

**YOUR NAME:**

.....

# 18 DIMENSIONS OF JEWISH LIFE

# FRAMEWORK



THE INSTITUTE  
FOR EXPERIENTIAL  
JEWISH EDUCATION

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The 18 Educational Dimensions of Jewish Life are based upon The 18x18 Framework, developed by Dr. Benjamin M. Jacobs and Dr. Barry Chazan in 2018. We would like to thank Dr. Jacobs and Dr. Chazan for challenging, expanding and provoking the possibilities of Jewish education through their visionary 18x18 framework. With their permission, in 2023 we updated the framework and for this work we are grateful for the help and guidance of the participants in the inaugural 18x18 Executive Fellowship, the M<sup>2</sup> staff team and the 18x18 Advisory Committee.

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MAIMONIDES FUND

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## **INTRODUCTION TO THE 18X18**

**What should a Jewish person know, care about and be able to do, and how do these things drive our work as Jewish educators, leaders and policy makers?**

The 18x18 answers this question by offering 18 distinct dimensions that comprise the breadth and richness of Jewish life. The 18 Dimensions are a guide for educators to identify, explore and articulate educational goals and purpose. The 18x18 offers language and structure to define purpose and vision; it can be interpreted and implemented in many ways, across diverse educational settings. We hope you find it helpful.

# 18

## DIMENSIONS OF JEWISH LIFE



**THE JEWISH PEOPLE IN ITS DIVERSITY**



**JEWISH FRIENDSHIPS**



**JEWISH ROLE MODELS**



**JEWISH HISTORY, MEMORY AND TRADITION**



**JEWISH COMMUNITY**



**JUDAISM'S RELEVANCE TO LIFE'S QUESTIONS**



**GOD, SPIRITUALITY AND PRAYER**



**RITUALS AND HOLIDAYS**



**JUSTICE AND TZEDAKAH**



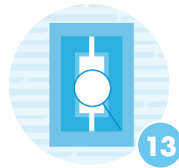
**MITZVOT AND CUSTOMS**



**HOLINESS OF NATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT**



**EXPRESSION OF GOD'S CREATION**



**JEWISH TEXTS, TORAH AND CORE NARRATIVES**



**ISRAEL AND ITS PEOPLE**



**HEBREW AND JEWISH TERMINOLOGY**



**JEWISH CULINARY TRADITIONS**



**JEWISH ARTS AND CULTURE**



**ISSUES FACING CONTEMPORARY JEWRY**



## THE JEWISH PEOPLE IN ITS DIVERSITY

Feeling connected to and responsible for other Jews and recognizing and valuing the many different cultural backgrounds and traditions within the Jewish People.



## JEWISH FRIENDSHIPS

Developing Jewish social networks that strengthen our identity and well-being.



## JEWISH ROLE MODELS

Learning from Jewish people, past and present, whose actions and values can inspire our own personal growth and Jewish commitment.



## JEWISH HISTORY, MEMORY AND TRADITION

Cultivating Jewish collective memory by learning about, commemorating and passing on the stories and historical experiences of the Jewish people.



## JEWISH COMMUNITY

The importance of being part of a Jewish community, including active participation, mutual support, and shared responsibility.



## JUDAISM'S RELEVANCE TO LIFE'S QUESTIONS

Turning to the multiple perspectives of Jewish tradition and wisdom in order to gain direction for navigating life's big questions and current challenges.



## GOD, SPIRITUALITY AND PRAYER

Exploring different ways to find meaning, through connecting with God, spiritual ideas and practices, and prayer.



## RITUALS AND HOLIDAYS

Marking Jewish holidays and lifecycle events with rituals and traditions.



## JUSTICE AND TZEDAKAH

The Jewish commitment to making the world better (Tikkun Olam) by doing acts of kindness and working for justice and fairness (Tzedakah).



## **MITZVOT AND CUSTOMS**

The notion of observance and obligation expressed in commandments (mitzvot), customs and the Jewish legal system (halakhah) as important parts of Jewish life and tradition.



## **HOLINESS OF NATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

Appreciating and protecting the natural world, as a way to access holiness in general and to take responsibility for the sustainability of our planet.



## **EXPRESSION OF GOD'S CREATION**

Seeing ourselves and others as created "in God's image" (B'tzelem Elohim), which means valuing our own dignity and treating everyone with respect and kindness.



## **JEWISH TEXTS, TORAH AND CORE NARRATIVES**

Studying and finding meaning in core Jewish texts and narratives, including the Torah, the Jewish textual tradition and contemporary writings.



## **ISRAEL AND ITS PEOPLE**

Learning about, caring for, and thoughtfully engaging with the Land of Israel, as well as the State of Israel and her, people, culture, and role in Jewish life.



## **HEBREW AND JEWISH TERMINOLOGY**

Understanding and using Hebrew language, as well as other Jewish languages and key Jewish terms that provide access into Jewish life, culture, and tradition.



## **JEWISH CULINARY TRADITIONS**

Sharing, transmitting and celebrating diverse Jewish food traditions, recognizing their central role in our culture and family life



## **JEWISH ARTS AND CULTURE**

Experiencing and creating Jewish arts and culture (like music, literature, and visual arts) as ways to express and connect with Jewish life.



## **ISSUES FACING CONTEMPORARY JEWRY**

Understanding and responding to important issues affecting Jewish communities today, such as antisemitism and other social trends, like polarization and AI.

