when our differences coexist in harmony.

PART IV: THE MAGEN DAVID AT DOHÁNY STREET SYNAGOGUE

Facilitator Notes

The Dohány Street Synagogue in Budapest, also known as the largest synagogue in Europe, carries the Magen David in nearly every corner. On the ceiling, walls, windows, even in the light fixtures and the iron gates outside. It’s as if the building itself breathes the message of the shield, harmony, and oneness.

The Magen Davids aren’t merely decorations; they’re reminders. Each one whispers that despite the pain and loss that Hungary’s Jews endured, the symbol of protection remains. In a place that witnessed devastation, the star endures beautifully and insistently as a testament to resilience and unity.

Discussion Question

How does the physical presence of this star in a synagogue, a gathering place for more than 5,000 Jews at once, reflect the themes of ahavat chinam and global Jewish peoplehood?

PART V: THE MATANEL EXPERIENCE

A Personal Reflection on Unity in Action

During the Matanel Fellowship trip to Budapest, participants from Hillels across the United States, Israel, and Poland came together in a shared celebration of Jewish identity. Instead of seeing our differences as division

or judging who was “more” or “less” Jewish, we came together with curiosity and joy, not despite our differences, but through them. In Budapest, I witnessed what it means to truly embody Am Echad B’Lev Echad, one nation with one heart. Each of us brought our own background, accent, and story, and together we created something larger than any one piece could contain.

Walking through the Dohány Street Synagogue, surrounded by Magen Davids carved into its walls, windows, and iron gates, the symbol took on new meaning. It was no longer just an emblem of history, but a living reminder of what unites us: our collective strength, resilience, and love for one another. Just as each point of the Magen David contributes to one harmonious whole, each person on the trip added a unique light to the shared experience.

In Parashat Bamidbar, Hashem commands Moshe to “lift up the heads” of each individual in Bnei Yisrael. Rashi explains that this was not to count them as numbers, but to recognize each individual by name, highlighting the inherent worthiness and holiness of each individual Jew. In Budapest, that verse came to life as each person’s individuality was uplifted and celebrated, contributing something irreplaceable to our shared Jewish identity.

This is what ahavat chinam looks like in action. When Jews from every corner of the world stand side by side and say: you belong here. When we remember that our differences don’t weaken our peoplehood, they complete it. Through love without condition and unity without erasure, we can connect over our shared Jewish identity, a bond between us so strong that it cannot be broken.

PART VI: CELEBRATING OUR DIFFERENCES

Facilitator Notes

This poem may be read aloud as a closing reflection or used for journaling. It reinforces the session’s central theme: that difference, when embraced with love, strengthens the unity of *Am Yisrael*.

Poem: “Celebrating Our Differences”

Different Backgrounds
Different Traditions
Different Cultures
Different Practices
Different Beliefs

These are just a few of the many things that differentiate us from one another.

Individual. Separate. Unrelated. Disconnected.

Yet something special we all share,
Something that connects us far beyond
Anything external or even internal —
An unbreakable, indestructible bond.

This is not our first time meeting,
Though I can’t quite remember the last.
I have this memory of you at Har Sinai,
Though it was so long ago in the past.

If we all trace back our footsteps
To those our ancestors once took,
We would find our steps come together —
To our shared story in our shared Book.

Once we all realize this truth,
A reason indeed to rejoice:
We are truly a family united;
To come together is the only choice.

Family is bonded no matter what,
An unbreakable, indestructible tie.
Even though we may fight and debate,
We can never really say goodbye.

So with this deep familial connection,
An unconditional love for all Jews,
It's not enough to tolerate each other —
Because when we're united, we cannot lose.

We don't come together despite our differences;
We come together to celebrate them.

Closing Question

What role do you foresee for yourself in embodying
ahavat chinam in solving the problem of divisions
within the global Jewish community?

FACILITATOR CLOSING NOTE

Encourage participants to share one tangible way they can practice ahavat chinam in their daily lives whether it be in their campus community, synagogue, personal relationships, or somewhere else entirely. This final reflection helps move from learning to living the message.

Lecture Shabbat: A Step-by-Step Educational Shabbat Experience

Valeriia Rodenko

Valeriia Rodenko is studying journalism and social communications at Vistula University in Warsaw, Poland.

IDEA

Lecture Shabbat is an intimate and educational Shabbat experience tailored for individuals who feel uncertain, disconnected or simply curious about Jewish religion, traditions and culture. Created in response to the growing need for more inclusive and explanatory Jewish spaces, this program offers a **step-by-step** exploration of Shabbat rituals, combining tradition with personal reflection, cultural context and open dialogue.

CHALLENGE

In many Jewish communities, including Hillel Warsaw, there are individuals who regularly attend Shabbat dinners but still don't feel fully connected to the "why" behind the rituals. Some are Jews by birth but lack formal education or confidence in Jewish practices. Others are from mixed backgrounds or are just beginning to explore their Jewish identity. What unites them is curiosity but also hesitation: the fear of asking "basic" questions or admitting what they don't know.

Many feel they participate in rituals out of habit or imitation, without deeper understanding. There is a clear need for a space where these questions are not only allowed but encouraged. The Shabbat Exploration — a blend of discussion, workshop, and lecture — was designed to meet that need.

OBJECTIVES

- To demystify Shabbat rituals for participants with varying levels of Jewish knowledge
- To create an inclusive, welcoming environment where no question is too simple or too complicated, and where joy and curiosity are brought into the rituals.
- To build a sense of belonging through shared experience and dialogue
- To connect Jewish identity with modern life using science, culture, history and spirituality as lenses

TARGET AUDIENCE

The program was designed for young adults from Hillel Warsaw, with an estimated group size of ~15 people

to preserve an interactive and personal atmosphere. Specifically, we engaged:

- Jews by birth who attend Hillel events but feel distant from Jewish meaning and tradition
- Newcomers exploring Jewish identity who may lack confidence in their knowledge
- Mixed-background individuals, including participants from Ukraine and Belarus, often raised without clear exposure to Jewish tradition
- Curious minds anyone open to learning, questioning and sharing

FORMAT & ACTIVITIES

Friday Night – Step-by-Step Shabbat Experience

- **Welcome Circle** — creating a safe, intimate space for the group to connect
- **Intro Discussion:** “What is Shabbat and what does Shabbat mean to you?”
- **Candle Lighting and first Tzedakah in Hillel Warsaw** — with reflection on its symbolism and relevance
- **Kiddush & Ritual Explanations** — the “how” and the “why” of each blessing

- **Shared Shabbat Dinner** — with guided pauses to introduce:
 - Hand washing, challah, traditional songs
 - Historical origins & diverse interpretations of Shabbat
 - Open conversation & personal stories
- **Interactive moments** — participants shared feelings, memories and even theories about traditions
- **Closing Reflections** — discussion of the difference in their meanings before and after the Shabbat lecture

tone & approach

- Open, non-judgmental and dialogue-based
- Welcoming to all levels of knowledge — no prior experience needed
- A blend of scientific, historical, spiritual and cultural perspectives
- Emphasis on peer-to-peer learning and shared discovery

INSPIRATION & PERSONAL CONNECTION

The idea for Lecture Shabbat was born during a **Hillel International trip to Budapest**, where I had a transformative experience. Despite our different languages, backgrounds and levels of Jewish practice, we found deep

connection in learning about Shabbat not just by doing it, but by **discussing and reflecting** on it together.

One phrase from that trip stayed with me:

“Our differences make us united.”

That moment made me realize: in diversity lies strength. I wanted to bring that feeling home to create a space where everyone, no matter their starting point, feels safe and encouraged to ask, “What does this mean?” or “Why do we do this?”

As someone from a mixed cultural background myself, I know how overwhelming Jewish practice can feel at first and how powerful it is to finally feel included and informed. That’s why I felt uniquely positioned to design and lead this program because I’ve been that newcomer and I’ve grown through open, inclusive spaces like this one.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Since the program has already taken place, I’m able to share some key outcomes. While this particular Shabbat program was a one-time event, the theme and format have strong potential for continuation. As I received a role of Program and Engagement Coordinator at Hillel Warsaw, I am already developing additional lectures and activities in collaboration with our Educational Director, exploring similar topics and engaging the community further.

- **Participant Engagement:** Throughout the evening, the group remained highly engaged. Many participants actively contributed to the discussions, shared personal reflections and asked thoughtful questions, creating a dynamic and meaningful exchange.
- **Atmosphere:** The overall tone was warm, inclusive and supportive. Participants felt comfortable sharing both their memories and uncertainties without fear of judgment, which fostered a sense of mutual trust and openness.
- **Informal Feedback:** Several attendees shared that this was the first time they genuinely understood the meaning behind Shabbat rituals they’ve been participating in for years.

Many expressed a strong interest in continuing this format or attending similar sessions in the future.

Following this, Esti Palmer suggested training the 15 participants from the original Shabbat dinner so they could each lead a similar experience.

This idea naturally led to increased interest in our **“Szabat u Ciebie”** program, where Hillel participants host a Shabbat dinner at home and practice the rituals together in a more relaxed setting. I personally organized one such Shabbat, and it was very well received—new participants were eager to gain more experience, while returning participants felt inspired and engaged.

For the next iteration, I would:

- **Add more structured peer conversations, “exercises** to further strengthen community bonds
- Develop a **feedback form or survey** to gather structured insights and measure impact more precisely

SCALABILITY & GLOBAL POTENTIAL

While this program was run at Hillel Warsaw, it is highly adaptable and could easily be replicated in other Hillel communities or Jewish spaces around the world. The format is flexible, the tone is universal and the core need (a space for open, educational Jewish exploration) exists far beyond Poland.

In fact, Lecture Shabbat could evolve into a **modular series** with different themes (Shabbat, holidays, life-cycle events) and even **collaborate with global educators** to bring in diverse perspectives. This could evolve into an **international course or toolkit** for community educators seeking to build inclusive Jewish experiences. In fact, I provided participants with visuals and printouts containing various pieces of information, which they were happy to take home. They also received additional knowledge and had the opportunity to practice the rituals. I continue to offer participants useful resources—for example, for Yom Kippur, I created a **checklist outlining** what people need to know about observing the holiday in Warsaw and practical guidance on what to do.

CONCLUSION

Lecture Shabbat was more than a one-time event, it was a **transformative communal moment**, born from shared curiosity and a deep desire to understand. By creating a space where participants felt empowered to ask questions and explore meaning, we didn’t just celebrate Shabbat — we made it **personal, relevant and truly our own**.

On a personal level, this experience also exposed new parts of myself I hadn’t fully recognized before. Thanks to the **Matanel Fellowship for Global Jewish Leadership**, I had the inspiration and support of **Hillel Poland** to turn an idea into something real. I now feel an even deeper responsibility and desire to give back.

After the event, many people came to me with kind words, questions and curiosity both before and after Shabbat. That excitement didn’t fade. Now, when I walk into Hillel, I feel like a bigger part of it, not just someone who attends, but someone who can shape, inspire and engage others to come closer to Jewish life and learning.

This is only the beginning. I’m committed to developing my ideas further and bringing them to new communities. At the beginning, when I got to this fellowship, even though it was later than other participants, I was an active student and member of Hillel. Now as I am writing this, the fellowship is coming to the end, but the difference is that I became Program and Engagement Coordinator at Hillel Warsaw, thankfully to **Matanel Fellowship for Global Jewish Leadership, Hillel International and Hillel Poland**.

Shabbat: A Friday Night Ritual Guide

Yakira Galler

*Yakira Galler is studying psychology at
Barnard College in NYC, USA.*

Welcome to this pluralistic ritual guide for Shabbat Friday night rituals. While no ritual guide can accommodate all people of all practices, this project uses Hebrew, transliteration, English translation, and intention setting and guiding questions, to hopefully meet everyone a little closer to where they are and allow us to share in our ritual traditions together in community. The translations, specifically of God's different names, vary in gender and form. The translations also vary in which denomination they most resonate with, especially regarding the theme of Zion and Mashiach. This project is not complete and will hopefully, eventually, include more rituals, more customs, and more perspectives.

This guide is important to me because it feels like a necessary tool to help bring people of different Jewish backgrounds together to share in the joy of Shabbat. I have been lucky enough to share Shabbat with people who have taught me so much about their Judaism and particularly their practice and customs of Shabbat. I hope this can be a little taste of this learning and Shabbat spirit.

Shabbat Shalom,
Yakira Galler

CANDLE LIGHTING *הדלקת נרות* Hadlakat Neiros

This ritual includes the covering of your eyes as you are saying the blessing. For most other mitzvot (commandments) you say the blessing before doing the action. However, because once you say the blessing, Shabbat has begun, you could not then strike a flame. Therefore, the act of covering your eyes is a way of shielding them from the flames as if pretending that you did not yet complete this act.

Intention

As you enter into Shabbat with candle lighting, think about your past week — What went well? What is something you want to work on? Allow Shabbat to be a moment of resetting. Let yourself recenter and remind yourself of the person you want to be and the person you can be. There is a new week ahead.

*ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר קידשנו במצו
תיון צונו להדליק נר של שבת*

*Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech haolam, asher
kid'shanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu l'hadlik neir shel Shabbat*

*Praised are You Adonai our God, King of the universe, who
instilled in us the holiness of mitzvot by commanding us to
light the candles of Shabbat*

PEACE BE UPON YOU

שלום עליכם *Shalom Aleichem*

Shalom Aleichem is a prayer greeting the angels of God and welcomes God's presence on Shabbat. Many people have the custom of repeating each line three times. Some say that the reason for this is because humans typically have two angels accompanying them at all times but on Shabbat they are joined by one more group of angels, so each repetition is in honor of the three groups of angels. Another reason is that this repetition simply adds emphasis to the words.