# THE VERBS

Each dimension is presented with 3 possible verbs to demonstrate the various ways that the dimension could be directed to learners with multiple goals depending on the verb/s chosen.

Celebrate • Connect with • Be responsible for

The Jewish People in Its Diversity

1

Prioritize • Cultivate • Enable

Jewish Friendships

2

Identify • Engage with • Emulate

Jewish Role Models

3

Investigate • Recall • Continue

Jewish History, Memory, and Tradition

4

Improve • Participate in • Promote

Jewish Community

5

Apply • Discover • Probe

Judaism's Relevance to Life's Questions

6

Incorporate • Explore • Wrestle with

God, Spirituality and Prayer

7

Participate in • Celebrate • Experiment with

Rituals and Holidays

8

Practice • Pursue • Advocate for

Justice and Tzedakah

9

## THE VERBS

Interpret • Practice • Critique

Mitzvot and Customs

10

Protect • Immerse in • Nurture

The Holiness of Nature and the Environment

11

Nurture oneself as • See oneself as • Treat others as

Expression of God's Creation

12

Study • Interpret • Create

Jewish Texts, Torah and Narratives

13

Understand • Care for • Grapple with

Israel and Its People

14

Utilize • Access • Translate

Hebrew and Jewish Terminology

15

Transmit • Partake in • Celebrate

Jewish Culinary Traditions

16

Create • Experience • Seek out

Jewish Arts and Culture

17

Investigate • Care about • Respond to

Issues Facing Contemporary Jewry

18

## DOMAINS

The 18 Dimensions can be understood and used either individually or as clusters, organized around different organizing principles where several dimensions overlap or have things in common. The dimensions are intentionally presented individually in order to signify to educators that they are free – indeed, encouraged – to interpret them as they wish and create their own clusters. Nonetheless, the table below suggests a way of clustering the dimensions in four categories: Peoplehood, Citizenship, Culture and Religion.

### PEOPLEHOOD

- Respond to **Issues Facing Contemporary Jewry**
- Access **Jewish History, Memory and Tradition**
- Care for **Israel and Its People**
- Connect with **The Jewish People in its Diversity**

### CITIZENSHIP

- Experience the **Holiness of Nature and the Environment**
- Pursue **Justice and Tzedakah**
- Participate in **Jewish Community**
- Cultivate **Jewish Friendships**
- Engage with **Jewish Role Models**
- See oneself as an **Expression of God's Creation**

### CULTURE

- Access **Hebrew and Jewish Terminology**
- Partake in **Jewish Culinary Traditions**
- Experience **Jewish Arts and Culture**
- Interpret **Jewish Texts, Torah and Core Narratives**

### RELIGION

- Practice **Mitzvot**
- Celebrate **Rituals and Holidays**
- Explore **God, Spirituality and Prayer**
- Discover **Judaism's Relevance to Life's Questions**

# THE 18 DIMENSIONS OF JEWISH LIFE



Each of the dimensions is presented below with some explanation.

## DOMAIN

A general organizing category; Peoplehood, Citizenship, Culture and Religion.

## CORE PRINCIPLES

The reason why this dimension is important and worthy of inclusion and a few sentences on what is intended in this general category.

## ACTION VERBS

Several possible verbs that define the intended outcome of a learner's interaction with this dimension. For example: for the dimension The Jewish People in Its Diversity, possible verbs are: "connect with," "celebrate" or "support."

## POSSIBLE CONTENT AREAS AND EXPERIENCES

A few examples of what might be taught or experienced by learners in order to engage with this dimension.

## POSSIBLE TAKEAWAYS OR OUTCOMES

Some of the potential skills, knowledge and capacities that learners might gain from their engagement with this dimension.

## CORE PRINCIPLES

- Judaism emphasizes the notion of *klal yisrael* – all Jews are responsible for one another. This imperative has expressed itself over time and place in the ongoing concern of Jews for each other and in their sense of community.
- Judaism is not only a religion, and Jews are not only members of a religious faith; rather they are connected by a national identity and, as part of a people, they share collective history and are bound by a common future.
- Jews and Jewish communities diverge from one another in many ways. Their numerous languages, customs, ethnic backgrounds, and cultural heritages are a source of great diversity and richness for the Jewish community as a whole.
- Jewish life throughout the ages has always been both a part of and apart from its local context. Jewish society and general society interact intimately and are mutually influential and, in many cases, even co-dependent.
- Jewish culture and civilization were formed from the mutual influences of the surrounding culture and need to be seen in this context in order to be fully understood and appreciated.
- The State of Israel can be understood as the vision and venture of the Jewish People – a national expression of collective identity.

### DOMAINS

Peoplehood

Culture

### THE VERBS

Celebrate • Connect with • Be responsible for



## POSSIBLE CONTENT AREAS AND EXPERIENCES

- Texts and cultural artifacts reflective of periods in which Diaspora Jewish communities flourished in dialogue with the surrounding culture: for example, the Babylonian Exile, the Golden Age of Spain, the Enlightenment in Germany
- Food, music, art and literature from different ethnic and cultural Jewish traditions
- The history of different ethnic Jewish communities (edot) across time and place
- Meetings with Jews from different communities and traditions
- A trip to Israel to meet the “extended family” of Israelis

## POSSIBLE TAKEAWAYS - AGE AND SETTING DEPENDENT

- Appreciate the range and the distinctiveness of many Jewish cultures
- Discern elements of Jewish and general culture that clearly overlap (e.g., universal moral codes), clearly diverge (e.g., religious beliefs), and sometimes intersect in more complex ways (e.g., the direct influence of Jews on general culture and vice versa).
- Feel at home and able to participate in a range of Jewish cultural contexts
- Embrace the celebration of national holidays (e.g., in the United States, Thanksgiving, Labor Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day) as exemplary expressions of both Jewish and universal values and symbols and of civic engagement
- Feel connected to and responsible for Jews across the world with an appreciation for global Jewish peoplehood

### CORE PRINCIPLES

- Friendships and social networks are important forces in shaping individual and communal identity, ensuring personal and collective wellbeing, and stimulating Jewish connectedness.
- Friends influence each other in many ways, including young people's choices about participating in certain programs or experiences (e.g., summer camp, educational travel, college) and adults' choices about how to live their lives (e.g., geographic location, career, lifecycle events). Having Jewish friends can be a significant influence on making Jewish decisions and fostering Jewish commitments.
- Living a Jewish life is enhanced and reinforced by being part of an inclusive Jewish community comprising people who share values, concerns, traditions, and lifestyles.
- While social networks need not be exclusively Jewish, relationships with fellow Jews can bolster and perpetuate Jewish identification and Jewish communal life and culture.

#### DOMAINS

Peoplehood

Citizenship

#### THE VERBS

Prioritize • Cultivate • Enable



## POSSIBLE CONTENT AREAS AND EXPERIENCES

- Opportunities to connect with Jewish peers in Jewish (or non-Jewish) educational programs and informal settings
- Structured Jewish social activities (e.g., OneTable, NuRoots), communal and cultural institutions (e.g., synagogues, JCCs), and social groups (e.g., youth groups, fraternities) that enable Jewish friendships and social networks
- Jewish social media networks (e.g., JDate, LostTribe) that cultivate virtual and face-to-face relationships

## POSSIBLE TAKEAWAYS - AGE AND SETTING DEPENDENT

- Seek out and form close relationships with Jewish peers with common interests
- Recognize the value of Jewish friendships as a cornerstone of Jewish decision-making and the perpetuation of Jewish communal life
- Take pride in being a “member of the Tribe”

### CORE PRINCIPLES

- Historical and contemporary Jewish role models include religious figures (e.g., rabbis, sages, scholars), secular achievers (e.g., in business, science, government, law, culture), and prominent people in our everyday lives (e.g., parents, peers, teachers) on the worldwide, national, or local level.
- Role models have an important place in shaping a sense of who we are and want to be. Young Jews who identify with positive Jewish role models can be motivated toward personal achievements that make a positive difference in the world and demonstrate commitment to Jewish life.
- Jewish tradition offers a balanced approach to learning from and appreciating role models, combining reverence with honesty and a recognition of human fallibility.
- Role models are often leaders in the broadest sense, and the overlap between the concepts is rich and helpful in providing multiple access points for learners, both for themselves and for their relationships with others.

#### DOMAINS

Peoplehood

Citizenship

#### THE VERBS

Identify • Engage with • Emulate



## POSSIBLE CONTENT AREAS AND EXPERIENCES

- Meetings with Jewish community leaders and entrepreneurs
- Text study focused on biblical leaders, including midrashic interpretations of their actions
- Historical investigations into the lives and legacies of Jewish women and other traditionally marginalized groups
- Exploration of Israeli leaders from different communities and ideologies and their impact on Israeli history and culture
- Teen leadership and counselor training programs designed to train the next generation of Jewish role models

## POSSIBLE TAKEAWAYS - AGE AND SETTING DEPENDENT

- Identify role models, living and dead, who inspire their personal Jewish growth and expression
- Find personal application for the rabbinic imperative: “Make for yourself a teacher”
- Read biblical and interpretative texts focused on Jewish leaders and their actions and appreciate the lessons learned from both their positive and negative qualities
- Develop personal leadership qualities and a commitment to serve as a role model for others

## CORE PRINCIPLES

- The commandment to remember (*zakhor*) echoes through Jewish tradition and has long been viewed as the key to Jewish survival. Narratives, laws, and customs were faithfully transmitted from one generation to the next in oral and written forms. The long collective memory of times and places of Jewish prosperity and suffering has always been regarded as carrying lessons for conduct in the present day (e.g., the *maggid* section of the Passover haggadah).
- History and memory are overlapping but contrasting approaches to the Jewish past: historiography involves the painstaking, complex, technical, and evidence-based reconstruction of often ambiguous circumstances and contexts, while commemoration involves the recreation and personification of narratives that reinforce individual and collective self-image without too much concern for evidence.
- The study of Jewish history (e.g., in academic settings), preservation of Jewish memory (e.g., in commemorative ceremonies), and celebration of Jewish heritage (e.g., on Jewish heritage tours) are core aspects of Jewish engagement and identification and cornerstones of Jewish peoplehood and rituals.
- Certain moments and periods in Jewish history continue to hold resonance and meaning that are re-enacted in the course of the yearly Jewish cycle and in the Jewish education system: e.g., the destruction of the Temple, the birth of the State of Israel, the Holocaust and many more.