Intention

Consider who you would like to welcome into Shabbat, whether it be friends, family, ideas, values. Let this be a reminder that you can set the tone for what your interactions and experiences look like.

שלום עליכם מלאכי השרת מלאכי השרת מלאכי השרת
בואו בם לשלום מלאכי השרת מלאכי השרת מלאכי השרת
השלום מלאכי השרת מלאכי השרת מלאכי השרת
ברוך ה' מלאכי השרת מלאכי השרת מלאכי השרת
צאתכם לשלום מלאכי השרת מלאכי השרת מלאכי השרת
מלאכי השרת מלאכי השרת מלאכי השרת
אקדוש ברוך הוא 3

Adding a line calling for the return of the hostages in Gaza was customary for many starting after October 7th, 2023.

Hopefully there will never be a time in our future where this prayer is again needed. Be'ezrat Hashem (with the help of God)

אשובכם לשלום מלאכי השרת מלאכי השרת מלאכי השרת
אכי ה' מלאכי השרת מלאכי השרת מלאכי השרת

*Shalom aleichem malachei hashareit malachei elyon
mimelech malchei hamlachim hakadosh Baruch hu x3*

*Boachem l'shalom malachei hashalom malachei elyon
mimelech malchei hamlachim hakadosh Baruch hu x3*

*Barchuni l'shalom malachei hashalom malachei elyon
mimelech malchei hamlachim hakadosh Baruch hu x3*

*Tzeitchem l'shalom malachei hashalom malachei elyon
mimelech malchei hamlachim hakadosh Baruch hu x3*

*Shuvchem l'shalom malachei hashalom malachei elyon
mimelech malchei hamlachim hakadosh Baruch hu x3*

(Add for the return of hostages)

*Peace to you, ministering angels, angels of service, of
the highest sovereign, of the king of kings, the holy and
blessed one*

*Come in peace, angels of peace, of the highest sovereign,
of the king of kings, the holy and blessed one*

*Bless me with peace, angels of peace, of the highest
sovereign, of the king of kings, the holy and blessed one*

Go in peace, angels of peace, of the highest sovereign,

of the king of kings, the holy and blessed one

Return them in peace, angels of peace, of the highest sovereign, of the king of kings, the holy and blessed one

(Add for the return of hostages)

BLESSING FOR CHILDREN

ברכת הילדים *Birkat Hayeladim*

Here are three different iterations of the blessings for children.

Intention

In the busy nature of all our lives, take this opportunity to slow down and be present with your children, your family, your Shabbat table. Whether this is the only time you all sit down together or it is one of many family meals in your week, or whether you are blessing your children in person or on the phone or in the direction of where your children are, how beautiful it is that we can bless one another.

For Sons

יְשׁוּ יִמְךָ אֱלֹהִים כָּאֲפָרַיִם וְכַמְנָשָׁה
יְבָרֶכְךָ יְהוָה וְיִשְׁמְרֶכָּה יֵאָר יְהוָה פְּנֵינוּ אֶלְלֶיךָ וְיִחַנְךָ יֵשׁוּ אֱלֹהִים
פְּנֵינוּ אֶלְלֶיךָ וְיִשְׁמְרֶכָּה יֵאָר יְהוָה פְּנֵינוּ אֶלְלֶיךָ וְיִחַנְךָ יֵשׁוּ אֱלֹהִים

Y'simcha Elohim k'efrayim v'chinasheh.

Y'verechecha Adonai v'yishmarecha. Yaeir Adonai panav eilecha v'yichunecha. Tisa Adonai panav eilecha v'yaseim l'cha shalom.

May God bless you like Ephraim and Menasheh,

May God bless you and protect you. May God show you favor and be gracious to you. May God show you kindness and grant you peace.

For Daughters

יְשׁוּ יִמְךָ אֱלֹהִים כְּסָרָה רִבְקָה רָחֵל וְלֵאָה
יְבָרֶכְךָ יְהוָה וְיִשְׁמְרֶכָּה יֵאָר יְהוָה פְּנֵינוּ אֶלְלֶיךָ וְיִחַנְךָ יֵשׁוּ אֱלֹהִים
פְּנֵינוּ אֶלְלֶיךָ וְיִשְׁמְרֶכָּה יֵאָר יְהוָה פְּנֵינוּ אֶלְלֶיךָ וְיִחַנְךָ יֵשׁוּ אֱלֹהִים

Y'simcha Elohim k'sarah rivkah rachel v'leah.

Y'verechecha Adonai v'yishmarecha. Yaeir Adonai panav eilecha v'yichunecha. Tisa Adonai panav eilecha v'yaseim l'cha shalom.

*May God bless you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah,
May God bless you and protect you. May God show you favor and be gracious to you. May God show you kindness and grant you peace.*

For Children

יְבָרֶכְךָ יְהוָה וְיִשְׁמְרֶכָּה יֵאָר יְהוָה פְּנֵינוּ אֶלְלֶיךָ וְיִחַנְךָ יֵשׁוּ אֱלֹהִים
פְּנֵינוּ אֶלְלֶיךָ וְיִשְׁמְרֶכָּה יֵאָר יְהוָה פְּנֵינוּ אֶלְלֶיךָ וְיִחַנְךָ יֵשׁוּ אֱלֹהִים

Y'verechecha Adonai v'yishmarecha. Yaeir Adonai panav eilecha v'yichunecha. Yisa Adonai panav eilecha v'yaseim l'cha shalom.

May God bless you and protect you. May God show you favor and be gracious to you. May God show you kindness and grant you peace.

KIDDUSH FOR FRIDAY EVENING

קדוש לליל שבת *Kiddush l'leil Shabbat*

Sit or stand according to your custom.

Intention

As we bless God for all creation and the mitzvot (commandments) we experience and cherish every day, think about what you are most grateful for in this moment. Feel to pour the wine/grapejuice for your neighbor and share with them something that you are grateful for.

Ashkenazi: אשכנזי

וְיַכְלֹה ה' שְׁמִים וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל לֵצַבָּאִים: וְיִכְלֹה אֱלֹהִים בְּיוֹם ה'
שְׁבִי. יְעִי מִלְּאִכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה. וְיִשְׁבֹּת בְּיוֹם ה' שְׁבִי. יְעִי מִכִּ'
לִמְלֹאֲכָתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: וְיִבְרַךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־יוֹם ה' שְׁבִי. יְעִי וְיִ'
קֹדֶשׁ אֲתוֹ. כִּי בּוֹשֵׁב־בְּתִמְכָּל מִלְּאִכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לִ'
עֲשׂוֹת
סְבִירִי:

respond: לחיים

ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו, מִלְּךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן

respond: אמן

ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו, מִלְּךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיִךְ
וְרָצָה בָּנוּ, וְשִׁבְתָּ קִדְּשׁוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרָצוֹן. הֵנָּה יָלְנוּ,
זָכְרוֹן לְמַעֲשֵׂה בְרָאשִׁית. כִּי הוּא יוֹם־תְּחִלָּה לְמִקְרַאי קֹדֶשׁ, וְזָכְרוֹן
לְיִצִּיאַת מִצְרָיִם. כִּי בָנוּ בְּחַדְתְּךָ וְאִתְּךָ תָּנוּ קִדְּשָׁתָּ מְכֻלֵּי
הָעֲמִים וְשִׁבְתָּ קִדְּשׁוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרָצוֹן. הֵנָּה לְתַתְּנוֹ: בְּרוּךְ
אתה יהוה, מִקְדֹּשׁ הַשָּׁבֶת

respond: אמן

Vay'hi erev vay'hi boker yom hashishi:

*Vay'chulu hashamayim v'ha'aretz v'chol-tz'va'am: vayichal
Elohim bayom hash'vii m'lachto asher asa. Vayishbot
bayom hash'vii mikol-m'lachto asher asa: Vayivarech
Elohim et-yom hash'vii vayikadesh oto. Ki shavat mikol
m'lachto asher-bara Elohim la'asot*

Savri: (respond: l'chaim)

*Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech haolam bore p'ri
hagafen (respond: amen)*

*Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech haolam, asher
kid'shanu b'mitzvotai v'ratza vanu, v'shabbat kodsho
b'ahava uv'ratzon hinchilanu, zikaron l'ma'aseh v'reishit. Ki
hu yom t'chilah l'mikrei kodesh, zecher l'yetzi'at mitzrayim.
Ki vanu vacharta v'otanu kidashta mikol ha'amim v'shabbat
kodshecha b'ahava u'v'ratzon hinchaltanu. Baruch ata
Adonai, m'kadesh hashabbat (respond: amen)*

It was evening and it was morning, the sixth day.

The heavens and the earth and all they contain were completed. On the seventh day, God finished God's work which God had done and rested on the Seventh day from all God's work which God had done. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation, which God had created to fulfill its purpose.

Attention: (to life)

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, king of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine (amen)

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, king of the universe who instilled in us the holiness of the mitzvot and cherished us, granting us God's holy Shabbat with love and goodwill, as a reminder of the creation. Because it is the first day of the holy festivals remembering the Exodus from Egypt. Because You have chosen us and sanctified us, from among all peoples and with love and goodwill given us Your holy Shabbat. Blessed are You, Adonai, who sanctifies Shabbat. (amen)

Sephardi: ספרדי

יום ה'ש'שי

וַיִּכְלֹה ה' שְׁמִים וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל לִיצְבָּאָם: וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי לַעֲמֹל לְאִכְתָּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה. וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל לִמְלָאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְעִיֵּן קֹדֶשׁ אֹתוֹ. כִּי בּוֹשָׁבֶת מְכַלֵּם לְאִכְתָּוֹ אֲשֶׁר-בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת

סְבִירָה:

respond: לחיים

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בִּנְרָא פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן:

respond: אמן

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְרָצָה בָּנוּ, וְשִׁבֶתָּ קִדְּשׁוֹ בְּאֶהְיֶה בְּרִצּוֹן הַנֶּחֱסֵד, יִלְנוּ, וְזָכְרוּ לְמַעֲשֵׂה בְרָאשִׁית. כִּי הוּא יוֹם חֵלֶל לְמִקְרַאי קֹדֶשׁ, כָּרָל יִצְיָא מִצִּרְיָם. וְשִׁבֶתָּ קִדְּשׁוֹ בְּאֶהְיֶה בְּרִצּוֹן הַנֶּחֱסֵד לְתַנּוּ בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם קֹדֶשׁ הַשָּׁבֶת

respond: אמן

Yom hashishi

Vay'chulu hashamayim v'ha'aretz v'chol-tz'va'am: vayichal Elohim bayom hash'vii m'lachto asher asa. Vayishbot bayom hash'vii mikol-m'lachto asher asa: Vayivarech Elohim et-yom hash'vii vayikadesh oto. Ki shavat mikol m'lachto asher-bara Elohim la'asot

Savri: (respond: l'chaim)

Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech haolam bore p'ri hagefen (respond: amen)

Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotai v'ratza vanu, v'shabbat kodsho b'ahava uv'ratzon hinchilanu, zikaron l'ma'aseh v'reishit. Ki hu yom t'chilah l'mikrei kodesh, zecher l'yetzi'at mitzrayim. V'shabbat kodshecha b'ahava u'v'ratzon hinchaltanu. Baruch ata Adonai, m'kadesh hashabbat (respond: amen)

It was evening and it was morning, the sixth day.

The heavens and the earth and all they contain were completed. On the seventh day, God finished God's work which God had done and rested on the Seventh day from all God's work which God had done. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation, which God had created to fulfill its purpose.

Attention: (to life)

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, king of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine (amen)

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, king of the universe who instilled in us the holiness of the mitzvot and cherished us, granting us God's holy Shabbat with love and goodwill, as a reminder of the creation. Because it is the first day of the holy festivals remembering the Exodus from Egypt. Because You have chosen us and sanctified us, from among all peoples and with love and goodwill given us Your holy Shabbat. Blessed are You, Adonai, who sanctifies Shabbat. (amen)

HAND WASHING

נטילת ידיים *N'tilat Yadayim*

Even though we do not observe all the laws of ritual purity and impurity, the institution and symbolism of hand washing remains. Many have the custom of rinsing each hand two or three times. Two washes symbolize purifying the water on the hands as the first wash's water is considered impure from touching impure hands. The third wash symbolizes the endurance that any remaining traces of water are washed away or to simply emphasize the importance of the ritual

Intention

Feel free to think about or share something you are “washing” yourself from this week.

ברוך אתה יהוה אל הינוּ מִלֶּךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיִךְ.
תִּינוּ, וְנִצְוֵנוּ עַל נְטִילַת יָדֵינוּ.

Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu al n'tilat yadayim.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, king of the universe, who instilled in us the holiness of mitzvot by commanding us to rinse our hands.

HAMOTZI

המוציא

Intention

Unlike other blessings, the blessing over the bread blesses both God's role in bringing forth this bread and also the product of human intervention. Acknowledge our active partnership with God in this world. Also recognize the labour that went into producing this bread before it made its way to this table.

ברוך אתה יהוה אל הינוּ מִלֶּךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמּוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, king of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

GRACE AFTER MEALS

ברכת המזון *Birkat Hamazon*

Intention

The blessing after the meal consists of four different sections: food/sustenance, land/home, Jerusalem/hope, and peace/fullness/goodness. As you go through the prayer, notice the headings that separate each theme. As you say this prayer feel free to consider these questions or any others that come to you to help ground you or personalize the prayer.

Food/Sustenance

- What's a meal you've had recently that made you feel cared for? - What's something you enjoyed sharing at this table tonight?

Land/Home

- What's a tradition or value passed down in your family or community that you're grateful for?
- Where do you feel at home?

Jerusalem/Hope

- What's something you're looking forward to?
- What gives you hope when nothing else does?