### DOMAINS

Culture

Peoplehood

### THE VERBS

Investigate • Recall • Continue



## **POSSIBLE CONTENT AREAS AND EXPERIENCES**

- Study of the Torah as a historical text using the tools of historical research and analysis
- Visits to sites of Jewish history and memory (e.g., historic Jewish communities, Jewish museums)
- Commemorative acts (e.g., Yom Hazikaron)
- Engagement with artifacts of Jewish historical culture (e.g., historical fiction, movies, theater, documentaries)
- Oral history projects with older members of the community (e.g., constructing a family history using historical research, analysis and oral history tools)
- Study of the Holocaust in order to draw relevant lessons for today

## **POSSIBLE TAKEAWAYS - AGE AND SETTING DEPENDENT**

- Understand the past – seek out opportunities to learn Jewish history in a variety of educational settings
- Inform the present – commemorate Jewish traditions with particular emphasis on their historical roots
- Preserve the future – commit to the continuity of Jewish life by contributing to the chain of historical transmission and tradition

## CORE PRINCIPLES

- Community plays a central role in Jewish history and civilization. From biblical times to the present day, Jews have been organized in social units that include, for example, families, tribes, political entities, neighborhoods and ethnic groups that touch all aspects of collective and individual life.
- Participation in the community is both a value and a practice that have been fundamental to the preservation of Jewish life over the ages. The various forms that community takes in daily life – from praying together in a morning minyan to serving in or being served by a social service agency – demonstrate that Jews are never alone in moments that matter.
- The organized Jewish community is the Jewish individual's social safety net, providing professional, logistical, philanthropic and spiritual support for almost all Jewish activity.
- Active membership in the Jewish community – or participatory Jewish citizenship – implies both privileges and responsibilities for the individual as both a beneficiary and a contributor to the collective wellbeing.

### DOMAINS

Peoplehood

Citizenship

### THE VERBS

Improve • Participate in • Promote



## POSSIBLE CONTENT AREAS AND EXPERIENCES

- Investigating the functioning of diverse Jewish communities in, for example, biblical Israel, pre-modern Spain, 19th-century Poland or contemporary America and understanding the place of community in Jewish life
- Becoming familiar with the various components of the organized Jewish community in one's area, including (if and where applicable) synagogues, community centers, religious institutions, educational settings, philanthropic organizations, social welfare providers and businesses
- Participating in an experience of the community in action – e.g., Jewish lifecycle event, social welfare project, political rally, or communal decision-making process such as a tzedakah project – in order to demonstrate active citizenship in the Jewish community and appreciate one's contributions

## POSSIBLE TAKEAWAYS - AGE AND SETTING DEPENDENT

- Develop positive attitudes toward participation in Jewish communal life
- Understand responsibility for something larger than oneself as both an obligation and an opportunity for a more meaningful life
- Actively engage in improving the functioning and wellbeing of the organized Jewish community
- Develop new forms of community life that serve traditionally marginalized groups

## CORE PRINCIPLES

- Jewish texts and tradition are concerned with life's existential questions: e.g., What is life? How are we created? What is the meaning of life? How does history happen? Is there a divine force? What is good? The many answers and approaches to these questions offer relevant, nuanced, challenging and illuminating wisdom that brings ancient ideas into use for modern life.
- Engagement with Jewish wisdom can provide grounding and a new perspective that helps learners make sense of contemporary challenges.
- Jewish tradition offers "70 Faces of Torah" – a huge range of approaches and perspectives to all these questions that provide relevant gateways for different learners. There is never one right answer to any question.

### DOMAINS

Religion

Citizenship

### THE VERBS

Apply • Discover • Probe



## POSSIBLE CONTENT AREAS AND EXPERIENCES

- Study of Jewish philosophical texts from the ancient to the contemporary: e.g., from Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed* to Levinas' approach to the "Other"
- Study of new halachic (Jewish legal) responsa to contemporary questions: e.g., responsa written from a queer perspective
- Discussions with scholars and rabbis on big questions
- M<sup>2</sup>'s Values in Action course for educators, which offers a values-based approach to contemporary social issues (e.g., cancel culture and antisemitism) enriched by Jewish wisdom

## POSSIBLE TAKEAWAYS - AGE AND SETTING DEPENDENT

- Access and use Jewish wisdom when confronted with a big question or life choice
- Read and analyze core Jewish texts as answers to existential questions and not just as tales or sagas
- Actively seek out the diverse approaches in Jewish tradition (ancient and contemporary) to life's big questions and the varied application of Jewish wisdom in different settings and communities
- Compare Jewish and non-Jewish approaches to the same big questions
- Find one's own answers to life's big questions, inspired or influenced by Jewish thought

## CORE PRINCIPLES

- The practices of Jewish life throughout the ages have been infused with rituals, celebrations and observances related to the core notion of divinity. A core component of the Jewish faith is a belief in a monotheistic God with whom the believing Jew is in constant relationship. Indeed, the name “Israel” represents the ongoing wrestling with God that remains a central Jewish narrative.
- The relationship between human beings and God (*ben adam lamakom*) is expressed on an everyday basis through prayer, study and other spiritual practices. One of the ways that Jews live their lives is by performing practices in the name of piety. Jews should have the experience of engaging with Jewish life through prayer, study or other spiritual practices as part of their own attempt to engage with the divine.
- Jewish spiritual practices are expressions of the human urge to find meaning, connect with the divine and expand consciousness. They have a long and evolving tradition and offer contemporary Jews the opportunity to find meaning and satisfaction beyond themselves.