Peace/Fullness/Goodness

- What's something good that happened today or this week?

- What's a small moment of joy you're thankful for?
- What's a kind thing someone did for you lately?
- Who's someone that brings good in your life?

If blessing after the meal not on Shabbat, skip these two paragraphs

On Shabbat Say:

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת: בָּשׁוּב יְהוָה אֶת־שֵׁי בֵּת צִיּוֹן הֵינּוּ כַּח לֵּמִים. אֲזַיֵּם
לֹא־שְׁחֹק פִּינוּ וְלִשְׁוֹנֵנוּ רָנָה אֲזַיֵּם לֹא מִדֶּן בְּגוֹיִם הַגְדִּיל יְהוָה לִּי
עֲשׂוֹת עִם אֱלֹהֵי הַגְדִּיל יְהוָה לִּי עֲשׂוֹת עֲמֻנָּה הֵינּוּ שֵׁ מַחִים. שׁוּ
בָּהּ יְהוָה אֶת־שֵׁ בֵּיתֵנוּ כִּי אֵין קִים בִּנְגֻב. הִזְרַעְתִּי עֵינַי בְּדִמְעָה
בִּי רָנָה יִקְצְרוּ הַלֶּךְ יִלְךְ בְּכַח נִשְׂא מִשְׁךְ הַזֶּרַע בָּא יְבוֹא בִּרְ
נָה נִשְׂא אֶל־מִתִּי

*Shir hamaalot, b'shuv Adonai et shivat Tziyon hayinu
k'chol'mim. Az yimalei s'chok pinu, ul'shoneinu rinah. Az
yom'ru vagoyim: Higdil Adonai la'asot im eileh. Higdil
Adonai laasot imanu, hayinu s'meichim. Shuvah Adonai
et sh'viteinu kaafikim baNegev. Hazor'im b'dimah b'rinah
yiktzoru. Haloch yeileich uvachoh, nosei meshech hazara,
bo yavo v'rinah, nosei alumotav.*

A song of ascents. When God restored the exiles to Zion it seemed like a dream. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with joyful song. Then they said among the nations: "God has done great things for them." Yes, God is doing great things for us, and we are joyful. Restore our fortunes, O God, as streams revive the desert. Then those

who have sown in tears shall reap in joy. Those who go forth weeping, carrying bags of seeds, shall come home with shouts of joy, bearing their sheaves.

Some add:

תִּהְיֶה אֲדֹנָי יִדְבֹּר: פִּי וְיִבְרַךְ: כָּל בָּשָׂר שֶׁקָּדְשׁוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:
וְאֵנָּה חֲנוּ נְיָ בֵּרַךְ יְהוָה מִשְׁתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם הָלָלוּ יְהוָה
הוֹדוּ לְאֲדֹנָי: כִּי טוֹב: כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֲסִדוֹ
מִי יִמְלֹל גְּבוּרֹת אֲדֹנָי יֵשׁ מִי עַל כָּל תִּהְיֶה

*T'hilat Adonai y'dabeir pi vivareich kol basar Sheim kod'sho
l'olam va'ed Va'anachnu n'vareich ya mei'atah v'ad olam
hal'luya*

Hodu Ladonai ki tov ki l'olam chasdo

Mi y'maleil g'vurot Adonai yashmiyah kol t'hilato

Now let my mouth declare praise for God, and let all humans bless God's holy name for all time. And as for us, we will bless God from now on and forever more. Praise God For God is good and God's loving kindness lasts forever

Who can account for all God's strength and utter all God's praise

The following introduction is customary if three or more individuals, above the age of 12 or 13, have eaten at the table together

הַמְזָמֵן: רַבּוֹתַי/חֲבֵרַי, נְיָ בֵּרַךְ
הַמְסִבִּים: יְיָ הֵי שֵׁם יְיָ מְבָרַךְ מִשְׁתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם
הַמְזָמֵן: יְיָ הֵי שֵׁם יְיָ מְבָרַךְ מִשְׁתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם: בְּרִשְׁוֹת מְרִנָּן
וְרַבָּנָן וְרַבּוֹתַי, נְיָ בֵּרַךְ (בְּעֶשְׂרָה: אֱלֹהֵינוּ) שְׂאֵלָנוּ מִשְׁלוֹ
הַמְסִבִּים: בְּרִיךְ (בְּעֶשְׂרָה: אֱלֹהֵינוּ) שְׂאֵלָנוּ מִשְׁלוֹ וּבְטוֹבוֹ
חַיֵּינוּ
הַמְזָמֵן: בְּרִיךְ (בְּעֶשְׂרָה: אֱלֹהֵינוּ) שְׂאֵלָנוּ מִשְׁלוֹ וּבְטוֹבוֹ חַיֵּינוּ.
בְּרִיךְ הוּא וְבְרִיךְ שְׁמוֹ

Hamizamen: Rabotai/Chaverai n'vareich

Hamisabim: Y'hi Shem Adonai m'vorach mei-atah v'ad
olam

Hamizamen: Y'hi Shem Adonai m'vorach mei-atah v'ad
olam. Birshoot m'ranan v'rabanen v'rabotai, n'vareich (if ten
individuals present: Eloheinu) she-achalnu mishelo

Hamisabim: Baruch (if ten individuals present: Eloheinu)
she-achalnu mishelo oov'toovo chayinu

Hamizamen: Baruch (if ten individuals present: Eloheinu)
she-achalnu mishelo oov'toovo chayinu. Baruch hoo
oo'varuch sh'mo

Collective Prayer Leader: Friends/those before me, let us bless/say grace Surrounding People: Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forever Collective Prayer Leader: Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forever. With the permission/authority of those before me, we will bless (if ten individuals present: our God) of whose bounty we have partaken

Surrounding People: Blessed be (if ten individuals present: our God) of whose bounty we have partaken and whose goodness we live

Collective Prayer Leader: Blessed be (if ten individuals present: our God) of whose bounty we have partaken and whose goodness we live. Blessed be (God), and blessed be (God's) name

Blessing on the Food

ברוך אתה יהוה אל הינו מלך העוֹלָם הַזֶּה אֶתְּ הָעוֹלָם לְפָנֶיךָ
בְּטוֹבוֹ בְּחֶן בְּחֶסֶד וּבְרַחֲמִים, הוּא יִתֵּן לָנוּ לֶחֶם לְכָל־בָּשָׂר כִּי
לֵעוֹלָם חֶסֶד וּבְטוֹבוֹ הַגָּדוֹל מִיָּד לֹא חָסַר לָנוּ וְאֵל יֵחַסֵּר
לָנוּ מִזֶּה לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד בְּעֶבֶר שְׁמוֹ הַגָּדוֹל כִּי הוּא אֵל וְיָמֵץ
רַחֲסָנוּ לְכָל־וּמָה טִיב לְכָל־וּמָה כִּין מִזֶּה. לְכָל־בָּרִיָּה תִּינוּ אֶשֶׁר בָּרָא
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הַזֶּה אֶת־הַכֹּל

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam, hazan et ha-
olam kulo b'tuvo, b'chein b'chesed uv'rachamim. Hu notein
lechem l'chol basar ki l'olam chasdo. Uv'tuvo hagadol
tamid lo chasar lanu, v'al yechsar lanu, mazon l'olam va-ed,
baavur sh'mo hagadol. Ki hu El zan um'farneis lakol umeitiv
lakol, umeichin mazon l'chol b'riyotav asher bara. Baruch
atah Adonai, hazan et hakol.*

Blessed are you, Lord our God, Master of the universe, who feeds the whole world with your goodness, with grace, with lovingkindness and tender mercy; you give food to all flesh, for your lovingkindness endures forever. Through your great goodness food has never failed us: may it not fail us for ever and ever for your great name's sake, since you nourish and sustain all beings and do good unto all, and provide food for all your creatures whom you have created. Blessed are you, Lord, who gives food to all.

Blessing on the Land

נִדְּחָה לָךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ עַל־שֵׁךְ הַנֶּחֱלָת לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ אֶרֶץ חֶמְדָּה
טוֹבָה וְרַחֲבָה וְעַל־שֵׁהוּ צִאֲתָנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְעַל
פְּדִיתָנוּ מִבֵּית עַבָדִים וְעַל־בְּרִיתְךָ שֶׁחָתַמְתָּ בְּשִׂרְנוּ וְעַל
תְּנוּתְךָ שְׁלָמֵנוּ דָּתָנוּ וְעַל־חֻקֶּיךָ שֶׁהוּא דִּשְׁתָּנוּ וְעַל־חַיִּים חֵן וְחֶסֶד
שְׁחֻנָּתָנוּ, וְעַל־אֲכִילַת מִזֶּה שֶׁאַתָּה זָן וּמַפְרִינֵס אוֹתָנוּ תְּמִיד;
בְּכָל־יוֹם וּבְכָל־עֵת וּבְכָל־שָׁעָה

*Nodeh l'cha, Adonai Eloheinu, al shehinchalta laavoteinu
ul'imoteinu eretz chemdah tovah ur'chavah; v'al
shehotzeitanu, Adonai Eloheinu mei-eretz Mitzrayim;
uf'ditanu mibeit avadim; v'al b'rit'cha shechatamta
bilvaveinu; v'al Torat'cha shelimad'tanu, v'al chukecha
shehodatanu, v'al chayim chein vachessed shechonantanu,
v'al achilat mazon shaatah zan um'farneis otanu tamid,
b'chol yom uv'chol eit uv'chol shaah.*

We thank You, Adonai, our God, for Your parceling out as a heritage to our fathers, a land which is desirable, good, and spacious; for Your bringing us out, Adonai, our God, from the land of Egypt, and redeeming us from the house of bondage; for Your covenant which You sealed in our flesh; for Your Torah which You taught us; for Your statutes which You made known to us; for the life, favor, and kindness which You granted us; and for the provision of food with which You nourish and maintain us constantly, every day, at all times and in every hour.

On Chanukah and Purim add:

עַל הַנִּסִּים וְעַל הַפֶּרֶק וְעַל הַגְּבוּרוֹת וְעַל הַתְּשׁוּעוֹת וְעַל הַמַּלְאָכִים
וְעַל חֲמוֹת שְׂעִי תֵּל אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בִּי מִסָּתְהָם בְּזֶמַן מִן הַזֶּה

Al hanisim v'al hapurkan v'al hag'vurot v'al hatshu'ot v'al hamilkhamot she'asita l'avoteinu bayamim hahem bazman hazeh

We thank thee also for the miracles, for the redemption, for the mighty deeds and saving acts, done by You, as well as for the wars which You waged for our ancestors in days of old, at this season.

On Chanukah:

בִּי מִיַּת תִּיהוּ בֶן יוֹחָנָן כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל חֲשׂמוֹן אִי וּבְנֵי כֶּשֶׁעַ מְדָה
מִלְּפֹת יוֹן הָרֶשֶׁעַ עַל עַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהַשְׁכִּיחַם מִתּוֹרַתְךָ וְלִלְבֹּשׁ
הֶעָרִים מִחֻקֵּי רְצוֹנְךָ וְאַתָּה בֵּרַחְתָּ מִן הָרָבִים עַמְּדֵת לָהֶם
בְּעֵת צָרָתָם רַבֵּת אֶת רִי בָם דִּנְתָּ אֶת דִּינָם נִקְּמֵת אֶת נִקְמָתָם
תָּמַם סָרְתָּ גְבוּרִים בִּידְּךָ לְהַשְׁכִּיחַם וְרָבִים בִּידְּךָ מִעֲטִים וְטַמְּאִים
בִּידְּךָ טָהוּ רִים וְרֶשַׁע עִים בִּידְּךָ צָדִיקִים וְצַדִּיקִים בִּידְּךָ עוֹסְקֵי תוֹרַתְךָ

וְלִךְ עֲשִׂיתָ שֵׁם גָּדוֹל וְקָדוֹשׁ בְּעוֹלָמְךָ וְלִעַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲשִׂיתָ
תְּשׁוּעָה גְדוֹלָה וְפֶרֶק וְחַיִּים הַזֶּה וְאַחֲרָיֶךָ בְּנִיךָ לְדֹר
בִּירְבִּיתְךָ וּפְנוּ אֶת הֵיכָלְךָ וְטַהְרוּ אֶת מִקְדָּשְׁךָ וְהִדְּלִיקוּ
נֵרוֹת בְּחֻצוֹת קִדְּשְׁךָ וְקַבְּעוּ שְׂמוֹנֶת יָמִים חֲנֻכָּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְהוֹדוֹת וְלִלְבֹּשׁ
הַגָּדוֹל

*Bimei matityahu ben yokhanan kohen gadol khashmonai
u'vanav k'she'amda malkhut yavan harsha'a al amkha
yisrael l'hashkikham toratekha u'lha'aviram makhukei
r'tzonekha v'ata v'rakhamekha harabim amad'ta lahem
b'eit tzaratam ravta et rivam danta et dinam nakamta et
nikmatam masarta giborim b'yad khalashim v'rabim b'yad
m'atim u'tmei'im b'yad t'horim u'r'sha'im b'yad tzadikim
v'zeidim b'yad oskei toratekha u'lekha asita shem gadol
v'kadosh b'olamekha u'lamkha yisrael asita t'shua gedola
u'furkan k'hayom hazeh v'akhar kein ba'u vanekha lidvir
beitekha ufinu et heichalkha v'tiharu et mikdashkha
v'hidlik neirot b'khatzrot kadshekha v'kav'u shmonat yemei
hanukkah eilu l'hodot u'lehalel l'shimkha hagadol*

In the days of the Hasmonean, Mattathias son of Johanan, the High Priest, and his sons, when the iniquitous power of Greece rose up against thy people Israel to make them forgetful of Your Law, and to force them to transgress the statutes of Your will, then You did in Your abundant mercy rise up for them in the time of their trouble; You plead their cause, You judge their suit, You avenge their wrong; You

deliver the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the arrogant into the hands of them that occupied themselves with Your Law: for You make a great and holy name in thy world, and for Your people Israel did work a great deliverance and redemption as at this day. And thereupon Your children came into the oracle of Your house, cleansed thy temple, purified thy sanctuary, kindled lights in thy holy courts, and appointed these eight days of Chanukah in order to give thanks and praises unto Your great name. For all these things Your name, O our King, shall be continually blessed and exalted for ever and ever.

On Purim:

בִּי מִיָּמֵי יְרֵדָה כִּי נֶאֱסָתָר בְּשׁוֹשַׁן הַבִּירָה: כָּשָׁעַ מַדְעָ לִי הֵם הָמָן
הָרָשָׁע: בִּקְשָׁה לְהָשִׁיב מִיַּד לְהַרְגוֹ וְלֹאֲבֹד אֶת־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים מִנֶּגֶד
עַד־עַד זָקֵן טַף וְנָשִׁים: בְּיוֹם אֶחָד: בְּשִׁלְשָׁה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ שְׁנִים עָשָׂר
הוּא חֹדֶשׁ אֲדָר: וְשָׁלַל לָם לְבוֹשׁ וְאֶת־הַבְּרִית מִיָּד הָרָבִים הַפְּרִיטִים
אֶת־עַצְמוֹ וְקָלָה לָתֵת אֶת־מַחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ וְהִשְׁבִּיחַ תְּלוּ גְמוּלוֹ בְּרֹאשׁוֹ
וְתָלוּ אוֹתוֹ וְאֶת־בְּנָיו עַל־הָעֵץ וְעָשִׂיתָ עִמָּם הֵם נָסִים וְנִפְלְאוֹת
וְנִגְדָה לְשֵׁם מַךְ הַגְּדוֹלָהּ

*Bimei Mordechai v'Esther b'Shushan habirah, k'she'amad
aleihem Haman harasha, bikeish l'hashmid laharog ul'abeid
et kol hayehudim, minaar v'ad zakein, nashim v'taf, beyom
echad, bishlosa asar l'chodesh shneim asar hu chodesh
Adar, ushlalam Lavon V'atah b'rachamecha harabim
heifarta et atzato, v'kilalta et machashavto, v'hasheivota
lo gemulo b'rosho, v'talu oto v'et banav al ha'eitz v'asitah
imahem nisim v'nifla'ot v'nodeh l'shimcha hagadol selah*

In the days of Mordecai and Esther, in Shushan the capital, when the wicked Haman rose up against them, and sought to destroy, to slay and make to perish all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, on one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey,—then in Your abundant mercy bring his counsel to nothing, frustrated his design, and return his recompense upon his own head; and they hanged him and his sons upon the gallows. For all these things Your name, O our King, shall be continually blessed and exalted for ever and ever.

וְעַל־הַכֹּל יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲנִי חֲנוּ מִזֵּדִים לְךָ וּמִבְּרָכִים אוֹתְךָ,
תְּבָרַךְ שִׁמְךָ בְּפִי כָל־חַיִּית מִיַּד לְעוֹלָם וְעַד: כְּכָתוּב: וְאֵלֶּכֶת
וְשֶׁבַע־יָמִים בְּרִית אֶת־יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן
לְךָ בְּרִיךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי הָאָרֶץ וְעַל־הַמָּזוֹן

*V'al hakol, Adonai Eloheinu, anachnu modim lach
um'var'chim otach. Yitbarach shimcha b'fi chol chai tamid
l'olam va-ed, kakatuv: V'achalta v'savata, uveirachta et
Adonai Elohecha al haaretz hatovah asher natan lach.
Baruch atah Adonai, al haaretz v'al hamazon.*

*For everything Adonai, our God, We thank You and bless
You. Blessed be Your Name through the mouth of all the
living, constantly, forever, as it is written: When You have
eaten and are satisfied, You will bless Adonai, your God, for
the good land which God has given to you. Blessed are You,
Adonai, for the land and for the food.*

Blessing on Jerusalem

רַחֵם נָא יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל עַמֶּךָ, וְעַל יְרוּשָׁה לִים עִירָךָ, וְעַל
צִיּוֹן מְשֻׁכֵּן כְּבוֹדָךָ, וְעַל מַלְכוּת בֵּית דָּוִד מְשִׁי חָךְ, וְעַל הַבֵּית
הַגָּדוֹל וְהַקָּדוֹשׁ שֶׁנִּקְרָא שֶׁמֶךְ עָלָיו. אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אָבִינוּ, רַעֲנוּ,
זוֹנִינוּ, פִּרְנוּ סֵנוּ וְכָל־לֵנוּ וְהָרוּי חֲנוּ, וְהָרוּחַ לָנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
מִהָרָה מְכַל צָרוֹ תִּינוּ. וְנָא אֶל־תִּצְרֵי כֵנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, לֹא לִי דִי
מִתְנַת בְּשֵׁר וְדָם וְלֹא לִי דִי הַלֹּא תָם, כִּי אִם לִי דָךְ הֵמָּלָא
הַפְתָּ חָהּ. הַקְדוּשָׁה וְהָרַחֲבָה, שְׁלֹא נִבְּוֹשׁ וְלֹא נָכַל לִעַן לָם
וְעַד

*Racheim, Adonai Eloheinu, al Yisrael amecha, v'al
Y'rushalayim irecha, v'al Tziyon mishkan k'vodecha.
Eloheinu Avinu, r'einu zuneinu, parn'seinu v'chalk'leinu
v'harvicheinu, v'harvach lanu, Adonai Eloheinu, m'heirah
mikol tzaroteinu. V'na al tatzricheinu, Adonai Eloheinu,
lo lidei mat'nat basar vadam v'lo lidei halvaatam, ki im
l'yad'cha ham'lei-ah hap'tuchah hak'doshah v'har'chavah,
shelo neivosh v'lo nikaleim l'olam va-ed.*

*Have compassion, Adonai, our God, on Israel, Your people,
on Jerusalem, Your city, on Zion, the dwelling place of Your
glory, on the kingship of the house of David, Your anointed;
and on the great and holy House upon which Your Name is
called. Our God, our Father tend us, nourish us, maintain us,
sustain us, relieve us and grant us relief Adonai, our God,
speedily from all our troubles. Adonai, our God—may we
never be in need of the gifts of men nor of their loans, but
only of Your hand which is full, open, holy and generous, so
that we may not be shamed nor humiliated forever and ever.*

On Shabbat:

רַחֵם וְהַחֲלֵנוּ לִי צֵנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּמִצְוַתְךָ וּבְמִצְוֹת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת בִּי
עֵי הַשָּׁבֶת הַגָּדוֹל וְהַקָּדוֹשׁ הַזֶּה. כִּי יוֹם זֶה גָּדוֹל וְקָדוֹשׁ הוּא לְ
פְנִיךָ לְשַׁבֵּת בּוֹ וְלָנוּ חֹבֶבָה כִּמְצוֹת רְצוֹנָךְ. וּבְרְצוֹנְךָ
הִנֵּי חָלָנוּ יְיָ
אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׁלֹא תֵהָא צָרָה וְיָגוֹן וְאִנְיָה בְיוֹם מְנוּחָתְנוּ וְהָרָ
אֲנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּנִחַת מִתְּצִיּוֹן עִירָךְ. וּבְבִנְיָן יְרוּשָׁה לִים עִיר קִדְשְׁךָ
כִּי אַתָּה הוּא בְּעַל הַשְׁוֹעוֹת וּבְעַל הַנְּחָמוֹת

*R'tzeih v'hachalitzeinu, Adonai Eloheinu, b'mitzvotecha
uv'mitzvat yom hash'vi-i haShabbat hagadol v'hakadosh
hazeh, ki yom zeh gadol v'kadosh hu l'fanecha, lishbot bo
v'lanuach bo b'ahavah k'mitvat r'tzonecha. Uvir'tzon'cha
haniach lanu, Adonai Eloheinu, shelo t'hei tzarah v'yagon
vaanachah b'yom m'nuchateinu. V'hareinu, Adonai Eloheinu,
b'nechamat Tziyon irecha uv'vinyan Y'rushalayim ir
kodshecha, ki atah hu baal hay'shuot uvaal hanechamot.*

*May it please You, to strengthen us Adonai, our
God, through Your commandments, and through the
commandment of the seventh day, this great and holy
Sabbath. For this day is great and holy before You, to
refrain from work on it and to rest on it with love, as
ordained by Your will. And by Your will, grant us repose
Adonai, our God, that there be no distress, sorrow, or
sighing on the day of our rest. Show us Adonai, our God,
the consolation of Zion, Your city, and the rebuilding of
Jerusalem, city of Your Sanctuary, for You are the Master
of deliverance and the Master of consolation.*

On New Moons and Festivals add:

אַל־הִינוּ וְאֵל־הֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, יַעֲלֶה וְיָבֹא יְגִיעַ יְרָאָה וְיִרְצָה יֵשׁ
מֵעַ יָפֶּקֶד וְיִצְכַּר זְכוּרֵינוּ וְזֶכְרוֹן אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, זְכוּרֵנוּ יִרְשָׁשׁ לֵים
עִירָהּ, וְזֶכְרוֹן מְשִׁיחֵנוּ בְּדוֹדֵנוּ כָּל־עַמֶּךָ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֵל לִפְנֵיךָ, לִפְנֵי לִטָּה לִטָּה לְחֹן לְחֹן לְסִדּוֹ לְרַחֵם מִיָּס לְחַיִּים וְ
לְשָׁלוֹם בְּיוֹם

*Eloheinu v'elohei avoteinu, ya'aleh v'yavoh yagiyah yera'eh
v'yiratzeh yashmiyah yifaked v'yizacher zichroneinu
v'zicharon avoteinu, zich'ron Yerushalayim ir'cha, v'zich'ron
mashi'ach ben David av'dach, v'zich'ron kol-am'cha beit
yisrael l'fanecha, l'fleita l'tovah l'chen l'chesed u'l'rachamim
l'chaim u'l'shalom b'ym*

*Our God and God of our fathers! May our remembrance
rise and come and be accepted before thee, with the
remembrance of our fathers. of Messiah the son of David
thy servant, of Jerusalem thy holy city, and of all thy
people the house of Israel, bringing deliverance and well-
being, grace, lovingkindness and mercy, life and peace on
this day of*

On New Moon say:

Rosh HaChodesh

The New Moon

רֵאשִׁי הַחֹדֶשׁ

On Passover:

Chag HaMatzot

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

On Sukkot:

Chag HaSukkot

The Feast of Tabernacles

On Shemini Atzeret:

HaChag Sh'mini Atzeret

The Eighth Day Feast of Solemn Assembly

On Shavuot:

Chag HaShavuot

The Feast of Weeks

On Rosh Hashanah:

HaZikaron

Memorial

חַג הַמַּצּוֹת

חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת

חַג הַשְּׁמִינִי עֶצֶרֶת

חַג הַשָּׁבוּעוֹת

הַזִּכְרוֹן,

הַזֶּה, זָכְרֵנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בֹּלְטֵנוּ בָּהּ, וְנִפְקְדָנוּ בּוֹ לְבָרָכָה,
וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ בּוֹ לְחַיִּים; בְּדֹבַר יְשׁוּעָה וְרַחֲמִים; חוֹסֵן וְחַנּוּן, וְרַחֲמִים
חֲסֵד לֵינוּ, וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ כִּי אֵל לֵךְ עֵינֵינוּ; כִּי אֵל מְלֶךְ חַנוּן וְרַחוּם
אַתָּה.

*Hazeh, zachreinu Adonai Eloheinu bo l'tovah, u'fakdeinu
bo livracha, v'hoshi'einu bo l'chaim, bi'd'var y'shu'ah
v'rachamim; chus v'chaneinu, v'rachem aleinu, v'hoshi'einu
ki eilecha eineinu, ki El melech chanun v'rachum atah*

*Remember us, O Lord our God, thereon for our wellbeing;
be mindful of us for blessing, and save us unto life: by thy
promise of salvation and mercy, spare us and be gracious
unto us; have mercy upon us and save us; for our eyes are
bent upon thee, because thou art a gracious and merciful
God and King.*

וּבְנֵה יְרוּשָׁה לִפְנֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ; בְּמִהְרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ; בְּרִיךְ אַתָּה יי
בּוֹנֵה בְרִית מִיּוֹ יְרוּשָׁה לִפְנֵי אֱלֹהֵינוּ.