### DOMAINS

Religion

Culture

### THE VERBS

Incorporate • Explore • Wrestle with



## POSSIBLE CONTENT AREAS AND EXPERIENCES

- Leading a prayer service for a Jewish community or participating in a minyan (prayer quorum)
- Practicing meditation using ancient Jewish practices and texts
- Finding spiritual power by being in nature or hiking
- Exploring the history of liturgy
- Writing new prayers or rituals for contemporary situations

## POSSIBLE TAKEAWAYS - AGE AND SETTING DEPENDENT

- Follow along in a Jewish prayer service, even in an unfamiliar city or with an unfamiliar liturgy
- Cultivate their own relationship with God
- Write their own prayers
- Be able to recite and understand the “Shema,” the central prayer of Judaism, as a way of grasping the traditional connection between the Jewish people and God
- Participate in a range of spiritual practices with ease and openness

## CORE PRINCIPLES

- The Jewish lifecycle and yearly cycle provide numerous opportunities for marking moments of meaning, both collective and individual.
- Celebrations of rituals, holidays and lifecycle events are important expressions of Jewish connectedness and community and provide personal joy and fulfillment.
- The ability to participate in Jewish rituals and holidays allows a Jew to be part of a community and contribute to it.
- The diversity of Jewish civilization is expressed in the multiple ways that different ethnic and denominational groups have adapted rituals to suit their own context. There is also a great deal of shared ritual across communities.
- Contemporary expressions of holidays and rituals highlight the ways in which Jewish tradition evolves and is renewed by each generation to meet its needs.

### DOMAINS

Religion

Culture

### THE VERBS

Participate in • Celebrate • Experiment with



## POSSIBLE CONTENT AREAS AND EXPERIENCES

- The meanings and symbols behind lifecycle and daily rituals
- The holidays and their celebrations: e.g., symbols, artifacts, blessings, foods
- Participation in lifecycle events, especially in different ethnic communities, in order to experience different ways of celebrating
- Developing innovative and gender neutral BMitzvah ceremonies
- “Shabbat in a box” activities for families to do at home
- Jewish perspectives on the rituals of death and dying

## POSSIBLE TAKEAWAYS - AGE AND SETTING DEPENDENT

- Be competent and familiar with lifecycle events: e.g., brit milah, bnei mitzvah, wedding, shiva
- Perform central lifecycle events and celebrate holidays
- Acquire items used for rituals and holidays: e.g., Chanukiah, Shabbat candles, Havdalah candle, seder plate
- Make informed choices about customizing lifecycle rituals to their own lives

## CORE PRINCIPLES

- Judaism emphasizes the idea that the world can be improved by people's well-intentioned ideas and actions and that people are partners with God and with each other in making the world a better place.
- *Tikkun olam* has come to mean concern for social justice, which includes helping the weak, oppressed, and needy all over the world. This concept finds its earliest expression in the Bible, particularly the prophetic teachings, and has reverberated in different times, places and circumstances throughout history and up to the present day.
- Jews are encouraged to perform acts of *gemilut chasadim* (the giving of loving-kindness), which includes *tzedakah* (charity and also righteousness, justice and fairness). *Tzedakah* involves not only the planned and spontaneous giving of goods and services but also a broader ethical obligation to enhance and advance the lives of others through good deeds.

### DOMAINS

Religion

Citizenship

### THE VERBS

Practice • Pursue • Advocate for



## POSSIBLE CONTENT AREAS AND EXPERIENCES

- The prophetic roots (in the Bible) of the idea of justice and the historical (in Hasidism) and contemporary (in popular Jewish culture) roots of *tikkun olam* and Maimonides' eight levels of *tzedakah*
- Participation in social justice efforts and *tzedakah* projects
- Development of philanthropic attitudes and practices

## POSSIBLE TAKEAWAYS - AGE AND SETTING DEPENDENT

- Seek out opportunities to right wrongs (these may be social, political or economic wrongs)
- Contribute with *kavanah* (purpose, intention), goods and/or services to worthy charitable causes
- Perform acts of loving-kindness as second nature

## CORE PRINCIPLES

- *Mitzvah* comes from the Hebrew word meaning obligation or commandment and is a central notion in traditional Judaism. The 613 *mitzvot* are divided into different categories and cover all elements of Jewish behavior, both individual and communal. The understanding of both the performance and meaning of *mitzvot* is a central aspect of Jewish life.
- *Mitzvot* and their associated customs are the core of Halacha, the Jewish legal system that has developed across millennia and reflects both a hermeneutic tradition and the diversity of Jewish life in different cultures and countries over the generations.
- In contemporary Jewish life, *mitzvot* continue to evolve and develop to acquire new meanings. Some have been renewed and innovated, especially by and for traditionally marginalized groups.

**DOMAINS**

Religion

Citizenship

**THE VERBS**

Interpret • Practice • Critique



## POSSIBLE CONTENT AREAS AND EXPERIENCES

- History and philosophy of the halachic system
- Understanding of the different kinds of *mitzvot* and their evolution
- Hands-on practice of common Shabbat rituals: e.g., Torah reading, candle lighting, *havdalah*, etc.
- Focus on the agricultural mitzvot connected to *shmita* (the sabbatical year of the agricultural cycle)
- Differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardi halachic traditions

## POSSIBLE TAKEAWAYS - AGE AND SETTING DEPENDENT

- Have the competence to participate in settings where mitzvot are practiced
- Share meanings of core mitzvot with friends and others who ask
- Articulate their own relationship to the halachic system and live accordingly

## CORE PRINCIPLES

- Judaism values the natural world; one of human being's first responsibilities was to "work and protect" it (Genesis 2:15). This has developed throughout history into a set of *mitzvot* and attitudes toward nature.
- Using Jewish attitudes to engage with nature is both interesting and valuable.
- Contemporary environmental challenges are significant and Judaism offers some wisdom about how individual Jews and Jewish communities can address this challenge through both study and social activism.
- There are many mitzvot that can only be fully understood through an understanding of nature and our relationship to the land of Israel.