*Uv'neih Y'rushalayim ir hakodesh bimheirah v'yameinu.
Baruch atah Adonai, boneh v'rachamav Y'rushalayim. Amen.*

*Rebuild Jerusalem, city of the Holy Sanctuary, speedily, in
our days. Blessed are You, Adonai, Builder of Jerusalem in
Your mercy. Amen.*

Blessing for Goodness

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מְלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הָאֵל אֲדָא בֵּינוּ, מְלָכְנוּ, אֲדָא
דִּירָנוּ, בּוֹרְאָנוּ, גֹּאֲלָנוּ, יוֹצֵרָנוּ, קְדוֹשְׁנוּ קְדוֹשׁ יַעֲקֹב, רוֹעֵנוּ רוֹ
עָה יִשְׂרָאֵל, הֶמְלֵךְ הַטּוֹב וְהַמִּיטִיב לְכָל שָׁבַי כָּל יוֹם וְיוֹם הוּא

הֵי טִיב, הוּא מִיטִיב, הוּא יִיטִיב לָנוּ, הוּא גְמָלָנוּ, הוּא גּוֹמְלָנוּ,
הוּא יְגַמְלָנוּ לְעֵד, לְחַנוּךְ לְחַסְדֵּנוּ לְרַחֲמֵנוּ לְרוּחַ הַצֶּדֶק
הַצֶּדֶק הַחַדְשָׁה, בְּרָכָה וְיִשׁוּעָה, נְחֵמָה פְּרִיָּסָה וְכִלְכָּלָה וְרַחֲמִים
וְחַיִּים. וְשָׁלוֹם, וְכָל טוֹב; וּמִכָּל טוֹב לְעוֹלָם אֵל יִחְסְרֵנוּ

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam, he-El
Avinu Malkein Adireinu, Bor'einu, Goaleinu, Yotz'reinu,
K'dosheinu, K'dosh Yaakov, Ro-einu Ro-eih Yisrael,
HaMelech hatov v'hameitiv lakol, sheb'chol yom vayom hu
heitiv, hu meitiv, hu yeitiv lanu. Hu g'malanu, hu gom'leinu,
hu yigm'leinu laad, l'chein ul'chesed ul'rachamim ul'revach,
hatzalah v'hatzlachah, b'rachah vishuah, nechamah,
parnasah, v'chalkalah, v'rachamim v'chayim v'shalom,
v'chol tov, umikol tov l'olam al y'chas'reinu.*

*Blessed are You, Adonai our God, King of the Universe, the
Almighty, our Father, our King, our Mighty One, our Creator,
our Redeemer, our Maker, our Holy One, Holy One of
Jacob, our Shepherd, Shepherd of Israel, the King, Who is
good and beneficent to all. Every single day God has done
good, does good, and will do good to us. God has rewarded
us, God rewards us, God will reward us forever with favor,
kindness, and compassion, relief, rescue, and success,
blessing, deliverance, and consolation, maintenance,
sustenance, compassion, life, peace, and everything good;
and of all good things may God never deprive us.*

הַרְחֵם מִן הוּא יְמַלֹּךְ עָלֵינוּ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.

Harachaman, hu yimloch aleinu l'olam va-ed.

The Merciful One will reign over us forever and ever.

הַרְחָמֵנוּ הוּא יְתִבְרַךְ בְּשָׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ.

Harachaman, hu yitbarach bashamayim uvaaretz.

The Merciful One will be blessed in heaven and on earth.

הַרְחָמֵנוּ הוּא יִשְׁתַּבַּח לְדוֹר וָדוֹר, וְיִתְפָּאֵר בְּנוֹ לְעֵדוֹ לְנֹצַחַן.
צַדִּיקִים, וְיִתְהַדָּר בְּנוֹ לְעֵדוֹ לְמִי עוֹלָמִים.

Harachaman, hu yishtabach l'dor dorim, v'yitpaar banu laad ul'neitzach n'tzachim, v'yit-hadar banu laad ul'ol'mei olamim.

The Merciful One will be praised for all generations, He will be glorified through us forever and for all eternity; and He will be honored through us for time everlasting.

הַרְחָמֵנוּ הוּא יְפָרְנֵנוּ בְּכָבוֹד.

Harachaman, hu y'farn'seinu b'chavod.

May the Merciful One maintain us with honor.

הַרְחָמֵנוּ הוּא יִשְׁבֹּר עָלֵינוּ מֵעַל צְוָארֵנוּ, וְהוּא יוֹלִי כֻנּוֹ קוֹמֵ.
מִיּוֹת לֹא רָצֵנוּ.

Harachaman, hu yishbor uleinu mei-al tzavareinu, v'hu yolichenu kom'miyut l'artzeinu.

The Merciful One will break the yoke (of oppression) from our necks and lead us upright to our land.

הַרְחָמֵנוּ הוּא יִשְׁלַח לָנוּ בֶּרֶךְ כַּהֲמַרְבֵּה בְּבֵיתָהּ, וְעַל־שֵׁל חָן.
זֶה שֵׁאֵל כִּלְנוֹ עָלֵינוּ.

Harachaman, hu yishlach b'rachah m'rubah babayit hazeh, v'al shulchan zeh she-achalnu alav.

May the Merciful One send us abundant blessing to this house, and upon this table at which we have eaten.

הַרְחָמֵנוּ הוּא יִשְׁלַח לָנוּ אֶת־אֱלִיהוּ הַגָּדוֹל בִּיאֲזוֹרָה לְטוֹב, וְיִבְשֶׁר
לָנוּ בְּשׁוֹרֹת טוֹבוֹת וְשׁוּעוֹת וְנִחְמוֹת.

Harachaman, hu yishlach lanu et Eliyahu HaNavi, zachur latov, vivaser lanu b'sorot tovot, y'shuot v'nechamot.

The Merciful One will send us Elijah the prophet, who is remembered for good, who will announce to us good tidings, deliverances, and consolations.

When eating at your parents table:

הַרְחָמֵנוּ הוּא יְבָרֵךְ אֶת־אָבִי מוֹרֵי (בְּעַל־הַבֵּיתָהּ זֶה, וְאֶת־)
אִמִּי מוֹרֵתִי (בְּעַל־הַבֵּיתָהּ זֶה).

Harachaman, hu yivarech et (avi mori) ba'al habayit hazeh, v'et (imi morati) ba'alat habayit hazeh

May the Merciful One bless (my father), my teacher, the master of this house, and (my mother), my teacher, the mistress of this house; them, their household, their children and all that is theirs.

When eating at your own table:

הַרְחֵם מִן הָאֵלֹהִים וְיִבְרַךְ אוֹתִי (וְאֶת־אִשְׁתִּי/בְעָלִי וְאֶת־רַעִי) וְ
אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לִי

*Harachaman, hu yivarech oh-ti (v'et ishti/ba'ali v'et zar'i)
v'et kol asher li May the Merciful One bless me, (my spouse,
my children), and all that is mine;*

אוֹתָם וְאֶת־בֵּיתָם וְאֶת־רָעָם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לָהֶם, אוֹתָנָם וְ
אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לָנוּ, כְּמוֹ־שֶׁנִּתְּבַרְכּוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אֲבִרָהם יִצְחָק
(וְיַעֲקֹב) וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ שָׂרָה, רִבְקָה, רָחֵל וְלֵאָה (בְּכָל־מִכְלָכָם
— כֵּן יִבְרַךְ אוֹתָנָם וְכָל־לָנוּ יַחְדָּם בְּרַכְּהֶם שְׁלֵמָה. וְנֹאֵם מֶרְאָם

*Otam v'et beitam v'et zar'am v'et kol asher lahem, otanu
v'et kol asher lanu, k'mo shenit'brachu avoteinu Avraham
Yitzchak V'Yaakov (v'imoteinu Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel,
v'Leah), bakol mikol kol — kein yivarech otanu kulanu
Yachad bivricha sh'leima. V'nomar: Amen*

*them, their household, their seed and all that is theirs, us
also and all that is ours, as our fathers Abraham, Isaac and
Jacob were blessed each with God's own comprehensive
blessing; even thus may he bless all of us together with a
perfect blessing, and let us say Amen*

בְּמָרוֹם יְיָ לְמַדְוֶה לִּי הֵם וְעַל־לִינוּ זְכוּת־שֶׁתִּהְיֶה לִּי מִשְׁמֶרֶת שְׁלוֹם.
וְנִשְׂאָ בְּרַכְּהָ מֵאֵת יְיָ וְצִדִּיקָהּ מֵאֵלֵי הַיֵּשׁ עֲנוּ, וְנִמְצָא חֵן וְשֶׁ
כָּל־טוֹב בְּעֵינֵי אֱלֹהִים וְאָדָם

*Bamarom y'lam'du aleihem v'aleinu z'chut, shet'hei
l'mishmeret shalom, v'nisa v'rachah mei-eit Adonai,
utz'dakah meiElohei yisheinu, v'nimtza chein v'seichel tov
b'einei Elohim v'adam.*

*Both on their and on our behalf may there be such
advocacy on high as shall lead to enduring peace; and may
we receive a blessing from the Lord, and righteousness
from the God of our salvation; and may we find grace and
good understanding in the sight of God and man*

Shabbat only:

הַרְחֵם מִן הָאֵלֹהִים יְיָ חֵי לָנוּ יוֹם־שְׁכֻל־שַׁבָּת וְיִמְנוּ חַהֲלֵה לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם
בְּמִים

*Harachaman, hu yanchileinu yom shekulo Shabbat
um'nuchah l'chayei haolamim.*

*May the All-merciful let us inherit the day which shall be
wholly a Shabbat and rest in the life everlasting*

On festivals:

הַרְחֵם מִן הָאֵלֹהִים יְיָ חֵי לָנוּ יוֹם־שְׁכֻל־טוֹב

Harachaman, hu yanchileinu yom shekulo tov

*May the All-merciful let us inherit the day which is
altogether good.*

One the Rosh Chodesh (New Moon):

הַרְחֵם מִן הָאֵלֹהִים יְיָ חֵי לָנוּ אֶת־הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לְטוֹבָה וְלִבְרָכָה

*Harachaman, hu yichadeish aleinu et hachodesh hazeh
l'tovah v'livricha May the All-merciful renew unto us this
month for good and for blessing.*

On Rosh Hashanah (The New Year):

הָרַחֵם מִן הוּא יְיָ חֹדֶשׁ עָלֵינוּ אֶת הַשָּׁנָה הַזֹּאת לְטוֹבָה וְלִבְרָכָה

*Harachaman, hu yichadeish aleinu et hashanah hazot
l'tovah v'livracha May the All-merciful renew unto us this
year for good and for blessing.*

On Sukkot:

הָרַחֵם מִן הוּא יְיָ קִים לָנוּ אֶת סִכַּת דָּוִד הַנּוֹפֵלָת

Harachaman, hu yakim lanu et sukkat David hanofelet

*May the All-merciful raise up for us the fallen Tabernacle of
David.*

הָרַחֵם מִן הוּא יְיָ זַכְנוּ לִימֹת הַמָּשִׁיחַ וְלִימֵי הַעוֹלָם הַבָּא. מִן
(On Shabbat, festivals, and days we do not say Tachanun): גְּדִיל וְתוֹעֵשִׁי וְלִדְגָּן מִן
מִלְכוּת, וְעֲשֵׂה חֶסֶד לְמַשִּׁיחוֹ, לְדָוִד וְלִי
רַעוּ עַד עוֹלָם. עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרְיָמִי, הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְ
עַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְאִמְרוּ: אֲמֵן

*Harachaman, hu y'zakeinu limot hamashiach ul'chaiyei
ha'olam haba. (On ordinary days): Magdil. (On Shabbat,
festivals, and days we do not say Tachanun): Migdol
y'shu'ot malko v'oseh chesed limshicho, l'David ul'zar'o ad
olam. Oseh shalom bim'romav, hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu
v'al kol Yisrael, v'im'ru: Amen.*

*May the All-merciful make us worthy of the days of the
Messiah, and of the life of the world to come. On Sabbaths,
Festivals, and New Moons—he is a tower of salvation to his
king; On Week-days—Great salvation gives him to his king.*

*And show lovingkindness to his anointed, to David and to
his seed, for evermore. He who makes peace in his high
places, may he make peace for us and for all Israel, and say,
Amen*

יִרְאוּ אֶת יְיָ קִדְשׁוֹ, כִּי אֵין מַחְסוֹר לִירְאָיו. כִּי פִי רִים וְרִשׁוֹ וְרַעְבוֹ,
וְדִרְשִׁי יְיָ לֹא יִחַס סִרְוֹ כֹּל טוֹב. הוֹדוּ לִי כִי טוֹב, כִּי לַעֲוֹלָם חֶסֶד.
פִּוְתֵי חַתְּךָ אֶת יְדְךָ, וְנִמְשְׁבִי עַל כָּל חַי רִצּוֹן. בְּרוּךְ הָעֹשֶׂה בְּרַחֲמָיו
בְּטַחֲבִיבִי, וְהָיָה יְיָ מִבְּטַחוֹ. נִעֲרָה הִיא תִּגְמֹל וְזִקְנָתִי, וְלֹא רָאִיתִי
צָדִיק נִעְזָב, וְנִרְעוּ מִבְּקֶשׁ לֶחֶם. יְיָ עֲזֵר לְעַמּוֹ יִתֵּן, יְיָ בְּרַךְ אֶת
עַמּוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם

*Y'ru et Adonai, k'doshav, ki ein mach'sor lireiav. K'firim
rashu v'raeivu, v'dorshei Adonai lo yachs'ru kol tov. Hodu
Ladonai ki tov, ki l'olam chasdo. Potei'ach et yadecha,
umasbi'a l'kol chai ratzon. Baruch hagever asher yivtach
badonai, v'hayah Adonai mivtacho.*

*O fear the Lord and God's holiness; for there is no want to
them that fear God. Young lions do lack and suffer hunger:
but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good. O
give thanks unto the Lord, for God is good: for God's
lovingkindness endures for ever. You open Your hand, and
satisfy every living thing with favor. Blessed is the man that
trusts in the Lord, and whose trust the Lord is. I have been
young and now I am old; yet have I not seen the righteous
forsaken, nor God's seed begging for bread. The Lord will
give strength unto God's people; the Lord will bless God's
people with peace.*

Bridges Beyond Borders: A Journey Into Jewish Connection

Avihu Sela

Avihu Sela is studying economics, management and information systems at Tel-Hai College in Tel-Hai, Israel.

As a student at Tel-Hai College in northern Israel, I took part in Hillel's leadership program, which included a delegation trip to Budapest.

I didn't really know what to expect. I was mainly curious to see a different side of Jewish life and to visit places filled with Jewish history.

During the trip, I found myself wanting to learn more about the Jewish past that lives in these places and to get to know the other students who joined the delegation.

Through conversations and shared experiences, I started to see new perspectives on what Judaism means to different people and to me.

It wasn't just something I learned about, it was something I could sense, standing there with others who shared the same connection.

In that moment, I felt that we are the next generation, living proof that Jewish life continues and that we carry their story forward.

Beyond the historical places, one of the most meaningful parts of the trip was spending time with the other participants. Each of us came from a different background, but we all shared a curiosity about what it means to be Jewish today. Through conversations and group activities, I started to see how Judaism can look and feel different yet still connect us.

One of the moments that stayed with me was visiting the Great Synagogue in Budapest.

Standing there, surrounded by history, I could almost feel how much Jewish life had once been part of the city.

It made me think about the generations that came before us, how they built communities,

faced challenges, and kept their traditions alive. Later on, walking along the Danube and seeing the memorial of the iron shoes, I felt the weight of that history in a personal way.

Some came from families that kept strong traditions, others from communities where being Jewish meant something more cultural or personal.

Listening to their perspectives helped me realize that what makes us special is not who we are as individuals but the Jewish tradition that connects us, the values, the memories, and the shared sense of belonging that continue to unite us. Coming back from Budapest, I felt inspired to keep the connections alive.

The trip made me realize how important it is for Jews in Israel and around the world to stay curious about each other, to learn, to listen, and to share.

I hope to take part in more programs that build these bridges so that the sense of unity I felt during the trip can continue to grow.

For me, this experience was just a beginning, a reminder that we all share one story and that every new connection keeps it alive for the future.

Between Us and Tomorrow — Echoes of a Nation

Katarzyna Witek-Mioduszevska

Katarzyna Witek-Mioduszevska is studying toward a PhD in Law at Uniwersytet Andrzeja Frycza Modrzewskiego in Krakow, Poland.

*To You — someone who perhaps hasn't yet been born,
but already carries within the light of our shared stories.*

Dear Person,

I don't know who you are.

I don't know if you're twenty or seventy, whether you live in Jerusalem, Krakow, Buenos Aires, New York, Addis Ababa, or somewhere far beyond the borders of any map we've drawn. I don't know what kind of world surrounds you — whether it is gentler or harsher than mine, whether memory still has weight, or whether history has turned into a blur, a background hum you no longer hear. I don't even know whether, in your time, the word “Jewish” still means what it means to us today — or if it means anything at all.

But this I do know: you are part of the same story.

The same current flows through you as flows through me — a current that has passed through deserts and cities, through exiles and homecomings, through silence and song. By writing to you, I'm trying to preserve something fragile yet vital — an echo that may reach you where our voices can no longer travel. A whisper passed hand to hand, soul to soul

I'm writing to you from the year 2025. The world around me is in constant motion, racing ahead with an intensity that leaves little room for reflection. Technology connects us and isolates us all at once. Information floods every screen and surface. Sound drowns out sound. Meaning disappears into noise. In this whirlwind, it becomes harder and harder to pause — to truly stop and ask: Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going?

To be Jewish — for some, it's prayer, faith, God, study.

For others, it's inherited stories, old recipes, candle flames, Hebrew school, or a surname mispronounced by strangers and worn with quiet defiance. A surname spoken sometimes with difficulty, and sometimes with pride. Sometimes it's a melody that you didn't know you knew until someone hummed it near you. From time to time it's a question. Only a question. One that stirs in the mirror between breakfast and the tram. One that echoes in a foreign land, or in front of a synagogue you've never entered. A question that isn't always answered, but never quite disappears. I carry that question with me — not as a burden, but as an open space.

There is no single answer to it and perhaps that's the point. Jewish experience is not linear. It is not simple. It is full of tension, contradiction, and beauty.

On one hand, we carry pride. Strength.

A sense of connection to those who came before us — who lit candles through darkness, who built homes from rubble, who spoke our names into the future. We remember those who survived pogroms and the Shoah, who refused to be erased. We walk in the footsteps of people who loved fiercely, who mourned deeply, and who imagined a better tomorrow even when the present was collapsing.

On the other hand, we also feel the fractures. The cracks that run through our global community. Not loud, not always visible — but real. Painful. Present. Sometimes it's not conflict that separates us, but silence.

Between those living in Israel and those in the Diaspora.

Between the religious and the secular, between tradition and modernity, between memory and future.

These differences can be painful. Not because they're unnatural — but because we don't know how to talk about them.

These fractures in our community aren't always loud or visible. Often, they're just silent driftings apart, accompanied by weariness, indifference, the pain of disappointment.

This fragmentation, this subtle but widening gap, is, I believe, one of the greatest challenges that the global Jewish community is facing today.

We are scattered, not just geographically, but emotionally, spiritually, and ideologically.

We no longer share a common thread of language, of symbols, of meaning.

For some, the language of tradition feels distant, foreign, even exclusionary. For others, modern expressions of identity feel rootless, disconnected from the soul of who we are.

Some feel alienated from institutions that once gave structure to Jewish life. Others long for meaning in ritual but don't know where to begin.

I see people my age, my generation, slowly walking away. Not always out of anger. Sometimes out of exhaustion. Sometimes because no one ever really invited them to stay.

Sometimes because they have only known Jewishness as pain, trauma, conflict, never as joy or home or possibility. Sometimes they don't even know which questions to ask. Even more often, they no longer believe any answers exist.

The “we” becomes a “they.” That one shift in language, that one syllable, creates a chasm deeper than any theological or political divide. As Pirkei Avot teaches, “It is not your duty to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it.”

These words remind me that even small acts — a question, a conversation, a letter — matter.

We don't need to fix everything. But we are responsible for trying.

Still, despite all of this, I do not want to give in to despair. I don't believe our story ends with division. I don't believe we are destined to drift forever.

Because there is still something quiet, but real that holds us.

It's the memory of our shared beginning.

It's the sense that someone, somewhere, once whispered your name in prayer.

It's the moment when a stranger says "Shabbat shalom" and something stirs inside you.

It's knowing that even in disagreement, we are still part of the same song.

I don't dream of a perfect global community.

I don't believe in unity that demands uniformity.

I don't long for a single path.

Instead, I imagine a Jewish future built not on sameness, but on sacred difference.

A future where we can sit across the table from one another across oceans, beliefs, generations and still say: "You are part of me."

Jewish identity doesn't have to be a narrow path.

It can be a wide-open landscape.

A place where questions are as holy as answers.

Where memory is not used to exclude, but to include.

Where tradition is not a wall, but a bridge.

We need to learn how to be together despite our differences.

Not to erase them. Not to pretend they don't matter.

But to honor them — and allow them to enrich the conversation.

I believe the key to this healing is dialogue.

Real, messy, courageous dialogue.

Not only between people who already agree, but especially between those who don't.

Between those who have never been in the same room — physically or spiritually.

Dialogue means listening, even when it's hard.

It means telling the truth about our pain, our joy, our confusion.

It means showing up — not with answers, but with presence.

With humility. With hope.

This is the role I hope to play.

And maybe it is the role you will play, too.

To write letters. To ask questions.

To be a witness to difference, and a builder of bridges.
To create spaces where people can belong, even if they're
not sure what that belonging means yet.

To model care. To open doors. To hold tension without
turning away.

My task, your task, is not to impose a single definition
of Jewishness.

It is to make room for many voices.

To protect the sacred space where a community can unfold,
over time, across boundaries.

A space where no one is told: "You don't belong here."

If this letter survives to reach your time,

If it still means something,

If even one sentence echoes in your heart,

Then maybe we did something right.

I don't know who you are.

I don't know what your world looks like.

But I believe you are part of this story and I believe,
one day, you will carry it forward.

That perhaps more than anything is hope.

Unorthodox: Everyday Jewish

Gabriela Markin

Gabriela Markin is studying culture and theater at Uniwersytet Jagielloński in Krakow, Poland.

CHALLENGE ADDRESSED

In the global discourse around Jewish identity, public understanding is often shaped by rigid or extreme portrayals — Orthodox, religious, or trauma-based (such as Shoah-centered narratives). This narrow representation leaves little space for pluralistic, everyday expressions of Jewishness. My project aims to challenge these limited frames by amplifying the voices of Jews whose identities are “unorthodox” — not in the halachic sense, but in the social, personal, and cultural ones.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Unorthodox: Everyday Jewish is a short documentary video exploring the diverse and often understated ways in which young Jews in Poland live their Jewishness today. The film combines intimate portraits, short interviews, and observational scenes from daily life. Each participant completes the phrase “My Jewishness is...”, creating a multi-voiced narrative that presents Jewish identity as a living, shifting, and creative practice. The video shows that contemporary Jewishness does not need to follow traditional or institutional boundaries — it can be personal, cultural, quiet, political, queer, or boldly expressive.

PROJECT PROCESS

During the making of this project, I encountered many remarkable stories from Jews living in Poland. I noticed that contemporary Jewish identity in Poland often forms outside institutional or traditional frameworks — as something personal, creative, cultural, or political. Many participants emphasized that their Jewishness is dynamic, evolving, and often reinvented on their own terms. These recurring motifs — diversity, everyday experience, and “unorthodox” expressions of identity — have become central to both the narrative of the video and the project as a whole.

As a cultural practitioner and someone actively engaged in contemporary Jewish arts and memory work in Poland, I want to create a space where nuanced, emotionally resonant, and plural Jewish stories can be seen and heard. I see myself as a connector — between generations, geographies, and identities — and I believe that this film can serve as a tool for both internal reflection and external dialogue.

This project not only reflects my own journey through the Matanel Fellowship but also serves as an act of Jewish public memory — showing that Jewishness in Europe today is not only about survival, but also about choice, creativity, and community.

[Click or scan here to view
“Unorthodox: Everyday Jewish”](#)



Jewish Identity in a Secular World: A Personal and Visual Exploration

Tsuf Oron

Tsuf Oron is studying psychology at Tel Aviv University in Tel Aviv, Israel.

THE CHALLENGE

Many young non-religious Jews feel disconnected from Judaism. For them, it can seem like something old, strict, or even threatening. In many cases, it feels like something that belongs to the past or only to religious people. This problem creates a gap, where many young Jews feel that if they're not fully religious, then Judaism isn't really "theirs".

From conversations I had during this program, I learned that for Jews living abroad, the sense of Jewish community plays a major role in shaping identity. As a Jew living in Israel, I realized that Jewish life can sometimes feel "obvious", which makes it easier to take it for granted. Still, I believe the challenge of finding a personal and meaningful connection to Judaism can affect Jews everywhere.

Furthermore, many times religion is tied with political arguments, which pushes the non-religious further away. In Israel, religion is often connected to political debates: for example, around public transportation on Shabbat, marriage laws, or the role of religious parties in government. These discussions sometimes make Judaism feel like a political issue rather than a personal or spiritual one.

MY VISION AND GOAL

Through this project, I want to raise awareness of this challenge and explore ways to make Jewish identity feel more accessible and personal. My favorite thing in the Jewish tradition is the holidays and the rituals that had been passed on for hundreds of years.

I want my friends and family to think about the Jewish rituals that they have and love in life, like making a special family dish, lighting Shabbat Candles, and more. Those rituals preserve the history of the Jewish people, and are not at all strict or threatening.

To achieve this goal, I created a photo exhibit of images and stories that express my connection and the connection of people who are close to me and experience this form of Judaism. Furthermore, the photos explain my connection to Judaism, in a daily way.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

I wrote a short resource guide with Israeli and global organizations and initiatives that help non-religious Jews connect with their Jewish identity in open and creative ways.

This project shares small and simple Jewish rituals through photos and stories. I think, it will help non-religious Jews see that you can feel a part of the Jewish People, by creating new rituals or participating in the rituals I suggested.

In addition to that, it will show that no group has a monopoly on religion. I truly believe the project has the potential to raise awareness of this challenge and explore ways to make Jewish identity feel more accessible and personal.

In my vision, the photos will make it clear to the viewer that those traditions are fun and connecting. Thus, encouraging them to think more about the rituals and traditions they have or want to have. If they choose to take part in more activities, they can use the guide for basic guidance.

INSPIRATION FROM THE FELLOWSHIP SESSIONS

One of the sessions that inspired me to choose this topic was the activity with “David Cards”. These illustrated cards provide an opportunity to explore various aspects of Jewish identity. One evening during the Immersive Weekend in Budapest, in small groups, each of us chose

cards that we felt connected to, which represented part of our story. This activity led to meaningful and open conversations about the role of Judaism in our lives, as well as about family stories and traditions. I was impressed by how easily each of us chose cards and how we all spoke about different aspects of our lives. The conversations touched on everything from family and friends to Jewish identity, history, and our vision for the future.

MORE INSPIRATION

In his book “A Passion for a People”, Avraham Infeld wrote that his fundamental understanding is that there is, without a doubt, more than one lane to be an enthusiastic Jew. His goal was to find as many lanes as possible to be a Jew and to participate in all of them. My project explains my lane, and my family’s lane, which is to keep tradition in our own way, so that we feel connected to the larger Jewish People.

In December 2020, at a ceremony held at the President’s Residence in Jerusalem, the final version of the declaration “Our Common Destiny” was presented. The document defines the shared values of the Jewish people worldwide, in an initiative led by Israel’s Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and the Genesis Philanthropy Group. As part of this process, more than 135,000 Jews worldwide took part in a survey. One of the key findings was that strengthening Jewish identity ranked among the top values: the third most important overall, and the second among Jews in the Diaspora with 40% of respondents selecting it as their top priority. (Israel Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, 2020).

This shows that Jewish identity, often expressed through traditions, holidays, and cultural practices, continues to play a central role for Jews of all backgrounds, including many who do not define themselves as religious.

MY ROLE

October 7th strengthened my desire to feel a deeper sense of belonging to my country, and through that, to Judaism as well. I did not know about the Hillel organization before I began my studies at university, and when I was introduced to it at the beginning of the year, I felt it was an opportunity for me to shape my Jewish identity. This is the reason I chose to add the second part of the project, the list of organizations, so that anyone who wishes can easily learn about the existing options.