### DOMAINS

Religion

Citizenship

### THE VERBS

Protect • Immerse in • Nurture



## POSSIBLE CONTENT AREAS AND EXPERIENCES

- Jewish texts and teachings dealing with people's relationship to the land including mitzvot such as *shmita* (sabbatical year of the agricultural cycle) and *leket/peah* (gleanings)
- Outdoor adventure experiences, such as hiking, camping, farming and community celebrations in nature
- Hiking in Israel and developing a personal relationship with the Land of Israel

## POSSIBLE TAKEAWAYS - AGE AND SETTING DEPENDENT

- Take action to combat climate change, using Jewish wisdom as their guide
- Spend time in natural settings where they integrate Jewish community-building, appreciation for the natural world and relevant *mitzvot*
- Find their own *shmita* practice that applies for contemporary life, even outside the Land of Israel

## CORE PRINCIPLES

- The Torah speaks of humans being created *b'tzelem Elohim* (“in the image of God”) during the Creation. As such expressions of God's creation, humans are tasked with continuing to perfect the world.
- Our mutual and intimate connection with God should lead us to act with respect and dignity for ourselves and other people.
- Respect begins with self-respect, and this involves a sense of humility alongside recognition of one's ability to make a difference in the world. Dignity involves treating others as equally significant as oneself (“*v'ahavta l're'echa kamocho*,” or “love your neighbor as yourself”) – with care, compassion and kindness – as we were all equally created in God's image.
- One aspect of treating humans as divine creatures is the imperative to love oneself. This involves taking good and special care of one's own mind, body and spirit as well as the wellbeing of others.
- According to Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism), while the physical body ultimately returns to dust, humans contain a divine spark that makes them holy and that can never be extinguished.

### DOMAINS

Religion

Citizenship

### THE VERBS

Nurture oneself as • See oneself as • Treat others as



## POSSIBLE CONTENT AREAS AND EXPERIENCES

- Study of morality, particularly in our relationship with God (*ben adam lamakom*) and with each other (*ben adam lachavero*)
- Developing good attitudes and practices for self-esteem and self-care, including attending to one's mental, physical and spiritual health
- Exploring what it means to “be human” while also “doing God's work” on Earth

## POSSIBLE TAKEAWAYS - AGE AND SETTING DEPENDENT

- Act morally and with dignity in their relationships with others
- Demonstrate self-respect
- Understand that their mind, body and spirit are in need of regular attention and special care

## CORE PRINCIPLES

- The evolving history of the Jewish people is told and retold in narratives that capture Jewish collective wisdom and values and transmit them across time and space.
- The Torah is the foundational text of Judaism, containing both Jewish creation narratives and the Jewish people's connection to God as well as the legal system that underlines Jewish practice today.
- Jewish core narratives include the themes of revelation and redemption, freedom and liberation, connection to Zion, the covenant, and others. These narratives are expressed in Jewish texts that start with the Bible, continue through the oral traditions (Mishnah, Midrash, Talmud, etc.) and are still evolving today in contemporary music, poetry and commentary.
- Knowledge of and access to these texts and narratives are central to Jewish literacy and connect us to the ongoing Jewish conversation across time and space.

### DOMAINS

Religion

Culture

### THE VERBS

Study • Interpret • Create



## POSSIBLE CONTENT AREAS AND EXPERIENCES

- *Havruta*-style learning (in study pairs) in a Beit Midrash format
- Learning to interpret the core biblical commentators (Rashi, Ramban, etc.) connected to the weekly Torah portion
- Learning to chant and understand the meanings of Megillat Esther on Purim or Megillat Ruth on Shavuot

## POSSIBLE TAKEAWAYS - AGE AND SETTING DEPENDENT

- Identify the master narratives of Jewish life, including Zion, redemption, revelation, covenant and others
- Recognize the plurality of Jewish voices and interpretations as authentic expressions of “*makhloket lashem shamayim*” (argument for the sake of heaven)
- Feel confident to approach a wide variety of Jewish texts from different time periods and to add one’s own voice and interpretation

## CORE PRINCIPLES

- For Jews today “Israel” refers to a historical place, a religious site, a contemporary society, a modern state, an ongoing aspiration, or a fulfilled/unfulfilled idea or dream. Relating to Israel in some way is important for Jewish identification, as Israel, as the Jewish homeland, is the only place in the world where Jews constitute a majority population.
- The Land of Israel is the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people, as reflected in biblical texts and ancient liturgy.
- Like all relationships, the Jewish people’s relationship with Israel involves belief and doubt, and appreciation and critique.
- Jews can derive meaning from both caring about Israel (i.e., Israel matters to them) and caring for Israel (i.e., connecting with Israel), including the land, nationhood, culture, and people.
- Engaging and grappling with the diverse voices of Israel (both Jewish and non-Jewish) provides opportunities to confront the political, religious, social, economic, military, ethnic and ethical dilemmas of a modern democracy facing ongoing existential issues.