PHOTO EXHIBIT

I wanted to select a variety of items, some related to holidays, some related to daily life, some are used regularly, like jewelry, while others are decorative. A few have been passed down through generations, and others represent new traditions that our family has created. Together, they reflect the different ways Judaism exists in our lives.



A Star of David necklace that my grandfather gave to my mother. After he passed away, my brother asked to wear it, and since then he has worn it every day.



My grandfather's ring with the words of the "Shema Yisrael" prayer.



Shabbat Candles that my mother and I light. My parents received these candlesticks as a wedding gift.



A Matzos plate with the words "This is the Matzah that we eat". The plate is from an Israeli vintage ceramics brand and is on our Seder table every year.

Jewish Identity in a Secular World: A Personal and Visual Exploration



A collection of Hanukkah menorahs that my parents gathered over the years. Every Hanukkah we light as many menorahs as possible.



A bag with Tallit and Tefillin that my boyfriend got for his Bar Mitzvah with his name on it.



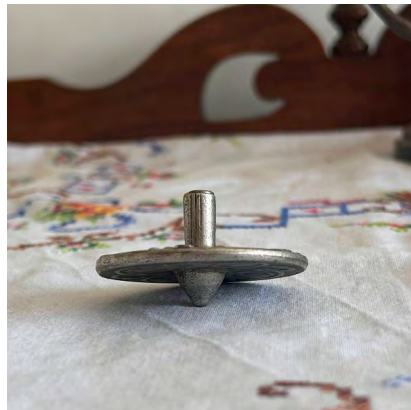
A prayer for healing (Refuah Shlema) that my mother keeps in her wallet.



The Traveler's Prayer (Tefilat Haderech) that I keep in my wallet.



My brother at his Bar Mitzvah Torah reading.



A sentimental dreidel belonging to my mother. I remember that when we were children, every year my siblings and I received new dreidels for Hanukkah.



I invite you to think of one of your own Jewish ritual objects and why it is special to you!

STORIES SHARED BY MY FRIENDS

“Every year at Passover, my grandfather makes a special chocolate cake from matzos for the entire family. It is his special cake, and I am excited to eat it every year.”

“The first thing that came to my mind was the fasting and forgiveness of Yom Kippur. Many non-religious Jews chose to observe this mitzvah and attach great importance to this day.”

“My family is not religious, but we love to integrate Jewish traditions into our daily life. Since I was a child, every Friday, I would go to my grandparents’ house with my mother and sisters to light Shabbat Candles with our grandmother. We always used the same candlesticks. After my grandmother passed away, we decided to keep this tradition and every week at least one of us comes to my grandfather’s house, lights the candles and talks about my grandmother. I plan to continue this tradition with my own family in the future.”

“When my grandmother was still alive, she used to light the Shabbat Candles in her unique silver candlesticks. These candlesticks are now in our home, and they will remind me of her forever.”

“Every year I look forward to our holiday dinners, when I get to see all my family members that I don’t meet often. We love singing the holiday songs loudly and enjoying all the traditional dishes made by my mother and grandmother.”

ISRAELIS & GLOBAL ORGANIZATIONS & INITIATIVES

- 1. Hillel:** Is an international organization serving more than 180,000 students each year at over 850 colleges and universities around the world, including in Israel. Hillel offers educational, cultural, and social programs that help young Jews of all backgrounds explore and strengthen their Jewish identity.
- 2. Mabua:** Is a network of Batei Midrash operated by and for Israeli young adults from across the religious spectrum. The initiative promotes Jewish learning, activism, and community building. Their programs include study frameworks such as the Elul Program, which offers an opportunity for participants to engage with Jewish texts and traditions in a pluralistic environment.
- 3. Alma - Home for Hebrew Culture:** A cultural center in Tel Aviv that offers courses, lectures, and cultural programming around Jewish texts, Hebrew literature, philosophy, and art, designed for a secular audience.
- 4. Taglit Birthright Israel:** In addition to the best-known program of Taglit that includes 10-day trips in Israel, Taglit also offers a variety of other programs. For example: program of volunteering in Israel and programs for university students.

5. JCC Global: Is a network of over 1,000 Jewish Community Centers (JCCs) worldwide. The organization aims to strengthen Jewish peoplehood by fostering local and global connections, cultivating partnerships and training local leaders. Thus, helping Jewish communities feel a sense of belongings.

6. Moishe House: An international initiative creating vibrant communities for young Jews in 29 countries around the world. This program includes Shabbat dinners, holiday celebrations, and cultural events that help Jews of all backgrounds connect to Jewish life in a flexible and creative way.

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<https://www.birtherightisrael.com/>

After October 7: Voices of the Diaspora — Reflections, Challenges, and the Future

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INTRODUCTION

The day of Simchat Torah, 7th October 2023, was an unimaginable tragedy and a day that changed the Jewish community worldwide. Since that brutal terrorist attack by Hamas, there has been a massive increase in antisemitism around the world. A report published by the World Zionist Organisation and the Jewish Agency for Israel shows that in the year 2024, the number of total antisemitic incidents has increased globally by 100% compared to the year 2023 and by 340% compared to the year 2022 [1]. Furthermore, according to the Global 100 survey conducted on 58000 participants by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), approximately 46% of the world's adult population holds elevated levels of antisemitic beliefs. Among the respondents, half of the people younger than 35 held

antisemitic attitudes, which is 13 percentage points higher than respondents older than 50 years [2].

Beyond these global statistics, it is crucial to understand how antisemitism manifests in specific countries, such as the United States, which has the largest Jewish community outside of Israel today. A US-specific ADL study demonstrated that there have been more than 10,000 antisemitic incidents in the United States in a year following October 7th [3]. Moreover, ADL reported 732 campus-based antisemitic incidents in the US between October 7th and the end of the year, which makes up a significant part of the 922 total annual incidents, marking an increase in antisemitic on-campus incidents nearly threefold compared to the previous year [2]. ADL researchers further found a 434% increase

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in the antisemitic posts on the day of the October 7 attack [4].

The rise in antisemitic behavior was also observed in Poland, but a significant portion of these incidents remains unreported or undocumented, according to the 2023 study carried out by the Polish Jewish Organization Czulent. Through the reports from Jewish communities, data from internet monitoring, and via their website dedicated to reporting antisemitism (www.zglosantysemityzm.pl), Czulent documented 894 antisemitic incidents in Poland in 2023. The majority of the reported incidents (809) have taken place online, and about 9,5% of occurrences happened „offline”, including physical attacks (4) and property damage (35). A nearly two-fold increase in online incidents was observed in 2023, compared to 2022 (420), with hate speech being the most common occurrence (654 incidents). [5]

Unfortunately, due to the conflict and the rising number of antisemitic incidents, many Jewish people started to feel unsafe. While Israelis experienced the trauma in direct and harrowing ways, through violence and loss, diaspora Jews have been affected emotionally, psychologically, and socially. This has left Jewish community members around the world with a sense of distress, fear, disconnection, and an urge to hide their identities.

According to the Jewish Federations of North America, many American Jews are still emotionally impacted by the news about the war between Israel and Hamas (Fig. 1) [6].

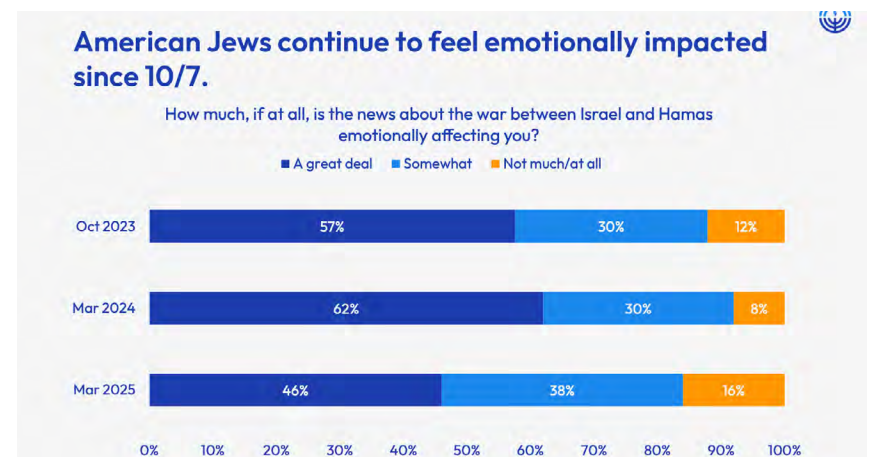


Fig. 1. The emotional impact of the news about the war between Israel and Hamas on American Jewry

At the same time, some people feel more proud after the attack. They have chosen to publicly wear their stars of David, kippot, and tzitzit, and to remain firm and resilient in the face of attacks. Moreover, many Jews have increased their engagement in Jewish life since October 7th.

Currently, approximately 31% of surveyed American Jews are engaging more with the Jewish community than they did before the start of the war [7]. Many Jews, especially in North America, have reconnected to their roots after years of disconnection from Jewish life, in a phenomenon termed October 8th Jews [8]. That is why it would be great for people who express a wide range of thoughts and emotions to connect and share their feelings and insights about the current difficult situation and the future of their communities. That connection could strengthen people's

Jewish identities and decrease negative feelings of isolation.

Therefore, the goal of the project is to create and share a curated collection of reflections from various people from the Jewish community of Poland, focusing on October 7th, the current situation, and their perspectives on the future, through a questionnaire, live interviews, and an opportunity to prepare a creative project. A database with curated data will be created, enabling people to express and share their emotions and views, which can partially alleviate the weight of unresolved trauma and make them feel heard. On the other hand, it will show others that they're not alone with their thoughts and emotions, and may allow them to gain insight from their friends. *I want to demonstrate that the Jewish people, despite their differences, may face similar challenges and can unite and persevere even during the most difficult times.*

METHODS

1. Data Collection

The thoughts, feelings, and experiences of participants regarding October 7th, the present, and the future will be collected through the online questionnaire via the Google Forms platform. The audio from live interviews will be recorded for transcription purposes, and the video will be captured according to the participants' consent. The creative projects will be collected in person, through the questionnaire, and through other digital means of communication.

2. Participants and Target Audiences

Project participants will be both the creators and the audience of the project. They will be recruited from various Jewish communities in Poland, spanning from Orthodox to secular. The link to the questionnaire will be sent privately to the prospective participants and shared with the groups of different Jewish communities in mass. At least 50+ participants will need to complete the questionnaire to increase the statistical significance of the results. Participants will have the opportunity to opt in for live interviews.

Furthermore, participants for the interviews will be chosen randomly or invited based on their responses to the questionnaire (10 or more). Participants will have the option to upload their creative project through the questionnaire or at a later time via digital means of communication (10 or more).

The members of the Polish Jewish communities (and beyond) will have the opportunity to share their thoughts, feelings, and express themselves regarding October 7 and the war, their current situation, and their outlook for the future of the Jewish community. The project will be targeted to both leaders and members of the communities. For leaders, it would provide the necessary data on members' engagement in Jewish life, the community's needs, and potential areas for future improvement. For the members, the shared creative expressions of others could provide the connection and support during the difficult times.

3. Data Curation

The data from the questionnaire will be quantified (where applicable), analyzed, and visualized as graphs. The descriptive answers will be categorized and visualized. The raw, selected recordings from the live interviews will be transcribed and published. Selected creative expressions will be included in the publication and shared with the communities. I will choose the most impactful expressions made by community members (perhaps with the help of the community leaders).

Processed data will be collected in a database and shared, in accordance with the participant's consent.

Why the diaspora?

I want to capture the unique perspective of Jewish people from the Diaspora after October 7th. The trauma of that event is a deep scar across the global Jewish community. For Israelis, the attack was direct, real, physical, and life-threatening.

The communities were shattered, and many loved ones were brutally taken away. In my project, I also want to include the powerful voices of people from Israel — their pain and strength, grief and hope — drawn from interviews and materials available online. However, the primary focus of my project is to capture the voices of people who may not hear sirens or hide in shelters fighting for their lives, but who experience the psychological shock that reverberated globally, who navigate through the

rising levels of antisemitism (verbal and physical attacks), isolation, or who conduct inner debates about their Jewish identities. I want to show the voices of sadness, grief, pride, anger, resilience, and mobilization. I want to amplify the voices that may not be fully heard.

4. The Questionnaire

The online questionnaire is a tool for evaluating the thoughts and feelings of the Jewish community in Poland following October 7th. The results will be discussed, and the conclusions may be used as a suggestion for the community leaders to provide the necessary changes and improvements. The form features a module where the surveyed person can upload creative expressions, such as poems or art related to the emotions associated with October 7th, the present times, or the future. This may provide a creative outlet, where people can express their voice and share their feelings with others.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. 7TH OF OCTOBER

1.1. Are you familiar with the events that happened in Israel on October 7th, 2023?

- a) Yes
- b) Somewhat familiar, I have a brief idea
- c) No [skip to the next section]

1.2. Were you or the people you know (including friends and family) in Israel on October 7th, 2023?

- a) Yes, I was in Israel on October 7th, 2023
- b) People I know were in Israel on October 7th, 2023
- c) On October 7th, 2023, both myself AND people I know were in Israel
- d) No
- e) I don't remember
- f) Prefer not to disclose

1.3. Have you or the people you know been directly impacted by the attack?

- a) Yes, I was impacted
- b) People I know were impacted
- c) Both myself AND the people I know were impacted
- d) No [skip the open question]
- e) I don't remember
- f) Prefer not to disclose

1.3.1. Can you briefly describe the direct impact of the events of October 7th? *You can leave this field blank (I don't remember/Prefer not to disclose)*

1.4. Can you recall the thoughts or feelings that you had on October 7th?

- a) Yes, I can clearly remember my thoughts or feelings on October 7th
- b) Yes, I can somewhat recall my thoughts or feelings of October 7th
- c) I can barely recall the thoughts or feelings of October 7th
- d) No, I don't remember my thoughts or feelings from that day
- e) Prefer not to disclose

1.4.1. What were your thoughts or feelings on October 7th? You can leave this field blank (*I don't remember/Prefer not to disclose*)

1.5. Did the events of October 7th emotionally impact you at the time?

1 – 5

Not at all Greatly

1.5.1. Can you briefly describe that emotional impact? *You can leave this field blank (I don't know/Prefer not to disclose)*

1.6. Have the events of October 7th impacted your daily life?

1 – 5

Not at all — Greatly

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1.6.1. In which areas of your life have you felt the impact?
You can leave this field blank (The events have not affected my daily life/I don't know/Prefer not to disclose)

JEWISH LIFE/COMMUNITY

1.7. Have you been engaged in Jewish life before October 7th?

1 – 5

Not at all — Very engaged

1.8. Have you been a member of the Jewish community before October 7th?

- a) Yes, as a community leader
- b) Yes, as a community member
- c) Yes (other)
- d) Not a member, but I was attending the events
- e) No
- f) I don't know
- g) Prefer not to disclose

1.9. Have the October 7th events changed your Jewish identity? *You can leave the question blank (I don't know/Prefer not to disclose)*

1 – 5 – 10

Negatively affected — Haven't affected —
Positively affected my Jewish identity

1.9.1. Can you describe these changes? *You can leave the question blank (I don't know/Prefer not to disclose)*

2. CURRENTLY

2.1. Are you closely following the news regarding the war between Israel and Hamas?

1 – 5

Not at all — I know every detail

2.2. Are you currently emotionally impacted by October 7th and the war between Israel and Hamas? *You can leave the question blank (I don't know/Prefer not to disclose)*

1 – 5

Not at all — Greatly

2.2.1. Can you briefly describe your emotions related to the war and the October 7th events? *You can leave the question blank (I don't know/Prefer not to disclose)*

2.3. Are you concerned about the rise of antisemitism?

- a) Yes, I'm deeply concerned
- b) Yes, I'm somewhat concerned
- c) I can't tell
- d) No, I'm not concerned at all
- e) I don't see the rise in antisemitism
- f) Prefer not to disclose

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2.4. How did the October 7th and the war impact your Jewish engagement?

1 – 5 – 10

Less engaged, not at all — No change — More engaged

2.5. Since October 7th, are you currently afraid to show your Jewishness, or do you feel more proud to present your identity?

1 – 5 – 10

Hiding my Jewishness — No change —
Showing my Jewishness

2.6. Do you feel safe now?

1 – 5

Not at all — Greatly

2.7. Do you want to learn more about Israel and Jewish topics since October 7th?

- a) Yes, Jewish and Israel knowledge
- b) Yes, Jewish knowledge
- c) Yes, Israel knowledge
- d) No, not at all
- e) I don't know
- f) Prefer not to disclose

2.7.1. What topics/areas do you want to increase your knowledge in? *You can leave the question blank (I don't know/Prefer not to disclose)*

2.8. Is there something that you currently need to support you and/or your community? *You can leave the question blank (I don't know/Prefer not to disclose)*

3. THE FUTURE

3.1. Can you briefly describe how you will see the global Jewish community in 5-10 years? *You can leave the question blank (I don't know/Prefer not to disclose)*

3.2. Can you briefly describe how you will see your local Jewish community in 5-10 years (if applicable), or will you be a part of the Jewish community? *You can leave the question blank (I don't know/Prefer not to disclose)*

3.3. How do YOU want to be involved in the Jewish community both globally and locally? *You can leave the question blank (I don't know/Prefer not to disclose)*

3.4. Generally, what are your hopes for the future of Jewish life and Israel? *You can leave the question blank (I don't know/Prefer not to disclose)*

4. THE CREATIVE EXPRESSION

In this module, participants can (but are not required to) upload their creative expressions, such as poems, art, music, and photos, related to October 7th, the current situation, or the future.

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Contemporary Scandinavia: Jewish Identity and Personal Security

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INTRODUCTION

Small Jewish communities have always played a significant role in the global Jewish story. While much of the contemporary conversation on Jewish Peoplehood focuses on Israel and North America, it is crucial to remember that Judaism is global and diverse. The Jewish communities of Scandinavia: in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, represent unique cases of resilience, integration, and vulnerability. In recent years, these communities have faced an intensifying challenge: balancing Jewish identity with a growing sense of insecurity caused by antisemitism and polarization.

My personal connection to this topic is deep and longstanding. For several years I have been fascinated by Scandinavia: its culture, values of equality, freedom, environmental stewardship, and quality of life, as well as its natural wonders such as the northern lights and fjords. At age 21, I had the opportunity to live in Sweden for several months, which gave me a first-hand experience of Scandinavian society. In addition, I have close relatives living in Denmark. These personal ties, combined with my academic interest in Jewish history and identity, inspired me to focus this project on Jewish life in Scandinavia and

to explore the ways in which Jews there navigate their identity in a rapidly changing environment.

This project seeks to explore one guiding question: “What support do Jews in Scandinavia feel they need, from within and beyond their communities, to strengthen their sense of safety and Jewish belonging?”

To answer this question, I conducted a series of interviews and conversations with Jewish individuals (or of Jewish background) from Sweden and Denmark and engaged with academic literature, NGO reports, and government action plans documenting the state of antisemitism and Jewish communal life in the region.

THE CHALLENGE FOR GLOBAL JEWRY

Highlighting these small communities is not merely an academic exercise, it is a call for recognition. By understanding how Scandinavian Jews experience and respond to antisemitism, we gain insight into broader questions that confront world Jewry: how can Jewish identity be expressed safely in increasingly polarized societies? What balance should communities strike between security measures and open cultural life? What

role can global Jewish solidarity play in supporting small and sometimes isolated communities?

The Scandinavian experience also functions as both a warning and an opportunity for learning. These countries have historically been seen as liberal, safe, and tolerant, yet today many Jews report concealing Jewish symbols, avoiding public events, or even considering emigration. Their experiences provide valuable lessons for other Jewish communities facing similar challenges.

METHODOLOGY

For this project, I conducted three semi-structured interviews. Nathan, a 26-year-old man from Gothenburg, Sweden, now living in Israel, shared his journey from hiding his Jewish identity as a child to becoming a youth leader and community organizer. Maja, a 24-year-old Danish-Israeli woman, living in Copenhagen, reflected on her cultural and national identity and on moments when being visibly Jewish felt risky. Melvin, a 22-year-old Israeli-Swedish student who grew up in Stockholm (and now shares his time between Switzerland, where he studies, and Israel), described both the pride and fear associated with being openly Jewish in Scandinavia and in Europe more broadly. These interviews provided a personal, human dimension to the statistical and historical information available in reports and research.

I also reviewed key studies and documents on the subject, including Andrew Buckser's ethnographic work on Danish

Jewish community life, the MR Institute's 2025 report on exposure to antisemitism among Swedish Jewish congregations, the EU FRA's 2024 survey of Danish Jews, and the annual Antisemitism Worldwide report. In addition, I examined an article by Kalle Kniivilä (2025) about Jewish students in Lund, the Swedish city in which I lived for a few months, based on testimonies collected by Daniel Leviathan, a PhD student for Jewish Studies at Lund University. The article describes Jewish students who felt compelled to hide their identity, especially since October 7th. Many avoid certain campus spaces and withdraw from student life due to aggressive demonstrations and antisemitic slogans on campus walls. I had the privilege of meeting Daniel Leviathan in person once during a Shabbat dinner with the Jewish student community in Lund, which made these accounts even more vivid and personal for me.

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

The interviews revealed a complex picture of Jewish identity in Scandinavia. Nathan described a transformative journey: as a child he avoided speaking Hebrew or wearing Jewish symbols, but in adolescence he embraced his Jewishness, began wearing a kippah, and took on leadership roles in a Jewish youth movement. Melvin also wears a Star of David and sometimes a kippah but admitted that he cannot do so as often as he would like because of safety concerns. Maja, though less religiously observant, feels strongly about her Jewish and Israeli heritage but hesitates to share it openly in all settings.

All three interviewees spoke about experiences of antisemitism. Nathan recalled a traumatic incident in which Molotov cocktails were thrown at a community building during a Hanukkah event, forcing attendees to hide in the basement for hours. Melvin remembered being harassed in middle school by a classmate chanting “Go go palestine” and even feeling physically threatened in his neighborhood. Maja recounted comments from a colleague who celebrated attacks on Israel and pressured her to take a political stance.

These stories resonate with broader findings. Reports document that since October 7th, 2023, Jewish communities across Sweden have faced a sharp rise in antisemitic incidents, including graffiti, harassment, and online hate speech (MR Institute, 2025). Surveys show that 83% of Danish Jews avoid wearing Jewish symbols in public at least occasionally (FRA, 2024). In Norway, government surveys confirm rising levels of antisemitic attitudes in society, prompting the publication of a comprehensive action plan to improve security and education (Government of Norway, 2025). Kniivilä’s article on Lund further illustrates how this climate affects students’ day-to-day lives, pushing them to withdraw from campus activities and making them feel like outsiders in spaces meant for learning and growth.

One significant factor mentioned both by interviewees and in research is that much of the antisemitism currently experienced in Scandinavia comes from immigrants of Middle Eastern origin, whose numbers have risen sharply

over the past decade. This demographic change has influenced public discourse around Israel and Jews and created new security challenges for Jewish communities.

Nathan highlighted that Stockholm’s Jewish community is by far the largest in Scandinavia, with several thousand Jews living there out of the roughly 25,000 Jews estimated to live across Scandinavia as a whole. In his view, Stockholm is likely to remain a center of Jewish life and may even grow stronger (for example, he mentions that Jewish community centers there become more and more popular), while smaller communities in Gothenburg, Malmö, and other cities may continue to weaken, as many Swedish Jews relocate either to Stockholm or to Israel, partly due to antisemitism and security concerns. Melvin spoke of friends considering moving to Israel to be able to live openly as Jews.

An important theme that emerged from both interviews and research is the tension between visibility and safety. Jews want to live proudly as Jews but are forced to calculate the risk of doing so. Concealment such as hiding a Star of David, and avoiding speaking Hebrew in public, becomes a coping mechanism. While this strategy may reduce immediate risk, it comes at the cost of free expression and full participation in public life. Over time, it may weaken communal cohesion and Jewish identity itself.

The interviews also highlighted differences between countries. Denmark’s Jewish community, while also cautious, was praised by Maja for its sense of openness

and solidarity. Sweden's Jewish community, particularly in cities with smaller populations, appears more vulnerable and dependent on self-financed security measures. Both Nathan and Melvin called for greater government support, particularly visible police presence and educational initiatives that address antisemitism among youth.

Additionally, as Johannes Due Enstad's article (2024) points out, the responses of the Scandinavian governments have differed significantly. In Sweden and Denmark, the prime ministers issued strong condemnations of the October 7 massacre in Israel, visited synagogues, and publicly committed to fighting antisemitism. By contrast, in Norway, the government's response was more cautious and neutral, focusing on general calls for interfaith dialogue rather than expressing explicit solidarity with the Jewish community. Many Jewish leaders felt that this response was insufficient considering the gravity of the events.

CONNECTING TO MATANEL FELLOWSHIP

The Matanel Fellowship's mission is to strengthen Jewish Peoplehood by connecting young leaders across borders, encouraging dialogue, and inspiring mutual responsibility. This project is directly aligned with that mission. By amplifying the voices of Scandinavian Jews, it brings their experiences into the broader global Jewish conversation and challenges us to think about what solidarity means in practice.

My participation in the fellowship has shaped this project's direction. The seminars and discussions during the monthly meetings, and even more so during the enriching experience of the weekend program in Budapest with the other students, emphasized that Jewish Peoplehood is not an abstract concept but a lived reality, made up of shared struggles and hopes. This project is my way of fulfilling that vision: building a bridge between Scandinavian Jews, who often feel overlooked, and the larger Jewish world that can support them.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The future of Jewish life in Scandinavia depends on two parallel efforts. First, governments must ensure that Jews can attend synagogue, wear Jewish symbols, and participate fully in civic life without fear. This means sustained funding for security, police cooperation, and robust education on Jewish history and antisemitism. Second, Jewish communities must invest in cultural and educational programming, youth movements, and creative initiatives that allow Jewish identity to flourish even in challenging times. At the same time, global Jewish communities and organizations must pay greater attention to smaller Jewish populations like those in Scandinavia; for example, by fostering stronger connections through shared student programs, cultural exchanges, or shlichim (emissaries) from Jewish and Zionist organizations.

My vision is for Scandinavian Jewish life to be both secure and vibrant. Security measures should not signal retreat

but serve as tools enabling greater openness. I believe that global Jewish networks can play a role here, whether by sharing best practices, funding joint initiatives, or simply ensuring that the stories of Scandinavian Jews are heard.

As an Israeli with family ties in Denmark and personal experience living in Sweden, this project is personal to me. I hope to help to amplify the voices of the Jewish Scandinavian communities, and that they will be included more often in the global conversation about Jewish peoplehood. The fellowship has inspired me to continue building these bridges and to use my skills, connections, and passion to strengthen Jewish life wherever it is vulnerable.

CONCLUSION

The Jewish communities of Scandinavia are small but vital threads in the tapestry of the Jewish people. They face serious challenges but also hold inspiring potential. By combining security, education, and cultural renewal, and by strengthening ties with world Jewry, we can help ensure that Scandinavian Jewish life not only survives but thrives.

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