### DOMAINS

Religion

Culture

Peoplehood

### THE VERBS

Understand • Care for • Grapple with



## POSSIBLE CONTENT AREAS AND EXPERIENCES

- Studying core ideas, events and facts related to the place of Israel in Jewish tradition
- The creation of the modern State of Israel and its achievements, and the accompanying complications for both Jewish and Arab peoples
- Experiencing first-hand the diverse people, places, languages, and customs that constitute contemporary Israel, engaging in the daily lives of the people living there
- Exploring Israel as a space where the complexity of contemporary Jewish life plays out more dramatically than anywhere else (e.g., the routine enactment of Jewish values, the rules regarding Jewish observance, and the debates over who constitutes a Jew)
- Enjoying Israeli music, cinema, food, literature and art as windows into the history and contemporary reality of the State of Israel
- Meetings with Israelis to build relationships and mutual understanding

## POSSIBLE TAKEAWAYS - AGE AND SETTING DEPENDENT

- Articulate their understanding of why Israel is a core part of both the historical and contemporary Jewish experience
- Be inspired to learn more about Israel, to follow the news, and to seek out Israeli culture
- Nurture ongoing relationships with Israeli peers
- Ask meaningful and complex questions about the sometimes paradoxical and existential challenges facing a Jewish democratic nation

## CORE PRINCIPLES

- Language is a key cultural marker as it suggests either membership in or exclusion from a group. To live a Jewish life is to speak an idiom of religious and cultural concepts that are unmistakably Jewish, which include terms from Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino, Aramaic and other historical Jewish languages that have special resonance in Jewish life (e.g., shalom, Shabbat, mitzvah, tzedakah, minyan, shiva, bris, mensch, schlep, kvell).
- Hebrew was and is both a cultural transmitter and a means of social cohesion among Jews. There are Hebrew words rooted in the ancient world and adapted for modern usage that carry Jewish civilization on their shoulders (e.g., Zionism).
- Hebrew is a living, dynamic modern language that describes all the dimensions of modern life in Israel while still being used in religious texts and ceremonial rites.
- Jews have historically needed to be multilingual in order to continue their religious traditions while interacting with the broader culture. Therefore, modern Hebrew includes roots and terms from the surrounding languages of Jewish communities around the world (e.g., English, French, German, Russian, Arabic).

### DOMAINS

Religion

Culture

Peoplehood

### THE VERBS

Utilize • Access • Translate



## POSSIBLE CONTENT AREAS AND EXPERIENCES

- Decoding Hebrew, i.e., identifying Hebrew letters and sounding out Hebrew words seen in the Israeli landscape (e.g., in street signs, advertisements and newspapers)
- Learning to perform Jewish rituals with their Hebrew blessings
- Learning Hebrew, Yiddish and Ladino songs
- Reading Jewish literature (in the vernacular or translation) and watching Jewish films, television and theater that use Jewish idioms and terminology

## POSSIBLE TAKEAWAYS - AGE AND SETTING DEPENDENT

- Have a basic level of Hebrew and Jewish cultural literacy (i.e., know a selected body of terms that have special resonance in Jewish life)
- Access and participate in Hebrew-speaking cultural environs in synagogue or in Israel
- No longer experience Hebrew as a foreign language
- Communicate with Israelis at a basic level

### CORE PRINCIPLES

- Food plays a central role in Jewish culture at a religious level (through the laws of Kashrut) and at a family and communal level (through celebrations, rituals and customs).
- The diversity of culinary traditions from Jewish communities around the world connects Jews over time and place, reflecting the breadth of Jewish experience and culture.
- Jewish culinary traditions are a way of preserving family history, evoking a sense of nostalgia, connecting with a broader cultural universe, and inspiring and feeding an appetite for things Jewish.
- Preparing and eating special foods is among life's most sensory pleasures, involving sight, smell, touch and taste

#### DOMAINS

Culture

Peoplehood

#### THE VERBS

Transmit • Partake in • Celebrate



## POSSIBLE CONTENT AREAS AND EXPERIENCES

- Understanding the basic laws and practices of Kashrut and its different interpretations in contemporary society (e.g., eco-kashrut)
- Baking challah and learning the “*hafrashat challah*” blessing
- Participating in a food tour of an Israeli market
- Exploring the different food customs related to Passover (e.g., different charoset recipes)
- Learning about the movements of Jewish immigrants to the United States through their food practices and evolving traditions (e.g., Chinese food on Christmas, bagels and lox)

## POSSIBLE TAKEAWAYS - AGE AND SETTING DEPENDENT

- Cook Jewish foods for their friends and family (e.g., hamantaschen at Purim, challah on Shabbat)
- Investigate Jewish food customs from their own ethnic background
- Recognize kosher and non-kosher ingredients in various foods
- Feel more connected to other Jewish communities through familiarity with their foods and food-related customs

## CORE PRINCIPLES

- Jewish artistic and cultural expressions (e.g., music, literature, art, crafts and film) reflect histories, values, and assumptions that are particular to the Jewish experience and cross many political, social, ethnic, national, linguistic and religious boundaries. They are the essence of Jewish civilization.
- Many Jews find their connection to Judaism, Jewish life and/or the Jewish community through the creation or consumption of arts and culture. Engaging in Jewish culture is a form of identifying Jewishly.
- Jewish arts and culture may include creations by artists who identify as Jews, products that have an explicitly Jewish theme, or neither of these. They are, essentially, cultural products that evoke Jewish senses and sensibilities in the people who experience them and can range from cantorial concerts to *Fiddler on the Roof* to the American Jewish tradition of eating Chinese food on Christmas.
- Experiencing Jewish culture either independently or communally is a way for Jews to connect to the broader Jewish world and to reach a new level of awareness of their place in the larger, more meaningful story of the Jewish people.

### DOMAINS

Culture

Peoplehood

### THE VERBS

Create • Experience • Seek out



## POSSIBLE CONTENT AREAS AND EXPERIENCES

- Gaining broad exposure to the many ways in which Jewish artists have explored their relationship to Judaism and Jewish life through artistic and cultural media (e.g., literature, visual arts, crafts, music, dance, film, fashion and architecture)
- Engaging with Jewish museums, cultural institutions and cultural events
- Interpreting selected works of Jewish art in light of their Jewish themes
- Creating or participating in an artistic or cultural form of Jewish expression

## POSSIBLE TAKEAWAYS - AGE AND SETTING DEPENDENT

- Demonstrate understanding and a connection to Jewish motifs in arts and culture
- Create their own forms of Jewish expression as part of their Jewish identification
- Seek out Jewish cultural experiences

## CORE PRINCIPLES

- The contemporary Jewish community regularly confronts critical issues regarding its strength and continuity, including internal issues (e.g., different ways of being Jewish, relationships with Israel, acculturation and assimilation, intermarriage, spirituality) and external issues (e.g., antisemitism, pluralism, integration, social justice, rights and responsibilities).
- Antisemitism, in particular, haunts Jewish life with increasing numbers of people, from across the political spectrum believing anti-Jewish tropes, perpetrating antisemitic incidents, and embracing anti-Israel and antisemitic sentiments. Combating antisemitism is one of the greatest concerns of contemporary Jewry.
- Contemporary Jewry must also contend with critical issues facing the wider society that, while not specifically related to Jews, have long been considered important to Jews and Jewish civilization. These include respect for legal and moral codes, commitment to social welfare, belief in emancipation and freedom, defense of religious liberty and human rights, and devotion to education.

### DOMAINS

Peoplehood

Citizenship

### THE VERBS

Investigate • Care about • Respond to

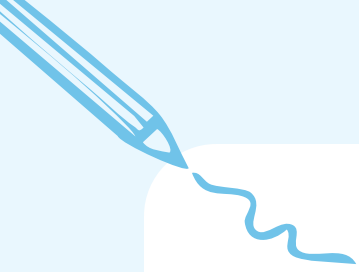


## POSSIBLE CONTENT AREAS AND EXPERIENCES

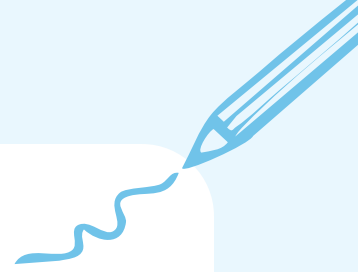
- Antisemitism 101 (i.e., what antisemitism is, terminology, history, manifestations and current circumstances)
- Studies about contemporary Jewry (e.g., demographics, political views, religious commitments, economic circumstances and cultural activities) and how this information influences the Jewish communal agenda
- Appreciation of the commonalities and diversities of Jewish life and the implications for participation in the Jewish community

## POSSIBLE TAKEAWAYS - AGE AND SETTING DEPENDENT

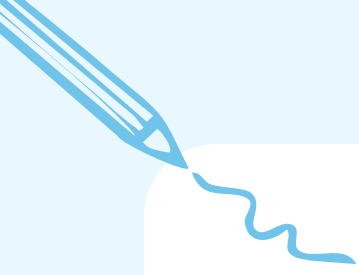
- Choose and explore issues on the Jewish communal agenda or initiate their own issues and articulate their position on them
- Identify and debunk antisemitic tropes
- Become politically active within and/or outside the Jewish community
- Take leadership positions in Jewish and non-Jewish organizations that address issues of relevance to the Jewish community



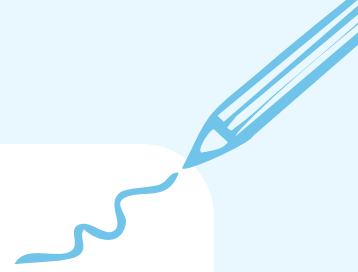
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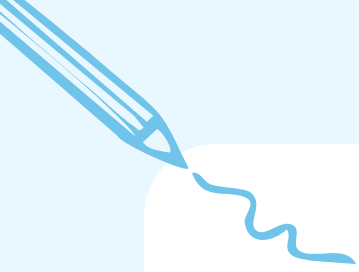
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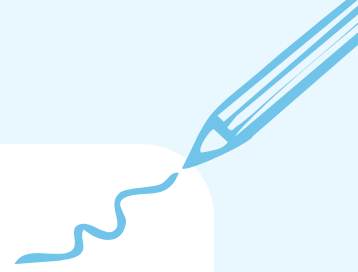
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# ABOUT US

M<sup>2</sup>: The Institute for Experiential Jewish Education was founded in 2016 with the belief that Jewish education can unlock meaningful and purposeful Jewish living. By offering cutting-edge professional development programs, innovative educational frameworks, and tailored consulting services, M<sup>2</sup> empowers educators and organizations to create impactful Jewish experiences. Its global network of alumni and partners continues to inspire and expand the reach of impactful Jewish education worldwide.

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

